

Bernadette Luciano

WELLINGTON 2013

«There's no place like home»:

The Anxiety of Mobility in the Works of Louise DeSalvo

“Wellington 2013” refers to a series of articles which developed out of papers presented at the conference “New Perspectives on Italian Gender Studies”, held on 15 February 2013 at the University of Wellington in New Zealand.

Abstract

The often conflicting emotions associated with home and the tension between mobility and fixity are at the heart of autobiographical works that map Italian American writer Louise DeSalvo's transition from working class girl to privileged «intellectual nomad» (BRUNO 2002, 404). The essay is framed around the theorizing of home as a geographical space and idea and its relationship to widespread and diverse forms of mobility. Migration, exile, transnationalism, tourism, and relocation create a mobile space for home not only as a site of origin, but as a destination and transit zone. Rosi Braidotti's multiple figurations of mobility, both physical and metaphorical, are particularly useful in an analysis of DeSalvo's autobiographical texts.

This essay concentrates on two of her memoirs: *Crazy in the Kitchen* (2004) and *On Moving* (2009). In these works DeSalvo interrogates the layers of meaning of home as well as the interaction between home and geographic and intellectual mobility. In *Crazy in the Kitchen*, a work that highlights the interconnectedness between food-writing and life-writing in Italian American culture, the narrator's search for self relies on the constant reinvention of geographical space, of domestic space, and of textual space. *On Moving* explores the condition of relocation or change of dwellings. Taking as a point of departure her own anxiety about changing homes, DeSalvo resorts to an examination of the relationship between mobility and home through the experiences of other writers and thinkers.

Recent theorizing of home as a geographical space and idea has been inflected by considerations of its relationship to widespread and diverse forms of mobility,¹ both the perennial mobility of exiles and migrants, but also a privileged sort of mobility, marked by what Giuliana Bruno has called «intellectual nomads» who while experiencing displacement and separation, also enjoy pushing the limits of national cultures and making new borders of identity (BRUNO 2002, 404). For

these «intellectual nomads» mobility and home, rather than representing separate realms, become interrelated, creating a mobile (rather than static) space for home not only as a site of origin, but as a destination and transit zone.

The tension between mobility and fixity is the «autobiographical imperative» (EAKIN 1985, 277) at the heart of Louise DeSalvo's writing.² Her works can be situated within the context of the flourishing field of Italian American literary studies,³ and more specifically in what Caterina Romeo calls the Italian American intellectual autobiography, a genre that flourished in the 1990s and includes works by «authors who generally separated by several generations from their country of origin reflect on their intellectual development in connection with or independently from their Italian American background» (ROMEO 2010, 137).⁴ Writing as a third generation Italian American, DeSalvo investigates her personal and collective past exposing the evolving nature of Italian American identity, a dynamic notion, that, according to Michael Fischer is to be «reinvented and reinterpreted with each generation and each individual.»⁵ Fischer further argues that components of ethnic identity are part of or exist parallel to components of non-ethnic origin as well, such as class, gender and political preference. Indeed DeSalvo also belongs to the gendered category of Italian American women writers, for whom the element of gender and the cultural anxieties associated with home and family persist as central factors in their works. Writer and feminist critic Sandra M. Gilbert expresses the tensions emerging from cultural expectations that Italian American women writers face: «How does a woman reconcile the exigencies of the species-her desire for stasis her sense of her ancestry, her devotion to the house in which she has lived with the urgencies of her own self? I don't know the answer» (GILBERT 1979, 260). The unanswered question posed by Gilbert and cited in the introduction to the *Dream Book* (BAROLINI 1985, 23), the first anthology of Italian American women writers,⁶ is addressed in numerous essays and autobiographical texts in which Louise DeSalvo explores home and mobility from multiple positions including her ancestral history of migration and her own genealogy of displacement.

In two of her more recent works, *Crazy in the Kitchen: Food, Feuds, and Forgiveness in an Italian American Family* (2004) and *On Moving: A Writer's Meditation on New Houses, Old Haunts, and Finding Home Again* (2009), DeSalvo unpacks the layers of meaning of home for herself and earlier generations of Italian Americans and explores the interaction between home and geographic and intellectual mobility. In *Crazy in the Kitchen*, a work that highlights the interconnectedness between food-writing and life-writing in Italian American culture, the narrator's search for self through her family's cultural history relies on the constant reinvention of geographical space, of the domestic space, and of textual space. *On Moving* on the other hand takes as its point of departure DeSalvo's own anxiety about changing homes. In this work, she resorts to an examination of the relationship between mobility and home through the juxtaposition of her personal history of relocation and that of other writers and thinkers. Through these «intellectual nomads» who, in order to privilege the space of creativity, redefine and reinvent home in a process of continual becoming (BRAIDOTTI 1999, 16), DeSalvo identifies a new configuration of mobility and a new understanding of home that contrasts with but emerges from that of her ancestors. Framed by a feminist theorizing of home as a geographical space and idea associated with feelings of belonging, desire and intimacy (as, for instance, in the phrase «feeling at home») but also with «feelings of fear, violence and alienation» (BLUNT and DOWLING 2006, 2), this article proposes a reading of DeSalvo's later works that focuses on the author/narrator's personal experiences of transnationalism and relocation. Confronting the anxieties and tensions associated with home and mobility ultimately leads to a revisionist idea of a 'mobile home' as the necessary precondition for learning to look differently at oneself and at transforming contemporary landscapes.

