Université de Montréal

*Geographies of Care and Posthuman Relationality
in North American Fiction by Women*

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Résumé

Cette thèse met en relief comment la primauté de la relationalité est représentée dans sept romans nord-américains contemporains écrits par des femmes. Pour y arriver, je montre, d'un point de vue critique, comment les notions de « géographies du *care* » et de « *care* posthumain » favorisent l'identification de pratiques et d'attitudes d'un « prendre soin » qui facilitent, non sans obstacle, l'appropriation de structures sociales et intimes par le développement d'espaces et de relations de solidarité. Cette étude fait ainsi interagir les pratiques du *care* et les pratiques discursives afin de mieux cerner « les inégalités structurelles et les enjeux de la domination qui touchent les sujets marginalisés » (Bourgault & Perreault 11).

Le premier chapitre déploie le tissage conceptuel de la thèse à l'intersection de la géographie émotionnelle (Davidson, Bondi & Smith; Anderson & Smith), de théories féministes sur l'espace (Shands, Miranne & Young, Massey), des éthiques du *care* (Laugier, Tronto) et du discours sur le posthumain (Braidotti, Hayles). Situant d'abord les ancrages entre l'espace vécu et le *care*, je propose un déplacement de la notion de « chez soi » vers celle de « géographies du care » afin de mieux circonscrire les expériences relationnelles imaginées dans les romans. Puis j'introduis le concept du « care posthumain » comme outil critique afin de mieux identifier les nouvelles subjectivités représentées et d'approfondir les apports du *care* lorsque les relations intersubjectives mettent en scène des figures non humaines et non vivantes.

Le deuxième chapitre explore les pratiques soucieuses et spatiales de préservation et de protection dans les romans *Housekeeping* et *Room* en portant attention à comment chacun des textes montre les difficultés de recevoir et de donner différentes formes de *care* en contextes d'oppression patriarcale, de marginalisation sociale et de tensions familiales. Je pose aussi certaines balises théoriques et méthodologiques quant à la lecture et à la configuration, en tant

que lectrice privilégiée, des représentations de subjectivités fragiles et de lieux de dominations dans les textes. Le troisième chapitre pose un regard critique sur deux romans qui imaginent un espace domestique marqué par l'exclusion, les dynamiques de pouvoir et le contrôle des corps : *The Birth House* et *Sous béton*. Les géographies du *care* dans ces deux romans montrent les liens complexes entre les notions de proximité relationnelle, d'appartenance et d'autonomie alors que le quotidien des personnages est inscrit dans une dynamique oppressive articulée par des conventions morales, sociales et scientifiques qui tendent à déshumaniser ceux et celles qui ne se conforment pas.

Le quatrième chapitre analyse comment le fardeau du trauma et les figures fantomatiques affectent l'expérience relationnelle des personnages ainsi que leur rapport à l'hospitalité et au processus de guérison. Les romans *Home* et *Le ciel de Bay City* montrent comment ces figures fantomatiques symbolisent les liens entre mémoire, trauma, et responsabilité, des liens entre passé et présent que le *care* illumine. Finalement, le cinquième chapitre aborde la notion de « care posthumain » directement, par un retour à *Sous béton* et à *Room*, dans lesquels les protagonistes évoluent au fil de relations avec des éléments non humains. J'analyse aussi le roman post-apocalyptique *The Year of the Flood*, dans lequel les protagonistes usent de stratégies de résistance qui favorisent la solidarité, la guérison et l'adaptation à des débordements technoscientifiques.

Mots clés :

Littérature contemporaine, éthiques du *care*, posthumain, espace vécu, sujets marginalisés, géographies du *care*, et relationalité.

Abstract

This dissertation explores how seven contemporary North-American novels written by women illustrate the primacy of relationality. To achieve this goal, I use the notions of "geographies of care" and "posthuman care" critically to uncover, in the texts, gestures, and attitudes of care that facilitate, despite obstacles, the appropriation of social and intimate structures through the development of spaces and relationships of solidarity. This study places caring and discursive practices into dialogue to circumscribe "les inégalités structurelles et les enjeux de domination qui touchent les sujets marginalisés" (Bourgault & Perreault 11).

The first chapter consists of a theoretical discussion at the intersection of emotional geography (Davidson, Bondi & Smith, Anderson & Smith), feminist space theory (Shands, Miranne & Young, Massey), care ethics (Laugier, Tronto, DeFalco), and critical posthumanism (Braidotti, Hayle). I expose the interconnections between care and relational space before showing the relevance of geographies of care over the notion of home. Finally, I introduce the idea of posthuman care as a critical tool for reading new subjectivities and for complicating the input of care when intersubjective relations involve the nonhuman.

Chapter two explores caring and spatial preservation and protection practices in the novels *Housekeeping* and *Room*, by looking at how each text illustrates difficulties of caregiving and care receiving in contexts of patriarchal oppression, social marginalization, and familial tensions. It also sets certain theoretical and methodological beacons regarding the reading and the configuring, as a privileged reader, of representations of fragile subjectivities and spaces of domination in the texts. The third chapter investigates two novels that dramatize domestic spaces marked by exclusion, power dynamics, and control of the body: *The Birth House* and *Sous béton*. In both novels the geographies of care expose complex links between notions of

relational proximity, belonging and autonomy as the characters' everyday struggle is characterized by constraining social, moral and scientific conventions that tend to dehumanize those who do not fit.

Chapter four analyzes how the burden of trauma and ghostly figures affect the relational experiences of characters, their sense of hospitality and ability to heal. The novels *Home* and *Le ciel de Bay City* illustrate how these ghostly figures symbolize and testify to the interconnections between memory, trauma, and responsibility and uncover links between past and present that care illuminates. And finally, Chapter five addresses the notion of "posthuman care" directly by returning to *Sous béton* and *Room*, in which the characters evolve through interactions with the nonhuman. I also address the post-apocalyptic novel *The Year of the Flood*, in which the protagonists make use of strategies of resistance that foster solidarity, healing, and easier adaptation to techno-scientific excesses.

Key words: Contemporary literature, ethics of care, posthuman, lived space, geographies of care, marginalized subjects, and relationality.

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

We prefer to think of buildings as solid,
of home as a place of safety,
of ourselves as separate from our neighbours,
and of our bodies made of living flesh
not inorganic atoms.
A traumatic event demonstrates
how untenable, or how insecure,
these distinctions are and these assumptions are.
It calls for nothing more or less
than the recognition
of the radical relationality of existence.
–Jenny Edkins

Over the last few decades, there has been heightened interest in the ethics of care from critics in the humanities. Initially in reaction to epistemological and cultural sexism, care ethicists developed a feminist perspective of care that centred on notions of the maternal, solicitude and female moral reasoning. The second wave of care ethics has continued investigating these issues by responding to criticism constructively. It has augmented the discussion of the ethics of care in relation to multiple issues, from global and social politics (F. Robinson, Tronto, Sevenhuijsen) to disability studies (Kittay & Feder), gendered division of labour (Hamrouni) and animal ethics (Laugier, Le Goff). Care ethics as epistemological and social perspective has also impacted other research fields such as bioethics, medicine, and human and cultural geography in efforts to promote care-related values such as responsibility, hospitality, interdependence and reciprocity.

This study is interested in the fictional representations of care attitudes and practices and on their impacts on human lived environments and coping mechanisms, an investigation that demands attention to issues of balance between distance and presence (DeFalco, "Moral Obligations" 4), interdependence, responsibility, and healing. I refer to the interactions between

those issues as "geographies of care," a figuration that I borrow from the field of emotional geography and that I appropriate to theorize the network of co-constitutive spatial and caring experiences that the novels illustrate. I apply this image as a result of using an interpretive and theoretical community of care ethicists and human geographers. My choice is also influenced by a discourse in cultural studies that "is littered with spatial metaphors" (Gesler and Kearns 77) and that unravels relational, co-constitutive and political configurations of the self and the other, which necessarily includes or at least indirectly touches the "relational construction of the identity of place" (Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility" 5).

This dissertation thus puts the fields of care ethics and human geography in dialogue by using the subtopic of emotional geography to shed light on the geographies of care in fictional posthuman encounters. In the context of this study, posthuman encounters involve interactions between human subjects and nonhuman others that problematize the sovereignty of the human figure and make place for new embodied subjectivities. I will demonstrate how critical posthumanism, as field that questions the condition of the posthuman and the varieties of posthumanism, and the field of emotional geography use the perspective of care extensively. Accordingly, they provide useful conceptual material for reading the representations of caring encounters and the demands for care in selected novels that rewrite and imagine living spaces in posthuman settings. Needing new terminology to characterize unconventional moral and spatial experiences found in the corpus, I build conceptual bridges between these disciplines to better understand how particular kinds of environments and embodied relationships "challenge the hegemonic notion of individuals as isolated atomistic entities," problematizing and shedding light on "the ongoing struggle to disrupt the binaries of the local and the global," of care and justice, and of the self and the other (Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility" 5, 14).

Reading geographies of care in the literary texts allows initiating a conversation about what I term "posthuman care." While some analyses of geographies of care show co-constitutive socio-spatial and caring negotiations between human constructs that reach beyond androcentric, humanist structures, others also shed light on caring human and nonhuman relationality represented by figures of ghosts, objects and hybrid living beings that also challenge the human paradigm, albeit on different terms. Moreover, my focus on fictional representation attends to particular situations that expose many obstacles to caring relationships. More precisely, how the selected texts make clear the "difficulty of responding to another's needs" (7) and challenge the dichotomies of human/nonhuman and life/death confirms what Marie-Anne Casselot identifies as "the inevitability of care".

The notion of "posthuman care" might seem euphemistic because care ethics is inscribed in social, cultural and theoretical approaches that seek to disrupt humanist, usually male-oriented Western thought based on individualism, anthropocentrism, and patriarchy. However, I use this term to differentiate my conceptualization of care from that of other researchers who strictly focus on specific and material forms of care such as care work and "para-ordinary" care (DeFalco). I also expose care ethics' natural disruption of "human exceptionalism" (LaGrandeur), which I suggest evokes the umbrella term of the posthuman. Accordingly, this project uses care in its widest definition, as an abstract and polysemous notion, to read the different moral and spatial trajectories of geographies of care in the corpus. I also use critical posthumanism to engage creatively with the representations of relationships between human and nonhuman figures and to think further the functions of care as a tool that sheds light on the unseen, the unheard, and possibly the unthought. Drawing on Seyla Benhabib's critical discussion about the "limits of universalistic discourse," I wish to argue that posthuman care

sheds light on very different "intimations of otherness in the present that can lead to the future," and amplifies discourse on relationality (Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other" 416). Accordingly, the corpus brings attention to several facets of geographies of care, some of which emphasize care as a fundamentally posthuman critical tool. Contextualized, inventive, transgressive, temporal, spatial, human and nonhuman, care is a weaving device that works both as a "lieu de mémoire" (Carrière, "Mémoire du Care" 6) and as potentiality for healing and a better future.

To map the conceptual process from geographies of care to posthuman care, I use contemporary novels written by women that help decode the importance of care for human survival (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 6). These selected novels dramatize challenging experiences of lived space in which the protagonists' caring choices make place for new, revitalized configurations of relationships that problematize moral and social conventions. Indeed, the dramatization of intersubjective, caring processes that use nonhuman others shed light on care as set of preservative structures that shape human life and as marker of posthuman accountability. More precisely, the fictional representations selected for this project use memory and figures of the posthuman as lineage tracing system: haunting, objects, symbolic living spaces and nonhuman beings participate the protagonists' negotiations and at times reconciliation processes with family and community. Referred to as geographies of care, these tracing systems reveal how care operates not only in human relationships but also in key interactions with the nonhuman, helping the protagonists to make sense and to compose with their demands for care with those of others in situations of inequality and precarity. Accordingly, the geo-emotional processes that the texts dramatize also bring to attention the survival strategies that the characters develop to mend broken relationships and to recover from abusive, harmful caregiving. This

project thus participates in the emerging conversation at the intersection of care ethics and literature by exploring literary representations that unveil new knowledge about care attitudes and practices and that serve to reshape and reimagine agency, subjectivity, and social structures.

Geo-emotional processes refer to the co-constitutive tensions between emotions and geographies, mainly theorized by the field of emotional geography, but to which I attend to in this literary project. Indeed, to theorize geographies of care and to demonstrate the interactions between the posthuman, caring gestures, and literary representations, I bring together theories of care and emotional geography. This theoretical configuration provides solid ground on which to read a set of contemporary novels marked by pain and suffering. These stories expose the links between several layers of systemic, historical and contextual abuse (sex/gender oppression, racism, physical and emotional abuse, and mourning). While the fictional texts address very different forms of crises and imagine different worlds at different times and in different places, they all express concerns about lineage and legacy through socio-spatial symbols and embodiment. The house, the domestic, the public, the basement, the body, and memory serve as narrative and textual elements through which the characters make sense of their need for and responsibility to care.

Initially, this project centered on the notion of home in fiction by women. However, it rapidly came to light that this dissertation was really about care and lineage and that my conceptual concerns had to do with geo-emotional and moral processes rather than with home space as central figure. Therefore, with perspective, the selected stories do not simply rewrite home space: geographies of care disrupt its shared features and open its traditional boundaries to revitalize its potential as source of both harm and care and to question its role in the quality of care to which inhabitants have access. The representations of family struggle, of haunting,

and of solidarity among characters who seek alternatives to abusive family and community life rather illustrate how lineage and figures from the past operate on and affect the subjects' capacity and willingness to care for themselves and for others in problematic and morally charged living spaces that problematize home space as personal, intimate, and undoubtedly caring. Using the figuration of geographies of care directs attention to other socio-spatial forms that help, in my opinion, uncovering new, and at times unsuspected, modalities of lived space that the predominance of home in spatial discourse has tended to overshadow. Without entirely rejecting the notion of home, I nevertheless have decided to refrain from using it too directly in reference to the spatial articulations in the texts.

This experimental choice also helps to focus on rendering care more visible in the spatial and relational processes, and I contend that taking a step back from such a heavily charged notion makes room for investigating invisible or lesser-known parameters of caring spaces. I am not suggesting that geographies of care and home are mutually exclusive. Rather, I suggest that geographies of care allow concentrating on the care gestures and attitudes that participate in relational processes of identity construction, whereas home, with its political and material implications, risks imposing terminological and conceptual boundaries not porous enough. As the textual analyses will show, geographies of care express the characters' relational experience: they are "located in a variety of spaces at the same time, spaces which are, all at once, multi-dimensional, shifting, contingent" (Rose 140). And, to further explore the permeable boundaries – spatial, material, relational – between human and nonhuman – I put geographies of care in dialogue with the idea of posthuman care. This puts in tension the role of the past and of haunting figures with other nonhuman things, exposing another facet of geographies of care that implies negotiations between life and death.

Concerned with conceptual and textual issues, this project is twofold: it uses fiction to further the contemporary discussion on care ethics, and it uses care ethics to provide new knowledge about literature. More precisely, I appropriate care ethics to read attitudes and practices of care in novels where there is an apparent struggle for comfortable, hospitable living spaces, often used in the texts as symbols of fragile identity construction processes. This investigation stems from an interest in the past and present geographies that allow subjects to question and to develop their relational and intersubjective identity in contexts that do not favour or encourage such questioning and development. These texts also raise important questions about the impacts of such caring on one's sense of belonging, which is mainly expressed in the stories through varied forms of memory and symbolic living spaces affected by a lack of or abundance of care gestures and leading to the forging of more inclusive and transgressive geographies and identities. Regarding care practices, gestures of responsibility, hospitality, and attention, as well as issues of relational proximity, recognition, and social transformation invest the narratives with emancipatory aspirations that, without necessarily being successful, nevertheless open the door for new expressions of well-being.

There are many publications about ethics and literature[1] that focus on what Tobin Siebers describes as "the means by which literary criticism affects the relation between literature and human life" and that look into "the impact of theoretical choice on the relation between literature and the lives of human beings" (Siebers 2). However, only a very small number of researchers in literature use care ethics and feminist care ethics in their work. While interest appears to be growing in France and Canada,[2] as illustrated by an international academic conference

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[1] For important publications on ethics and literature, see Bauman, Siebers, Lorenzini and Revel, Davis and Womack, and Laugier (2006).

[2] On literature and care, see Carrière, DeFalco, Deschênes, Hétu, and Snauwaert.

organized at the Université de Montréal and few publications, much remains to be done regarding the textual and narrative impacts and functions of care in literary and artistic contexts. In fact, and as Marjolaine Deschênes rightfully remarks, much of what is published on literature and care ethics concerns how literature serves philosophy, how it impacts moral attitudes towards life as a form of experience (14) rather than it discusses what Deschênes calls a "littérature *care*" or "écriture du care".

In addition to the field of emotional geography, I also use a mostly feminist alternative body of work that complements the ethics of care and that also seeks to challenge the male-oriented tradition of independence and autonomy as privileged values for defining human state and experience. Hence, the theoretical and critical work of Iris Marion Young, Elizabeth Grosz, Kerstin W. Shands, Doreen Massey, and Roxanne Rimstead on space and women inform my literary analyses and compose a strong interdisciplinary model with which to configure my reading of socio-spatial configurations in the selected texts. They provide additional and sometimes radical ideas and concepts that are necessary for the analysis of a corpus composed of a wide range of fictional representations of the experience of being-at-home in contexts of sex-gendered, class and racial exclusion and oppression. Their contributions nourish my understanding of space as a relational and webbed process and my conceptualisation of this relationality as a fundamental trait of human experience and identity construction. They each provide a unique perspective on space and on "ways of living as bodies in space" (Grosz *Space, Time* 93). Also, beyond supplementing or correcting existing models of knowing, they disrupt mainstream knowledge and – more importantly – they "develop altogether different forms and methods of knowing and positions of epistemological enunciation" (41). They are committed to the theorizing of a plurality of experience within their respective field (philosophy, geography,

literature), which validates my similar interdisciplinary approach to the representation of experience in fiction.

Despite not addressing or using the field of care ethics in their work, these feminist thinkers share intentions similar to mine. They offer alternatives to normative and naturalized theories that fail to include women and other marginalized subjectivities as subjects of knowledge and that express a "naive humanism insufficiently aware of social plurality" (Young 7-8). For instance, without directly addressing care ethics, Young addresses the work of caring in her theorization of the lived body and her discussion of the ambivalence of house and home through notions of preservation and the "much unnoticed labor of women" of "meaning maintenance" (127). This resonates with my starting hypothesis that care practices and lived space are interrelated and mutually influential. Also working on space and bodies, Grosz refers to the notion of relationality to explain the interconnections between space and corporeality as well as to stress the importance of being able, for subjects, to situate him- or herself "as a being located in the space occupied by his body" (89). Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Henri Bergson, Grosz suggests "the ways in which space is perceived and represented depend on the kinds of *relation* the subject has to . . . objects. Space makes possible different kinds of relations but in turn is transformed according to the subject's *affective and instrumental relations* with it" (92, emphasis added). Her focus on the relational processes within lived space and, like Young, on the particularities of the situated body, also supports my argument that their feminist theorization of space uncovers a language of care ethics – sometimes referred to as and conflated with an ethics of relationality – that must be brought to attention.

Literature at the intersection of care and human and cultural geography has grown since the early 2000s. Particularly in the fields of emotional and human geography, publications use

the notion of "geographies of care" to "suggest that we build *spatially extensive* connections of interdependence and mutuality" (Lawson 1, emphasis added). A dialogue between care ethics and human geography, which both draw on feminist theory, indeed provides new arguments with which to destabilize interrelated categories of livability and subjectivity by infusing the experience of lived space with the material, emotional and ontological elements of care. Such a conversation also serves to denaturalize historical and long-standing social structures of public and private categories and sex-gendered power forces that dictate social and moral behaviours and render care practices "relatively unnoticed and little valued" (Young 23).

The Corpus

From Québec, Canada, and the United-States, the selected novels illustrate, in different historical and spatial contexts, the struggles that vulnerable subjects experience as they try to cope with inhabitable places and relationships as well as with hostile environments and communities. The coping strategies involve caring and careful relational processes between the protagonists and other characters as well as between old and "new moral landscapes," which shed light on the functions of particular ethical, social practices such as transiency, sheltering, drifting, dreaming, protection and preservation (Gleeson & Kearns 74).

Published in Québec, in Canada and the United-States between 1980 and 2013, the selected pieces of fiction are written by women and address, either in French or English, at times directly and at others more subtly, issues of private and public spatial struggle, belonging, corporeality, and care. I have selected *The Year of the Flood*, by Margaret Atwood; *Room*, by Emma Donoghue; *Sous-Béton*, by Karoline Georges; *Le Ciel de Bay City*, by Catherine Mavrikakis; *The Birth House*, by Amy McKay; *Home*, by Toni Morrison; and *Housekeeping*,

by Marilynne Robinson. This corpus questions unconventional life trajectories; it dramatizes experiences of memory and trauma; physical and psychological abuse; transiency and drifting; and uncovers geographies of care shaped by family relationships and a troubled sense of geo-emotional belonging. These primary sources share similarities but also present many differences, allowing better identifying and comparing the textual and narrative possibilities of geographies of care as well as providing multiple angles from which to approach the dialogue of care and fiction.

In *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood dramatizes the dangers of technoscientific progress by telling the story of Toby and Ren, two women who negotiate their identities and their life stories in a post-apocalyptic world. The two protagonists use strategies of survival marked by solidarity, healing, and eco-responsibility to cope with their experiences of mourning, sexual and physical abuse, and isolation with care gestures and practices. The latter operate as acts of resistance and transgression in their new micro-society that tends to replicate patriarchal and power-driven patterns.

Emma Donoghue, with the novel *Room*, challenges the concept of home space by setting her story in a violent and confining environment and by focusing on the survival and protection strategies used by the characters to make sense of their world. The narrative begins with a mother and her son who are held captive. As they escape confinement, they both experience different reactions to the new world they inhabit, and this strongly impacts their relationship. The author explores language, trauma, and trust in connection to issues of displacement and rebuilding, stressing the strong interconnections between intense emotional, physical and mental disturbance, interdependence, and symbolic places. In *Room*, the geographies of care are characterized by the complex relationship between mother and son as well as by the particular

use of objects. The latter strategy serves to open, in the text, the boundaries of care, and to uncover functions of care that reach beyond the living and human. Those caring processes shed light on other sources of healing and meaning, and discover additional elements for understanding the symbolic and geo-emotional delineations of posthuman care.

The short apocalyptic novel *Sous Béton*, by Karoline Georges, centers on the inhumane living conditions of a young male protagonist and his interaction with his siblings and surroundings. Set in a mile-wide and mile-high bunker called "l'Édifice," this short novel explores the limits of the body in a situation of extreme violence and alienation and in which humans are fed pills and treated like cattle. Deprived of a sense of comfort and love, the young boy experiences a striking moment of awakening and develops a particular connection with the concrete wall in which he finds a breach and through which he tries to escape and to make sense of the world. Symbolically and physically homeless, this character develops psychological and posthuman strategies to escape corporeal violence and emotional emptiness, reinventing his sense of being in the world and his embodied self.

Addressing issues of death and memory, *Le ciel de Bay City*, by Catherine Mavrikakis, tells the story of a young woman named Amy who does not fit in her family and who tries to resist the weight of historical memory and trauma related to the Holocaust. The present, illustrated by the family's relation to space and place as well as the relationships between siblings, is heavily haunted by the past. The living is haunted by the dead and the protagonist, a pilot fascinated by the sky but who has strong connections to her childhood house basement, struggles to preserve her sanity and make sense of her presence in the world. Also telling the difficult life story of a young woman who struggles to fit in her community, *The Birth House*, by Ami McKay, is set in an early 20th century Nova-Scotia. The protagonist, Dora Rare, must

negotiate her place in the community as she wishes to continue the legacy of Miss B., who is the healer and midwife of the village. Dora and Miss B. encounter difficulties when Dr. Thomas, who symbolizes modern medicine, arrives in the village. His medical practice participates in the pathologization of women, the shaming of non-scientific healing practices and patriarchal medicine. In this novel, geographies of care pertain both to a rewriting of domesticity as Dora resists social norms about women's place in the community and in the private sphere and to transgressive care practices that blur the boundaries of relational proximity by disrupting conventional structures of the family.

In her 2012 novella *Home*, Toni Morrison dramatizes the journey of a racialized subject and war veteran who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and who is haunted by memories of the war and his childhood. Racism, segregation and interrelated responsibility for the self and others are central topics in this narrative set after the Korean War. The protagonist's sense of duty towards his younger sister is what gives him the strength to embark on a journey that leads to new geographies of care, but that also brings him back in the segregated South and triggers the memory of traumatic events. The interactions between these psychological, emotional and socio-spatial struggles limit the extent of his care, and it is when he reunites with his sister and when he finds healing in this interdependent relationship that he can search for and take charge of his voice. Finally, Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping* explores family ties and responsibilities by dramatizing interactions among siblings and with their hostile community. It represents caregiving struggles and fragile living spaces. Robinson's novel focuses on the negotiations and appropriation of living spaces, of domesticity, and on the development of strategies for coping with death, for making amends, and for protecting fragmented life stories.

While the genres, settings, contexts, and styles vary, these novels all seem to suggest, through their representations of inter- and codependent characters, that "la relation est l'unité appropriée" (Paperman & Molinier 16). They also expose how this relation, as it evolves and affects the different living spaces that the protagonists experience, is at the core of geographies of care. Again, those relationships are not only composed of human constructs, but also involve nonhuman living beings and objects. The analysis of this corpus thus participates in a discussion about care ethics that questions and disrupts human's sovereignty in the world. This study also engages in the development of an alternative geoeomotional approach that appeals to a particular sense of human responsibility, and that is concerned about the human and nonhuman networkings that demand a certain reconfiguration of our sense of identity. With this dissertation, I hope to demonstrate that geographies of care, as figuration, allow reconsidering what matters to foster and maintain, in vulnerable states always, a good life.

Drawing on Astrida Neimanis' critical discussion of concepts in *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, I suggest that geographies of care are a figuration, an "embodied concept" rooted in a posthuman feminist genealogy. Referring to Donna Haraway, Neimanis configures "figurations as 'living maps' that acknowledge 'concretely situated historical positions'" (8). She adds that

> [f]igurations are keys or imagining and living otherwise, but unlike a concept unfettered by the world we actually live in or as, figurations are importantly grounded in our material reality (I have never been entirely convinced by theory that frames anything as wholly 'immaterial' . . .) I like the idea that our best concepts are already here, semi-formed and literally at our fingertips, awaiting activation. (8)

Quoting Braidotti, Neimanis argues that "figurations can also be a mode of feminist protest: a 'literal expression' of those parts of us that the 'phallogocentric regime' has 'declared off-limits' and 'does not want us to become'" (8). My configuration of geographies of care, along with my theorization of posthuman care, resonate with this "feminist impetus" (8) and, like Neimanis' bodies of water, they are "not arbitrary, but arise in response to a particular contemporary question or problem" (8): my inquiry is rooted in the resurgence of the theme of vulnerability (Ferrarese 132) and in an ethical and political "rethinking [of] bodily matters beyond a humanist imagination" (Neimanis 9).

Finding echo in Axel Honneth's theory of recognition that elaborates on the necessary conditions for a "vie réussie," Judith Butler's essay *Precarious Life*, Martha Nussbaum's "fragilité de la vie bonne," and Estelle Ferrarese's political theorization of vulnerability, I apply my configuration of geographies of care to depictions of vulnerable lives that raise questions about "the political ramifications of gendered [and human] obligations to care" (DeFalco, *Imagining* 15). Subsequently, my figuration of posthuman care underlines a particular need to reach beyond interhuman relationality. Neither "conceptual fantasy or metaphor," geographies of care and posthuman care encourage an imaginative traveling that raises questions about the lineage that structures one's meaningful experience of being in the world. They unveil critical questions about the "geography of the relations through which the identity … is established and reproduced" (Massey 6) and about "corporeal relational ethics *that begins to extend beyond the individual human*" (Neimanis 11).

The Chapters

Five chapters structure the theoretical discussion on the different functions and expressions of care as narrative and textual tool in the texts and as perspective with which to read the stories. The aim of this dissertation is to bring various discourses into dialogue by examining the interrelations between care and lived experience in novels written by women and by shedding light on the potential of literature for enriching our understanding of posthuman relationality. This investigation thus attends to geographies of care articulated between human subjects but is also motivated by the presence of nonhuman others, bringing attention to how the representations of care interact with the posthuman in their imagination of new, more hospitable territories.

In the different chapters, attention is directed to characters that barely fit in their respective communities, who struggle to belong and to feel a sense of belonging in environments that sometimes tend to exclude them and in others that offer a receptive response to their direct or indirect calls for help. The characters are also sometimes considered immoral and are therefore ostracized by other subjects or by their community, which highly impacts their situatedness, their corporeality, their freedom and their socio-spatial experience. Similar to what Amelia DeFalco observes about the dramatization of the disabled body in Canadian narratives of caregiving, the embodiment of selfhood from the perspective of care ethics emphasizes, in my selected corpus, "the fallacy of individualism and the vulnerability inherent in embodiment" (*Imagining Care* 33). More precisely, the bodies develop with other bodies, and they are marked by self-care gestures and the caring of other embodied subjects. A core component of geographies of care is thus the body characterized by and in need of care. Not unlike the disabled body that DeFalco discusses, it is "part of a larger pattern of response to impairment, injury, and

illness" to which I would add another pattern of response to trauma, memory and responsibility (*Imagining Care* 33).

Therefore, to theorize the notion of geographies of care as an amalgam of geographical, embodied and affective experiences of lived space and care practices, I bring together novels that, at first glance, do not have much in common, but that nevertheless address and complicate similar care-related issues. I compare very different stories to uncover the particularities of each imagined world and to compare points of tension that involve similar notions for the configuration of geographies of care. This comparative approach allows stepping away from conventional reading patterns centred on an individual protagonist's quest for a better life. It also favours reading with a care perspective, meaning that I can focus on the texts' similar and clashing dramatizations of interdependency, responsibility for the self and others, and human and nonhuman relationality through specific themes. Reading with an ethics of care also implies a "tension between merger and individuation" (Larrabee 137). This means that while the literary analyses centre on the relational dynamics affected, improved and at times problematized by the needs and the demands for care gestures, processes of individual subjectivity remain relevant in how they participate in the development of such relational processes. Reading interdependent and intersubjective processes of becoming requires particular attention to the embodied subjects that shape such relationships,

The first chapter, "Geographies of Care in Context," delineates the conceptual and theoretical framework of geographies of care. Drawing on contemporary spatial discourse from the field of human and cultural geography – especially the subtopics of emotional geography and therapeutic landscape theory –, I shed light on the strong interconnections between lived space and care. I also map out and interrogate the shared feminist genealogy of care ethics and

emotional geography, which also attests to the transformative and at times the radical potential of geographies of care and, accordingly, of posthuman care. This shapes my definition of care. I agree with Amelia DeFalco that "the frequent incompatibility of feeling care and doing care complicate the broader theorization of care" (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 5). My corpus also shows that care often becomes visible in situations "that involve responsibility for one in need, a need often precipitated by illness or impairment that creates an imbalance of ability or means between the two parties involved" (*Imagining Care* 5). Therefore, I want to focus on how care, as a transformative, representational and affective tool in the selected narratives, allows, despite the frequent inadequacy of caregiving (*Imagining Care* 7), to imagine more inclusive living structures that are respectful of the particularities of experience.

Chapter 2, "Preservation and Transformation of Relational Negotiations," explores the strategies used by characters to protect, modify and adapt to living spaces; actions that are closely related to demands for care and a renewed sense of self that interactions with unexpected human and nonhuman characters shape. *Housekeeping* and *Room* use textual elements that symbolize both renewal and mourning, two processes of identity formation that are inscribed in care gestures that put the characters to the test. The protagonists' survival strategies are in constant negotiations between their needs and those of others, between the burden of care and its empowering potential. This chapter identifies spatial symbols and functions of care that dramatize familial relationships marked by trauma and mourning. Also, both novels rewrite the figure of the mother as the demands for conventional, gendered care gestures are not met and are put into question. The chapter thus addresses interconnections between gender and care as well as the ways care is used, despite the difficulties, to foster radical change. The chapter exposes the life-saving potential and posthuman inclination of care through gestures that, both

ordinarily and uncannily, maintain and modify interdependent relationships between embodied subjects and in which material environment is a key participant.

The third chapter, "Rewritings of Relational Proximity," investigates how two novels imagine alternatives to domestic space through characters' caring relationships with human and nonhuman others who do not fit in traditional living spaces and social habits. In *Sous béton* and *The Birth House*, the protagonists resist social expectations by developing strategies of resistance characterized by care towards others and towards themselves, by a sense of responsibility that their respective environments seek to invalidate and by developing an alternative vision of relational proximity to find comfort and belonging. This chapter uses two very different novels that illustrate how different expressions of care endanger/threaten the protagonists' domestic comfort and physical and emotional safety while also providing the characters with a clearer sense of identity and purpose. Normative care practices and expectations are confronted with particular, contextualized caring gestures that shed light on care's potential for transgressive gestures in systems that abuse the powers that come with institutional and naturalized domestic caregiving.

The next chapter, "Haunting Figures, Healing Processes," explores two novels that use haunting figures to trigger memory and responsibility, questioning the limits of the ethics of care as a human perspective and exploring further the possibilities of posthuman care. In *Home* and *Le ciel de Bay City*, haunting processes participate in the construction of healing and suffering spaces, bringing attention to internalized processes of identity construction and to geographies of care that extend beyond the living and that unfold therapeutic qualities. In the novels, memory is a site where issues of racial and genocidal trauma are negotiated with a profound sense of responsibility both towards the living and towards the dead. The protagonists

use and seek living space to provide care and to find healing, to make a liveable place for interdependent relationships that they initially refused. In this chapter, geographies of care symbolize the subjects' attempt to come to terms with a historical traumatic burden and personal experiences with haunting figures, in a complex set of caring interactions that blur the boundaries between past, present, life, and death.

Finally, the last chapter, "Variations of the Posthuman" addresses posthuman care directly by analyzing *The Year of the Flood* and by returning to novels discussed in the previous chapters to question whether the different representations of relationality are still inscribed in caring interdependence or if other moral and political processes are at play. Again, the novels appeal to human lineage and relationality, which are illustrated by intergenerational solidarity and responsibility, memory of past family tragedies, transmission of family home space, transmission of knowledge among women as source of power and legacy, and anthropophagic practices. They also engage the collaboration of the nonhuman to fictionalize a shifting intersubjective process of identity formation that interdependence, new interubjectivities and new embodied relationality characterize. Figures of the posthuman render visible, in the selected texts, "subjects whose subjectivity is invisible" (Lippit 244), and trigger different forms of intersubjective experience, often because the human interactions do not provide the care needed and fail to respond adequately to the demands of others and of the self. How the writers treat this posthuman subjectivity in language unveils a persistent claim for interdependencies between humans and their material and affective environment, echoing Karen Barad's claim that the "primary ontological units are not 'things' but phenomena – dynamic topological reconfigurings/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations of the world" (141). This final chapter addresses how representations of posthuman relationalities, "turbulent processes" that

bring to attention alternative states of being in the world (Murdoch 16), display care gestures that stress a certain persistence, a remaining of care as foundational "acknowledgement of interdependencies" (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 167).

Hence this contributes to the discussion of care in literature by addressing what DeFalco rightfully describes, in the conclusion to her very recent book *Imagining Care*[3], as the "future of care": namely "a future in which human interaction is no longer an inevitable feature of care relations" (153). It is here important to note that DeFalco's pioneering and insightful work demonstrates how care relations "can be at once nurturing and hurtful" in Canadian narratives of "caregiving relations necessitated by illness and impairment" (22), whereas I focus on a corpus that consists of multiple and varied experiences of patriarchal, cultural and social abuse that limit one's sense of place. In my corpus, characters respond to these experiences of abuse by preserving, transforming and fostering relational comfort. The texts also clearly illustrate how these moral, physical, and emotional responses come with difficulty and hesitation, both in time and space. I thus theorize geographies of care to understand how the use of care gestures as narrative strategy confirms but also goes beyond the "progressive and regressive" care relations by imagining posthuman alternatives that enforce a new paradigm for thinking livability.

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[3] DeFalco's book *Imagining Care*, the first on care ethics and literature in Canada, was published just as I was finishing this dissertation. She works primarily on the notion of "para-ordinary care," which she uses "to refer to caregiving that is not taken for granted and habitually represented within popular culture in the same way as 'ordinary' care relations" (7). DeFalco briefly addresses, in her conclusion, the relevance of bridging care ethics and the posthuman, bringing to attention "a potential for collaboration between different entities, biological and technological that could liberate humans from the contingencies of species-specific caregiving" (166).

Chapter 1

Geographies of Care in Context

This is not a matter of fixing or mapping the contours
of our present existence but of understanding
our environmental entanglements and how these might recompose
our mode of being in the world.
The process of ethical becoming requires an emotional openness
to circumstances that enable the previously determined boundaries
of our being to be re-constituted and re-interpreted.
–Owain Jones

This chapter presents the theoretical framework with which I analyze the selected novels and with which I configure the geographies of care. More precisely, it articulates the links between contemporary studies in human geography and care ethics, including new avenues for thinking care through discourse on the posthuman. This allows showing the intricate weaving between the novels as "géohistoires" of the self – representations of "permanences, [de] l'inertie ou [d]es trajectoires imposées par des configurations spatiales, d'en faire un récit, bref, d'en montrer le sens dont le temps actuel est le terme" (Jacob-Rousseau 211) – and geographies of care. Whereas the other chapters theorize the representations of care more directly and in greater detail, this chapter serves to articulate the larger path from the notion of home towards the concept of geographies of care.

In the next four chapters, the theoretical concerns and reading strategies are intersectional in how the analyses connect issues of geo-emotional struggle with other social factors such as gender, class, age, ethnicity, race, and technoscientific progress. With this methodology, I wish to shed a stronger light on the impact of care practices on different and overlapping systems of oppression and domination. The selected texts share similarities in their treatment of domesticity, scientific and medical progress, patriarchy, and in their dramatization of "the self as being immersed in a network of relationship with others" (Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete

Other" 403), others that are human, nonhuman things. To better understand the geo-emotional processes that characterize these networks of relationships, I use an interdisciplinary set of contemporary theories from the fields of care ethics and human geography. More precisely, I use second and third waves of care ethics and subtopics of emotional geography. The latter has developed a language of care ethics with field-specific concerns about relationality and echoes other related fields in geography that use care-related notions such as emotions and healing, namely medical and health geography.

These geographies are thus closely tied to different crossing points and rites of passage. They symbolize a preoccupation with the self and others, with the world and particular events and encounters that unfold in alternative spatial practices. They operate in a socio-spatial logic that resists traditional and often oppressive domesticity, and they expose how the characters' search for a sense of belonging is often built outside the traditional figure of the home. Land- and caring-scapes work together in the texts and unveil another facet of relationality that operates in a fluid, malleable, shifting intersubjective system of caring encounters. Accordingly, the "interplay between presence and absence" (Dungey 242), between here and there, highlights another characteristic of geographies of care, which is a rethinking of the shared space of domesticity and proximity. In other words, I suggest that reading spatial imagery with an ethics of care problematizes conventional analysis of spatial imagery and "offers a more flexible and less deterministic view of caring and space" (Phillips 118).

Cheryl McEwan and Michael K. Goodman's "Introductory Remarks on the Geographies of Ethics, Responsibility and Care" serves as a brief review of the literature on the topic of care ethics in the field of human geography. They explain why and how "geographers have also begun to explore spaces in which a feminist ethic of care connects morality, responsibility and social justice, and in which social relations produced through emotional and emotional connections are

also understood as sites of power" (105). They also argue that "care is fundamentally geographical in its production, development, reception and, now, consumption" (109). It is not surprising that they use McKie et al.'s definition to illustrate their theoretical objectives: "McKie et al. (2002), for example, use the conceptual framework of caringscapes to explore the ways in which ordinary interdependencies across the lifecourse, at different spatial scales, can be enacted through a variety of forms of communication, including expressive embodiment" (105). They also expose how care ethics make clear that "care is bound up with a postmodern humanism that emphasises the interdependence of self and others (including non-human others), acknowledges contingency and values responsibility .... And in an increasingly unsettled and continuingly unequal world, it is the politics of care that matter, and matter in crucial ways for many" (109-110). McEwan and Goodman argue that some geographers turned to care ethics to develop "the ability to pursue an agenda [that] is conditioned by a range of social factors (race, ethnicity, class, gender, and so on" (108). Their aim is to develop human and emotional geography "based on relational understandings of space and place" (105).

The semantic fields used in the selected stories also resonate with Kerstin W. Shands' and Kristine Miranne and Alma H. Young's configuration of space as gendered social construction and as multiplicity of interrelations, as an intersubjective, agential experience despite historical, political, racial, patriarchal and class-related constraints and marked by how these subjects "create their own histories and construct relation with each other ... and with the processes played out in space" (Miranne & Young 2). When reading interactions between care and relational proximity in the texts, the work of Shands provides solid ground for developing and maintaining a radical feminist framework that is careful not to reproduce and reinscribe masculinist patterns. For instance, in *Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse* she asks whether feminist thinkers and academics reproduce deeply ingrained patriarchal paradigms of reason when they

develop their spatial metaphors and theories: "Do feminism's mobility metaphors articulate an impetus to transform or to imitate masculinist notions of identity, value and hierarchy?" (22).

In the ongoing resistance to the normative and naturalized category of woman, these feminist thinkers, along with several others, have shown concern for women's situatedness and space accessibility. It is a concern closely tied to their opposition to traditional and patriarchal constructions of femininity: the mother, carer, and nurturer, roles that are usually limited to domesticity and caregiving. Subsequently, feminism transformed and provided alternatives to traditional concepts of space such as the public/private, home/house, body/mind, carer/provider dichotomies. Several feminist thinkers revisited common grounds and territories to integrate and include women's experiences to expand and complicate the understanding of socio-spatial experience as well as to provide alternative spaces and spatial metaphors to "symbolize the female condition from microinferential to macropolitical levels and to indicate transgressive-transformative strategies" (Shands, *Embracing Space* 1-2).

Indeed, as Shands notes, the three waves of feminism have offered an abundance of spatial metaphors and analogies to theorize and dramatize the experience of women. They have challenged home, body, environment, and language as spaces of oppression and provided new spatial figures for thinking womanhood and female subjectivity. Shands exposes,

> [a]long with the political concerns and on an even deeper level, more difficult to articulate, ... an ongoing reconstellation of spatialities, a swift and subtle, strong stream that is linked to shifting and transforming localities, positionalities and, I would argue, spiritualities. Feminism's spatial metaphors suggest a deep-seated desire for a shifting of grounds, a movement that is both political and personal, spiritual and material, directed inward and outward yet always beyond. (7)

While she is critical of some feminists' spatial metaphors, her theory and survey of feminist cartographies complicate popular imagination and dominant spatial discourse by underlining the capacity of women to reclaim territories from which they were either excluded or assimilated to, and to forge new spatialities through which they can establish their own boundaries and their own trajectories. In my view, Shands's important discussion on the relationship between "dwelling" and "unforeseen territories" allows revisiting women's relationship to space by pointing out the need for a "reconceptualization of time and space . . . , along with a deconstruction of concepts of action, progress, and teleology, of being and doing" (*Embracing Space*, 128). Even though she is not the first to address these issues, her parabolic space model, which brings together, in "an embracing curve" rather than in a more common dichotomy system, "finite closure and infinite openness" (*Embracing Space* 128), and her extensive survey of feminist approaches to metaphorical space, participate in my configuration geographies of care and associated figurations of relational proximity (chapter 3), healing spaces of haunting (chapter 4) and the posthuman (chapter 5).

Shands pays attention to the transformative potentiality of spatial metaphors. She questions whether they reproduce, within a feminist framework, patriarchal propositions, or whether they transgress, politically and theoretically, oppressive codes and terrains: "Do feminism's mobility metaphors articulate an impetus to transform or to imitate masculinist notions of identity, value and hierarchy?" (*Embracing Space*, 22). In the hope that contemporary feminist theory produces more inclusive and transformative spatial imagery that does not replicate oppressive systems of power forces, she argues for a reconceptualising and demythologizing of feminist thought. She introduces, in an article that preceded her book, the concept of "parabolic" space as possible solution: "Parabolically speaking, we need to find original, non-dualistic figures that bypass essentialist-constructivist dichotomies" ("(Em)bracing Space", 28). In the book, she pushes the

concept further by asking for a "letting-go impulse" in the development of new feminist spatial figures: "Parabolically speaking..., the letting-go impulse residing in dwelling may unlock portals to colossal, unforeseen territories, while hyperconscious travail may grind desired changes to a halt" (*Embracing Space*, 128).

Rather than applying her model to my readings, I rely on her concept of embracing space to configure geographies of care as complex, non-dualistic negotiations between fixity and fluidity. I use Shands' theorization for a revision and deconstruction of spatial imagery in texts where women and other minoritized groups often have limited options. It is also useful to conceptualize and identify the alternative spaces given to them in those texts that allow re/thinking women's life-worlds. More precisely, while I agree and share Shands's feminist discourse, I do not specifically work with a feminist corpus. Rather, I am interested in the ways women authors use a combination of spatial imagery and language of care to tell stories about characters who struggle to make sense of their socio-spatial experience and to find, maintain, preserve or transform their sense and sources of belonging and healing. Accordingly, I should stress again that an area that I problematize with the figuration of geographies of care is home space. In the novels, its symbolic and material boundaries uncover particular relational intricacies and a multidimensional cartography that geographies of care underline and connect, in tension, with wider spatial ramifications about the ethical paradoxes of occupying spaces in which characters are both at center and margin. Employing Gillian Rose's terminology, I claim that the texts' geographies of care thus highlight "the subversive potential of this position" (qtd. in Mahatni 299).

Drawing on Shands and Seyla Benhabib, I suggest that "geographies of care" is a feminist figuration that allows reading the movements and trajectories of female, male and youth characters who struggle to fit in spaces and "spheres of life controlled by tradition" (Benhabib, *Situating the Self* 110). In Shands' terms, the concept of geographies of care qualifies as an "embracing space":

"embracing space fuses the *healing capacities of the restorative and the sacred*, spiritual embrace of place with the liberating, profane prospects of limitless physical and cultural space. Empty and full, embracing space shares a yearning for the plenitude of origin" (*Embracing Space* 111, emphasis added). Similar to Shands' "embracing space," geographies of care resist and evacuate "the exploitative and oppressive connotations of a patriarchally conceived plenitude" (111), but whereas Shands focuses entirely on spatial imagery, I pay careful attention to those "healing capacities" and healing spaces that are shaped by care attitudes and practices, that are made and unmade through the characters' caring movements and rooting.

Using the parabola—"curvaceous and spiraling" (112)—to illustrate her concept of embracing space, Shands' theorization of feminist strategies is helpful for the configuration of geographies of care as it validates my observations that geographies of care should not be framed on dichotomies of home/unhomely and care/careless but should instead be shaped on "curved spectra linking contradictory or complementary spaces, restful refuges where place becomes space and vice versa, enabling way-stations from which a feminist cosmization can unfold" (112). For Shands, the parabola "suggests a blending of place and mobility and a decomposition of the dichotomies of stasis and movement ... [a] peculiar sense of place *and* movement, space *and* curvilinear departure from that space. Traveling-in-dwelling, the parabola is both point and mobility rather than stasis" (112). That is very similar to how I understand the characters' development in the texts. Their functions and actions, when analysed with geographies of care, bring to attention how the authors are rewriting a world that goes beyond conventions and traditions. The characters must also negotiate an "avenue towards freedom" (116) within certain limits established by power forces, imagining alternatives by using narrative and textual strategies such as appropriation of domestic space, figures of ghosts and human/nonhuman relationality. These strategies are characterised by interdependence, responsibility and intersubjectivity and they reveal,

in my opinion, an "embracing" geography of care: a "yearning for shelter but not a suffocating kind of enclosure" (123). Hence an interplay—parabolic interplay, to use Shands' words—of care practices and attitudes characterizes geographies of care. It does not serve to idealize the transformative power and agency of characters in situations of struggle but rather to illuminate hidden healing and caring solutions to everyday crises marked by different expressions of injustice.

Addressing geographies of care appeals indirectly to the relationality of home space to better understand how the selected texts of fiction imagine the complex system of private and public negotiations that affect the socio-spatial experience. Besides using the word home and related notions as titles—such as *Housekeeping*, *Home*, and *The Birth House*—these stories tell difficult experiences of home, oscillating between the possible and the impossible, ambivalent regarding both spatial access and social and personal alienation. Drawing on how these socio-spatial negotiations are interrelated and significantly affected by care attitudes and practices, the textual and conceptual analysis of the corpus, in the next chapters, will underline how concepts of space and care influence one another. The discussion complicates traditional ideas of subjectivity by showing how the figure of home is modeled on geographies of care, on "the place of responsiveness and responsibility in our ethico-political lives" (Carrière, *Writing in the Feminine* 104). The analyses also show how certain texts of fiction widen the perspective of care ethics by demonstrating alternative world views and survival strategies that complicate human responsibility and relationality.

This combination of literature and care provides alternatives for thinking "new forms of relationships and actions that enhance mutuality and well-being" (Lawson 2). Indeed, as Victoria Lawson remarks: "[c]are ethics suggests that we build spatially extensive connections of interdependence and mutuality" (2). Accordingly, paying attention to the complex dynamics

between series of places and relations will thus allow for new knowledge about the complicated interconnections between human life, vulnerability, lived space, and literature, which raise important questions about ethics, politics and representation. Related to this task is the desire to challenge the home aporia, a recurrent issue addressed in contemporary literature and Western politics. This study should thus provide insight about relational, ambivalent and porous lived spaces and the representations of alternative living practices, of "new possibilities for conviviality" (Whatmore 146).

Reflections on the Concept of Care

For Heidegger, dwelling and care share intrinsic connections. First, in his essay "Building Dwelling Thinking," he uses the word home to suggest familiarity with and in space, whereas his notion of dwelling addresses a more complex ontological state of being in the world. Placing the space of the house in relation to the highway and the working environment, Heidegger asks: "but – do the houses in themselves hold any guarantee that *dwelling* occurs in them? Yet those buildings that are not dwelling places remain in turn determined by dwelling insofar as they serve man's dwelling" (146). He seems to suggest that something more is required for dwelling to be accomplished. He adds that the action of building, as well as the buildings in themselves, define dwelling, which "unfolds into the building that cultivates growing things and the building that erects building" (148). Heidegger stresses the difference between the actions of building (cultivating and erecting) and the building as thing: "Cultivating and construction are building in the narrower sense. *Dwelling*, insofar as it keeps or secures the fourfold in things, is, as this keeping, *a building*" (151). Heidegger then states that dwelling, through building, consists of establishing "locations" through built things and through relations with others and with the world, in a site that both gathers and assembles, bringing together the fourfold (sky, divinities, earth and mortals) that

constitutes the world: "the location makes room for the fourfold in a double sense" (158). It both "admits" and "installs": "[a]s a double space-making, the location is a shelter for the fourfold or, by the same token, a house. Things like such locations shelter or house men's lives … though not necessarily dwelling-houses in the narrower sense" (Heidegger 158). Dwelling thus refers to the ontological, phenomenological experience of being in the world, and is the result of relational dynamics with this world through building and preserving.

Heidegger's ontological theorization of human beings as homely bodies stresses the importance of space in understanding our experience of life, but care (*Sorge*, *Fürsorge*, and *Besorgen*) is also central to his system of thought. Using care not in the sense of concrete manifestations but as "the basic structure of the human self" (Reich), Heidegger suggests that care

> has the double meaning of anxiety and solicitude ... and these two meanings of care
>
> represent two conflicting, fundamental possibilities (Heidegger, 1973). Anxious,
>
> worrisome care (*Sorge*) represents our struggle for survival and for favourable
>
> standing among our fellow human beings. (Reich)

Dwelling, which for Heidegger is the condition of being, is thus implicit in care, shedding light on its relational and ethical constitutive elements.

Heidegger's fundamental interconnection between dwelling, being, and care made way for the development of a theory of care that centered on the constitutive dimensions of care (Reich) in human identity but that did not explore the ethical dimensions attached to the spatial experience of dwelling. While the development of this interdisciplinary theory of care at the junction of ethics, philosophy and psychology is not entirely indebted to Heidegger's ontology, it might in part explain why most care ethicists do not focus on the spatiality of care in their work but rather discuss

notions related to humanistic and universal notions of responsibility, vulnerability, hospitality, and health.

It is also important to note that the theory of care that stems from Heidegger's language is different from the theories of care that prevail today and with which I am concerned. These care ethics, often conflated with feminist care ethics, stem from the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan and have recourse to philosophers of vulnerability and relationality such as Emanuel Levinas, Martin Buber, and Paul Ricoeur. My interest for care mainly resides in the latter theories of care ethics, and my theorization of home space does not resonate much with Heidegger's dwelling. However, I bring into play his concepts of dwelling and *Sorge* to acknowledge the interconnected genealogies of space and care as well as to raise questions about the relational configurations of lived space to analyze their representations in literature.