The Auto/biographical Act: Louis DeSalvo's Italian American Life-Writing

The relationship between mobility and freedom for women permeates DeSalvo's life-writing and is visible in her early work, *A Portrait of the Puttana as a Woman in Midlife*, which first appeared in *The Dream Book* (1985). In this essay

DeSalvo uses the word *puttana* ('whore') to refer to herself as a woman who violates societal norms by traveling unaccompanied by her husband. DeSalvo reminds us of the transgressive nature of female mobility, a right only recently acquired by women who have been traditionally confined to the *domus*: «Mobility is one of the aspects of freedom, and as such it is something new and exciting for women: being free to move around, to go where one wants to is a right that women have only just started to gain» (BRAIDOTTI 1999, 256). DeSalvo's first voyage, a research trip, reflects not only physical movement, but is directly related to her development as a scholar and a feminist, to «intellectual nomadism».

The essay was reprinted in DeSalvo's first book-length memoir, *Vertigo* (1996), a self-reflexive autobiographical text in which the narrator traces her emergence from working-class daughter of immigrants to writer and intellectual, highlighting the seemingly insurmountable difficulties she had to overcome in order to create a life for herself that was different from the one that had been scripted for her. DeSalvo's subsequent life-narratives further re-script her life, addressing other major events whose memories Sidonie Smith suggests, «[are] evoked by the senses of smell taste, touch, sound and encoded in objects or events with particular meaning for the narrator» (SMITH 2001, 21). These works emerge from the materiality of life itself: bodily conditions (including physical ailments, desires, or traumas in *Vertigo*, *Breathless*, and *Adultery*), food (*Crazy in the Kitchen*), and domestic places and objects (*Crazy in the Kitchen* and *On Moving*). In them DeSalvo constructs and reconstructs herself, filling in gaps, re-writing her life experiences. They exemplify how autobiographical writing can be a powerful form of «scriptotherapy» (HENKE 1998, XV), a process of writing that gives voice to traumatic events and that has therapeutic and transformative effects on the narrator and her life story. They represent writing as a way of healing, to borrow the title of DeSalvo's own manual of scriptotherapy.

But these works do more than tell an individual's life story. Writing herself in relation to the people around her, Louis DeSalvo's memoirs contribute to a broader understanding of Italian American migration history as she takes on the

task of transmitting the experiences of her parents and grandparents who were not in a position to write them for themselves:

All I can do is conjecture, imagine, invent their lives. My story of their story, a distortion, a misrepresentation of what they lived. But my story of their story, now a respect I must accord them – though I cannot possibly get it right, though I cannot possibly understand who they were – so their lives do not pass into oblivion. (DESALVO 2004, 143)

In her acknowledgement of the impossibility of writing the lives of others, she signals the importance of at least mediating these lives that deserve to be remembered. In this vein DeSalvo joins two centuries of Italian American writers who have remembered the lives of those who had no access to writing and whose experience went unrecorded, providing a better understanding of the reasons motivating their migration and «of their identities shaped between cultures» (ROMEO 2010, 139).

Writing from a privileged position of successful academic, hence both subject and object of dominant culture, she gives voice to her ancestors and through them to previous generations of silent, subordinated Italian Americans, in particular women.

As DeSalvo revisits her own and her ancestor's lives and the spatial and emotional homes, communities, and nations that haunt her, she finds a way «to tell a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the present within that experiential history» (SMITH 2001, 16). Each of these autobiographical narratives is a homecoming of sorts, a return to and reinterpretation of the past through the slippery terrain of memory: a mapping of life experiences.

Negotiating Home through Food and Writing

In the closing lines of *Vertigo*, DeSalvo anticipates *Crazy in the Kitchen* by signalling the significance of the kitchen as the site of dispute and reconciliation for the generations of women in her family: «The most trivial, yet the most important personal effects of the women of my family, come together at last, and mingle in my kitchen drawers and cupboards» (DESALVO 1996, 263). The kitchen, as the symbol of home, moves centre stage in *Crazy in the Kitchen*, and is cast as

a traditional female space, a territorial battleground for the narrator's mother and grandmother, and ultimately DeSalvo's site of authority. The narrator divulges that her own dictatorial ways in the kitchen, what she calls «craziness in the kitchen», are a strategy «to undo the past». She writes in order to «[u]ndo that my mother couldn't feed me, undo her fury at my grandmother. Undo my father's violence. Undo my ancestors' history» (DESALVO 2004,166).

DeSalvo frames her memoir with a prologue and an epilogue that create a continuity between her ancestral past and the future. The prologue's retrospective timeless gaze looks back to a series of myths associated with her grandparents' Italy, revisited only to be verified or debunked at various times in the narrative. The epilogue projects into the future through the introduction of the narrator's own granddaughter, a clear descendant of her mother, her grandmother, and her great grandmother. This little girl, who sits in her toddler music class singing but also stirring – literally playing the bowl – who cooks and tastes and sings into the future, recalls the past and her genealogy of crazy women in the kitchen. Thus DeSalvo examines the psychological oscillations between past and present, old country and new, through a geographical movement back and forth between Italy and the United States.