Also, and not unlike the tradition of space theory, care theory developed from Heidegger's *Sorge* stems from a usually male-oriented, universal Western theory of knowledge that rarely acknowledges gender biases. This system of thought has often failed to recognize what contemporary feminist care theorists such as Carol Gilligan, Joan Tronto, and Sandra Laugier have brought to attention as core elements of care ethics: the voices of the invisible, of the silenced, of the other which is not male, not white, and not privileged (Paperman & Molinier. See also Molinier, Laugier, & Paperman). These feminist theorists work to reposition care ethics as a fundamentally inclusive, non-universalist project. Similar to posthumanist feminist theorists, they also disturb epistemological points of tension by showing how dominant ideological paradigms have, as Genevieve Lloyd argues, "historically incorporated an exclusion of the feminine, and that femininity itself has been partly constituted through such a process of exclusion" (Lloyd x). What Shands and Iris Marion Young do for space theory, contemporary female care theorists do in their work in reaction to dominant philosophical, ethical and political discourses that are predominantly

characterized by a "terminology of ... rights and duties" and by "cognitive attitudes ... usually associated with distance and impartiality, and with the ability to transcend the individual point of view in order to reach a general viewpoint" (Sevenhuijsen 5). In addition, while they do not invalidate the contribution of male philosophers, ethics of care theories and posthuman feminist criticism[4] share a desire, in their respective field, to question a persistent tendency to use the white, privileged male as normative category. Several thinkers raised similar interrogations in the area of space theory[5].

A growing number of feminist theorists, ethicists and philosophers have been seeking the transformation of the traditional paradigms of space, home and identity "that have traditionally informed [negatively] the lives of women, and servants, slaves, and workers" (Tronto 3). Their work exposes how grand narratives produced by those in positions of power reflect these standardized paradigms. They have also called attention to practices and attitudes that have been historically devalued and traditionally associated with the female, such as nurturance, responsibility, attentiveness, and preservation. Fundamentally feminist, care ethics sheds light on the primacy of care by identifying the different structures – ideological, political, sex-gendered – that work together to essentialize gender roles. These structures, fragmented and rendered invisible by a system that tends to devalue ordinary work and nurturing tasks predominantly accomplished by women, also naturalize expressions and manifestations of caregiving and care-receiving: "la fragmentation du *care* perpétue le mythe du self-made man et invisibilise toutes les activités dont il bénéficie" (Molinier, Laugier & Paperman 78). The central tenets of care ethics encourage an understanding of the political and particular, singular contexts rather than a universal set of norms.

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[4] See Braidotti, Wolfe, Butler, Barad, and Alaimo.
[5] For key publications on the sex-gendered power dynamics at play in space (private, public, everyday, workspace, etc.), see Grosz, Pratt, Rimstead, Young, and Zandy.

Care ethicists participate, instead, in an ethico-political reflection that shows where and why, conceptually, care practices and attitudes should not be discredited because of rationalist and patriarchal misconceptions within which they are encaged (Molinier, Laugier & Paperman 79-80. See also Tronto 12).

Care ethics thus opened debates about ethical and political responsibility as well as argued for the recognition of values, practices and subjects that, historically, have been rendered invisible. They put emphasis on the notion of relationality, opening new avenues for thinking, among other spatial modalities of care, distance, and proximity, and thus creating bridges with the field of geography and with discourses on space. Relationality is instrumental both for care ethics and geography in developing their view of the social and of feminist issues in their fields. This theoretical concern in part explains why many feminist geographers "have sought to investigate the complex spatialities of caring, bringing the social space of care, and particularly of care work, under renewed scrutiny" (McEwan & Goodman 103). On one hand, care ethics thus provides geography and space theory with a particular framework built on concern, attentiveness, and responsibility to investigate complex spatialities. On the other, geography, with spatial concepts based on the notion of relationality, proposes useful avenues for thinking the questions of power that affect human connectivities and mobilities beyond an idea of the subject modeled on ideals of rationality, independence, and individualism that care ethicists seek to transform.

In addition, despite the fundamental place of *Sorge* in Heidegger's philosophy, feminist critics have remarked that his article "Building Dwelling Thinking" undervalues nurturing activities traditionally associated with women when he writes that: "mortals nurse and nurture the things that grow, and *specially* construct things that do not grow" (151, emphasis added). One of the questionable claims is that "building in the sense of preserving and nurturing is not making anything" (152). As several feminist critics have demonstrated, nurturing and other related tasks

have been historically attributed to women, along with a "history that categorized domesticity as a peculiarly feminine 'place'" (Foster 3. See also Delphy). While they should not be essentially attributed based on gender, these naturalized tasks are nonetheless inscribed in a historical and political hegemonic tradition in which women have been objectified and mostly kept within a domestic, private spatiality.

A vast multidisciplinary literature on the subject of womanhood has shown how women have traditionally been relegated to nurturing functions associated with the mother figure and domestic space, as men have "project[ed] onto women the nostalgic longing for the wholeness of the original mother" (Irigaray, qtd. in Young, 124). As such, it has been demonstrated that the home has been traditionally associated with the mother figure and the first experiences of care-receiving and wellbeing, at the same time keeping women in a certain limited "position ... in the stratification system" (Delphy 38). For instance, Wiley and Barnes have also shown in *Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home* that many contemporary women writers use the material and metaphorical to imagine and represent home. Therefore, I position home space in a set of tensions not only between "material space and home as ideal place" (xix) but also across a geography of experiences of care practices and attitudes. I contend that those tensions open or uncover breaches that allow exploring new alternatives for inhabiting the world and for acknowledging the emotional geographies that construct inter/subjectivities.

From Home to Geographies of Care

Home space is thus marked by political, sex-gendered, racialized and economic aspects (Delphy, Zandy, hooks) and has been analyzed extensively, at times in conflation with the house and at others in negotiation with embodied, sex-gendered, fantasized or shared spatiality.

Traditional canonical space theorists on home space, such as Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gaston Bachelard, theorize a shared human experience (Jacobson) and do not seem to intentionally exclude the diversity of experience related to space and dwelling. However, several commentators have questioned the tendency towards essentialism of their work and the lack of differentiation in theorizing the shared experience of being (Heidegger), embodiment (Merleau-Ponty) and poetic space (Bachelard). The critics shed light on how they privilege male experience and how they portray a "privileged presumption of standardized notion of a (material) house and a (conceptual) home" (S. Robinson, para. 2). More inclusive theoretical assessments of embodied spatiality have thus augmented earlier configurations of home space to challenge fixed and homogenizing understandings of human spatiality and dominant paradigms.

Indeed, while some women thinkers see home as "positively charged," others, like Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty, as well as Luce Irigaray, associate dwelling and home as "the fundamental trait of man's being" (Martin & Mohanty x. See also Irigaray, qtd. in Shands 8). Similar to Iris Marion Young, Shands discusses the tensions between some feminists' emphasis on mobility and "change-as-movement" theories and a conceptual "disdainful imagery as regards to the home" (*Embracing Space* 128). While Shands recognizes the utopian tendency of her idea of "embracing space," she claims that it could well solve this conflict between ideas of "world-changing" and "world-building" (128). If she does not make direct reference to Heidegger's ontological dwelling as building, her theoretical argumentation clearly touches on what Heidegger is said to have tossed aside: the transformational potential of non-making, and yet "world-changing" actions in the building process.

Iris Marion Young's essay also exposes points of tension between prominent feminist theorists whose views on space – more specifically on home space – at times diverge and at others concur, stressing the complexities, across time and ideologies, of this gendered notion. Young

argues that home, and more precisely activities of preservation associated with home space that were, in her opinion, devalued in Heidegger's "Building Dwelling Thinking", have a highly "valuable potential for [they] carr[y] uniquely human values" (124). She also acknowledges the political and epistemological problems surrounding "the yearning for a whole, stable identity that the home often represents" (124).

Young sheds important light on the conflation between house and home by questioning canonical feminist texts that reproduce oppressive patterns against women by confining them in domestic and nurturing womanhood. And Young, like Shands, does not want to reject the notion of home entirely. She rather seeks to emphasize some of its aspects that were devalued or hidden in modern society (124). She connects Irigaray's overgeneralising claim that women have no sense of home with Beauvoir's statement that a woman "has no other job than to maintain and provide for life in pure unvarying generality," and denounces the absence of women's voice and agency in both positions:

> Beauvoir has an entirely negative valuation of what she constructs as woman's situation, a negative valuation of the activity of giving meaning to and maintaining home. She is surely right that much of what we call housework is drudgery, necessary but tedious, and also right that a life confined to such activity is slavery. … If Irigaray is correct, of course, many women pour their soul into the house because they have no other envelope for the self. But it seems too dismissive of women's own voice to deny entirely the value many give to 'homemaking.' (138).

Young goes beyond Irigaray and Beauvoir's critical work on women's experience of home by suggesting that despite systemic patriarchal and capitalist hegemonies, "we can reconstruct core values from the silenced meanings of traditional female activity" (138). She suggests an approach

to home space that is not strictly gender-oriented, and that acknowledges sexual and gender difference, giving "meaning to individual lives through the arrangement and preservation of things" (138). By focusing on home space with care practices, with "arrangement and preservation", Young creates a breach that directs attention to home as a site of resistance, as "space beyond the full reach of those [oppressive] structures, where different, more humane social relations can be lived and imagined" (149). Young turns to bell hooks, who, in "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance," argues that home, while it can reflect one's marginalized or privileged identity, is not apolitical: she "reverses the claim that having 'home' is a matter of privilege. For the philosopher, 'home' is a universal value, one that the oppressed in particular can and have used as a vehicle for developing resistance to oppression" (Young 150). Young suggests that home is thus where acts of preservation allow protecting personal "history and culture … in the face of colonizing forces of the larger society" (150). It is important to note that while hooks addresses more particularly racialized home space, Young makes a parallel with sex-gendered power forces at play. Young also suggests, by referring to care experts Sara Ruddick and Joan Tronto, who "focus on the preserving and protecting actions of caring persons, but both also talk about the caring for things that supports this activity," that preservation is closely related to the notion of care (142).

For Young, preservation is one of the gestures that allows home space and experiences of being at home to be positively charged and to serve the development of women agency. Similar to feminist care ethicists, Young suggests that a key strategy to avoid essentializing homemaking and related, often undervalued activities attributed to women is "to emphasize the radical potential of values that attend to the concrete localized experience of home, and the existential meaning of being deprived of that experience" (151). This *attending* to the particular, rather than a focus on

the development of universal rules, moral norms and activities, sheds light on experiences that are often silenced, on socio-spatial and geo-emotional realities that are sometimes invisible. It also exposes possibly radical coping strategies and ethical stances that demand wider frames of inclusion and greater responses to vulnerability.

In addition, Elizabeth Grosz's[6] *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* offers interesting avenues for exploring female corporeal experiences of spatiality. Drawing on and disturbing Merleau-Ponty's claim that the body is the first spatial level (Merleau-Ponty 166), she complicates the idea that the body is "the primary sociocultural product" and suggests that space and time are strongly anchored in corporeality: "they are a priori corporeal categories, whose precise features and idiosyncrasies parallel the cultural and historical specificities of bodies" (Grosz 32). Indeed, sharing a similar concern than Heidegger's with location and body as "dynamic center" of dwelling (157), Merleau-Ponty suggests, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, that the body is the first spatial level from which the human makes sense, both passively and actively, of the world (296). He argues that a spatial level is what orients the body: "The constitution of a spatial level is simply one means of constituting an integrated world: my body is geared onto the world when my perception presents me with a spectacle as varied and as clearly articulated as possible… a general setting in which my body can co-exist with the world" (Merleau-Ponty 292). The body is thus understood as "establishing for us a stability and an orientation for our world" (Jacobson 2009, 369).

Grosz questions this stability and suggests that a system of forces—ideological, political, rational—defines the precarious conditions of female bodies and limits the availability of spaces (*Architecture* 33). Consequently, female subjects – theorists, philosophers, writers, and citizens –

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[6] The following part on embodied spatiality (p. 38-39) is an adapted rewriting of pages 11 to13 of my master's thesis.

take action to potentially transgress physical and social boundaries (33). Grosz's theorization of bodily space and lived spatiality helps to understand the configurations and modalities of gender bias in the production of space: "We need quite different terms by which to understand space and spatiality, if we are to be able to successfully rethink the relation between women and space. We would have to consider very *carefully* the boundaries of what constitutes the occupation of space and occupying it 'as a woman" (*Architecture* 25, emphasis added).

And so, one of my hypotheses, which is that female subjects can redefine and make their living spaces more complex through and because of care, is grounded in Shands', Young's and Grosz's careful reconsiderations of socio-spatial boundaries. It also relies on Donna Haraway's idea that the private and the public should not be conceptualized as polarities but rather as parts of a webbed system:

> [I]t is now a totally misleading ideology, even to show how both terms [private and public domains] of these dichotomies construct each other in theory and practice. I prefer a network ideological image, suggesting the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic. (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 170)

Caren Kaplan maintains a similar argument in *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, where she questions the broader dichotomy of location/displacement. She argues that a new theorization of socio-spatial processes reinforces a destabilization of the location/displacement dichotomy that encompasses and disturbs the concepts of movement, homelessness, liminality, private, public, home, identity and self. Kaplan also remarks how most attempts at such destabilization of master narratives and traditional dichotomies of difference have not spent enough time looking more critically at how subjects who experience dominant discourses

of poverty, sexism and racism continue to live with such power inequities on many different psychosocial levels (Kaplan 21).

Geographies of care, as a "webbed system" of ethical, spatial and cultural interconnected nodes that are rendered visible in the literary experience, show how space is never closed nor fixed, and that it is both a place for the dominant and for the dominated to co-exist. Grosz writes that "women, or gays, or other minorities, aren't 'imprisoned' in or by space, because space (unless we are talking about a literal prison) is never fixed or contained, and thus is always open to various uses ... because space is open to how people live it. Space is the ongoing possibility of a different habitation" (*Architecture* 9). When applied to the fictional representations of lived space and geographies of care, this possibility of renewing space by occupying it differently provides solid ground for arguing that characters in crisis can invent, alter or negotiate a space for themselves in places that often seem to be fixed and predetermined. It also helps for thinking new categories for describing and theorizing the experience of being and inhabiting the world that favour open, evolutive, embracing, and more inclusive concepts of difference and subjectivity.

The selected texts of fiction express an ability, for subjects, to actively participate in the shaping and preserving of their living spaces. They also show how these practices are constitutive the subjects' experience of belonging, which reciprocally, although not necessarily symmetrically, participates in the socio-spatial experience of being at home and in processes of identity construction. Neither necessarily positive nor negative, this experience is multifaceted: made of cultural, material, political, technological, virtual, geographical and emotional configurations that fluctuate, at times resulting in negotiations with the environment, the neighbourhood and other socio-spatial structures (Appadurai).

In the language of anthropology and ethnography, local subjectivities are constitutive of subject formation as they participate in rituals and routines. Arjun Appadurai argues that they

consist of "*commitments and attachments*," as well as "the memories and *attachments* that local subjects have ..., their times and places for *congregating* and escaping" (Appadurai 191, emphasis added). It is my intention to bring to attention those ethical, political and material "commitments and attachments" as manifestations or lack of care practices and attitudes in the literary analyses instead of zeroing in on the experience of being at home.

Appadurai mainly discusses the contradictions and complexities between localities and nation-state apparatuses due to various contemporary "logics of movements" (192) and is concerned with understanding the political and spatial circuits that organise, relationally, nation-states on local and global levels. However, his configuration of the local, enmeshed with the national and with the global in the virtual age, seems to suggest that those "commitment and attachments," two words that underline a relationality and an ethical position that participates in this socio-spatial, are key. They indicate an important sense of responsibility and connection to local space as well as to broader socio-spatial and political dynamics. It is my contention that those attachments and commitments – strong or fragile, temporary or permanent, coerced or voluntary – are fundamental to the development and sustaining of a sense of belonging and direct attention to the intersubjectivity of beings, to their co-constitutive relationality and their shared vulnerability (Ferrarese). Making use of Appadurai's theorization of locality and neighbourhood, connected by the production of "social life, particular forms of intentional activity and particular sorts of material effects" (182) to my conception of socio-spatial experience, I theorize geographies of care as a particular "structure of feeling" tightly connected to context (191). They consist of "discrete actions and settings" that bring to attention and shed light on the vulnerability and necessity of those "commitments and attachments" (191).

Despite a subtext of emotion and affect that is often found in discussions on home (Bachelard) and living spaces, the ethical interactions that participate – positively or negatively –

in the development of a sense of belonging have often been left out of scientific and academic discourse on spatiality. Those interactions involve common gestures, practices, expressions and habits that characterize and structure everyday living spaces in which one ideally feels comfortable, accepted, and that are at the core of relationships. Accordingly, the figuration of geographies of care sheds light on the tensions between lived space and ethical relationality, opening new avenues for thinking, among other modalities of care, distance, and proximity, following Doreen Massey's renown claim that "space is the product of interrelations" (Massey, *For Space* 9).

Hence, drawing on the propositions of care ethics and on the representations of lived space in the selected texts of fiction, I want to suggest that home is, for this project, less primordial a space when seeking an understanding of geoemotional relationality, and that geographies of *care*, because they allow encompassing all kinds environments and encounters, offer rich alternatives for configuring the relational, socio-spatial experience of being in the world. For instance, most of the literary texts under study disrupt conventional boundaries of home space by bringing to attention the geoemotional movements and relationality of corporeal subjects – characterized by care practices and attitudes, distance, proximity and body – that lead to the development of survival strategies and to wellbeing despite everyday struggles. In those texts, home space is often fragile, fragmented, and threatened, yet never entirely dispossessed of an affective or nostalgic meaning. It is displaced and sometimes multiplied, revitalized, and repositioned in the "maps of loyalty and affect" as the careful and careless relationships alter and are altered by "the geographies of political responsibilities" (Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility" 9, 10). Responsible social actions of building, inhabiting and caring are thus closely connected to actions and experiences of "being placed" and "located", but also operate in the construction and production of space (Pile & Keith).

More precisely, Massey provides solid ground for using care ethics to reflect on the imaginary articulation of space and place by bringing attention to responsibility in the spatial

tensions between nearness and distance, and between local and global. As she exposes the ethical and political implications of spatial configurations, she refers to care-related notions of responsibility, hospitality, and proximity, suggesting that they are instrumental in the "reconceptualization of spatial identity" (Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility" 5). Indeed, Massey reminds us that "if we are to sign up to the relational constitution of the world – in other words to the mutual constitution of the local and the global," then the dichotomy between space and place should not characterize space as meaningless and place as meaningful 7). Instead, she suggests questioning whether place is always meaningful and grounded. She wonders "how can that kind of groundedness be made meaningful across distance," that is, on the global level (8). In addition to her contribution to this ongoing debate about the taken-for-grantedness of space and place meaning system, Massey has augmented the space-place discussion by revisiting the phenomenological notion of embodiment: "the meaningful relation to place is intimately bound up with the embodied nature of perception. In other words, it is based in the fact of groundedness, of embodiment" (8). She is careful not to suggest that there is only meaningful place and abstract space and suggests that "embodiedness, then, has to be on certain terms to result in meaningfulness" (8). More importantly, she adds that "the relational construction [is] highly differentiated from place to place through the vastly unequal disposition of resources" (13). Notions of care and responsibility seem integral to her argumentation, but she is also critical of their articulation, using a Russian dolls analogy to express her concern:

> in Western societies, there is a hegemonic geography of care and responsibility
> which takes the form of a nested set of Russian dolls. First there is 'home', then
> perhaps place or locality, then nation, and so on. There is a kind of accepted

understanding that we care first for, and have our first responsibilities towards, those

nearest in. (8-9)

Notions of care and home are important here, for they raise questions about the "spatial tension" that are similar to those asked since the spatial turn. Therefore, if space and place both can and cannot be grounded, if the relational construction of identity depends in part on resources available (i.e. material, human, economic) and on the idea of meaningfulness, what happens to the Russian dolls set? Moreover, what becomes of the idea that home is the place we care about the most because of prevalent notions of "face-to-face interactions" and proximity? Challenging the "persistent focus on parent-child relationships as iconic reference point" and the related idea of the "local as seat of genuine meaning," Massey disturbs the linear polarization of space and place and their associated identities by configuring places as "agents of globalization" (11). She makes clear the "plurality of positionalities" that a relational understanding of the local and the global brings to attention: "that not all places are victims [of the global] and that not all of them, in their present form, are worth defending" (11).

Making use of Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd's claim that responsibility is relational and extensive, Massey suggests that meaningful and responsible global space transforms the cultural subject's responsibility in proximity, turning it into "a responsibility that implies extension: it is not restricted to the immediate or the very local" (9). This is useful in the analysis of the texts under study, as they disturb the relation between proximity and responsibility by imagining long-distance relationships, dispersed families and a diversity of subject positions that open up the possibility "of an alternative politics of place" (11). This also sheds light on what Massey does not address directly: the praxis of care that participates in the politics of positionalities and in the cultural subjects' moral processes of decision-making.

Most of the literary texts under study, while they do not centre on issues of globalisation, dramatize the embodiments of the socio-spatial configuration, creating a tension between home as most meaningful place (which would refer to the smallest doll in Massey's Russian dolls set) and movements and relationality – characterised by care practices and attitudes; distance, proximity and body – that participate just as much in the identity construction of the characters. Massey's arguments, while addressing economy and global politics and thus focusing on a research field distant from mine, are useful conceptual tools for understanding this fragility of the home represented in the different literary texts of fiction and the relationality and subjective responsibility that characterizes the socio-spatial experience.

While the geographies of home have been extensively researched and represented and remain a source of literary and theoretical production, it appears that the moral and ethical configurations of being at home have not been explored as explicitly. Reaching beyond individual and essentialized notions of comfort and safety within a specific place associated with a sense of belonging, the moral aspects of being at home raise questions about the constitutive relationality of this socio-spatial construction: is being at home defined by the relation between self and space or between self and others who inhabit and are outside that space? How does this sense of home depend on the ethics of care that frame social interactions, putting emphasis on "home as being-with-others" and on the "premise that humans are fundamentally social beings enmeshed in a web of relationships"? (Wu 193, Hamington & Miller xii). Looking at the ethico-political implications of home space, as part of the geographies of care that participate significantly in the cultural subjects' wellbeing and sense of belonging, brings attention to the fundamental relationship between self and other in processes of identity formation by exploring socio-spatial notions of responsibility, vulnerability, autonomy and ordinary life.

Again, I want to stress that home, hardly evitable in contemporary theory and discourse on identity and belonging, as well as being used extensively in literature, should be the starting point for a new, more inclusive and more representative discussion on what it means to live where spaces are marked by oppression, threat and exclusion and what it means to belong despite material, corporeal or emotional hardships. More precisely, I am interested in questioning how the female self is constructed and represented in relation to this complex, care-related experience of home if the latter becomes or is limited and constraining, if it is outside or beyond the limits of the social and moral norm?

Given these points, I transpose these objectives to literature, which, as social practice and as source of imagined geographies and imagined lives, corresponds to "un ensemble de relations et de formes" (Lefebvre 131) that participates in understanding the identity and socio-spatial construction processes of the self and the other. For instance, the selected texts address issues of home, belonging, public and private negotiations and dis/placements in varied poetic and symbolic shapes and forms. They tell stories in which a variety of spaces and places, along with the power forces that characterize them and their inhabitants, symbolise how humans dwell and seek a sense of home – generally understood as a sense of comfort, belonging and familiarity. The subjects struggle to inhabit the world as individuals and as intersubjective beings. They cope with their vulnerability and with different obstacles as they struggle to find a place in their community, as they struggle to find who they are amidst problematic relationships with humans and nonhuman others. As Laugier suggests, the caring subject is a node of attachments: "une conception – essentielle au *care* – de la personne comme noeud d'attachements qui font d'un être plus, et autre chose, que la somme de ses propriétés non-relationnelles" (Laugier, *Tous vulnérables* 107-8). Indeed, social encounters, interactions and experiences are marked not only by a complex dialectic

between private and public locations, but also by ethical encounters and interactions between self and others that characterise both collective and individual situatedness.

The characters under study experience and perceive the world through the different figures of space that participate in the life narrative (city, memory, house, street, workplace, window, bridge, etc.). These different sites are made and unmade according to the interrelations between bodies and space and between different bodies, reinforcing the importance of the relations in the formation of space and of the co-constitution between space and body in processes of identity construction. It is important to stress here that "home," a strong topos in the Western imaginary, was excluded from the above parenthetical list on purpose for it can be articulated in and through each of these elements. It is this complex, tensed and recurring idea of home, with its aporetic relational configurations and imaginaries found in my corpus, that was the point of departure of this careful investigation. Indeed, my use of the figuration of geographies of care stems from my observations that home is constantly in need of conceptual clarification and adjustments, evoking a singular, complex feeling rather than a universal state of being. These theoretical difficulties confronted me with a sense of saturation regarding the figure of home, supported by a heavy amount of literature that complicated by theoretical attempts at revitalizing it through my corpus. As explained earlier, I thus decided to refrain from using it as central configuration and to use geographies of care, in the hopes that such an experiment would lead to radical rereadings and new avenues.

I am thus making use of Mallet's conclusion that "[c]learly the term home functions as a repository for complex, inter-related and at times contradictory socio-cultural ideas about people's relationship with one another, especially family, and with places, spaces, and things" (84). I also rely on Massey's claim that space should be understood as relational if we are to "challenge the

hegemonic notion of individuals as isolated atomistic entities which took on (or were assigned) their essential character prior to social interaction" ("Geographies of Responsibility" 5). They help bringing to attention the socio-spatial connections between relational, care-related behaviours and attitudes that differentiate the experiences of lived space and that impact the sense of being at home and the ethical and political capacity to be at home with others. I hope to decorticate those interconnections by reading, critically, the presence of geographies of care in the novels.

Accordingly, it is the relational experience of being at home that connects, at first glance, the literary texts under study. The texts share an interest with the experience of particular living spaces that concentrate around the figure of the house (*Home*, *The Birth House*, *Housekeeping*, *Room*, etc.) and more generally with the experience of a posthuman environment (*The Year of the Flood*, *Sous béton*, *Le ciel de Bay City*). More particularly, the authors each illustrate the co-constitutive fragility of livability and subjectivity through representations of precarious, vulnerable human lives that struggle to find their place in the world and that develop survival strategies through processes of posthuman care, the latter shedding light on the role of memory, ghosts, and nonhuman figures in the configuration of places and relationships that can promote healing and a better understanding of the social structures in which the characters evolve.