In the early parts of the memoir the narrative moves between the present and the past, evoking an Italy reconstructed through memories sparked by photographs, family stories, and food, in particular the peasant bread the grandmother bakes. In the book's first part, *Bread*, DeSalvo constructs the figures of her grandmother and mother as polar opposites, an opposition defined by their direct relationship to the bread they make or buy. While the grandmother's thick-crust bread exudes the old country, Louise's mother's choice of bread is the white-sliced American bread, that in her mother's mind will transform her from an Italian American into an American American. In their constructions, DeSalvo's grandmother and mother represent two very different generations of Italian Americans and reflect the trajectory that Italian American identity took in the first half of the twentieth century, between first generation immigrants and second generation descendants. Many first

generation Italian Americans emerging from the economically underdeveloped southern agricultural provinces of Italy remained poor and working class, and indeed found themselves victims of racism. Thomas Guglielmo documents how naturalization officially recorded Italian immigrants' colour as white, their complexion as dark, and their race as Italian (GUGLIELMO 2003). Partially as a result of this racism and subordination, in the post World War II era, when white privilege and power became deeply institutionalized in the United States, Italian Americans began to organise more self-consciously as white. Louise's mother represents that generation which recognized that denying Italian American identity and striving to be white middle class suburban American was the path to the American dream.

As DeSalvo explores the generational distinction between her immigrant grandmother and her mother, she does so from the privileged perspective of the third generation writer, who interweaves old world and new world values while participating in a version of Italian American which situates her in between her mainstream American culture and the country of her ancestors. Her writing nonetheless sympathetically recuperates her grandmother's unrelinquishing hold on the country she came from while slowly coming to understand her mother's fervent denial of her roots.

In the third part of the book, *Chasing Ghosts*, as she tries to fill the gaps in the stories she remembers from her childhood, the narrator transforms a geography of nostalgia into a geography of despair. The educated, privileged transnational narrator who studies Italian history and then visits her grandmother's home uncovers a different Italy from the one she knew from the stories she had been told as a child:

Throughout my childhood and adolescence when I hear about Italy, it is this impoverished village she describes to me while she makes the bread, this white stone village that tumbles down a hillside to an azure sea, that I imagine all of Italy to be. And when I travel to Italy after she dies, it is this bread, her bread that I hope I will find there. (DESALVO 2004, 23)

In her grandmother's story, the site remains the same, adhering to the archaeological model of memory, explored by James Olney in his study of

memory and narrative, that suggests that a memory remains fixed and unchanged over time (OLNEY 1999, 19).

Like other Italian autobiographical writing of this time DeSalvo interrogates the reliability of memory and shifts the focus «from one's life to one's memory and its discontinuities from the factual truth to the authenticity of the process of remembering» (ROMEO 2010, 134). The narrator, who travels back to Italy in search of her grandmother's village, and later of her father's village, discovers that these landscapes do not correspond to the recounted memories. Her grandmother's idyllic village only exists as the nostalgic and desired home of a woman who does not feel at home in the country to which she has emigrated. What the narrator discovers during these trips are not her grandmother's memories but historical realities of violence and brutality that explain her mother's desire to erase the past. The homeland that her grandmother identified with was in her mother's eyes a cruel and hostile motherland that exploited workers and could not feed her people.

In America these two ideas of homeland affect the two women's relationship with the new homeland. Unable to relinquish her idea of home, the narrator's grandmother inhabits a psychological space that is neither Italy nor America – she exists in homelessness – and attempts to re-create home in the objects encoded by home: the bread she makes and her needlework. For the narrator's mother, on the other hand, Italy lives inside her as a country of privation. Her image of Italy as a country that forced her people away in a search for food is accentuated in her attitude toward food. DeSalvo's mother, in her parsimonious purchases and in her preparation of minimal amounts of (non-Italian) food, starves herself, unwittingly replicating the privation experienced by her people in the south of Italy. She views America as the antithesis of Italy: a culture of abundance versus a culture of privation. And while DeSalvo's mother tries to become American, to belong to this culture of abundance, she also punishes herself, burdened by the guilt of having what those she left behind do not have.

In her own home and in her own kitchen, De Salvo fights her mother's privation with abundance, excess, and extravagant experimentation into the cult

of food. Her self-earned class privileges allow her to travel freely to Italy and her borders and understanding of the homeland change. Initially, she searches for her grandmother's home and peasant bread; subsequently, she visits other regions and explores unfamiliar culinary traditions. She overindulges, buying innumerable cookbooks and regional ingredients, which extend beyond the boundaries of her grandmother's culinary world. Back home in her kitchen, she obsessively recreates home by replicating her grandmother's dishes, but also by reinventing them. She attempts recipes far beyond the scope of her grandmother's imagination, as only her generation, her class, and her transnational experience enable her to do. In this kitchen, through cooking and home-making, she creates a new home-land, an Italy that is no longer the location of ancestral myths and stories. She is reminiscent of Giuliana Bruno's prototype of the intellectual nomad who has «felt all the tensions of displacement and the grief of separation but [has] also enjoyed pushing the limits of national cultures and making new borders of identity» (BRUNO 2002, 404). While not bound by nostalgia or fixity, DeSalvo, like Bruno's configuration, has the privilege of choosing, of making «identity detours» (BRUNO 2002, 404).