Hence, by questioning the caregiving and care-receiving nature of the characters' movements and locations, and by looking more critically at how they are represented textually, I am committed to seeking knowledge about their caring and intersubjective experience of socio-spatial struggle. It is also important to remark that the texts themselves are a form of resistance to the silencing of precarious subjects and to the invisibility of care ethics and praxis, while they also often allow the creation or transformation of relational space that gives the characters a sense of homecoming. A unifying thread of the following chapters will thus consist of those survival and relational strategies that, combining notions of care as well as spatial negotiations around the figure

of home, challenge theories that rely on "establishing fixed boundaries by means of ethical norms" (Sevenhuijsen 3).

Actions and values such as taking care, being attentive, responsibility, vulnerability, and protecting, are central to the fundamental experience of lived space (150). The evidence of interconnections between space and care suggests that augmenting discourse on home space with that of care ethics is necessary to understand the spatialization of daily struggle and to provide new sources of knowledge about the ethical, political, socio-spatial experience of being in the world. By creating this theoretical framework and by contributing to the discussion at the intersection of care and literature with the figuration of geographies of care, I claim that a strategic, less direct use of the trope of home better serves my analyses of the characters' attempts at finding comfort in places that are not designed to offer any and makes room for a revitalized theoretical configuration of intersubjectivity and relationality.

Finally, another key aspect of geographies of care is how it allows questioning the ethico-political and intersubjective nature of the characters' movements and locations. I would therefore define geographies of care as a complex network of living spaces and places affected by caregiving and care-receiving practices and attitudes, thus an ethico-political system of lived spatiality–the characters' experience of living spaces and the strategic forging of new space to deal with the daily struggles. By putting lived space in relation to imagined manifestations of care (absent or present, successful or not) and struggle, I hope to deepen our understanding of how the literary texts dramatize lived experience of precariousness and exclusion and challenge in part due to the essentialisation of female identities, social and moral status in Western culture. How the novels use relational and spatial imagery illustrates the work of care in geoemotional dynamics and experiences of lived space beyond the traditional conflation of house and home.

Relationality and Lived Space: Emotional Geography

Especially since the spatial turn, there has been a proliferation of theoretical work from and at the intersection of the fields of philosophy, human geography, and literary criticism. Interdisciplinary theory on space has shown how imagination produces knowledge about the spatialization of human interactions and the situatedness of daily life. For instance, Augustin Berque has claimed that "l'identification de la personne est situationnelle" (395). Similarly, space theorists Michael Keith and Steve Pile suggest that "how the individual is understood to be placed – located – in society" has rendered visible the politics and the relationality that inscribe socio-spatial vulnerability and autonomy on the level of the local and of the particular (34). They also suggest that solutions can be found in the spatial, "whether real spaces, *imaginary spaces, or symbolic spaces*" (35, my emphasis).

This focus on relationality echoes Lefebvre's notion of lived space, which is the space of representation and the symbolic: "c'est à dire l'espace vécu à travers les images et les symboles qui l'accompagnent, donc espace des 'habitants', des 'usagers', mais aussi de certains artiste. . . C'est l'espace dominé, donc subi, que tente de modifier et d'approprier l'imagination" (49). Lefebvre's Marxist work on space as "metaphor for the spatialization of the social order" (Shields) focuses on urban, internal and external relations that operate in the ideological formation and spatialization of the industrial world. Keith and Pile's argument echoes his statement that "l'espace réel est celui de la pratique sociale," emphasizing the subject's actions and practices that lead to and are the source of the organization and production of living space: "L'espace n'est pas produit comme un kilo de sucre ... L'espace est un rapport social inhérent aux rapports de propriété et aux forces productives. Produit qui se consomme, il est aussi moyen de production" (Lefebvre 31, 102). Put together, these arguments emphasize how space and place, two notions that are often opposed – like the local and global – should rather both be thought of as being grounded and embodied.

The two vary in their degree of meaningfulness, for not every "local place" is "the seat of genuine meaning" and "global space" is not necessarily "without meaning, as the abstract outside" (Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility" 9). Space and identity are, as theorists of the spatial turn demonstrated at length, co-constitutive.

The dynamics between the dichotomies of space/place and global/local are inevitable in my discussion of geographies of care. Bringing again Doreen Massey's concept of geographies of responsibility in a different direction, one of my hypotheses is that the fictional texts under study challenge the "romanticisation of place" that she identifies, as my corpus rather suggests "the local as source of differentiation" (7). Indeed, in the selected novels, what is emotionally and spatially close is not necessarily what is best regarding lived space, relationships, and moral comfort. The corpus challenges "closeness or face-to-face relations and interactions in various forms as a source of morality in social life" (10) and shows different rewritings of relational proximity that uncover breaches created and preserved by care attitudes and practices.

It has been suggested that the importance of space lies in the readability of actions and decisions (de Certeau) and in the relationality of its shapes and ensembles (Lefebvre). Also, the field of human geography, especially through the subtopics of emotional and feminist geography, has exposed how space is made of contextualized positionalities and that it is "a situational marker" (Friedman 23). Emotional geography, for instance,

> is composed of ways of considering how emotions, along with linked modalities
> such as feeling, mood or affect, are constitutive elements within the ongoing
> composition of space-time, and exploring how learning to respond to and intervene
> in such modalities could or perhaps should disrupt human geography's
> methodological and theoretical practices. (Gregory, et al. 188-89)

It is also important to note that

emotional geography responds, on the one hand, to the claim that emotions are an intractable aspect of life and thus potentially a constitutive part of all geographies (Anderson and Smith, 2001) and, on the other, to the recognition that emotions have long been manipulated and modulated as a constitutive part of various forms of power. (Gregory, et al. 188)

Those different "forms of power" are marked by different positionalities such as "class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, national origin" and they "function relationally as sites of privilege and exclusion" (Friedman 23). Bridging emotional and feminist geography, Kay Anderson and Susan Smith write that

[e]motions are an intensely political issue, and a highly gendered one too. The gendered basis of knowledge production is probably a key reason why the emotions have been banished from social science and most other critical commentary for so long. This marginalization of emotion has been part of a gender politics of research in which detachment, objectivity and rationality have been valued, and implicitly masculinized, while engagement, subjectivity, passion and desire have been devalued, and frequently feminized. (2-3)

Accordingly, I suggest that emotional geography shares common ground with care ethics. They are both concerned with gender issues and with moral categories and feelings. They also share a commitment to "the relationality of emotions" and "an assumption that emotions are not contained by, or properties of an individual mind" (Gregory, et al. 189).

Drawing on Gregory *et al.*'s definition of emotional geography in *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, I suggest that both this sub-discipline and care ethics

perform a sensibility that attends to the webb and flow of everyday life. First, and most prominently, there is the careful attention in feminist geographies to the

silencing or repressing of differential, often gendered, emotional experience and the subsequent attempts to reclaim and give voice to emotional experiences. Second, attention is paid ... to the emergence ... of emotions from within more or less unwilled assemblages that gather together human and non-human bodies (Gregory, et al. 189)

There is a language of care in this definition, as the text refers to "careful attention" and mentions that "attention is paid" to differentiated experiences and power forces that limit the expression of emotional experience.

This is another illustration of the interconnections between the two disciplines from which I borrow theoretical material to better read the geographies of care in the corpus. It is also important to note that emotional geographers Anderson and Smith acknowledge the role of the arts in emotional configurations. They make the remark that the traditional rationalist paradigm has tended to evacuate emotions from the public and social spheres, whereas access to emotions "is gained through settings where the emotional is routinely heightened, for example in musical performance, film and theatre, spaces of mourning and so on" (3). Therefore, this dissertation uses emotional geography to bridge a gap between care ethics and literature as the stories make use of spatial imagery to dramatize relational proximity. The texts reconfigure domesticity and address different forms of mourning that blur boundaries between public and private as well as between human and human affect, using textual and narrative strategies that bind the characters to one another and that emphasize their intersubjective, relational construction.

The concept of relationality used and developed in emotional geography and care ethics favours a plural definition of subjectivity and takes into consideration the multiplicity and the particularism of experience. It complicates universalist and rationalist theories that have often used a privileged white male as referential figure and that have often not taken into account the different power forces that participate in processes of identity construction. Hence, emotional geography

and care ethics theorize a caring relationality that does not shy away from the importance of emotions and that challenges binary configurations of modalities such as place/space, self/other, global/local, man/woman. Drawing on the work of emotional geographers and care ethicists, I suggest that it is the perspective of care that best illuminates relationality in the novels that I analyze. Both shape my theoretical framework and my geo-emotional approach by bringing to attention the roles of responsibility, vulnerability, hospitality, attentiveness, and intersubjectivity in the development of a conceptual vocabulary for understanding the important interconnections between care ethics and critical posthumanism. To fully understand the roles and functions of the fundamental geo-emotional configurations of lived space in the relational process of identity formation, I also pay attention to the figures of the nonhuman in the novels. I investigate their role in relational processes, and therefore I complicate care ethics' focus on human interactions. Geographies of care are thus also characterized by a posthuman relationality that disrupts further our configurations of subjectivity.

Bridging the Posthuman with Care Ethics

The posthuman is an umbrella term that characterizes a "projected state of humanity" in which differences between human bodies and other bodies are blurred (LaGrandeur), and in which cybernetic mechanism and biological organism function with similar processes. The term "posthumanism" is used differently, as it seeks to undermine human sovereignty over other species and living matter. Rosi Braidotti situates the emergence of a posthumanist epistemology in reaction to and following the anti-humanist movement. Critical of this posthuman paradigm, she suggests that the latter "consists in de-linking the human agent from this universalistic posture, calling him to task, so to speak, on the concrete actions he is enacting (Braidotti, "Posthuman Humanities" 3). She also connects the origins of the posthuman paradigm to the development of post-structuralism:

"The 'death of Man', announced by Foucault (1970), formalises an epistemological and moral crisis that goes beyond binary oppositions and cuts across the different poles of the political spectrum" (3). She exposes the connections between this "death of Man" and the speculative death of the human, understood not only as species but also as a symbol of the naturalized category of the white, privileged, and humanist subject. Braidotti, along with other posthumanist feminist theorists, investigates problematic articulations of posthumanism. This approach is referred to as critical posthumanism.

In addition to an unsettling of traditional anthropocentric worldviews, what characterizes the posthuman paradigm is an appeal to technology and scientific progress as sources of enhancement and compensation: robots, monsters, hybrid human constructs, and virtualities are used to challenge the limits of the human body. Critical theorists of the posthuman usually credit Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles as being the firsts to "critically embrac[e] the ambiguous potential that 'becoming posthuman' might bring, both liberating and regressive" (Herbrechter 3). In a similar line of thought, other contributors such as Cary Wolfe, Karen Barad, and Sheryl Vint are also critical of the posthuman and question the risks of repeating oppressive patterns that favour mind over body through technological and scientific enhancement. Hence the term "critical posthumanism" serves to challenge different approaches to the posthuman and raises question about the many facets of this projected state of humanity.

Braidotti describes this posthuman compensation with technology and systems of power by going back to Haraway's cyborg. She suggests that it "inserts an oppositional consciousness at the heart of the debate on the new technological societies currently being shaped, in such a way as to highlight issues of gender and sexual difference within a much broad discussion about survival and social justice" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* 68). Braidotti notes that Haraway's cyborg is a useful tool for resisting and understanding how "the bodies of women and other minorities have been

cannibalized by the new technologies" in the "postindustrial system of production" (67). She also argues that the cyborg "inhabit[s] the posthuman body, that is to say, an artificially reconstructed body" and that this "posthuman predicament does not wipe out politics or the need for political resistance: it just makes it more necessary than ever to work towards a radical redefinition of political action" (69). Indeed, both the posthumanist approach and the post-anthropocentric approach require new, reinvested political action in their redefinition of human subjectivity. Critical posthumanism, such as in the work of Hayles, Braidotti, Wolf, and Barad, provides emancipatory aspirations that liberate subjectivities other than "Man" as well as new living structures that resist "the scientific and economic control and commodification of all that lives" ("Posthuman Humanities" 6). The figure of the cyborg is thus marked and inscribed in technological progress, but Braidotti argues that the cyborg is also a feminist representation that stresses the disposability of many embodied subjects like women and other minorities who do not fit in the humanist tradition.

I rely on Braidotti's configuration of the posthuman cyborg to read the representations of resisting bodies in the texts. While most bodies found in the corpus are not transformed by technology or "artificially reconstructed" (*Transpositions* 69), they nevertheless use posthuman relationality to stand firm against medical, patriarchal, and technoscientific systems of domination. The bodies appropriate their living spaces in relational proximity with other bodies, but also with nonhuman others. The stories thus expose strategies of resistance that make clear the importance of embodiment in intersubjective processes of identity formation. The centrality of embodiment is key in the posthuman relationality that I circumscribe in the texts. The novels engage with the responsibility of the embodied subjects in connection with the material world and ghostly figures, exploring alternative subjectivities and relational structures as sources of healing and comfort. I

suggest they are fictional treatments of the posthuman in how they give relational importance to the nonhuman in the construction of subjectivity.

In the chapters, the textual analyses will expose points of tension between care ethics and critical posthumanism. Care ethics is fundamentally feminist, appropriating space in different fields of the humanities that have historically deprived minorities – especially women – of a voice and that have denied their capacity to produce knowledge. Care ethics "has represented a welcome alternative to prescriptive, justice-oriented patriarchal ethics, which tend to involve abstract principles and rules that have little relevance to the day-to-day lives of individual subject" (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 12). On the one hand, care ethics challenges the supremacy of "Man" by repositioning moral and ethical reasoning in a model that is not androcentric and that "challenges philosophical traditions based on independence and autonomy, rights and justice" (11). The different forms of care and related notions of responsibility, hospitality, and recognition serve to promote a relationality that "opens up the possibility of witnessing, of opening the self to the mystery of otherness without resorting to assimilation and domination" (125). On the other, a branch of care ethics pushes the reflection further and explores the post-anthropocentric turn by addressing questions of vulnerability and responsibility towards all living matter such as nonhuman animals and the environment. Related fields such as bioethics, ecology and geography make use of such an ethics of care: "La remise en cause de l'égoïsme caractéristique de la relation actuelle des hommes [sic] à la nature et aux vivants non humains constitue la clé de voûte d'une réforme. Le prendre soin (*care*) paraît constituer un modèle de comportement efficace" (Larrère, qtd. in Laugier, *Tous vulnérables* 124). And critical posthumanist theory, much like propositions of care ethics, "destabilizes the dominant biopolitical order" by bringing to attention a new way of inhabiting the world (Ciobanu 160) and challenges what Rosi Braidotti identifies as "the basic unit of reference for human in the bio-genetic age" (4).

Accordingly, a primary aim of this investigation of geographies of care in fiction is to see how both approaches to posthumanist concerns are closely related to care ethics. I am also interested in how these interactions operate to imagine new alternatives for marginalized subjectivities and lifestyles. Some of the selected texts dramatize attitudes and practices of care inscribed in posthumanist revisions of human subjectivity by rewriting gendered spaces (chapter 3) and roles as well as by stressing the importance of relational proximity in the development of healing and survival strategies of racialized subjects (chapter 4). By augmenting care ethics with the posthuman to better read the selected texts, I intend to demonstrate how some of these healing strategies appeal to postanthropocentric possibilities by using the figure of the ghost and other nonhuman entities. As demonstrated by Amelia DeFalco, "certain novels depict a family stricken by the traumatic legacy of racist history, a legacy that at once amplifies the need for care and impedes it" (*Imagining Care* 55). I intend to contribute to this discussion by showing how, in different novels, other forms of traumatic legacies are mediated with care ethics and ultimately imagine posthuman care.

Indeed, the connections between care, the posthuman predicament, and literature go beyond what moral philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum have suggested: literature is not merely a source of examples to be used by moral philosophy to validate theory (DeFalco, "Moral Obligation" 243). While several commentators argue that Nussbaum rejects care ethics for a more liberal moral approach (Held 94), she remarks that literature contributes to moral philosophy and moral life "by inviting the reader to perform ethically significant acts of perception and attention, acts that are themselves part of a well-lived ethical life" (Nussbaum 10). She adds that "[t]he text in this way does not simply represent ethical deliberation, it incites it; and the reader's acts are valuable sorts of moral activity" (16). Drawing on Nussbaum's argument that literature contributes to the

understanding of ethical matters, and departing from her belief that literature only serves to provide examples for moral theory, I agree with DeFalco that literature deepens and complicates critical theory and moral philosophy. It does so by giving access to imaginary representations of different forms of life that reveal the intricacies of ethical responsibility, and that deepen readers' comprehension of both the "desirable and debilitating" aspects of care ("Moral Obligation" 243).

As the selected stories show, being able to occupy, inhabit, protect, modify, fix a living space with tools and/or with other people, animals or the nonhuman, produces knowledge about the space being experienced. These possibilities also uncover characteristics regarding the subject doing the action, experiencing the environment and adjusting to material, social and cultural conditions in which the home space – anywhere from being at home in the world to having a place or person that is or feels like home – is always in tension, stressing the co-constitutive processes that shape the geographies of care. Objects from a diversity of shapes and forms – tools, food, clothing, souvenirs, modes of transportation, walls, etc. – are participants in the fictional subjects' process of identity formation as they instigate new spatial and affective moments leading or helping the troubled characters to develop survival strategies and/or to preserve and protect their sense of belonging. Hence relationality is to be understood not only between two cultural subjects but also between human and non-human, including these different forms of sociability, acknowledging caring relationships between humans and objects, bringing to attention alternatives states of being that also impact lived space (Ahmed. See also Barad and Kleinmann).

Recent philosophical discourse on space, care ethics, and posthuman criticism are linked and in opposition to an epistemological tradition that, mostly since the work of Martin Heidegger, has shed light on the phenomenological relations between bodies and between bodies and the world, focussing on situated experiences between the embodied subject and the social environment, and investigating perceptions and embodied experiences to further understand the "domain of our

dwelling" (Heidegger 145). Care ethics and posthuman discourse do not center their propositions on spatiality nor share Heidegger's language of "thrown-ness" in the world. However, theorists are concerned with understanding different components of relationships such as spatiality and location, to have a relational comprehension of the subject as situated, complex, non-unitary, yet unique. Less interested in developing a universal experience of the world, they focus on the beings and bodies – animated or inanimated – that forge the self through encounters with those particular others (Noddings 101).

It is the notion of encounter that brings them together, an encounter that is situated, located, and thus spatialized. In exploring what and who is encountered, and what participates in the relationships emotionally, physically, psychosocially, culturally, and materially, it appears evident that subjects, places, and objects interact and operate in spatial arrangements. While care ethics and posthuman theory share key propositions and promote a configuration of life-world where human is not at the centre but rather part of a wider shared living system – which reflects in the selected texts under study – they do not directly address the cultural, emotional and moral impacts and functions of spatiality. The imagined lives, developing "through a multitude of complex encounters" (124), will provide knowledge for discussing the co-constituency of lived space and care.

Chapter 2

"It Was He Who Put Us in This Unlikely Place"[7]:
Preservation and Transformation of Relational Experiences

This chapter uses two novels that illustrate space preserving and space building strategies by female and youth characters in situations of economic, corporeal, emotional and socio-cultural struggle and who use care practices and attitudes to appropriate their living spaces and to locate meaning and purpose. As the excerpt used in the title suggests, the struggles represented in the novels initially stem from patriarchal oppression and control. The characters' strategies, at times resistant to and at others complicit with the systems of power forces (patriarchy, institutions and authorities, and family structures), shape the geographies of care as ambivalent and ambiguous and characterize their intersubjective life trajectory. The spatial imagery in *Housekeeping*, by Marilynne Robinson, and *Room*, by Emma Donoghue, unveils a doubling strategy: the characters want and need to make a change regarding their living spaces as well as they seek a certain stasis through normative ideals (Shands, *Embracing Space* 16). In each text, the characters face ethical and spatial challenges and cope with these difficulties by protecting particular relationships and habits that empower them and that affect their living spaces. They also try to preserve a certain sense of normality by adapting their living spaces and by resisting hegemonic practices of figures of power that dehumanize, ostracize and hold them hostage. The spatial consequences of this pattern of invisibility for subjects who experience precarity are multifaceted and can be expressed by limited access to the public, invasion of the private by power forces associated with the public, alienating workplaces, neglected bodies and dangerous living spaces (Hétu, "Fictional Struggle". See also Beneventi and Rimstead).

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[7] In M. Robinson, p. 3.

I contend that making room for reading practices that rely on the ethics of care allows for a different understanding of these problematic relational experiences that blur the boundaries between inside and outside. The boundaries are also messy between self and other in narrative forms that dissipate the voice of the narrator with that of other characters. I suggest it is a different reading in the way the ethics of care shifts the center of attention from the individual character to the relational processes that illustrate socio-spatial vulnerabilities; different in how the collective imaginary is disrupted to investigate particularities rather than commonalities. Care ethics promotes the development of a heterogeneous and interdependent subject by making room for another axiom than the liberal and independent individual. The two novels expose how interdependent subjects, through relationships of care, can come to terms with "the violence of social boundaries" (Rimstead 203) as well as with the inconsistencies between their needs and habits, and what the community or family promotes (Held 43).

In the two texts, the protagonists are confronted with such inconsistencies, and I suggest that the relational configuration of those protagonists is a narrative strategy that reterritorializes their initial idea of home and dramatizes a resistance to hegemonic forces that is deeply inscribed in care. Also, the presence of care-related gestures and emotions, of a language of care, connects the narratives with the theory of the relational person (Friedman) and of relational autonomy (Nedelsky) developed by different feminist care ethicists and with a theorization of recognition (Honneth). These conceptual bridges complicate care ethics by bringing attention to the multiple webs of meaning and attachments between characters that participate in the geographies of care. The living spaces, objects, and environments such as the forest and the river in *Housekeeping* and Jack's few dirty belongings in *Room* participate significantly in those geographies of care and participate in the posthuman language of the texts. However, this chapter is mainly concerned with the unconventional caring strategies that the characters put into practice to escape different forms

of abuse. Such a focus serves to shed light on how the novels comment on and dramatize the consequences of inadequate human relationality and the difficulties of care-related abilities like responsibility, autonomy, and attentiveness. The chapter thus exposes how care participates in the poetic structure of these two texts.

Jennifer Nedelsky coined the umbrella term "relational autonomy" in her feminist approach towards a more representative conceptualization of the phrase (Ricard 32. See also Mackenzie & Stoljar). Nedelsky suggests, in her renown article "Reconceiving Autonomy: Sources, Thoughts and Possibilities," that feminism has rejected the "prevailing conception" of autonomy that "stands at the core of liberal theory and carries with it the individualism characteristic of liberalism" (7). She also demonstrates how, similar to feminism, certain branches of political and philosophical theory have worked to provide a new language that would better reflect "the nature of human beings" and the fact that "people are not self-made" (8). She remarks that

> we come into being in a social context that is literally constitutive of us. Some of our most essential characteristics, such as our capacity for language and the conceptual framework through which we see the world, are not made by us, but given to us (or developed in us) through our interactions with others. (8)

Laurence Ricard shows how feminist care ethicists then recuperated Nedelsky's concept "pour mieux définir en quoi l'autonomie dépend des relations d'interdépendance entre les individus" (67). Ricard also illustrates the similarities between Nedelsky's relational autonomy and Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, in which: "[a]utonomy is a capacity that exists only in the context of social relations that support it and only in conjunction with the internal sense of being autonomous" (Honneth 129). The idea of the relational subject – often associated with queer and affect theory (Pratt & Rosner 6. See also Sedgwick) – is also central to the ethics of care and emotional

geography. Drawing on feminist theory, the two fields suggest that co-constituency, interdependence, and intersubjectivity are shaped by feelings and attachments: "Feeling is affect, but it is also feeling *something*; the perceiving subject is not an island but deeply and multiply connected to the world around her" (Pratt & Rosner 7). The idea of relational autonomy is thus multidisciplinary and is useful for configuring the interconnections between space, relationships and subjectivity beyond and in resistance to the traditional liberal subject.

In addition, as Roxanne Rimstead noted, "English-Canadian criticism has been preoccupied for decades with the primacy of place as a cultural determinant" (65). Rimstead's remark about the primacy of place also applies to French-Canadian and Québécois criticism, as issues of territory, landscape, urban, and regional intricacies inform several critical and popular conceptualization of socio-cultural life. Rimstead raises questions about the long-lasting tradition of "liberal notions of cultural inclusiveness and nationalist notions of collective, imaginative experiences of place" to explore "the place of the poor and the working class in Canadian literature" (65). Her work is helpful in regards to my concerns about the tradition of liberal and humanist spatial discourse, but my analysis zeroes in on different neglected, non-mainstream issues: namely the relationality of the geographical experience and its care-related intricacies, which I argue are constitutive of the intersubjective experience of lived spatiality.

The connection between care and private space comes from naturalized views that associate women with caregiving roles. Care ethicists and theorists recognize that care ethics and the ethics of justice should not be opposed but should complement each other, as Virginia Held explicitly remarks that "there must be *room* for much more than liberal individualism for either persons or societies to flourish" (77, emphasis added). For instance, Rimstead does not situate her theoretical approach in care ethics, but the liberal notions such as inclusiveness and collective imaginary that she challenges to read Canadian poverty narratives written by women are brought into question.

They are tainted by ethical failure, which is often illustrated by systematic and vertical depreciation and exclusion of the other (Rimstead. See also McCann).

It thus seems fair to say that questions of ethics, space and place have occupied a fair share of inquiry in critical theory. However, theories of cultural geography and spatiality have tended to neglect the emotional and moral dimensions of lived spatiality, a problem that the sub-field of emotional geography has since attempted to address by developing a methodology with a perspective of care. Drawing on this combination of emotional geography and care ethics, I intend to show how the two selected novels can be read with a geo-emotional approach to explore the f subjects' relational struggle.

On the one hand, the male characters (a family patriarch and a sheriff in *Housekeeping* and a kidnapper and rapist in *Room*, as well as medical figures) expose women and children's vulnerability by placing them in dangerous situations, by abusing them, and by denying them a right to live on their terms. On the other, their failure to keep women and children in place, within their intended spatial and moral boundaries, as well as the actions elaborated by the protagonists to escape these oppressive environments, symbolize the texts' preoccupation with challenging patriarchal conventions and violence. I suggest that the latter form of resistance to hegemonic practices is characteristic of the ethics of care, especially because of how it is dramatized in the texts.