For DeSalvo's narrator, home, embodied in her kitchen, is a transnational, mobile space that in Alison Blunt's and Robyn Dowling's formulation of the domestic «is produced and recast through a range of home-making practices that bind the material and imaginative geographies of home closely together» (BLUNT and DOWLING 2006, 228). Through her own strategies of emplacement DeSalvo reinvents Italy in a way that seeks to generate a relationship of belonging between herself and her ancestral home. By applying Blunt's and Dowling's notion, the imagined home, rather than a physical place to return to, becomes «one that can be transformed, newly invented, and developed in relation to circumstances in which [she] finds [herself] or chooses to place [herself]» (BLUNT and DOWLING 2006, 228).

In *Crazy in the Kitchen*, home is encoded in food, as the narrative progresses through the construction of relationships, personal and geographical, mediated through food. Her courtship with her husband is a culinary courting, beginning

with a sumptuous meal prepared by her mother, to joint cooking projects with Ernie, to the pizza at Amerigo's that seals their marriage. Attempts at matchmaking her grandmother and her husband's father fail because of their irreconcilable tastes in food. DeSalvo demonstrates her respect for the dead by writing of her desire to feed them: «you shouldn't bring flowers to people's graves, you should bring food to the dead, that you should bring them the kinds of meals they liked to eat in life» (DESALVO 2004, 228). Most significantly, she explores female genealogy and the mother-daughter relationship in the ever-shifting conflict of meal preparation from time-honoured, traditional Italian recipes to their Americanization, modernization, and re-appropriation. DeSalvo traces her genealogy and constructs herself in relation to and in conflict with her mother(s) and her motherland(s). The narrative, which begins by setting the two generations of mother and grandmother as antagonists to each other, becomes a celebration of the genealogy of women.

The narrator's refusal to be like her mother slowly evolves into reconciliation with the mother that culminates in the book's final dream chapter. Here DeSalvo emotionally describes her mother's painful last days by recording everything she ate. She writes: «as if my cooking could feed her, as if my eating could be her eating, as if my cooking and eating could keep her alive» (DESALVO 2004, 241). The pages reveal regret—looking at her mother, she desires what she never had, «ordinary talks like other people have, like other mothers and their daughters have» (DESALVO 2004, 248). Most poignant in these pages is the yearning for the idealized but often unrealized mother-daughter intimacy and the narrator's deep desire «to love [her] mother before she died» (DESALVO 2004, 249). Ultimately, this book is an act of homecoming, an imaginary act of love. The final chapter, in which the narrator fantasizes an ideal encounter with her mother, is a writer/daughter's gift to her mother. During the dream's shared meal, the mother and daughter do not cut the bread because they have forgotten to bring the knives, the real and metaphorical knives with which they had so often wounded each other. On this day of reconciliation, there is instead a «breaking of bread», a desire to get to the core, to understand and accept each other despite their

differences, and to acknowledge sameness in those differences. The reconciliation, the homecoming not possible in life, is possible in and through writing, writing as a construction and homage to the past surviving in the present and projected toward the future.

Writing provides the means to record and invent experience. This intellectual and creative activity, which distinguishes DeSalvo and her generation of Italian American women writers, is forever interwoven with the activity that so divided her mother and grandmother: the preparation of food. Food makes writing itself possible as DeSalvo defines her identity as based on an on-going symbiotic relationship between writing and food, between the intellectual and the domestic. The writing of food becomes the writing of the self: «without cooking, there can be no writing.[...] Cooking gets you out of your head.[...] Whatever the reasons, I know that I couldn't write if I didn't cook» (DESALVO 2004, 226).

Even though she cooks her way into a denial of and, later, a reconciliation with her mother, her provisional understanding of her mother and grandmother and of herself only comes through that empowering tool, that privilege, that she possesses and that is so indispensable for her identity construction:

I wonder, now, what it's like to live a life where you almost never write, almost never sign your name; what it means not to be able to use the act of writing to keep a record—of your feelings and thoughts and who you were and where you come from. Wonder what it means not to be able to participate in the creation of your identity through writing. (DESALVO 2004, 90)

DeSalvo situates herself in a space that defies geographic and domestic boundaries; she constructs herself in a textual space that is home, where she remembers and reinvents the past and all the craziness and tension in the kitchens of her mother and her mother's mother's homes.

On *Moving and Moving On: Relocating Home*

In *Nomadic Subjects*, Rosi Braidotti theorizes the contemporary mobile subject proposing three figurations of women – the migrant, the exile, and the nomad – acknowledging the economic and geo-political differences that distinguish them. Unlike the migrant and the exile, which she explores in depth in relationship to

migration trends in contemporary Europe, Braidotti's nomad is neither homeless nor displaced but rather has willingly chosen mobility. Furthermore, Braidotti suggests that the physical dimension of moving and its motivations, is only one aspect of mobility. She links nomadism, both physical and metaphorical nomadism, to subjectivity, suggesting that mobility is fundamental to a redefinition of female identity, values and idea.