Housekeeping and *Room* dramatize women and children characters struggling to find their place in environments governed by caretaking authority figures who fail to listen to their demands and who refuse how these female figures take care of themselves and others under their own care. I wish to argue that geographies of care are thus shaped by the characters' movements in and out of those oppressive spaces as well as by their own resistant – and at times complicit – caring gestures towards themselves and the others of whom they are in charge. In addition to the

interactions between characters, both narrative voices, in their intersubjective and unique composition, become illuminated differently when read with care ethics' concept of vulnerability. Indeed, they both depend on other subjectivities to express themselves and to make sense of their world. The presence of different characters and objects in the text shapes their voices and exposes a caring, yet fragile relationality marked by solidarity, interdependence, and the recognition of others, human or nonhuman.

In these novels, a relational imagery stresses emotional, affective, and caring dimensions of lived space. The characters struggle to take care of their relationships as well as of their psychological, physical, and emotional health because of dominant and oppressive male figures that control space, both public and private. The impact of abusive and caring relationships on these characters' experience of intimate and shared living spaces suggest that care—as a concept that encompasses notions of responsibility, hospitality, vulnerability, accountability and healing— affects space and inscribes the symbolic meanings attached to geographical settings. Similarly, personal and social experiences in particular living spaces, such as kidnapping, domesticity, owning a place, drifting, grief, suffering, and healing impact and participate in the relational processes. The movements created by the combination and the interactions of these interrelated processes shape the geographies of care and uncover meaning about the fragile processes of belonging and identity formation that require both self and others.

By drawing on care ethics and a geo-emotional approach, this chapter goes after specific objectives, all of which serve to expose the interconnections between care, belonging and preservation in actions of keeping and making place. First, I want to address how, in the novels, the subjects organize everyday actions and attitudes of care to maintain and construct livable and comfortable living spaces. I also read these representations in relation to and beyond gender stereotypes and beyond essentialising dichotomies such as nature/nurture, private/public and

body/mind. Finally, to expose how literature provides an understanding to the aporia of care and socio-spatial experiences, I want to make clear the nuances and strategies that characters use to cope with careless others and with their responsibilities to provide care. The difficulties of providing care without abusing the powers that come with caregiving, along with the successful, caring interactions between characters and between characters and their environment and community allow configuring geographies of care as ambivalent, paradoxical networks of caring and spatial modalities.

To achieve these objectives, I complicate care theory to conceptualize the relational processes that the texts represent. The analysis places the care-related concepts of autonomy, of vulnerability, and of the relational person in dialogue with ideas that emerged in spatial discourse with "geography's moral turn" (McEwan & Goodman 105). Indeed, drawing on McEwan and Goodman's claims that "care is fundamentally geographical in its production, development, reception and consumption" and that it is "about 'feeling' as much as 'doing,' ... about 'doing to' as much as 'feelings from'" (109), I read these two texts of fiction as representations of geographies of care by "point[ing] to how entangled and complicated these issues and instances of the multiple practices and expressions of care can be" (109). This chapter thus brings attention to the dynamics and patterns that operate between the characters' living spaces, their sense of belonging to these spaces, and the gestures and attitudes that they organise and put in place to find comfort and to survive.

Housekeeping*: Women, Memory and Interdependence*

With *Housekeeping*, American writer Marilynne Robinson "charts the efforts of its women to escape the memory and absence of the father" (Lassner 50). Told by female protagonist Ruth, this story begins with the death of the family patriarch, her grandfather Edmund Foster, who

disappears when the train he was in falls into the lake. As Phyllis Lassner and several other commentators have remarked,[8] his body and the train, which are never found, are "both symbols of patriarchal power and conquest" (50). They serve to make "him larger than life, part of a mysterious story in which he is a compelling and legendary presence" (51). It is thus meaningful that Ruth begins her story by telling that of her grandfather's difficult life and tragic death in a train wreck, before directing her attention to the women of the Foster family, whose presence and memory fill and shape her narrative. Lassner has also argued that Ruth "remakes the myth of the American West in the voices of mothers and daughters" (50). She does so by rescuing the stories of the Foster women from "patriarchal text" (49) and by creating "an alternative model for female relationships by first breaking the tie to the Law of the Father" (50). Ruth interprets the lives of female family members. For instance, she imagines what her mother was like and tries to understand what led her to commit suicide by driving her car in the lake. She also envisions her grandmother Sylvia, who "keeps her house and daughters, later her granddaughters, with 'generous and absolute government'" (53); her sister Lucille, with whom she shares a special bond but who eventually separates from the family; and finally Sylvie, whom Ruth adopts as replacement for her mother and with whom she creates "a new kind of interdependent relationship, a new bond that displaces father and mother as it fractures the traditional family structures" (51).

I add that Ruth and Sylvie's interdependent relationship also fractures the conventional ideas of housekeeping and home. Their interactions provides them with mutual comfort and

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[8] Early readings of *Housekeeping* underline the text's feminist inclinations and how it "challenges traditional notions of motherhood and domesticity" (Galehouse 117). Martha Ravits also suggests that Robinson is "reinvent[ing] the American myth to fit female consciousness" (644), Joan Kirby demonstrates how the novel rejects "a specific social vision of the female" as constructed by patriarchy (105), and Paula Geyh raises important questions: "Can the feminine subject ever really be thought beyond the structures of patriarchy, or is the transient subject finally only a spectre, doomed to haunt the father's house forever?" (119). Later critical work tends to agree with these feminist readings but has also complicated the identity crisis of the female characters with intersectional analysis, mostly including issues of class, by addressing homelessness and transiency as metaphors for subversion (Smyth. See also Mallon, Klaver, and Geyh).

confidence and the necessary relational tools to break free from the patriarchal haunting that shapes

the lives of the Foster women since Edmund's mysterious death. Ruth and Sylvie's unique

sisterhood resists what Patricia Smart theorized as "the Father's House," "a metaphor for culture

and its ideological, artistic, and linguistic structures of representation, shown by feminism

precision and clarity in recent years to be the projection of male subjectivity and male authority"

(6). Rimstead augments Smart's theorization by shedding light, in her analysis of Gabrielle Roy's

Bonheur d'occasion, on the political terms that inscribe the representation of women experiencing

poverty and struggle under patriarchy. She stresses how "[p]oor women buttress their families

against poverty in a world where their nurturing identity becomes the last collective resource for

survival. When patriarchal society fails to house and feed the poor and when men flee

responsibility ..., the story of daily struggle and survival falls to the women to tell" (81). Even

though Rimstead does not address care directly in her discussion, she pays attention to the ordinary

gestures accomplished by Roy's protagonist Rose-Anna as representation of women's material,

caretaking struggle "inscribed as a fact of the quotidian ... within a disorder clearly not of her own

making" (82), which echoes Ruth's and Sylvie's experience in *Housekeeping*.

Rimstead also connects Roy's life story with the lives of the writer's protagonists. She

stresses the link between Roy's mother's storytelling habits and her writing of economic struggle

as "strategy to survive poverty" (82) and as healing strategy: "Thus the novelist names her

mother/storyteller as her antecedent, describing both their art forms as firmly grounded in lived

experiences and aimed at similarly *therapeutic* ends" (82, emphasis added). Rimstead uses a

language of care to discuss the characters' material and emotional experience. She describes the

narrative as therapeutic strategy and highlights the ordinary, everyday caretaking and caregiving[9] gestures to stress the agency of Rose-Anna rather than her martyrdom inside and outside the house.

Rimstead suggests that such reading strategies shaped by feminist and class-based perspectives make way for "a circle of cultural inclusion which is not simply a sentimental encircling of the most excluded elements but rather one constructed through political insight into the related function of class and gender as mechanisms of cultural exclusion and a profound sense of social responsibility to see the world otherwise" (85). I rely on her metaphor of the circle of cultural inclusion – which echoes Shands' embracing space – and draw on her analysis to better decode representations of therapeutic, healing, and nurturing gestures in the texts. Her critical readings bring attention to the politics of lived experience in contexts of precarity. I thus read the selected novels as strategies to transgress and dethrone "rigid boundaries between matters of justice and that of the good life" (Benhabib, *Situating the Self* 111-12) with a language and representations of care that shape new perspectives for thinking cultural and political resistance through the symbolic.

In *Housekeeping*, Ruth's recollection of events, through which she imagines and fantasizes about her female family members' inner thoughts and experiences, makes place for "a new structure emerging, a cumulative movement of emerging women's subjectivities that ... eventually shake the Father's House to its very foundations" (Smart 268). Ruth's narrative describes how she

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[9] Drawing on DeFalco's discussion, I do not use caregiving and caretaking interchangeably. DeFalco explains the distinction between caregiving and caretaking accordingly: "The terminology of care 'giving' and care 'taking' provides a useful entry point for attending to the precariousness of care. Though 'give' and 'take' are opposing verbs, the former denoting donation, the latter receipt, once compounded with 'care,' the clear opposition begins to blur" ("Caretakers/Caregivers" 381). She adds that "the development of 'caregiving,' both the term and the practice, emphasizes the association of dependency work with the heroism of love, duty, and honor, banishing the unsavory aspects of care, its labor and burdens. The new term thus masks the many ways 'caregiving' can resemble 'caretaking,' in particular, the opportunities it provides for objectification, reimbursement, and dangerous power imbalances. The lexical distinction between the terms speaks to a desire to maintain ideological distinctions between love and work" (383).

and Sylvie subvert traditional gender roles, resist the community expectations by inhabiting public space as transients, and how their transiency transforms the house built by Edmund. Care and spatial imagery mark her narrative and render visible a growing sense of belonging shaped by actions of preservation and transformation, of keeping and making place.

Issues of domesticity, space occupation, credibility, and autonomy complicate caregiving and care receiving in the different living spaces. These particular connections are symbolized more precisely by the preservation and construction of space in the text. Sylvie's return to the family house impacts the inside and the outside of the house as well as the public space she inhabits; her presence and the way she provides care for Ruth and Lucille have significant consequences on the sisters' relationship. Conversely, Sylvie's relationship, first with the two sisters and eventually with each one of them, also strongly impacts both the way they inhabit the house together and separately as well as how they move and occupy public space. Sylvie puts a strain on the sisters' stable bond and the symbol of sisterhood shifts from Ruth and Lucille to Ruth and Sylvie as the girls come of age and make their individual choices regarding their response to Sylvie's transgressive and unconventional socio-spatial habits.

While Lucille symbolizes a desire and a sense of security in respecting social conventions and expectations, Ruth chooses Sylvie's lifestyle despite the mockery and the loss of her sister's affection. Also, whereas Lucille is interested in forging new friendships and forming a new family with her Home Economics teacher, Ruth dwells on the past and the memory of the dead. She and Sylvie appropriate the house and public spaces, shaping social and spatial boundaries to their transient lifestyle, to better cope with their struggle with conventional and normative domesticity. Sylvie's presence shakes the foundations of the house as well as those of Ruth and Lucille's relationship. She participates in a series of shifting boundaries in the town of Fingerbone that lead to Ruth and Sylvie's departure. These boundaries express how the past inscribes the present. They

also illustrate how the dead (the girls' mother, grandmother, and grandfather) inhabits the living and how attitudes and practices of care – through a particular sense of responsibility as well as through actions of spatial preservation and transformation – help or participate in the negotiation of those boundaries. The latter incidentally affect the geographies of care that characterize the characters' experience of lived space.

Robinson's novel is lesser known in Canada but greatly celebrated in the United States.[10] It makes use of narrative and textual strategies that participate to an ethics of care in its questioning of singularity and community, in its capacity to challenge traditional ideas about identity and subjectivity, and in its ability to illustrate the impacts of caring practices. More precisely, *Housekeeping* provides material for thinking presence and absence, for revisiting spatiality in terms of memory, spectrality, and hospitality. Again, several literary analyses of the novel have explored the functions of space, of domesticity and of a particular aesthetic of haunting to question identity construction and conventional narrative structure. My analysis provides a new reading of these elements by complicating their relationship with care-related themes and a conception of lived space closely connected to moral life.

As Amy Hungerford notices, the novel raises feminist questions by complicating the domesticity associated with housekeeping as well as by using female characters to disrupt moral conventions and social norms in an imaginary small town. She also rightfully notices how the novel adds layers of meaning to the feminist analytical framework. The novel does so by asking questions about the legibility of identity, and by using one narrator, Ruth, whose voice is infused with that of other characters – mostly female – whose imagined thoughts and feelings inscribe Ruth's

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[10] Robinson is the recipient, among numerous other prizes, of the Hemingway Foundation/Pen Award for best first fiction in 1982 for *Housekeeping*, of a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction nomination for *Housekeeping*, and of a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *Gilead*. She was recently awarded the National Humanities Medal by U.S. President Barack Obama.

persona and suggest that identity is singular, yet not entirely independent and separate from others'. What the analyses fail to show, however, is that this interdependent singularity, this shared vulnerability, is a pivotal point in the narrative. Ruth's encounter with the other is both fact and fiction, both self and other dwelling in memory, fantasy, and care. She navigates through the different relationships that forged her narrative identity, thriving on a blurred sense of self characterized by the presence and absence of other women, by their voices that she imagines to make sense of her place in Fingerbone.

Accordingly, the text exposes how care, as Selma Sevenuijsen argues, is a "form of human agency" (4). The novel shows how the reciprocity that characterizes the relationships allows ethical possibility for the characters to take action—to preserve, protect or challenge this relational process (Carrière 38). Similar to what several care theorists and ethicists investigate, the novel addresses "the question of how to deal with dependency, responsibility, vulnerability, and trust; the importance but also the fragility of intimacy and connectedness; the ever-recurring problem of establishing boundaries between self and others" (Sevenhuijsen 3). Ruth's messy memory constructs the identity of the characters in a system of negotiations between the social expectations and traditions of Fingerbone and her personal, particular experience. The women she imagines, along with Sylvie's presence and influence, foster in Ruth a sensitivity and responsiveness to her surroundings that appeal to a different set of evaluations of the world. Her caring gestures and attitudes complicate a language of justice used by the community of Fingerbone in its attempt to mould her and Sylvie's housekeeping and caregiving.

The language of care that qualifies the interactions of the subjects also underlines the ethical dimension of lived space. For instance, the representation of domesticity illustrates first Ruth and Lucille's togetherness and then Ruth and Sylvie's solidarity and interdependence. Their interrelated private experience makes clear a sense of belonging that counterbalances their

individual expectations and the constraints of conventional housekeeping imposed by the community: "For by now we knew, though the certainty was not especially reassuring, that Sylvie was ours" (M. Robinson 110). Paradoxically, the knowledge that is uncovered with a reading of care in the novel highlights the vulnerability – an ongoing uncertainty, a haunting of something "not especially reassuring" – as well as the solidity of the relationships that remain in Ruth's memory and that she preserves by telling her story.

Acknowledging the strange nature of her connection to Sylvie, Ruth is also able to recognize the value of their interdependence that thrives as they spend time in the forest, in town, and in the house. Hence a certain confidence and comfort mark their relationship across the different living spaces, adding to the evident tensions represented between the geo-emotional attachment to the house in Fingerbone and Sylvie's hard-wired nomadism. The latter transforms into what Jackie Smyth identifies as sheltered vagrancy: "[In the novel] the transience is contained by shelter. To put that idea another way, the house itself becomes a transient structure. In particular, the transience is characterized as a partial destruction of the symbolic order and as an acknowledgment of other forces" (285). Therefore, the traditional configuration of the domestic is remodeled in this rewriting of habitability as combination of transience and settling down that, as Smyth rightfully notices, is more complicated than a polarizing dichotomy: "*Housekeeping* breaks down binary oppositions such as inside-outside, lost-found" (283). Ruth finding comfort in Sylvie's habits disrupts anticipated reactions of rejection and exclusion, instead bringing attention to the girls' fear of abandonment and Sylvie's transient negotiations: "I was reassured by her [Sylvie's] sleeping on the lawn, and now and then in the car .... It seemed to me that if she could remain transient here, she would not have to leave" (103).

As Maggie Galehouse suggests, the first-person narrator allows Robinson to write from within the mobility/stability dichotomy. Drawing on Spivak, Galehouse argues that Robinson thus

puts emphasis on the spatialised transformation of Ruth: "Ruth is well-equipped to outline the transition from domesticity to drifting. . . . Spivak maintains that this type of linguistic positioning is a useful way for a narrator (and, by extension, an author) to critique the nature and inadequacy of dichotomization" (120). Indeed, the figure of the female drifter, initially represented by Sylvie and then also by Ruth, who adopts her lifestyle, is a subversive figure that troubles the social functioning of the community. Sylvie's wandering disrupts traditional public and private order.

This form of alternative living allows Ruth to open up and to find a healing space in her relationship with Sylvie, whereas Lucille moves out of the house to live with the Home Economics teacher, who symbolizes traditional housekeeping and enforces a lifestyle that better suits Lucille, who wants to fit in the community. As a drifter, Ruth "becomes a part of Sylvie's world, agreeing to follow Sylvie wherever drifting leads them. Ruth's decision to drift is, ironically, a commitment to stay with Sylvie, the only family member she has left" (Galehouse 122). Abandoned by her mother, by Lily and Nona, and by her sister, Ruth adopts, voluntarily, Sylvie's transience, which both guarantees Sylvie's presence as well as foreshadows Ruth's departure from Fingerbone.

Disrupting conventional housekeeping and breaking patterns of domesticity with female transients, Robinson reinvents the usually polarized connection between intimate and public space. Her text fictionalizes care practices between marginalized characters whose experience of such spaces encourages a new relational spatiality: geographies of care that, despite a context of economic, social and emotional struggle, illustrate how the amalgam of these textured spaces and caring relationships are central to the thriving of the protagonists. As an expression of care ethics, *Housekeeping* sheds light on the impacts of care practices on lived spatiality, on the effects of moral and affective situations on spatial perceptions and embodiment:

> That was when I noticed the correspondence between the space between the circle of
>
> my skull and the space around me. I saw just the same figure against the lid of my

eye or the wall of my room, or in the trees beyond my window. Even the illusion of

perimeters fails when families are separated. (M. Robinson 198)

The unknown posture of Ruth as narrator, as she tells the events that led to her and Sylvie's departure, maintains that blurry distinction between boundaries, between those spatial, material, emotional, and embodied "perimeters". Whether Ruth's memory is reliable or not, the textual elements of the novel mirror Ruth's struggle with the legibility of her identity. Indeed, the text makes sense of the narrator's recollection through the other characters, their inner thoughts and thus uses intersubjectivity and interdependence to provide answers to the problem of readibility that the narrator creates.

Moreover, Ruth's and Sylvie's mutual care, the attention given to what is outside the house, as well as the preservation of Sylvie's transient habits through Ruth's transformation and choices, are inscribed in a complex dynamic which main objective is for them to stay together, to keep the family together. These human constructs negotiate, by disrupting the domesticity/transiency dichotomy, a new form of spatial and social belonging that geographies of care render visible by shedding light on what these characters do, carefully and at times radically, to find comfort and make sense of their vulnerability. Indeed, Ruth's voice echoes the voice of these other women as she tells the story of how she struggled to develop her own sense of self. She prefers a connection to these other characters, often expressing a confused sense of differentiation with others: "I suppose I don't know what I think" (105), and a fear of getting no recognition, of not being acknowledged by the other women with whom she identifies: "I was afraid to put out my hand for fear it would touch nothing, or to speak, for fear no one would answer" (61). As Kaivola notices, "Ruth's struggle for individuation is complicated by an equal if not even more powerful desire not to become: she longs to merge with others, to lose herself" (Kaivola 675). The text testifies to the struggle for individuation (675) when relationships and space of interdependence challenge

tradition and normative conceptions of the self. Drawing on Kaivola, I suggest that the geographies of care, within which acts of protection, preservation and construction operate, inform the novel's meditation on legibility of identity (Hungerford) and on the struggle to restore/appropriate the strategies that make legibility possible or that make place for a more trustworthy legibility.

By legibility, I refer to Ruth's capacity to decipher or decode her identity within the different relationships that delineate her persona. Ruth struggles to make sense of Fingerbone as well as what others expect from her, and it is difficult for her to find her place in both meaning systems: social and subjective relationality. I thus argue that spatial legibility is also put to the test in the novel. Experts define this key concept of urban studies and urban design as "the characteristics of the space that provide an understanding through helping create cognitive maps and wayfinding" (Herzog & Leverich, qtd. in Koseoglu & Onder 1192). In *Housekeeping*, space is ambiguous: domestic space is inadequate both for the inhabitants of the Stone-Foster house, and public space is both occupied by the girls as transients, governed and pushed inside the Stone-Foster house by the authorities, and blind to the hobos who live near the bridge.

The narrative and textual strategies illustrate how Ruth struggles to make sense of these layers of meaning, how she is incapable of creating "cognitive maps and wayfinding" on her own (Koseoglu & Onder 1192), resorting to using imagined thoughts of dead family members while recalling the events, as well as merging her identity with Lucille's and Sylvie's to map her way in and out of Fingerbone. What space theorists refer to as spatial legibility is complicated and expanded with existential, relational legibility, revealing that memories, emotional attachments, and affects inscribe the spatial landmarks that play a role in Ruth's story: the house, the bridge, the lake, the female body, as sites in and through which intersubjective identities are constructed and negotiated.

In the novel, Lucille and Ruth feel the pressure to comply to the expectations of their community. How Lucille is strategically placed in sync with Fingerbone's social norms and in opposition to Sylvie's habit, then in opposition to Ruth's, symbolizes patriarchal ideology in domesticity and gendered roles as well as the invasion of the public in the private. Ruth describes Sylvie's attitude after being threatened to lose the girls due to her lifestyle deemed unhygienic and irresponsible. She remarks: "Those days she cast about constantly for ways to conform our lives to the expectations of others, or to what she guessed their expectations might be, and she was full of purpose" (M. Robinson 201). These forced orientations and evaluations of daily life engender an ethical stance on "good" and "bad" living conditions that literature allows to imagine and to problematize.

It would be easy to argue that the practices of preservation and transformation of the house fail and lead Ruth and Sylvie to give up and to burn it down in a final act of resistance. This could ultimately symbolize the inadequacy of this genealogical homespace and foreshadow an inevitable movement from the inside to the outside that is paralleled in their ethical and spatial experience outside the family house and mostly spent in the forest and in the public. Indeed, the boundaries of the house are opened by Sylvie's transience and Ruth's transformation, by their mutual affection for the environment, for nature and for the haunting presence of the dead, among whom Ruth's mother Helen and grandfather Edmund, who both allegedly disappeared in the lake.

But I read the destruction of the family house as a radical form of protection of a space forced to change, despite Sylvie's attempt at implementing domestic changes better suited to Fingerbone's moral and social micromanagement. The outside invades the inside, and so Sylvie and Ruth resist to this unwanted invasion by being nomads, by living in the public sphere rather than in the traditional house, rather than keeping their house closed and tidy, accepted by and acceptable to social norms of home space. This is about reading differently what is available and

what is allowed, geo-emotionally, for underprivileged subjects who do not fit in their social environment, who resist social norms and who struggle to accept homogenizing values and structures.

Indeed, a particular attention to the representations of geographies of care allows investigating what is important in terms of "droit aux attachements et aux émotions" rather than in terms of what is "raisonnable," in order to read differently the causes and consequences of the experience of exclusion of these vulnerable subjects (Delon 121). In this literary analysis, care is therefore an analytical tool that facilitates different frameworks for thinking agency and subjectivity: "un outil de résistance contre les hiérarchies implicites dans les éthiques majoritaires […] [qui] permet d'articuler l'affectif et l'empathie à une analyse des conditions sociales de la domination d'une catégorie par une autre" (Donovan, qtd. in Laugier, *Tous vulnérables* 31). For instance, in her symptomatic reaction to the conventional system of social norms in Fingerbone, Lucille leaves her family to move in with the Home Economics teacher. This event stresses the weight of domestic morality on the shoulders of the young girls by eventually separating them, and it triggers moral tensions as the reader is confronted to the ideological and social impacts of this system of gendered power forces that ultimately separates the entire family and forces Sylvie and Ruth to leave town after burning down the house.

While critics of *Housekeeping* have also commented on several aspects of the space of domesticity and its influence on female subjectivity, such as Ruth and Sylvie finding shelter in the house of the father figure (Patricia Smart's *Writing in the Father's House* comes to mind), and the symbolic "interdependency of transiency and domesticity" (Smyth 289), what remains to be addressed are the strong interconnections of such narrative strategies with the ethics of care and its illuminating perspective on notions of interdependence, invisibility, as well as its potential, as radical epistemological framework, for subversion. Commentators have described the house built

by the grandfather as a symbol for the girls' and Sylvie's sheltered transiency (Smyth) and as a metaphor for women's constrained lives (Geyh. See also Kirby). Critics analyse it as a subversive symbol of livability, for the unfinished structure makes it a "transient structure," and because Sylvie's transformation of the house "unsettles old patterns of domesticity" (Smyth 286). I add that a perspective of care sheds additional light on the characters' tactics of survival and on the novel's problematizing of some of the aforementioned social traditions, spatial structures, and normative standards of living. The ways these women are "embedded within spatialized materialities" (Murdoch 2) share nodes of tensions with their embeddedness in conflicting and collaborative practices of which care is the driving force.

Room*: Geo-Emotional Confrontations and Caregiving*

Emma Donoghue's novel *Room*[11] tells the awakening of five-year-old Jack to the world after he manages to escape from Old Nick, a man who has abducted his mother and has been holding her hostage for seven years in a small shed in his backyard. The reader understands rather quickly that Old Nick is Jack's father because the boy is five years old and the result of rape, inscribing the narrative in a framework of patriarchal oppression and sexual violence. Being familiar only with the shed, his mother, and their few belongings, Jack lacks social skills, has a hunched back because he cannot stand up entirely straight in the shed, and speaks a rough language untouched by the outside world. When he and his mother – only referred to as "Ma" throughout the text – finally escape, Jack's life turns into an adventure of which he is both afraid and excited. On the day of the escape, in a surprising encounter with other humans in an outside world he cannot

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[11] This summary of the novel is an expanded rewriting of a first version published in *Mosaic* 48.3 (2015). Whereas in the article I focus on the representation of wonder in encounters between human and nonhuman, in this chapter my reading of *Room* centres on interconnections between interdependent relationships and survival strategies of preservation and protection.

yet fathom, Jack is astonished by everything he sees and cannot understand. Reunited with his mother moments after the police find her in the shed, Jack slowly begins, first in pain and then in fear, to socialize and to experience new spaces, contacts, and language forms. He soon thrives in a world that sees him as a young hero, while his mother struggles to return to the world in which she must face her numerous traumatic experiences with unwanted public attention. Jack's spatial experience is different than Ma's. He perceives the room as a normal space where he finds comfort and through which he experiences a sense of home. For Ma, however, the room is both a place she must adapt, adjust and transform so that Jack thrives and a cage in which she has suffered severe abuse (rape, violence, isolation, loss of children due to lack of care during childbirth). Their relationship, Jack's relationships with objects (see Chapter 5) and her protection and attentive practices and attitudes operate in this negative space as sources of wellbeing and care.