Located not in the context of mass migration or exile, but in the everyday moves of millions of American «nomads», DeSalvo's most recent book, *On Moving* (2009), examines more than the tension between anxiety and exhilaration that comes with leaving an old abode for a new one. In *On Moving* DeSalvo draws parallels between the perennial (dis)ease experienced by migrants and her modern privileged position as someone about to move into a new home. The book's title is significant: *On Moving: A Writer's Meditations on New Houses, Old Haunts, and Finding Home Again*. While the phrase on moving conjures up many forms of mobility and the contemporary processes that moving implies, including but not limited to exile and migration, the subtitle alerts us to what is central to the text: the notion of moving as the physical (and emotional) act of changing residence. This movement is bookended by two material and affective homes—the one left behind after thirty years and the new home that holds no memories. In this clearly defined temporal space – the period in which the narrator sees herself located between homes – she ponders the personal reasons for changing home, historical motivations for changing home(land), and the relationship between home in flux and self in flux. The fundamental motivation behind moving lies in the strong desire for home; we move because we're convinced «that somewhere there is [a] place where [we'll] finally feel at home» (DESALVO 2009, 6).

In order to understand what motivates relocation, DeSalvo resorts again – as she does in *Breathless* and *Adultery* – to familiar writers and thinkers, providing through these newly constructed «moving» biographies, explanations for what motivates our moves and for the resulting feelings we experience. By rewriting and rethinking their experiences of moving as well as her family's own history of

migration, she draws connections between the present and the past: «[O]ur moves often recall those of our ancestors even those whose moving histories are unknown to us, for the significance of what moving meant to our forebears seems to be transmuted through the generations, sometimes nonverbally» (DESALVO 2009, 4).

Whether we move in search of our roots (Vita Sackville-West) or because our lives are determined by an obsession formed in childhood to remain constantly en-route (Eugene O'Neill, D.H. Lawrence, Mark Doty) and chronically displaced (Elizabeth Bishop), we each have a moving history. DeSalvo rewrites Virginia Woolf's life as one in search of the right place to write; through Sigmund Freud's exile, she explores the relationship between home and belonging(s); through Carl Jung's move, she relates the significance of home-making to the psychic process. For Marguerite Duras, home is a place to hide in order to write books, and Bonnard's paintings of/in his much loved home embody the notions of refuge and confinement. Where we live, the place we call home, she concludes, matters: «where we move to can enrich our lives» (DESALVO 2009, 183). For «intellectual nomads» such as DeSalvo and her literary models, «mobility also refers to the intellectual space of creativity that is to say the freedom to invent new ways of conducting our lives, new schemes of representation of ourselves» (BRAIDOTTI 1999, 256).

These eclectic anecdotal fragments from other writers' lives provoke DeSalvo's autobiographical responses. She intersperses her reflections on the writers' lives with reconstructions of her father's relationship to home and to his perennial sense of displacement. While earlier memoirs ended on a note of reconciliation with her mother, in *On Moving* DeSalvo forgives the father whom she had blamed in *Vertigo* for disrupting her home life – «[f]or turning our idyllic world upside down» (DESALVO 1996, 58-59). She recounts a different, more sympathetic version of her father's return home from the war to a place that was no longer his home. In *On Moving*, she symbolically comes home to her father, understanding his own moving history as «the most important gift my father gave me before he died» (DESALVO 2009, 9). She links her father and grandfather

to the male lineage of migration visible in the dreams of the new Korean migrants and the more recent Guatemalan migrants in search of home.

The final chapter of the book, *Moving On*, turns more specifically to the author's reflections on moving as a historical process. She reminds us that moving has an ancient history, and we can all, as she herself has done, trace our moving history. Studying these histories reveals the motivations behind migration: cataclysmic historical or geo-political events that still account for masses of people migrating today. But how can an understanding of these life-threatening motivations help us understand the motivation behind our privileged, chosen relocations? While not impelled to move because of calamitous circumstances, she suggests that her own moves in some way resemble those of her ancestors. Each of the moves in her lifetime has been prompted by a survival instinct: «each of my moves is remotely connected to feeling my life or well-being was threatened» (DESALVO 2009, 189).⁷ Her first move occurs because her «mother has been terrorized in her home» (DESALVO 2009, 184) by rowdy sailors who break into their apartment. Her father's need to erase the trauma of war accounts for the family's next move to Ridgefield. The desperation to escape the parental home leads the young DeSalvo to marriage, a move into an apartment, and the chance for an independent life. But repeated acts of violence, including a robbery and a murder in their apartment building, propel the young couple out of Jersey City: «I became too terrified to continue to live there» (DESALVO 2009, 191). While a sense of physical safety accompanies the move to Cranford, this home front soon becomes threatened by her husband's affair. To save the marriage, they move again to Palisades Park, a working-class neighbourhood close to their families and one that encompasses the emotional characteristics of home: «I am happy here, happier than in Jersey City or during that calamitous year in Cranford. My origins are working-class and this neighbourhood feels comfortable and familiar» (DESALVO 2009, 194). The next two moves also celebrate survival: after her husband manages to fortuitously avoid the draft, they move to Teaneck. The final move occurs shortly after 9/11, «in the aftermath of terror – the terror so many of us felt after that day – with the dream that it will

dissipate with a change of residence» (DESALVO 2009, 197). Writing her history of moves as relocation motivated by terror links her «moving history» to that of her ancestors: «when I asked my father why my grandfather came, he said 'He came, really, because he was afraid'» (DESALVO 2009, 179).