In *Room*, Jack's character is defined by his relational ties to human and nonhuman others, by his moral and affective involvement that qualifies him as an active intersubjective human construct rather than as a passive, sacralised figure of the innocent child. The mother's preservation and space-building strategies while in captivity create and maintain Jack's sense of normality since he knows nothing else. When they escape, the new living spaces and new interactions with persons and objects challenge his understanding of the world. They expose new geographies that challenge his habits and complicate his relationship with his mother, who struggles to adapt to freedom and the massive media coverage of their story. His relationship to the world is transformed, as he encounters new forms of life and objects that, in the words of the doctor who examines him, bring challenge "in the areas of ... social adjustment, obviously, sensory modulation—filtering and sorting all the stimuli barraging him—plus difficulties with spatial perception" (Donoghue 182). The room symbolizes both a confined spatiality and a well-preserved relationship with his mother and with objects given human traits. Ambivalent, this room is both center and margin, resonating

with feminist geographer Gillian Rose's concept of the paradoxical space where the lived experience of the quotidian is confined without being entirely restrained. Rose imagined this concept in reaction to her ambivalent relationship with masculinist space in the field of geography, as space from which she could come to terms with a "social scientific masculinism" and her feminist work.

Similar to Mildred Mortimer, who borrows Rose's concept to read representations of space in francophone women's fiction in Africa and the Caribbean, I use the notion of paradoxical space to better read how contradictory discourses and dynamics characterize the geographies of care. If the initial room in Donoghue's novel is shaped around Old Nick's system of oppression and criminal intentions, it is also undoubtedly shaped by Jack and Ma's relationship, by their affective movements with personified objects and rituals. The latter preserve a certain sense of normalcy within this ambivalent space and allow them to find some comfort. They also serve to initiate a particular healing process for Ma, who, unlike Jack, is aware of their imprisonment and who experiences the abuse directly, both physically and psychologically. I suggest that the language of care ethics brings to attention notions of dependence and vulnerability that unfold in the story and that shed light on "the relational, spatially extensive and public dimensions" of care (Katz, qtd. in Lawson 6). In the text, how Ma protects and makes space for Jack in the shed and later on in the outside world symbolize how, to recall Edward Soja, "life stories are geographically grounded" (qtd. in Mortimer 2) and how places of confinement can be transformed and altered through subversive techniques that provide a certain sense of belonging despite an initial dangerous space.

While several feminist thinkers such as Elizabeth Wilson and Gillian Rose have worked with the concept of "alternative space" or "paradoxical space" to think of "somewhere beyond capture" (Rose 143), their conceptualization aimed at "articulat[ing their] ambivalent relationship

with masculinist discourse," and thus served their methodology as feminist geographers. But as "imagined space[s]" their concepts share points of tension with the imagined spaces represented in the novels, in particular with those dramatized in *Room*. Indeed, as Mortimer remarked in her discussion of feminist contributions to the field of geography, innovative geographical perspectives and "emancipatory geography" allow to "validate personal experience that occur in lived space" (7). They also help resisting the "containment of women" through imagined spaces that complicate representations of modes of existence characterised by gendered power forces and that uncover "the power of imagination in self-definition and individual transformation" (10).

Mortimer's appeal to feminist geography to read Francophone African and Caribbean women writers shows similarities with mine: she draws on thinkers such as Grosz, Rose and Chandra Talpade Mohanty to validate her hypothesis that

> the female protagonist moves toward empowerment by entering public space from
> which indigenous patriarchs and European colonizers have excluded her, and
> establishing a new relationship to domestic space, characterized under patriarchy as
> a restrictive enclosure. She posits a liberating alternative space within it. (ix-x)

Mortimer "view[s] alternative space as a place of possibilities" and "emphasiz[es] its flexible and multipurpose nature ... [by] linking the search for place to the search for self" (x). Novels like *Room* and *Housekeeping* allow me to augment this theoretical discussion with feminist care ethics, which allows drawing attention to the differences between female protagonists' lived experiences of patriarchal and social structures. The alternative spaces represented in these two texts is first and foremost relational, shaped by the characters' interdependent yet vulnerable interactions that make place for survival strategies empowered by the interconnections and the shared responsibility between characters. What Mortimer describes as a "place of possibilities" shares similar

conceptual nodes of tension with my configuration of geographies of care, which consists, again, of geo-emotional, caring interactions and attachments.

A pivotal point of care ethics, the concept of vulnerability developed in the ethics of care and ethics of relationality is characterised as being implicit to the human condition: it "is a disposition of embodied, social, and relational beings for whom the meeting of needs and the development of capabilities and autonomy involve complex interpersonal and social interactions over time. Dependence is one form of vulnerability" (Dodds 182). Using the example of the child, Susan Dodds defines the interconnection between dependence and vulnerability accordingly: "as vulnerable embodied humans, infants are inherently dependent. The absence of an attentive carer will mean that the physical vulnerabilities of infants will become acute" (184). She adds:

> [d]ependence, then, is a specific form of vulnerability. The particular vulnerabilities associated with dependency are such as they are best met or supported by a specific person (or small number of people) due to the intimacy, immediacy or subtlety of the needs, support, and protections that are involved. (183-4)

Similarly, in *Tous vulnérables? Le care, les animaux et l'environnement* Laugier suggests that placing vulnerability at the core of care ethics exposes how "la dépendance et la vulnérabilité ne sont pas des accidents de parcours qui n'arrivent qu'aux 'autres' mais sont le lot de tous – y compris de ceux qui semblent les plus indépendants, mais qui pour cela ont besoin d'autres pour assumer leur autonomie" (11). Laugier also writes that "le care rappelle que nous avons tous besoin d'autres pour satisfaire nos besoin primordiaux" (11), and, with Marie Gaille, she suggests that

> La dépendance et la vulnérabilité sont des réalités difficiles à reconnaître, même si elles sont aisément admises dans le discours, moral ou politique. Car les éthiques

du *care* ébranlent l'abstraction éthico-politique de l'individu indépendant et autonome, qui n'aurait besoin de *care* (ne serait vulnérable) qu'au grand âge et dans la petite enfance – sauf accident de parcours ou maladie (d'où la commodité de l'identification faite parfois entre *care* et soin). (Gaille & Laugier)

The concept of vulnerability in care ethics thus goes beyond the standard definition found, for example, in the *Oxford Dictionary*, which is to be "exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally." In care ethics, vulnerability is rather understood as "une disponibilité à la blessure" that is inherent to the human condition (Laugier, *Tous vulnérables* 12. See also Ferrarese): "de même que le corps humain est à chaque instant disponible à la blessure physique, la psyché est constamment ouverte au tort et à la blessure morale" (Ferrarese 133). Ferrarese adds that corporeal vulnerability and psycho-emotional vulnerability "invitent à concevoir une exigence de préservation de l'intégrité psychique de manière analogue à la préservation de l'intégrité physique" (134). It is a relational vulnerability that she distinguishes from precarity:

S'il existe une vulnérabilité à la maladie, à l'accident, inhérente à la fragilité des structures organiques et/ou à leur maturation ou leur dégénérescence, je la nomme précarité, afin de me concentrer sur la vulnérabilité comme possibilité de l'infliction d'un tort ou de l'absence de soin (lequel peut être rendu nécessaire par l'expérience de la précarité), bref la vulnérabilité de l'homme [sic] relationnel, la vulnérabilité à autrui. (133)

Such a configuration of vulnerability stresses the importance, in care ethics, of interrelated notions of responsibility, attentiveness, and recognition that participate in the geographies of care shaped by the intersubjective relationships between self, others and the environment.

For instance, as a child, Jack is highly dependent both physically and emotionally. Jack and Ma are also dependent on Old Nick physically and materially: he is the only resource available for food, medicine, and different products that Ma needs to care for Jack and herself. Old Nick represents the power possessed by those who are not in situation of interdependence. He also illustrates how the responses to dependency and vulnerability can be harmful rather than careful and maintain the receivers in situation of need: "unjust social institutions and structures as well as dysfunctional relationships can instead create additional pathogenic vulnerabilities for those who are dependent" (Dodds 182). It may seem strange to characterize Old Nick as a care provider, but he keeps mother and son alive and brings them necessary supplies. The quality of care provided by this character is associated with violence, manipulation, and abuse. It is a form of care that maintains mother and child as dominated and that fluctuates according to Old Nick's needs. This form of care suggests that not all care is *caring* and ethical, stressing the power forces at play in caregiving gestures that accentuate and maintain dependence and violence in asymmetrical relationships.

As care ethicist Virginia Held argues, "a caring person not only has the appropriate motivations in responding to others or in providing care but also participates adeptly in effective practices of care" (4). Indeed, Old Nick provides care to respond to Ma and Jack's basic needs only so that he can continue his cycle of abuse. Care is thus not always the source of comfort, nor is it always motivated by good intentions: "sometimes the response to vulnerability is care, sometimes the response to vulnerability is aggression" (Ruddick, qtd. in Tronto, n.p.). And as DeFalco remarks about the representations of care in one of Alice Munro's short stories, literature has the propensity to "confront the cruel imperfection of interrelational identity and the responsibility it engenders" (*Imagining Care* 134) in the particular dramatizations of "imperfection, inequality, and inadequacy" (135).

More precisely, *Room*'s representations of vulnerability through the characters of Ma and Jack expose the difficulty to meet and to harmonize demands for care with appropriate and significant responses. These representations make clear that vulnerability – which is constitutive of subjectivity in its theorization in care ethics and theories of recognition[12] – is the result of social arrangements that create positions of subordination, where the threat of being hurt – physically or morally – comes from the other. As Estelle Ferrarese writes: "la menace n'est jamais endogène, elle provient nécessairement de l'autre (compris comme singulier, collectif, ou comme structure généralisée)" (132). The novel's asymmetrical relationship between Old Nick and Ma, in which one party uses caregiving tactics and thus "conceals ulterior motives" (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 135), uncovers an "unsettling vision of subjectivity and responsibility in which ethical relations debilitate the subject" (135). Indeed, Ma is held captive by Old Nick and is thus dependent on his decisions to provide what is necessary for her to survive in the shed. It is Jack's presence that uncovers the empowering dimension of her vulnerability, its performative force.

Ferrarese relies on Veena Das to suggest that vulnerability is both a "capacité d'agir" and an "effet incapacitant" (132.). The latter resonates with Ma's drug addiction, a symbol of her vulnerability as dependence and fragility, a form of desperate escape that cuts her out of the world for a few hours, leaving Jack on his own in the shed. Ma's vulnerability is marked by her dependency: she is dependent on Old Nick and she has difficulty establishing boundaries between herself and Jack, expressing how her motivation to stay alive relies entirely on her son. Das' work centres on the social production of vulnerability. She suggests that it is constitutive of subjectivity in how the latter is affected by the experience of violence and trauma but also in how it develops through the recuperation of that violence in efforts of appropriation often at the level of the private,

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[12] For the role and configuration of vulnerability in theory of recognition, see Honneth; and for the notion of vulnerability at the intersection of care ethics and contemporary political theory, see Ferrarese.

the ritual and renarration (59). This resonates with how Ma uses her environment to enact such a renarration with Jack: she appropriates her negative experience to perform something positive not only as care gesture for her son Jack but also as vulnerable "capacité d'agir."

Ma says that before Jack she had given up on life, that his arrival gave her a sense of purpose and gave her a new sense of self. He both symbolises and helps her deal with trauma. Jack is part of these affective, imagined circuits of care: he provides his mother with comfort and a sense of purpose that encourage her to develop survival strategies while being held captive. During an awkward interview, Ma says: "but for me, see, Jack was everything. I was alive again, I mattered. So after that I was polite [with Old Nick]" (Donoghue 233). Jack thus provides a unique care for his mother in the sense that he validates Ma's "need for recognition ... in a mutually empathetic relationship" (Mackenzie & Stoljar 9), which sheds light on the different forms of caregiving that operate together in the text.

DeFalco rightfully identifies these caring interactions as "a process of exchange," bringing attention to how "identity and meaning for vulnerable subjects are often construed as the effect of *their effects* on others" (*Imagining Care* 35). Without forgetting that Jack, as a child, is dependent on his mother for survival, his narrative voice clearly expresses his careful, ordinary gestures and caring attention: "Ma is snoozing. I hear a sound so I get up not waking her" (Donoghue 30). And when he notices Ma's impatience at his insistence on keeping objects from the room in their new apartment, he surprises her with his answer: "'If for once in your life you thought about me instead of—' 'I do,' I shout. 'I thought about you always when you were Gone'" (305). His struggle to understand his mother's desire to have a room of her own in their new apartment expresses the labour of care that comes with parenting and with children dealing with trauma. In addition to Jack's incapacity to dissociate himself from his mother, the latter's suicide attempt in the hospital

is another illustration of mental and physical strain, of her sense of failure at providing care for Jack and herself. Ma's struggle also symbolizes the necessary reciprocity of care, as her needs are overshadowed by Jack's and by their sudden celebrity.

Jack's presence provides her with a sense of purpose expressed in a particular relationship with Old Nick, characterized by a self-sacrifice that somehow secures appropriate care for Jack. Indeed, the novel shows how demands for care at times cause "self-denial and self-sacrifice" (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 134) and, as Ma sacrifices, while captive, her body and self to protect Jack, these demands lead to the enactment of imagined places and ultimately to their escape, which they rehearse several times. While Ma and Jack are obviously dependent victims, they also manage, mainly due to Ma's inventive stories that serve to protect Jack from the violent environment in which he thrives, to resist "the unavoidable complications that lurk within performances of care and acts of responsibility" (137).

This resistance is made possible by Ma's exaggerated humanization of their surroundings as she experiences a dehumanizing experience. While it provides Jack with a meaning system, it provides Ma with temporary escape, as she tells him that "stories are a different kind of true" (Donoghue 71). Those imaginative places created by Ma thus shape the geographies of care. They provide her with a sense of purpose and responsibility. Her character is also marked by an affect of shame as she feels guilty for raising a child in severe conditions and works carefully to adapt the room and to dissipate and conceal manifestations of violence and entrapment so that it seems a typical environment for Jack. To do so, she uses their few belongings to create a new narrative for their life and this gesture is, to borrow the words of David McNeill, "a material carrier that helps bring meaning into existence" (qtd. in Gibbs 199). This imagination allows her to transform a limited space into a playground, a racetrack, a gym: it is, for Jack, a normal home, whereas she pretends to preserve his sense of safety and belonging. Her care practices and space transformation

techniques work together to provide Jack with comfortable material and emotional living conditions.

In the outside world, Ma struggles to make sense of her life and must take some time on her own, leaving Jack in the care of her parents after attempting suicide. She has been caring for Jack and Jack has provided care for her, but outside of Room she reacts to institutional care with difficulty and with defiance, afraid of their influence on Jack and feeling judged:

> 'Jack doesn't need *treatment*, he needs some sleep.' Ma's talking through her teeth. 'He's never been out of my sight and nothing happened to him, nothing like what you're insinuating.' The doctors look at each other. . . . 'All these years I kept him safe.' 'Sounds like you did,' says Dr. Clay. 'Yes, I did.' There's tears all down Ma's face, now. . . (Donoghue 167)

The institutional healing spaces are also paradoxical spaces in how they provide a particular care for Ma and Jack but also participate in Ma's experience of shame and guilt and Jack's fear of the outside world. One interaction in particular, between Jack and the doctor, stresses the conflicting languages between the two cultures, between the treatment culture of the medical world and Jack's experience of lived space: "I stare at him [the doctor]. 'Now you're safe, it's gathering up all those scary thoughts you don't need anymore, and throwing them out as bad dreams.' His hands do the throwing. I don't say because of manners, but actually he's got it backwards. In Room I was safe and Outside is the scary" (218-19).

The geographies of care are constituted of these several spatial and ethical confrontations in the room, in the hospital, in Ma's parents' house, in public spaces, as well as in Ma and Jack's new apartment in an "independent living residential facility" when Ma is released from the clinic following her suicide attempt. The relationship between Ma and Jack, affected by the combination

of these paradoxical living spaces and the care practices perpetrated by the different characters, illustrates how self and living space cannot simply be associated without taking into consideration the moral intricacies that participate in the social and cultural constituency of the living space.

Issues of vulnerability, responsibility, and protection are influenced and influence the spatial arrangements. Drawing on Amy Mullin's claim that "social arrangements" have a role "in generating or reducing vulnerability" (286), I suggest that *spatial* arrangements also have a role in the relational experience of vulnerability. The latter is symbolized in the novel first by Ma's inventive use of the shed to pretend to some level of normalcy, and then by Jack's and Ma's struggle to adapt their relationship and their sense of self to the outside world and encounters after the escape.

In confinement, Jack's relationship to Ma reveals caregiving practices that bring attention to moral and emotional attachment through body and materialities, using the relationship's response to their lack of spatial comfort as a form of resistance to their situation. For instance, after a violent conflict, Old Nick punished Ma and Jack by cutting their electricity and not delivering food for days. As Ma tries to explain the situation, Jack surprises her with his reaction, as he does not associate the absence of power with punishment and as he gives importance to their relationship rather than to their physical health:

> 'It's my fault, I made him mad.' I stare at her face but I can hardly see it. . . . 'How's
> he going to punish us?' 'No, he is already, I mean. By cutting the power.' 'Oh,
> that's all right.' Ma laughs. 'What do you mean? We're freezing, we're eating
> slimy vegetables...' 'Yeah, but I thought he was going to punish us too.' I try to
> imagine. 'Like if there were two Rooms, if he put me in one and you in the other
> one.' 'Jack, you're wonderful.' (Donoghue 79-80)

Several instances of the text stress the inseparability of Ma and Jack, their resourcefulness at protecting their relationship, and the different rituals that preserve their togetherness, both inside and outside the shed. Along with Jack's attempts at decoding his mother's reaction, expressions, body language, and language, Ma's protection and preservation gestures testify to the impacts of care attitudes and practices on spatial arrangements and moral experiences.

Room sheds light on how "bodies are intensely emotional areas" and on how fiction allows representing emotions and moral feelings. It also brings to attention the shared symbolic meaning of places by dramatizing the relational and spatialized continuum on which Jack and Ma evolve together. The text sets the language of care, of vulnerability, and of responsibility in tension with patriarchal oppression that exploits and confines women and children. It also exposes an institutional care that instrumentalizes the female body and devalues Ma's voice, and it illustrates how social media attempts to glorify and romanticize Ma's experience. Not only do these tensed encounters complicate the healing process of both protagonists but they also put a strain on their relationship. The novel ends as the two become familiar with a revitalized sense of life, in a new apartment that they can adapt to their needs and desires. The geographies of care shaped by trauma, abuse, and violence are also structured by their relational solidarity, their caring interdependence, by the strength of their sense of responsibility towards one another, and by the mother's resilience and resistance to Old Nick's plan. As a child, Jack cares for his mother and recognizes – albeit partially – her fragility, and reading both characters' contribution to preserving this relationality unveils the transformative potential of care ethics.

Weaving Stories and Acknowledging Privilege

In *Housekeeping* and *Room*, the preservation and the construction of living spaces to deal with daily struggles are characterized by an ethics of care in how these actions taken to cope with

situations of precariousness involve interdependence, vulnerability, responsibility, and autonomy. Acts of preservation are used in the novels to illustrate the agency of the characters as well the desire to care for and protect a particular shared space where meaningful relationships develop. The preservation gestures or behaviours also seek to maintain, through and in space, material and physical comfort as well as traces of the past that transpire in the present and that affect how the characters inhabit the world and experience livability and relationality.

Accordingly, it seems inevitable to discuss how the texts make place for marginalized subjectivities and challenge the myth of the liberal subject by using textual and narrative strategies that focus on relational processes of identity construction and negotiation. By telling stories in which relational encounters serve to solve life issues and cope with moral and spatial struggle, the selected narratives show how the relational subject, "vulnerable to the natural environment and to the impact on the environment of our own, individual and collective, actions and technologies," evolves and moves in and through geographies of care (Mackenzie, Rogers, & Dodds 1). These geographies of care consist of these different elements that make care practices successful as well as by the individual and collective habits and choices that keep the living spaces habitable or that allow for the making of such new spaces. They also involve paradoxical spaces and moral gestures that threaten positive responses to demands for care.

Each novel centers on the relationships that participate in the situations of precarity and the ones that lead to the tentative and strategic forging of geographies of care to eventually escape that situation, testifying to spatial and moral ambivalence. Also, the lives imagined in the selected texts touch on issues of female subjectivity, hospitality, social transformation, and memory that inform both the moral reasoning and the lived spatiality of the characters. These two texts bring to attention different aspects of relationality that expose sites of struggle not only as class-based and socially-

delineated boundaries (Rimstead 89) but also as symbols of moral and emotional states (90) characterized by the presence or lack of care rather than by normative justice or injustice.

Responses to such a struggle are articulated spatially and carefully. They reveal geographies of care that, despite not always being successful, provide the characters with more opportunities for having a good life and for reinventing this figure of home that often initially corresponds to standards established by the community, family traditions, and social norms. The characters make attempts to negotiate their needs with those of others, the latter participating in their struggle for belonging. Those encounters and situations complicate the traditional models of home, subjectivity, individuality and dependency. The texts, in their interrogation of care practices and attitudes as well as through the characters' capacity for preservation and re/building, provide alternatives to exclusionary social norms and psychosocial spaces.

The house is a strong symbol in *Housekeeping*, and the movements of the female protagonists in other living spaces shape its frontiers and its interior. Sylvie and Ruth's demands for recognition are connected to their transiency and search for meaning in nature and in hostile public space, where they gain perspective on their individual sense of belonging, both socio-spatially and intersubjectively. In *Room*, the movements away from the shed where they were hostage into the outside world, including the hospital, the mother's house, and the new apartment, dramatize a caring network that does not always succeed. It does provide help to Ma and Jack, but it also puts a strain on their relationship. This relationship is strongly marked by the particular bond between the two protagonists, characterized, on the one hand, by a sense of protection, mutual dependency and on the other by a struggle for their respective identity and respective needs in reaction to the trauma experienced, the cause of tensions exacerbated by the demands of those outside of that relationship. In both texts, when the protagonists feel safer in their new environments and relationships, they use available spaces—both physical and imaginary—to

repair broken bonds, testifying to the ontological dependency that care ethics seeks to bring to attention and the "fundamental moral demand in the empirical reality of a vulnerable being, claiming protection and responsibility" (Jonas & Longstrup, qtd. in Nortvelt & Nordhaug 157).

Movements away from difficult home spaces lead to a set of caring experiences that redefine and transform the characters' sense of belonging, and these actions unfold psychological, embodied, ethical and socio-spatial transformations that weaken their sense of disconnectedness. Expressions of care such as responsibility, hospitality, and recognition inscribe these transformations that are at times physical and at others emotional and intellectual (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 256). For instance, Ruth weaves – without blending – her voice with other female voices through memory, through an imagination of other voices as she tells the story of the women in her family and what led to her leaving Fingerbone with Sylvie. Her movements as a young girl in Fingerbone are physical, embodied and spatialized. Ruth is mobile, active, connected to other voices that enable her to tell her story in flux. She defines her subjectivity in these moving interactions, as well as in this back and forth between the present and the past. Caring and feeling a certain responsibility towards these other voices brings her back, imaginatively, to Fingerbone, while the story she tells addresses how she and Sylvie decided to leave town.

Those geographies of care expose complex interactions that challenge the notion of center associated with the figure of home, that subverts conventional ideas of dwelling and home space by shedding light on the intensity of interconnectedness between living spaces and what Braidotti theorizes as "emphatic proximity" (5). This proximity is not only physical or embodied; it is a relational and affective proximity marked by care: geo-emotional weavings that value the connected self both in local and global terms, and that acknowledge the spatial politics of moral responsiveness. Like Ruth's voices and Jack's experience of distance between him and his mother when she attempts suicide, this configuration of empathy means that "physical nearness" is not

always inherent to the caring relationship, that it is not always the key to propelling a response: "nomadic becoming is neither reproduction nor just imitation, but rather emphatic proximity, intensive interconnectedness" (27). Therefore, the texts selected for this chapter illustrate a complicated experience of proximity through the characters' mobility and experience of distant interdependent relationships.

Like Sylvie's ambivalence and hesitation in *Housekeeping*, it is not strictly being nomad or being sedentary that guarantees freedom, comfort and agential power. The recognition of the self as relational, as interdependent, and as responsible also greatly participates in the construction of one's ability to resist dominant forces and constraining spaces. Similarly, whether in the shed or in the new apartment, Jack and Ma's sense of belonging and engagement with the world relies heavily, I believe, on their particular ethics of relationality. If the novels do not address issues of race and nation, reading these stories with care ethics brings attention to the "kinds of differences" that poverty, sexism, trauma make for women and other minoritized groups. Such a reading also challenges essentializing patterns by paying attention to how particular subjects engage, in their unique ways, with others and with the world rather than seeking common threads and universal responses to struggle. Geographies of care contribute to this critical discussion by shedding light on the emphasis that care ethics puts on particularity, hospitality and responsibility as expressions of difference and moral response to the other's existence. Thinking at the intersection of care and space provides valuable tools with which to complicate such feminist nomadic thinking by bringing to attention "the vastly unequal disposition of resources" (Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility" 14) and the difficulty for subjectivities who are considered unfit to access and benefit from these resources.

Chapter 3

"I'm tired of being afraid"[13]: Rewritings of Relational Proximity

one confronts and accepts
dispersal and fragmentation
as part of the construction
of a new world order
that reveals more fully
where we are,
who we can become.
–bell hooks

The idea of geographies of care challenges dominant paradigms of selfhood, subjectivity, and well-being by exposing the interconnections between socio-spatial practices and caring relationships. It is an approach to lived space that brings together emotional, social, and corporeal cartographies through "moral categories of responsibility, sharing, and bonding" (Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete" 411). This approach problematizes conventional spatial configurations and related social constructions of private and public delineations. It also provides new ground for thinking and reimagining the way subjects relate to others and, more specifically, the ways the texts imagine these interrelations in fiction.

The previous chapter addressed how two novels use human characters and spatial imagery to dramatize relational strategies of preservation and transformation to survive problematic living spaces and psychosocial struggles. It decorticated how practices and attitudes of preservation and protection allowed for psycho-spatial transformation and for geographies of care to flourish/operate, leading to better processes of identity formation for the protagonists and more comfortable lives. This chapter goes further in the discussion of geographies of care by looking at two novels that rewrite domestic environment and complicate relational proximity. It suggests that the imagined

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[13] In McKay, p. 361.

worlds made possible by literature reveal a language and an imagery of care that uncovers meaning about the functions of care in resisting patterns of spatial exclusion (Beneventi 212) and patriarchal and institutional oppression that tend to impose lifestyles and limit opportunities. Reading with a perspective of care highlights one's reliance on others – human and nonhuman – for finding physical, mental, emotional and socio-spatial resources to counter unwelcome demands and abusive care. It also allows reading the politics of voice – articulated by narrative strategies that empower disenfranchised subjects who have been silenced and denied a proper place in the world – through care-related issues that have been historically and socially relegated to the intimate sphere (Benhabib, *Situating the Self* 108-09).

The selected texts thus challenge domestic conventions with a language of care and related, alternative moral and spatial configurations that discursively reconceptualise and problematize the binary opposition between public and domestic spheres. It is an opposition that, under "traditional modes," has "been part of a discourse of domination which legitimizes women's oppression and exploitation in the private realm" (110). The novels *The Birth House*, by Ami McKay, and *Sous béton*, by Karoline Georges, show, unsurprisingly, that the exploitation also takes place in the public realm. I first explore Ami McKay's novel *The Birth House*, in which the protagonist uses and develops strategies of relational proximity to find recognition and to develop her identity in hostile socio-spatial conditions. Then I investigate problematic human relationality and corporeality in the novel *Sous béton*, by Karoline Georges. Geographies of care serve to delegitimize both public and domestic patterns of abuse towards minorities represented in the texts, namely underprivileged women and children. They do so by directing focus on the caregiving and caretaking dialectics at play in the everyday and sometimes invisible mechanisms of power, and by exposing differently the negotiations between exploiting and exploited and between public and private.

This chapter goes beyond the operations within the interrelationships to explore how geographies of care are also characterised and affected by proximity and distance. It explores the evolving sense of responsibility that affects the trajectory and the different paths taken by characters symbolize relational *parcours*, intersubjective encounters that mark and are marked by the characters' caring and careful movements in the stories, leading to a destabilization of the domestic. The two novels dramatize marginalized subjects' search for better living conditions; conditions that are inscribed in the tensions between change and belonging to a place and to a community that is resistant to such change, between subjectivity/selfhood and interdependence. Accordingly, dissecting the novels with a perspective of care demands paying close attention to the interactions of boundaries – visible and invisible – that connect intimate and public living spaces and that "can form a social space that delineates who belongs and who does not. ... suggesting what is safe and what is not" (Miranne & Young 8). Regarding geographies of care, how the texts rewrite the domestic by blurring boundaries between private and public is articulated by the negotiation of needs and demands for care for the self and others. These care-related negotiations allow the characters to "manipulate the constraints placed before them by reconfiguring and resisting these boundaries" (13).

Miranne and Young's theoretical work on poor women's negotiations of boundaries in the city is useful in my theorization of geographies of care. It demonstrates how subjects in situations of precarity "find ways to challenge the boundaries that constrain them while creating new boundaries to encompass who they are and the lives that they want to lead" (14). They address the idea of "geography of opportunity" (12), which brings together the impacts of poverty, racism, and sexism on the multiplicity of women's experiences of urban life, along with their theorization of boundaries. They suggest that "a potential outcome of boundedness is rootedness – the extent to which someone is bound to a place through personal relationships, habits of behaviour, emotional

ties, and the like" (67). They provide valuable answers to questions that apply when reading McKay's *The Birth House*, such as "How can women critique the social, economic, and political agendas that have been established?" and "How can women become empowered through their expertise at devising strategies to live within cities?" (13). Miranne and Young also inspire reading strategies that allow better decoding the characters' relations to their environments (14), which also applies to the protagonists in *Sous béton*.

Miranne and Young's geographies of gendered experience in urban settings initiate a discussion in which geographies of care participate by adding a moral dimension to such experience, by showing how emotional and moral categories are also constitutive of the socio-spatial experience of minorities. While I am careful not to conflate the experiences of women with other minority groups, I look at how patriarchal sources of oppression impact alternative spheres of life and emancipatory aspirations of youth and female characters whose choices resonate with feminist principles of care. It is important to mention that this dialectic between rootedness and boundedness is, with geographies of care, characterized by networking and particularism, which is a key notion of care ethics that legitimizes the variety of embodied situations rather than universal factors to describe human experience. In light of their demonstration of the value of plural experience and Shands' illuminating analysis of spatial metaphors in Western feminist discourse, I theorize the multiplicity of experiences of relational proximity represented in the novels as an expression of the importance of particularism, singularity, and concrete others. This theoretical configuration is rendered possible by augmenting a discourse on lived experience with care ethics and by looking at contrasted fictional experiences of moral and spatial struggle.

The Birth House and *Sous béton* are very different texts, set in contrasting contexts and dramatizing worlds that, at first glance, share very little. Analyzing these two texts together sheds light on how particular contexts and singularities expose different patterns related to similar

experiences of domestic exclusion and demands for care. I also selected these two novels because they reveal distinct facets of geographies of care while validating one another's narrative strategies for imagining alternatives to normative environment and relationships. *The Birth House* does so by expanding the traditional image of the family, by revising the boundaries of the private space and by putting emphasis on women solidarity and the caring agency that structures body ownership. *Sous béton* explores similar themes but within a posthuman framework that exposes the protagonist's mutability not in terms of self-destructive behaviour but rather in terms of self-care and responsibility for a post-apocalyptic world that demands reinvention.

In both novels, there is a resistance to universal configurations of human experience and a search for meaning in the singularity of the intersubjective experience, in the relational particularities that literature renders visible:

> La littérature ... affine notre perception en faisant apparaître les questions morales dans des situations particulières, se détachant sur un arrière-plan qui fait apparaître ce qui est important, et y attire notre attention (*carefulness*). ... C'est bien dans l'usage du langage (choix des expressions, style de conversation) que se montre ouvertement ou s'élabore intimement la vision morale d'une personne. ... L'attention aux autres que propose la littérature ne nous donne pas de nouvelles certitudes ou l'équivalent de théories, elle nous met face, aux prises avec, une incertitude, un déséquilibre perceptif. (Molinier, Laugier & Paperman, 23-5)

Contemporary ethics of care came to attention following Carol Gilligan's *A Different Voice*, but Laugier also locates the development of care ethics within a turn to moral particularism. More precisely, she associates care ethics with "une éthique de la perception particulière des situations, des moments, de 'ce qui se passe'" ("Le sujet du care" 168). Laugier suggests that care ethics developed in reaction to what Ludwig Wittgenstein named the "pulsion de généralité" (169):

La réflexion sur le *care* va contre ce que Ludwig Wittgenstein appelait dans le *Cahier*

bleu 'la pulsion de généralité', le désir d'énoncer des règles générales de pensée et

d'action. Elle vise à faire valoir en morale l'attention au(x) particulier(s), au détail

ordinaire de la vie humaine. Une telle volonté descriptive modifie radicalement la

morale : apprendre à voir ce qui est important et non remarqué, justement parce que

c'est sous nos yeux. (168)

My analysis of the two novels finds useful tools in this methodology and stems from a desire to

understand the many textures, perspectives, and expressions of domestic geographies of care rather

than deploy an abstract, fixed model to be validated by fictional texts.

A similar reasoning applies to how I put geographies of care in dialogue with the trope of

home found in the novels. Drawing on David Morley's claim that "home is not necessarily a spatial

concept," and on feminist critical readings of "claims of universality" about lived space that might

be "ill-founded" (Morley 15), I complicate, with *Sous béton* and *The Birth House*, conventional

socio-geographical positions and movements in and out of destabilized and compromised

traditional domestic space by paying attention to the interrelations between their particularities

and care practices/attitudes, and by giving importance to the notion of relational proximity.

Marita Nordhaug and Per Nortvelt are medical ethicists who use a care ethics approach in

health care and nursing ethics. Their definition of relational proximity is divided in two. It consists

of giving an "emphasis to spatio-temporality" (9), which refers to being near in time and space,

and therefore does not necessarily require emotional bonding with the other. But they also suggest

that relational proximity should not be limited to space and time constraints and that it can also

consist of "empathic responses and personal and emotional ties," which would refer to affective

ties and feelings shared with the other ("Justice and Proximity" 9). In a similar line of thought but

in another field, Rehmann-Sitter, Düwell and Mieth write, in *Bioethics and Cultural Contexts*, that

"a care-based ethics remains sensitive to proximity, whether it be the relational proximity of family or friends or the geographical contiguity of neighbours and fellow citizens" (328). Relational proximity is thus understood as "physical or emotional caring" and it is a notion used by care ethicists to define "the locus of ethical choices and actions as situated in the relationships we have with one another" and thus as an "argument for partiality" (Hintze, Romaan-Aas & Aas 3).

Accordingly, the link between proximity and partiality in care ethics derives from a methodological strategy to theorize from ordinary, everyday, embodied interconnections between humans. It is not motivated by abstract and universal rules to qualify the human experience. It recognizes the value of inevitably biased relationships in the development of moral knowledge: "close relationships call ... for personal concern, loyalty, interest, passion, and responsiveness to the uniqueness of loved ones, to their specific needs, interests, history, and so on. In a word, personal relationships call for attitudes of partiality rather than impartiality" (Friedman, qtd. in Held 95). The argument that subjects feel more responsible towards those closest to them also depends on the value of their interactions, widening the scope of a politics of relational responsibility that second-wave care ethicists such as Joan Tronto, Virginia Held, Selma Sevenhuijsen and Fiona Robinson have theorized to develop a global approach to care ethics. They demonstrate that care ethics is not limited to family ethics and the domestic sphere: "At both the level of the personal and the level of the social and political, we cannot dispense with the network of caring relations, and its values have priority" (Held 136). Drawing on this conceptualization, I read the domestic experiences in *Sous béton* and *The Birth House* as negotiations of both instances.

Geographies of care expose the rewriting of domestic space in both texts, stressing the importance of relational proximity as well as its many possible expressions. In *The Birth House*, using the figuration of the geographies of care also sheds light on the female characters' capacity to reinvent, in spite of difficulties, their roles in the community and in their private relationships.

In *Sous béton*, the female character is complicit with the system of power forces that dehumanizes and micromanages human subjects and does not take responsibility when confronted to her children's needs. The domestic is a cold, asceptisized and threatening place, where the father and the authorities keep subordinated subjects under control. The nameless woman's son – narrator and protagonist – copes with this careless parental dynamic and violent relationship with the father by imagining a breach in the wall of their apartment, fragmenting the domestic, opening it to the immensity of the mysterious cement structure where all humans are kept after an apocalypse. In both texts, the rewriting of the domestic is dramatized by characters' subversive moral and spatial practices.

Gendered Spaces and Care in The Birth House

Ami McKay's 2006 novel *The Birth House* is a recollection of past events that leads to independence, autonomy and recognition for the main characters. It is set in rural Scots Bay, Nova-Scotia, at the beginning of the 20th century, in a patriarchal and religious community of woodcutters, fishermen, and shipbuilders. The community struggles with poverty and harsh weather, and the women are "bartered with each other to fill their pantries and clothe their children" (McKay ix). First-person narrator Dora Rare tells her life story, from being a seventeen-year-old financial burden and embarrassment to her family to becoming – not without many difficulties – a homeowner, healer, and midwife: "My house became the birth house. That's what the women came to call it, knocking on the door, ripe with child, water breaking on the porch. ... They all came to the house, wailing and keeping their babies into the world" (ix). How Dora reorganizes her domestic life after a failed and abusive marriage, confrontations with the town doctor and social ostracization is shaped by how she holds on to her caring values of solidarity, hospitality, and autonomy.

The novel dramatizes, through this character's identity search, the hardships brought by the modernization of a traditional village on the inhabitants' system of beliefs and cohesion. The novel addresses questions of health care and women's bodies ownership as well as it problematizes the idea of "progress" by representing asepticized, distant, infantilising medical practices that put emphasis on cleanliness, on technology, and on demonizing local and traditional practices of healing and midwifery. The character of Dr. Thomas symbolizes modern medicine and "new obstetrical techniques" (31). He attempts to take control of women's birthing experience with an ethics of justice and a language of fear that eventually gives him the social and political power to incriminate Dora and her mentor Marie Babineau – known as Miss B. – for their midwifery practices.

The novel[14] fictionalizes the resistance of female subjects to patriarchal and medical control over their bodies and choices as modern science and medicine clash with healing and birthing traditions. Dora, "the only daughter in five generations of Rares" (McKay 5), tells the story of how she became the community healer to replace Miss B., an Acadia-born midwife and healer, who left Scots Bay following the opening of the Canning maternity home, operated by Dr. Thomas. Feeling betrayed and useless, under the pressure of Thomas's language of law and culture of fear, Miss B. takes Dora under her wing and passes her knowledge on to her: "You have to take it from me, Dora, take the prayers, the secrets. If you don't, they'll be lost, and I'll never have a moment's peace on the other side. ... The women here, they'll need someone. They'll need you" (71). Dora struggles to make a choice and hesitates to continue Miss B.'s legacy. She feels a sense of duty to

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[14] I published a first analysis of this novel in a special issue of *Canadian Literature*. While the chapter examines the role of caring gestures on the forging of alternative domestic spaces, the article, titled "'All I ever wanted was to keep them safe': Geographies of Care in Comparative Canadian Fiction," interrogates, in Catherine Mavrikakis' *Le ciel de Bay City* and McKay's text, the dramatization of moral and political problems of responding to suffering, to non-paradigmatic attachments, and to the dilemma of reconciling the demands of others and of the self.

respect the patriarchal conventions first represented by her father's wishes for her to settle and marry, and by her abusive husband Archer Bigelow, who demands she quits "the baby business" (174) to fulfill her role as housewife: "Come on, Dorie, how about I take you to bed and you act like a proper wife" (173).

In addition to her personal struggles, early in the novel, Dora is witness to domestic abuse in the community, as she attends her first birth with Miss B. at Brady Ketch's house. Drunk, violent and indifferent to his wife's physical and emotional state after delivering her baby too soon, he expresses anger and entitlement: "It was almost dawn when Brady Ketch came home. He stomped through the house, drunk and demanding to be fed. 'Experience Ketch, get outta that bed and get me some food.' The poor woman tried to get up, as if nothing had troubled her at all, but Miss B. held her down" (15). Miss B. does her best to protect Mrs. Ketch despite her husband's aggressiveness and threats involving Dr. Thomas: "She can't just take to bed for days whenever she feels like it. There's things that need to get done around here. ... That Dr. Thomas, down Canning way, he'd know how to make her right" (16-17).

Early in the novel, the reader is confronted with issues of hazardous childbirth, women's lack of health care, domestic abuse, and, as the excerpt above shows, women solidarity. The patriarchal system operating in the domestic sphere is provided resources and additional power by the institutional medical system, which also benefits from male domination at home: "Let's just say the doc and I... we have a *gentleman's* agreement" (17). Women are resistant to this system of abuse, as Miss B. and Dora assist some of them in their difficulties and continue the healing and birthing traditions of their ancestors. But, they are also at times complicit, struggling to find a balance between their needs and experiences and the social conventions associated with marriage, religion and community life. Dora symbolizes this continuum, wanting to pursue Miss B.'s legacy but feeling pressured by her family and, more explicitly, by her deceiving husband, to fit in:

I couldn't bring myself to tell her [Miss B.] that Archer's already insisting I stop

midwifing once we're married. 'A husband needs the attentions of his wife. You

can't be distracting yourself with the work of spinsters and old grannies and expect

me to be happy about it. Besides, Dr. Thomas is more than ready to take it over

from Miss B., you said so yourself.' I didn't say what I'd do one way or the other.

I didn't say anything at all." (154)

The Birth House not only depicts the lives of women under domestic and medical abuse; it also

uses a language of care and spatial imagery to dramatize how these women create safe spaces for

themselves in the form of solidarity and spatial appropriation. Along with practices and attitude of

care such as hospitality, sisterhood, and nurturing, the subversive strategies of mutual support and

embodied space reveal geographies of care that allow for alternatives to the living spaces limited

by economic, patriarchal and political forces.

Divided into three parts, Dora's story begins with her reluctant departure from the family

home and her moving in with Miss B., with whom she develops a close interdependent relationship

as Dora struggles to find balance between her interest in midwifery and the social exclusion that

comes with the task. The second part begins after Miss B. leaves Scots Bay on Dora's wedding

day, at the end of which Dora had to deliver a first baby on her own. This section centers on Dora's

difficult marriage with Archer and her consequent decision to stop midwifery and healing. She also

copes with not being able to conceive a child, even attempting to find a cure with Dr. Thomas, who

hastily diagnoses her with a form of hysteria. Dora expresses feelings of solitude and frustration,

which climax in her attacking Dr. Thomas after he tried to intimidate her in public:

He smiled, talking through his teeth. 'Maybe it's time that a hysterical, reckless

woman who encourages women to deceive their husbands should be everyone's

business.' ... He stroked my cheek with his hand. 'You look a little feverish. Isn't

Mr. Bigelow seeing to your well-being? Isn't he working at giving you the child

you've been wanting? I could speak to him about that, Mrs. Bigelow. I could tell

him what you require. I could tell anyone, really. (233)

A newspaper clipping inserted in the text illustrates Dora's physical attack on Dr. Thomas, giving the narrative an authentic aspect that strengthens the representations of women's resistance to modern medicine controlling their bodies and influencing their choices. During those events Dora's husband dies, leaving her "widowed at the age of 19" (277) and liberating her from an oppressive marriage. The third part of the novel confronts the power of patriarchal law over women more directly, as Dora is forced to leave Scots Bay after helping Mrs. Ketch get an abortion. The woman was later killed by her husband, who then tries to frame Dora for the murder, blaming her for terminating the pregnancy and using Dora's reputation to raise suspicion in the community: "Down the line women began to whisper, some wondering if someone should go and fetch my father or one of the other men down at the wharf. Others started to wonder if maybe Brady Ketch was right and if something hadn't better be done" (291). Fearing the consequences of Ketch's lies and Dr. Thomas' threats to take away her child, Dora imitates Miss B. and leaves Scots Bay. She goes to Boston, where her brother lives with friends, the latter introducing Dora to women's rights issues and helping her to come to terms with her identity as midwife, healer and woman. Contrary to Miss B. who didn't benefit from the support of other women and who worked in isolation, Dora returns to Scots Bay. This event suggests she is successfully continuing her mentor's legacy with support from the women who worked, in her absence, to clear her name:

Bertine and Sadie delivered letters to local women, asking for their support at a

Mother's May Day march in Canning. Precious and Mabel have sewn a large

banner for the women to carry, and I have agreed to speak (to anyone who'll listen).

If women lose the right to say where and how they birth their children, then they

will have lost something that's as dear to life as breathing. I'm tired of being afraid.

(361)

Dora then lives alone in her house, welcoming women "who have stayed ... a day, a week and even a month or more" (366). She is also in a caring and peaceful relationship with Hart Bigelow, the brother of her deceased husband, whom she refuses to marry: "Always my lover, never my husband. He still asks for my hand from time to time, but never complains when I say I prefer it this way" (367).

Dora's unconventional living choices open boundaries of domesticity and challenge traditional living spaces: she favours interdependent relationships with women, spaces of solidarity and care with Miss B. and the women of Scots Bay. These relationships provide her with tools and support that serve to better appropriate home space and female body. Her refusing to marry and her desire to maintain a level of independence and autonomy that is uncommon for women allow, in the language of care ethics, "mutual autonomy": "it includes mutual understandings and acceptances of how much sharing of time, space, daily decisions, and so on there will be ... such autonomy is fully consistent with the ethics of care and should be cultivated, but does not require the suppression of emotion" (Held 55). This mutual autonomy in *The Birth House* is represented not only in Dora's decision not to marry Hart, but also in her spatial configuration of their relationship, in maintaining the journey to her house: "I'll stay perched up here on Spider Hill, catching a baby or two when they come, singing Miss B.'s lullabies, writing poems on old grocery receipts and keeping Hart company when he happens by. Tonight he'll make his way up the hill, tired but wanting, home from the Dulsin' tide" (McKay 368).

The character of Dora complicates the notions of proximity and domesticity by refusing to share her house with Hart and by operating her birth house instead of visiting the houses where the births are happening, like Miss B. used to do. Having witnessed the inhospitality and the

unwelcoming homes, she opens her house to the women in need of care and healing, opening the boundaries of the traditional home beyond conventional domestic relationships, as well as establishing her own particular boundaries around her relationship with Hart. Their relational proximity – "personal closeness both relationally and in its spatio-temporality [that] is morally significant" (Norveldt & Nordhaug, "The Principle and Problem of Proximity" 157) – as a marker of care and love, as a common spatial expression of personal engagement, is augmented by Dora's care practices and caring choices.

Such a relational understanding of proximity is closely linked to the particularism of the ethics of care:

> relational proximity is our moral responsibilities constituted by the relational bonds
> to concrete others based on interpersonal ties. Relational proximity is thus 'thick' and
> not strictly situational. Rather, it is shaped by a more or less lasting connection to
> others within family and group affiliations, taking human bonds to emanate from
> interpersonal experience and communication. (Norveldt & Nordhaug, "The Principle
> and Problem of Proximity" 158).

Not wanting to repeat the pattern of oppression and isolation she experienced while she was married to Archer, Dora is now able to decide the kind of proximity and attachments she wants. Privileged for having her own house (her father's wedding gift), she does not want her relationship with a man to threaten her identity as woman and as a healer and midwife, and thus to threaten her living space. Her sense of responsibility and hospitality towards the women of Scots Bay and to a long-lasting relationship with Hart shape her living spaces and help her resist the conventional, expected living habits. The novel thus illustrates the empowerment made possible with a perspective of care and it also depicts "the day-to-day difficulties of care in the private realm of ... family" (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 23).

Dora's ability to live on her own terms, to have her birth house, is the result of her resistance to the male-dominated systems of power both in the domestic: what she witnessed as midwife, what she experienced during her marriage, the treatment given to her by her parents for being different; and in the public: Miss B.'s social alienation, Dr. Thomas' methods and sabotage, the social and medical treatment of women's bodies, her own experience of cultural and social shaming. The novel, dramatizing that "men, by nature and by right, exercise the primary prerogatives of civilization" (Keller 2) through a misogynistic medical system and domination at home, testifies to a paradigmatic, abstract model that denies women subjectivity and rational thought. It also depicts the poor value attributed to women's knowledge about their embodied and emotional experiences.

In addition to the character of Dr. Thomas, the novel uses intertextuality to illustrate the inhospitable historical and social context. Books and journals of medicine and psychology participate in the domestic and public shaming of Dora. Dora reacts passively to her father's decision to burn the books: "Before long I could hear the crackle of the fire, smell the smoke from dried twigs, Wuthering Heights, Pride and Prejudice and all the rest" (McKay 41). Her father is influenced by Aunt Fran, who is reading *The Science of a New Life*. In this book, "novel-reading" is described as "a producer of evil thoughts" and as the cause of "derangement" (39-40). Novels by women writers in which the protagonists struggle to make and take their place in difficult, misogynistic environments are opposed to medical, psychoanalytical publications, dramatizing the clash between the medicalization of women's behaviours and bodies. Aunt Fran and Dora's father respectively symbolize this influence of medicine's "progress" and patriarchal control, whereas Miss B. and Dora's mother help the girl in respecting who she is. Dora's mother suggests Miss B. as an option to her sister Fran so that Dora can "have quiet" instead of getting married "and raising babies, cooking, cleaning, waiting on her husband" (74). The mother's alternative suggests that she

knows her daughter is embarking on a different path than the traditional wife/mother roles. The mother also expresses her awareness of the women's rights movement, as she surprisingly remarks that women "want a say in things, to be their own persons" (73).

Accordingly, Dora resists a form of care that maintains "the myth of female frailty," and that allowed "the male-dominated discipline" of medicine to "disqualify women as healers but made women highly qualified as patients" (J. Clarke 64). Caregiving and the health care system work together in the novel to illustrate the necessary negotiations needed between women's experience and medical progress. Also, Dora and Miss B. question the travel distance to reach Dr. Thomas' clinic, its isolation and thus response time to emergencies: "Dr. Thomas, the maternity home is nice enough and all, but I [Dora] wonder about the safety in getting there. Going down North Mountain in the winter can be difficult" (McKay 90). Their knowledge of the place, their proximity and mobility often make them the first ones to attend to women in labour, and Dr. Thomas shows little concern for the woman's care when they do not respect his contract.

For instance, on Dora's wedding day, she helps a friend deliver her baby, and Dr. Thomas arrives later, discarding Dora's work and blaming the mother: "Dr. Thomas arrived, too late to catch the baby or the afterbirth. He took off his coat and paced around the house, grumbling about women not knowing what's best for themselves. 'Since she chose to have the child at home, I'm afraid I'll have to limit the care I give her" (161). Refusing to fully examine or provide the assistance for which the parents paid, Dr. Thomas leaves after blaming once more the new parents for not being able to benefit from the insurance they paid: "the certificate clearly states that the mother's confinement and care are to be attended to at the Canning Maternity Home" (162). Dr. Thomas' language of justice and medicine, with words such as "confinement" and "certificate," serves to take power and agency away from the women involved. It also serves to accentuate the dichotomy between private and medical space, inferring that the home is unsanitary and that

women should be isolated: "As Miss Rare can tell you, I don't allow visitors of any sort at the maternity home. I don't recommend it for home births either. Health concerns, you understand" (162).

Once again, the novel illustrates the complexity of geographies of care by showing the interrelated ethical and spatial levels on which care attitudes and practices operate. The difficult interactions between Dora, Miss B., and Dr. Thomas in various places of Scots Bay; the localized and embodied caretaking of women; the negotiations with a community vulnerable to the knowledge and scientific authority of Dr. Thomas and fearful of Miss B.'s mysterious healing concoctions constitute those geographies of care that make clear the role of caregiving and care receiving in the intersubjective process of identity construction. The rewriting of relational proximity—through alternative domestic living spaces and care-based responsibility and hospitality—does not center on Dora's trajectory only, but rather involves the many spaces and caring interrelationships that allow her to make place for her birth house, to make place for her world.