DeSalvo's pattern of moves motivated by fear questions the traditional understanding of home as refuge. It adheres, rather, to the feminist geographers' argument that, for women, home «might be dangerous, violent, alienating and unhappy rather than loving and secure» (BLUNT 2005, 6). As a result, women must leave home or relocate. In this process of relocation, the desire for a home, «which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives» (HOOKS 1991, 148), replaces nostalgia. Home as a physical space becomes a metaphor for an emotional space as women embrace the desire to transgress traditional boundaries of home. In a similar vein, for DeSalvo « [d]reaming about moving is always about desire: wanting something other than what you have; being someone other than who you are; living someplace other than where you live; experiencing life in a new way» (DESALVO 2009, 34). Such a place does not simply exist but is made: it is the result of the creative process, of home-making, and of understanding forms of belonging. It is the result of realizing the new home as necessary for the person who is (always) in the process of becoming.

The *Afterword* of the book is a final return home, «a final gesture of farewell» (DESALVO 2009, 201). In her ritual of leave-taking, the narrator turns to Henry Miller as a model. He is a writer who, before moving, parts with his writings: he travels light and moves on to his next home, «unfettered, ready to embark on another of life's great adventures, open to the experience of each new day» (DESALVO 2009, 203). As the narrator prepares to transition into her new abode, she bids a formal goodbye to her old home. She moves systematically through the house or, to borrow a term from Bruno's charting of emotional geography, she «travels domestic» (BRUNO 2002, 238), mapping her home, providing a landscape of her years spent there, reciting the life-narratives embodied in her children's bedrooms, in the animated bathroom, in her study (a writerly-motherly space), in the treasured sunken living room, and in the kitchen, the

«heart of the house» (DESALVO 2009, 208), the space that seamlessly merges the domestic with the literary. The house is a living document. The house is a text: it is a complex narrative of dreams, fantasies, bodies—a life map.

Moving through this emotional terrain allows her to remember and remember the house at the same time that it prepares her for detachment, for letting go. Theorizing, a transitive rather than a fixed relationship to the home, Bruno suggests that,

Wandering defines this cartography, which is guided by a fundamental remapping of dwelling. A constant redrafting of sites, rather than the circularity of origins and return, ensures that spatial attachment does not become a desire to possess. (BRUNO 2002, 86)

In this final return visit, the narrator is like the migrant returning to the place of origin where something has inevitably been left behind. However, the visit signals the move-in-progress not as a final relocation, but as part of a continual process. As a relocated subject, living between two homes, the narrator/subject of *On Moving* finds herself positioned as the prototype of the intellectual nomad. Not homeless, she is situated between two homes, privileged because as a writer, «she can recreate a home base anywhere» (BRAIDOTTI 1999,16).

And so slowly I let myself become the person the house seems to want me to be. A woman who has chosen to become more private, to turn her back on much of public life, to become more solitary, quieter, slower, a woman who is surprised by the person she is becoming. A woman who spends more time knitting than reading. One who makes simple soups from vegetables and heirloom beans she collects instead of the fancy food she used to spend hours concocting. (DESALVO 2009, 158)

DeSalvo's narrator is a female subject on the move, in transit, prepared to reconfigure her identity in a new home-space.

The Perpetually Journeying Subject

In both *Crazy in the Kitchen* and *On Moving*, the narrating subjects journey between homes. Mobility defines their sense of home as their identities are partly formed by and in the journey between homes. Home is reconfigured as a provisional site that can accommodate a constantly evolving subject in what

Linda Anderson calls a space of difference, «contained in the formulation ‘what will have been’; not somewhere we can ever return to or arrive at – never somewhere that can be planned or predicted or retreated to – but an opening up to present parameters towards change» (ANDERSON 1997, 132). Anderson’s formulation allows for a rethinking and re-imagining of mobility and home. Rather than being diametrically opposed, they become interrelated as women travel to negotiate new spaces of home and new spaces of creativity where there is the freedom to invent new ways of conducting their lives. DeSalvo’s autobiographical narrators retrace ancestral and literary histories, evoked by the senses and encoded in meaningful objects, rituals, and personal relationships. By undoing the past, the ancestral and personal past, the violent and oppressive past, they rewrite the anxiety of mobility. Rewriting fear and nostalgia into desire, they rewrite home and re-make home as lived and imagined places, sites of relocation, «mobile homes» to accommodate identities in flux.

Notes

- ¹ In recent years, a range of disciplines have published an enormous amount of research on issues of home. I have found the work by feminist geographers helpful in particular. I also found Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling's book *Home* (2006) a useful starting point. The chapter *Home: a Landscape of the Heart* (24-63) in *Domicide* (2001) by J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra E. Smith also provides a good panorama for ways in which home is understood.
- ² Louise DeSalvo was born in 1943. She spent the early part of her childhood in Hoboken, New Jersey. Her parents were both children of Italian immigrant parents. De Salvo received her PhD from NYU. She is a highly regarded Virginia Woolf scholar (*Virginia Woolf's First Voyage: A Novel in the Making* [1980], *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* [2001], *Melymbrosia by Virginia Woolf* [2002] *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work* [1989], *Conceived with Malice: Literature as Revenge in the Lives of Woolf, Lawrence, Barnes, Miller* [1994]), has published feminist readings of Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1987), and has co-edited with Edvige Giunta a book on American Women Writers on food and culture, *The Milk of Almonds: Italian American Women Writers on Food and Culture* (2003). She has written a number of autobiographical works including the memoirs *Adultery* (1999), *Breathless: An Asthma Journal* (1997), *Crazy in the Kitchen: Food, Feuds, and Forgiveness in an Italian American Family* (2004), *On Moving: A Writer's Meditation on New Houses, Old Haunts, and Finding Home Again*, (2009), *Vertigo: A Memoir* (1996), *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives* (2000), and autobiographical essays with roots in her Italian American experience. De Salvo is a writer and professor of English at Hunter College where she teaches students with backgrounds similar to her own.
- ³ VISCUSI 2010 traces the development of a field of study that hardly existed in the 1960s. He attributes the boom to the publication of critical works in both Italy and the United States which include: In 1990 Anthony Tamburri, Paolo A. Giordano, and Fred L. Gardaphé introduced the journal «VIA: Voices in Italian Americana», and Carol Bonomo Albright revived the journal «Italian American». In 1991 the editors of «VIA» published *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana, a collection of contemporary Italian American writing* and in 1994 Mary Jo Bona edited *The Voices We Carry: Recent Italian/American Women's Fictions*; in Italian American gender studies major works include George Guida's *The Peasant and the Pen* (2003), Bona's *Claiming a Tradition* (1994), Mary Ann Mannino's *Revisionary Identities Strategies of Empowerment in the Writing of Italian American Women* (2000), Edvige Giunta's *Writing with an Accent Contemporary Italian American Women Authors* (2002).
Significant works in Italian include the two volume anthology *Italo-Americana: Storia e letteratura degli Italiani negli stati uniti* (2001-2005), Martino Marazzi's *Misteri di Little Italy: Storie e testi della letteratura italoamericana* (2000).
In addition to citations in numerous critical works, Louise DeSalvo has earned a special volume dedicated to her work, CARONIA and GIUNTA, *Personal Effects* (2014) and Caterina Romeo has translated *Vertigo* into Italian (Rome, Nutrimenti, 2006).
- ⁴ Other works attributed to this category by Caterina Romeo are: Marianna De Marco Torgovnick's *Crossing Ocean Parkway* (1994), Helen Barolini's *A Circular Journey* (2006), Barbara Grizzuti Harrison's *An Accidental Autobiography* (1996), Diane di Prima's *Recollection of My Life as a Woman – The New York Years* (2001). The autobiographical production by Italian immigrants to the United States begins with works written in the nineteenth century but not published until the early decades of the twentieth century: Lorenzo Da Ponte (*Le memorie di Lorenzo Da Ponte, da Ceneda, scritte da esso* [1923]) and Blandina Segale (*At the End of the Santa Fe Trail* [1932]). Autobiographies of the 1920s and the decades following often recounted tales of migration and assimilation and the challenges faced in the process of becoming American (ROMEIO 2010, 133). The end of the 1960s saw the publication of another ground-breaking autobiographical text Diane di Prima's 1969 *Memoirs of a Beatnik*.

- 5 From its early association with immigrant identity and the challenges posed to and by Italian immigrants in their attempts to assimilate into the new country the term is today linked to the conservation and/or co-existence of Italianicity in the dominant culture.
- 6 Helen Barolini's anthology includes works (fiction, non-fiction, poetry) by 56 Italian women writers including Louise DeSalvo. The authors in the volume shared a sense of being Italian American women writers but did not feel part of a community of writers. Things have changed significantly since then, with Italian American writers gaining critical attention in both the United States and Italy and Italian American women writers even have their own Facebook group, the Malia Collective, www.facebook.com/groups/21922378314 (27.02.2015).
- 7 DeSalvo writes extensively about her family's move from Hoboken to Ridgefield in the chapter entitled *Safe Houses* in *Vertigo*. She elaborates on the feelings of loss associated with this move and the relationship between feelings of safety and the notion of home (DESALVO 1996, 87-95).

Bibliography

ANDERSON 1997

Linda ANDERSON, *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Futures*, NY, Prentice Hall, 1997.

BAROLINI 1985

The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian American Women, ed. Helen Barolini, New York, Schocken Books, 1985.

BAROLINI 2006

Helen BAROLINI, *A Circular Journey*, New York, Fordham UP, 2006.

BLUNT 2005

Alison BLUNT, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home*, Malden, MA, Blackwell Pub., 2005.

BLUNT and DOWLING 2006

Alison BLUNT and Robyn DOWLING, *Home*, London and NY, Routledge, 2006.

BONA 1999

Mary Jo BONA, *Claiming a Tradition: Italian American Women Writers*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois UP, 1999.

BONA

The Voices We Carry: Recent Italian/American Women's Fictions, ed. Mary Jo Bona, New York, Guernica, 1994.

BRAIDOTTI 1999

Rosi BRAIDOTTI, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, NY, Columbia U P, 1999.

BRUNO 2002

Giuliana BRUNO, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, NY, Verso, 2002.

CARONIA and GIUNTA 2014

Personal Effects: Essays on Memoires, Teaching and Culture in the Work of Louise DeSalvo, eds. Nancy Caronia and Evige Giunta, New York, Fordham University Press, 2014.

DA PONTE 1923

Lorenzo DA PONTE, *Le memorie di Lorenzo Da Ponte, da Ceneda, scritte da esso*, New York, Gray, 1923.

DE MARCO TORGOVNICK 1994

Marianna DE MARCO TORGOVNICK, *Crossing Ocean Parkway: Readings by an Italian American Daughter*, Chicago, University of Chicago P, 1994.

DESALVO 1999

Louise DESALVO, *Adultery*, Boston, Beacon, 1999.

DESALVO 1997

Louise DESALVO, *Breathless: An Asthma Journal*, Boston, Beacon, 1997.

DESALVO 1994

Louise DESALVO, *Conceived with Malice Literature as Revenge in the Lives of Woolf, Lawrence, Barnes, Miller*, New York, Dutton, 1994.

DESALVO 2004

Louise DESALVO, *Crazy in the Kitchen: Food, Feuds, and Forgiveness in an Italian American Family*, NY, Bloomsbury, 2004.

DESALVO 1987

Louise DESALVO, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Humanities Press International, 1987.

DESALVO 2009

Louise DESALVO, *On Moving: A Writer's Meditation on New Houses, Old Haunts, and Finding Home Again*, NY, Bloomsbury, 2009.

DESALVO 1996

Louise DESALVO, *Vertigo: A Memoir*, NY, The Feminist P, 1996.

DESALVO 1989

Louise DESALVO, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1989.

DESALVO 1980

Louise DESALVO, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage: A Novel in the Making*, Totowa, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1980.

DESALVO 2000

Louise DESALVO, *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*, Boston, Beacon, 2000.

DESALVO 2002

Melymbrosia by Virginia Woolf, ed. Louise DeSalvo, San Francisco, Cleis Press, 2002.

DESALVO and GIUNTA 2003

The Milk of Almonds: Italian American Women Writers on Food and Culture, eds. Louise DeSalvo and Edvige Giunta, New York, The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2003.

DESALVO and LEASKA 2001

The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf, eds. Louise DeSalvo and Mitchell Leaska, San Francisco, Cleis Press, 2001.

DI PRIMA 1969

Diane DI PRIMA, *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, New York, Penguin, 1969.

DI PRIMA 2001

Diane DI PRIMA, *Recollection of My Life as a Woman – The New York Years*, New York, Viking, 2001.

DURANTE 2001-2005

Italo-Americana: Storia e letteratura degli Italiani negli Stati Uniti 1776-1880, a c. di Francesco Durante, Milano, Mondadori, 2 voll., 2001-2005.

EAKIN 1985

John Paul EAKIN, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-invention*, Princeton, Princeton U P, 1985.

FISCHER 1986

Michael M.J. FISCHER, *Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory*, in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Berkeley, CA, U of California P, 1986.

GILBERT 2002

Sandra M. GILBERT, *A Fine, White Flying Myth*, in *Shakespeare's Sisters*, eds. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1979.

GIUNTA 2002

Edvige GIUNTA, *Writing with an Accent Contemporary Italian American Women Authors*, New York, Palgrave, 2002.

GRIZZUTI HARRISON 1996

Barbara GRIZZUTI HARRISON, *An Accidental Autobiography*, Boston, Houghton, 1996.

GUGLIELMO 2003

Thomas GUGLIELMO, 'No Color Barrier': *Italians, Race, and Power in the United States in Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America*, eds. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, New York, Routledge, 2003.

GUIDA 2003

George GUIDA, *The Peasant and the Pen: Men Enterprise and the Recovery of Culture in Italian American Narrative*, New York, Lang, 2003.

HENKE 1998

Suzette HENKE, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing*, NY, St. Martin's Press, 1998.

HOOKS 1991

bell HOOKS, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, London, Turnaround, 1991.

MANNINO 2000

Mary Ann MANNINO, *Revisionary Identities Strategies of Empowerment in the Writing of Italian/American Women*, New York, Lang, 2000.

MARAZZI 2000

Martino MARAZZI, *Misteri di Little Italy: Storie e testi della letteratura italoamericana*, Milano, Angeli, 2000.

OLNEY 1999

James OLNEY, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing*, Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1999.

PORTEOUS and SMITH 2001

Douglas J. PORTEOUS and Sandra E. SMITH, *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's UP, 2001.

ROMEO 2010

Caterina ROMEO, *Remembering, Misremembering and Forgetting the Motherland, in Teaching American Literature Film and Popular Culture*, eds. Evige Giunta and Kathleen Zamboni McCormick, New York, MLA, 2010.

SEGALE 1999

Blandina SEGALE, *At the End of the Santa Fe Trail 1932*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico P, 1999.

SMITH 2001

Sidonie SMITH, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minneapolis, U of Minnesota P, 2001.

TAMBURRI, GIORDANO, and GARDAPHÉ 1991

From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana, eds. Anthony Tamburri, Paolo A. Giordano, and Fred L. Gardaphé, West Lafayette, Purdue UP, 1991.

VISCUSI 2010

Robert VISCUSI, *The History of Italian American Literary Studies Teaching American Literature Film and Popular Culture*, eds. Evige Giunta and Kathleen Zamboni McCormick, New York, MLA, 2010.