These geographies of care echo what Catherine Keller defines as the sum of "places of inner and outer freedom in which new forms of connection can take place" (3). In *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self* Keller suggests that women "seeking an empowering center in themselves and often furious at the sums of selfhood drained away in futile asymmetries" who are said to be "repudiating connectedness" – not unlike Dora's reputation for refusing to marry Hart, for instance – advocate "a new connectedness" (2): "women struggling against the constraints of conventional modes of relation desire not less but more (and different) relation; not disconnection, but connection that counts" (3).

Dora's caring practices and careful spatial and moral resistance to hegemonic patriarchal power forces of community and medicine problematize the spatiality of Scots Bay. Her role as

midwife and healer serves to resist the problematic maternity clinic that is not readily accessible for women and that compromises their safety. The clinic's monetary, geographical and patriarchal constraints contribute to women's subjugation and participate to the imposition of a form of care that is not always appropriate. This public space illustrates oppressive behaviours that, when read along what takes place in the private homes of some of the women, show how the social and private dynamics work together to limit women's solidarity, agency, and autonomy. Dora's decision to follow in Miss B.'s steps, to voice her opposition to Dr. Thomas, to leave her child and escape when threatened with false accusations, and finally to open the birth house, are other elements that constitute the novel's geographies of care. The textual elements of care (language, practices, gestures that uncover responsibility, hospitality, and interdependence) work with the spatial imagery, exemplifying how geographies of care provide "an opportunity to experience space less habitually and to rethink societal norms of spatial occupation that deal unethically with difference" (McCann 507).

Moreover, Dora's correspondence with friends in Scots Bay is used, like the newspaper clippings, to expose the strong interconnections between Dora's living spaces and relationships. It shows other points of view that shape the narrative around the determination of Dora to preserve her relationships with women of Scots Bay and her child. Her letters provide pieces of advice to prevent illnesses such as influenza and spatialized expressions of her care for the women as she offers her house to the sick. In a letter to a close friend, she writes: "As you may already know, influenza is making its way through Boston ... if you could see how many shrouded bodies are brought out of houses each day, you would understand. If someone comes down with it in the Bay, open my place as a sick house" (McKay 327). Dora's offer foreshadows her return to Scots Bay and the transformation of the house as a private place of confinement during her marriage into a birth house where women experience hospitality and solidarity.

The birth house is a caregiving facility that reconciles Dora with her community and her identity as midwife and healer. The purpose of the house illuminates the opening lines of the prologue: "My house stands at the edge of the earth. Together, the house and I have held strong against the churning tides of Fundy. Two sisters, stubborn in our bones" (vii). The conflation of house and woman has often served to essentialize the role of female subjects, but in *The Birth House* the narrative strategy of subverting Dora's house from a conventionally domestic configuration into a caregiving facility disrupts such metaphor. It opens boundaries, both spatially and relationally, and makes place for geographies of care that denaturalize women's servitude to men and lack of bodily knowledge, shedding light on their intersubjective agency and spaces of solidarity.

Domestic Breaches and Shared Singularity in Sous Béton

Sous béton[15] is a short novel written by Québécois interdisciplinary artist Karoline Georges. It tells the story of a young character simply named "L'Enfant" throughout the text: "Je n'avais pas de nom, mais ça m'importait peu. Car je n'avais rien d'autre non plus" (Georges 25). Nameless, this character narrates a series of events that led to his escape from an abusive, uncaring, life-threatening home space characterised by a violent father, a depressed mother, substance abuse, and the murder of siblings. The story takes place in a post-apocalyptic world where healthy but zombified humans are confined to a mile-wide and mile-high building referred to as "l'Édifice." The building is made of "Béton Total" and keeps the sick, the old, and the rebellious locked outside and left to die: "Dehors, les exclus se dévorent les uns les autres" (15). The protagonist experiences

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[15] I also analysed *Sous Béton* in a paper to be published in *Comparative Literature for the New Century* (Pivato and DeGasperi). This paper centres on the posthuman care illustrated in the story, whereas the present analysis focuses on the representations of the domestic experience under patriarchal control and on the caring strategies used by the protagonist to reinvent, if not to escape from, his intimate world and embodied self.

confinement in a dark and closely regulated apartment where all he does is sleep and wonder. The text centers on the child's radical thinking process and awakening, on his ability to make new sense of his living space, on his coping mechanism to deal with the physical and emotional violence, and on his curiosity to understand the power dynamics at play both in the apartment and in "l'Édifice":

> J'avais donc conclu que nous étions tous orphelins d'un monde qui s'était dissous en énigme à travers la succession de nos naissances silencieuses sous béton ... tout est pareil en tout temps : pères, mères, enfants, disait-il. Murs, sièges. Oxygène, nutriments. Écrans avec même paysage. Ailleurs dans l'Édifice on trouve des chaînes de production automatisées qui fabriquent portes et sièges, nutriments, oxygène, écrans. (18)

Sous béton imagines the possible consequences of a techno-scientific world where dehumanized beings are confined to closed spaces and forced to eat pills, living on a tight schedule dictated by absent and omniscient authorities and working mechanically so that "l'Édifice" can function. "Béton Total" is an important character in the novel, seemingly more alive than the child's parents and, surprisingly and uncannily, providing a sense of belonging to "l'Enfant." Indeed, the author reverts to the nonhuman to make sense of the child's life, to give him a sense of purpose: "l'Enfant" becomes aware of what he calls his "singularité" when he imagines and then sees a breach, as he lays on the ground at night:

> Moi, j'imaginais la forme d'une fissure au mur. ... L'obsession d'une fissure était apparue tandis que je simulais le sommeil, les yeux mi-clos fixes au plafond. Une ombre y était apparue, bien nette. Une ligne sinueuse qui avait lentement glissé jusqu'à l'angle du mur. Et j'avais alors entendu pour la première fois un craquement profond du béton, aussitôt transformé en grondement. (32)

Different elements participate to the development of his singularity. He holds on to the belief that his life might have a different outcome than that of his siblings or of his parents. He also experiences a particular sense of interconnectedness to "Béton Total," to the breach in the wall, and to peculiar sounds that he hears coming from it. Each provides "l'Enfant" with an unexpected set of survival strategies. These strategies make clear a proximity with the nonhuman that brings him to a feeling of recognition, of a care transacted by a relatedness to "Béton Total." This care is articulated by the child's attention to his "semblables" whom he hears through the breach, with whom he feels an embodied interconnection inscribed spatially. In *Sous béton*, geographies of care are thus shaped by the child's capacity to reinvent his subjectivity in relation to invisible others, and by his empowered vulnerability, which he uses to transform himself rather than to succumb to the father, to the authorities' domination.

The novel illustrates a double vision that comes with the discourse of care and its ethical contradictions. While care practices and attitudes might threaten, when instrumentalized and naturalized by prescriptive, technoscientific, and patriarchal ethics, to reinforce gender roles that align women and children with stereotypical roles and positionalities, they allow, at the same time, "keeping a critical eye trained on the marginalizing, denigrating structures of care within a culture that idealizes autonomy and self-reliance" (DeFalco, "Moral Obligation" 243). The protagonist and his mother, detached and powerless, fail to protect the other children from the father's killing hands. The mother, portrayed as weak and depressive, expresses a certain guilt when failing to help her child to fit in the system and thus avoid the father's violence. Nevertheless, care and demonstrations of emotions are scarce: "l'Enfant" is "coincé entre deux êtres programmés" (Georges 77). The figure of the father, the domestic, local figure of authority, dominates at home and pushes "l'Enfant" to seek a sense of safety and belonging elsewhere, outside of his body: "Aucune place pour moi au 804 étage 5969. Aucune place dans mon propre corps" (120).

"L'Enfant" is a witness to his mother's sinking into depression, as she is incapable of coping with the violence of the father and of the repetitive tasks imposed by the authorities: "J'observais la boucle prévisible des comportements du père et de la mère. La précision avec laquelle ils manifestaient toujours la même hargne, avec grimaces agencées toujours identiques" (77). "L'Enfant" is a muted subject who finds a voice, a place through his disturbing relation with "Béton Total," with the other voices he hears coming from the cement structure rather than with human others. The text takes a luminous, radical turn, tainted with an uncanny sense of hope, when "l'Enfant" and the breach in the wall come together and make new space for a new kind of existence, for a new kind of life. The child hears voices coming from "Béton Total," and he expresses a desire to escape through that breach, a willingness to respond to those voices who give him a sense of purpose as well as who validate his existence, offering him an opportunity unhoped for: "J'avais trouvé comment. Et mon oeil s'est ouvert ailleurs" (151). In the text, healing "comes from the surprise of the unexpected encounter, the productivity of the encounter that defies expectation, as well as that which welcomes the future openly" (Grosz, *Time Travels* 166).

Ambiguous, told using cold, asepticized language that makes the child's process of individuation uncanny and difficult to decode, the text challenges conventional institutions: the family is broken and self-destructive, living spaces are deprived of comfort, and machines regulate a society trapped inside "l'Édifice". Before the discovery of his "singularité," the child's existence is fixed, limited to sleeping, keeping up with the schedule, and suffering from the abuse of his father and mother's inaction. He contemplates death: "Après tout, il fallait parer à toute éventualité: l'expulsion de l'Édifice était imminente ; le corps, menacé par toutes les infections. Tôt ou tard, la souffrance l'emporterait sur l'ensemble des possibles" (Georges 110). Also, different elements in the text blur boundaries between life and death. For instance, the authorities alienate the inhabitants with an alcoholic substance and a debilitating system of heavy working hours and mediatized

brainwashing. The father's unpunished murders, the child's parents who behave like zombies, "déjà morts" without really being dead, and the dead bodies that serve as food to those zombies, participate in the blurring of boundaries between life and death. The living becomes lifeless so that "Béton Total", described as "la Vie", can thrive:

> Je pensais connaître l'Édifice. Un système où toutes les opérations, toutes les particules, toutes les volontés adjointes assuraient la pérennité de l'unique réalité, la Matière. Mais qu'est-ce que la matière, ai-je souvent demandé. La Matière, c'est la Vie, m'a-t-on répété avec exaspération. Alors j'ai mémorisé : l'Édifice est vivant. (101)

The interactions between the dynamics in the apartment and the global system of "l'Édifice" illustrate the child's hopeless state. Dominant forces in private and public spaces use oppressive tactics of control, offering no emotional support and providing minimal care. The apartment exposes, with the death of the children, that there is little room for survival both in and outside "l'Édifice." *Sous béton* speculates about what might become of conventional frontiers between inside/outside, private and public configurations. The child's home space is invaded by the dominant forces that govern "Béton Total." He understands that the technologies in the apartment serve to control their behaviour, to dictate tasks, and to monitor the inhabitants of the building through fear, processed food called "nutrients," and a product similar to alcohol called "l'abrutissant" (145). The father is addicted to this mind-numbing drink. The mother, traumatised by the death of children to her husband's hands, behaves like an automaton: "Il n'y a jamais eu ni une ni deux soeurs, aucune insinuation contre toi, tout n'est qu'illusions, hallucinations, nous ne sommes plus sept, jamais si, que le père et deux petits frères, oublie les images, oublie les hurlements, oublie mes larmes maintenant, oublie" (22).

The child is thus isolated and aware of his difference. He soon expresses subtle, internalized dissent: he feels an awakening. He becomes aware of his condition, of his environment, and of his capacity to see the world differently. He hears sounds and perceives vibrations that the others do not seem to feel. Coping with the father's violence, he pays attention to the uncanny rumble coming from the floor and walls of "Béton Total": "Pourtant, chaque matin, tandis que l'élancement au cerveau se dissipait, je pressais davantage l'oreille contre le sol. Aussitôt, j'entendais les murmures du béton. ... la main à plat révélait un grondement plus profond" (16). As he resists the immobility and apathy imposed by his siblings, he experiences a meaningful intersubjective relationship with "l'Édifice" that disrupts his dehumanized world and revitalizes his subjectivity through an affective and mutual recognition:

> Mon nouvel oeil se posait partout avec *une attention* d'une profondeur affolante.
> S'enfonçant sous chair, sous béton, pour s'ouvrir sur quelque chose d'imperceptible
> Quelque chose qui augmentait les palpitations *du coeur*. Qui imposait silence en tête.
> Quelque chose qui semble m'observer en retour. Avec la *même attention*" (73,
> emphasis added).

The language of care in this excerpt testifies to the potential of literature to shift the attention from the individuality of the human construct to relationality and encounter that lead to a new world and new understanding of one's place in the world. Reading the text with an ethics of care engages different configurations of space and subjectivity, uncovering another presence, a "quelque chose" that participates in the child's identity construction and self-understanding. The breach he sees in the wall allows him, in a manner reminiscent of Charlotte P. Gillman's protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper," to observe the world differently, to break free from immobility, and make new space for himself:

> Moi, j'imaginais la forme d'une fissure au mur. ... L'obsession d'une fissure était

apparue tandis que je simulais le sommeil, les yeux mi-clos fixes au plafond. Une

ombre y était apparue, bien nette. Une ligne sinueuse qui avait lentement glissé

jusqu'à l'angle du mur. Et j'avais alors entendu pour la première fois un craquement

profond du béton, aussitôt transformé en grondement. (32)

This imaginary breach is the starting point of his psychological, emotional and socio-spatial

emancipation. It allows "l'Enfant" to find answers to his existential questions, as he dreams of

freedom and of an elsewhere in an attempt to find meaning outside his family apartment governed

by violence and carelessness: "Alors je pouvais continuer à patienter en silence. À écouter le

grondement de l'Édifice. À compter les minutes entre le pied du père subitement enfoncé dans mon

estomac et l'heure de l'injection. Ou à guetter l'apparition d'une fissure" (46). Before this

imaginary breach and strange contact with "Béton Total," he tries to follow the system's

instructions despite the feeling of constriction that characterizes his daily life.

Read with a framework of care ethics, *Sous béton* reveals fragile relational processes

between humans and dramatizes the consequences of suppressed care practices in the domestic

sphere. The novel not only complicates the human condition; it also problematizes conventional,

expected, normative behaviours. It does so by using a cold and dry language to accentuate the

absence of warmth and comfort in the child's home space and to reinforce the blurry distinction

between the public in the private. The breach that "l'Enfant" sees in "Béton Total" is a textual

manifestation of this blurring: from the inside of his oppressive, constraining home space, the child

escapes into the dangerous, micromanaged, secretive "Édifice." The narrative then centers on the

child's strange capacity to escape through a disembodying process and eventual merging with the

walls of "Béton Total," which are suggested to be made of the disincarnated entities of several

other people. The novel testifies to the importance of and the many forms of interconnectedness by

imagining this strange relationship between the child and the building. His capacity to develop

fragile strategies of mobility, such as his shape-shifting and his tentative escape from the apartment, serves to expose the need for relationality, even in a context where humans seem incapable of responding to demands for care. The child does not thrive on his own; he does not save the "semblables" in "Béton Total" nor does he make an attempt at changing the system of power forces in which he lives. However, he manages to find purpose and comfort outside of the apartment. He acquires a certain level of control by reaching for the breach in the wall and imagining new possibilities for his life. He finds a certain source of care in his relationship with "l'Édifice" and the voices that call on him.

Sous béton also uses textual strategies to emphasize the continuum between the child's immobility and mobility, first qualifying his existence in "l'Édifice" as passive and stagnant, with variants of the word "immobilité" being used repeatedly. Other characters are also described as not moving. For instance, the child says that "Avant, j'avais été longtemps immobilisé sur mon siège, mais toujours occupé à ne pas bouger" (133) and that he is caught between his two parents, "entre le père et la mère, en silence, sans trop bouger, que la mâchoire quelques secondes" (87). He adds: "Le père et la mère étaient bel et bien des adultes. Mais le père s'abrutissait de plus en plus. Et la mère pourrissait au même rythme" (97). The text makes clear the characters' paralysis. The child explains his daily routine, which consists of learning and faking sleep: "Je patientais toute la journée assis sur mon drap gris, tête enserrée dans le cubicule d'apprentissage, immobilisé entre les murs de béton sans fenêtre aucune et le sifflement du filtre à oxygène. Le reste du temps, je cumulais exactement deux autres occupations : dormir, ou feindre le sommeil" (25), and of accepting, passively and quietly, the father's violence: "Il fallait accepter, passif, les humeurs ou les silences. Il ne fallait pas manifester souffrance après punition. ... Alors j'ai ravalé larmes, arguments et gémissements, malgré l'état de tension qui grandissait en moi. Nul autre choix que l'immobilité. Réaction béton" (110). This "état de tension" marks the transformation of the child.

When he realizes that the building seems to contain other singularities that acknowledge his presence, he finds the strength to leave and to resist the alienated life he is expected to live: "Mais plutôt que de me protéger, j'ai alors affirmé avec une certitude qu'on ne me connaissait pas: 'Je ne peux pas faire comme vous. Ça n'a aucun sens. Vous êtes déjà le pire. Vous êtes déjà la mort'" (119).

His desire to act differently, to defy death, is manifested in this imaginary breach in the wall of "Béton Total," in his capacity to question his existence and to search for new forms of life. His parents try to make him understand that the only thing to do is to accept their situation and listen to instructions, but he wonders what death means in this lifeless existence and rejects his parents' submissive attitude. Thinking back on their advice, he says:

> J'aurais pu capituler, comme toujours, comme on me l'avait enseigné, et me concentrer sur le va-et-vient au seuil de l'Édifice, sur la venue du prochain fou. … Un noeud en moi, qui s'était densifié par la répétition aliénante du même. … J'étais beaucoup trop grand malgré ma petitesse, beaucoup trop présent. Je ne voulais plus être là, du tout. Mais il n'y avait nulle part où aller, je savais bien. (120)

This knot that he feels inside him sparks a sense of wonder at the new possibility before him, through this breach that will eventually allow him to disincarnate and to merge with "Béton Total."

In an interview for an article about *Sous béton* in *Le Devoir*, Georges comments on her protagonist's disembodying process. She describes it as a way to surmount pain and as a strategy to imagine life beyond the human: "J'ai toujours été fascinée par la transcendance, par cette idée que l'être humain est transition, que le corps est embryonnaire. L'idée … c'est d'atteindre un niveau plus avancé. C'est dégager un corps subtil d'un corps grossier ; se libérer pour atteindre une qualité, une finesse" (Lalonde). Georges then shares a possible source of inspiration for this posthuman disembodiment: "j'ai des cicatrices, j'ai vécu des accidents assez graves dans ma vie ...

Je sais ce que c'est que la souffrance physique, profondément, et je crois qu'on poursuit dans notre vie des thèmes, un peu comme une forme de résilience" (Lalonde n.p.). "L'Édifice" might thus be read as a symbol of this body in pain, struggling to adapt to the side-effects of pain and trauma symbolized by a post-apocalyptic environment and enforcing a regime of terror on what Georges names "la conscience" in her efforts to reimagine and rewrite relational proximity and processes of intersubjectivity. That the child cannot find recognition from human others but from the voices of the disembodied others within "l'Édifice" suggests a demand for ethical and spatial alternatives illustrated by the transgressive practices of the protagonist who refuses to give in to the "répétition aliénante du même" (Georges 120). The language of care used in the text sheds new light on the post-apocalyptic future and it brings necessary attention to the difficult harmonization between the needs of the self and the needs of others when life is threatened, when all is left seems to be the imagination of new forms of relational beings.

The work of care in the novel demands new configurations for improving the quality of life: caregiving fails more often than it succeeds for the child. However, his care for the voices that he hears through the breach and his willingness to resist dehumanization like his parents and death like his siblings lead to his "singularité," a sense of self that thrives on a constellation of affects and on his interactions with the nonhuman others, in a different dimension of relational proximity: "mon oeil s'est ouvert ailleurs" (151). It is thus an expression of care as fundamental vulnerability, as intrinsic quality of being. The text does not simply subordinate physical, embodied pain to the emotional struggle of the mind: it reimagines life "along alternative arcs, according to different ethical structures" (Mintz 147).

Accordingly, rather than restating old configurations of dualism that naturalize subjectivity as separated from the body and rather than dwelling on that "residue of that ideal in our contemporary consciousness," (Lloyd, "The Man of Reason" 18) the figure of the child can be

interpreted as a symbol of a revitalized subject. He finds, in an alternative relationality with nonhuman matter, an inclusive and empowering sense of embodied self. The child's desire for a sense of belonging and his careful attention towards the breach lead to a new form of relationality and to a new form of living that illustrate posthuman care. I suggest that this idea of posthuman care might be a pivotal point towards theorizing intersubjective bonds with others that are not human or not living. *Sous béton* seems to suggest that even in the darkest dystopian environment there is place for possibilities, for promises of a better life, independently of the form it takes. "L'enfant" refuses to capitulate, to become like his parents, and to abdicate to a lifeless existence. Through the breach come "promises of possible reembodiments" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 68) that allow the protagonist to reinvent himself and to find an alternative space, despite the confinement and the close controlling of bodies.

Towards Posthuman Relationality

The Birth House is not as directly inscribed in posthuman discourse as *Sous béton*. It nevertheless uncovers significant posthuman themes in how it dramatizes, through characters and places, an ethics "that is not circumscribed by the human but is instead accountable to a material world that is never merely an external place but always the very substance of ourselves and others" (Alaimo 158). Indeed, the house that Dora characterizes as her sister, the healing plants and concoctions that she and Miss B. use, Miss. B's legacy, and Dora's supposed gift that allows her to talk to animals, are textual elements that inform a posthuman reading of this novel set in the early 20th century. These elements participate in Dora's process of identity construction and participate in the geographies of care. This network of emotional, moral, and spatial interactions, through which she manages to help others and help herself, exposes how human and nonhuman encounters also shape a constellation of affects that challenge the place of Man in the community.

Geographies of posthuman care complicate the divide between mind and matter, self and other, body and environment. Therefore, I suggest that *The Birth House* shows a "posthuman perspective that rests on the assumption of the historical decline of Humanism but goes further [than anti-humanism] in exploring alternative ways of conceptualizing the human subject' (Braidotti *The Posthuman* 37).

The intention here is not to force this novel to fit in the posthuman discourse, but rather to show how reading it with a care perspective triggers and uncovers key posthuman elements that provide new avenues for reading the intersubjective processes of geographies of care that transform the house as wedding gift into a birth house. Accordingly, I would suggest that this transformation is analogous to Dora's evolution. She first feels obliged to accept the traditional role of the wife and give up her work. Dora, however, values her relationships with other women. Their relationships expose her as an intersubjective figure whose caring relationality provides her with new ways to speak for herself and to foster a new sense of belonging for the women in the community. Reading Dora's caring gestures with a posthuman lens also diffuses the risk of repeating stereotypical images associated with the female subject or essentializing care practices as pertaining to women only. Rather, the novel's geographies of care retrace the lineage of the female body with the emancipation – at least partially with the departure of Dr. Thomas from Scots Bay and with Dora's return and opening of the birth house – from certain naturalized identities and historical oppressions.

Sous béton imagines scientific and technological futuristic extremes where the social, the moral and the humane have been replaced by the functional, the malleable and the disposable. It also illustrates, with the "disparition" and the "singularité" of "l'Enfant," a fundamental human vulnerability and capacity for reinvention and revitalization. The reembodied child exposes the possibility, if not the need, for new living boundaries and new bodies. His blurry and shapeless

corporeality, as he merges with "l'Édifice," complicates life and death in their traditional sense and uncovers traces of posthuman care:

> Quelque chose allait crever. S'épandre. Se dissoudre. Mon regard semblait encapsulé sous une fine membrane qui délimitait les pourtours de ma présence. J'allais disparaître complètement, si je ne fuyais pas sur le champ. Je sentais que le processus était en cours ... au moment où j'avais découvert mon visage gravé dans l'Édifice. (Georges 159)

His experience can thus be read as a metaphor for social responsibility and for rethinking "the distance between human and more-than-human" (Asberg & Neimanis), as Georges is textualizing, through dystopia, a need for renewal beyond conventional configurations of life and death, of human and nonhuman. The novel imagines an alternative life form when dehumanized subjects face lifeless existence and the failures of techno-scientific progress.

The child's shapeless movements in and out of the apartment and ambiguous corporeality suggest a desire to rethink "bodily roots of subjectivity," stressing the embodied experience as a vector for subversive actions (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 3). Georges' way of complicating human and nonhuman delineations places the fleshy subject of "l'Enfant" in a position of rescripting himself (Asberg & Neimanis) by developing an intersubjective relationship with "Béton Total" in an out-of-body experience motivated by a desire to escape his oppressive and violent living situation. Drawing on Asberg and Neimanis' argument that the posthuman discourse suggests "clearly [that] we are embedded in reciprocal relations of both human and nonhuman making," I read *Sous béton* as a contribution to the posthuman discourse that also testifies to the centrality of relational intersubjectivity for living meaningfully. Accordingly, the character's mobility following his discovery of the breached wall testifies to the social force of space (Foucault, qtd. in Mortimer 3), but, more specifically, it dramatizes how particular encounters with nonhuman

others transform human beings and raise questions about their place as figures of the universal. The child's uncanny interactions with "Béton Total" also express strong connections to the posthuman critical approach and to care ethics, two fields of research that share critical nodes of tension and goals: to reconceptualise social accountability and destabilize dominant philosophical and political models for thinking life (Laugier, *Tous vulnérables* 8).

Sous béton and *The Birth House* dramatize geographies of care marked as much by the materiality of lived space, by the symbolic importance of home space, as by moral and spatial transgressive behaviours and movements that make space for alternative life courses than the ones imposed and prescribed by the governing apparatuses. Despite evolving in very different social, cultural, and spatial contexts, the protagonists express a desire for transformation through others, through a growing sense of relationality that they learn to recognize and assume as the traditional or excepted figures of the caregiver fail to take their responsibility.

Reading the impacts of those failures demands more than the application of care ethics to representations of experiences of lived space: it requires paying attention to how the novels fictionalize the relational and social alienation of individuals. It is also important to closely read these characters' capacity to modify symbolic landscapes and living spaces that "are invariably enmeshed within the materialistic determinism" (Beneventi 6) of their respective systems of power forces. The characters also shed light on a capacity for resistance, for empowerment, and for transgression in environments that, like "l'Édifice" in *Sous béton*, thrive on their alienation. The protagonists' difficulty of adaptation make place for survival strategies that allow them to appropriate their living spaces, to forge new relationships and to foster these relationships in order to break with familial, social and institutional traditions. More precisely, how the protagonists produce, with the help of human and nonhuman others, better living conditions in worlds that are

physically and culturally designed to exclude them uncovers interconnections between care ethics

and the posthuman.

Chapter 4

"Les cauchemars se réveillent"[16]: Haunting Figures and Healing Processes

Le soin est aussi, de toute évidence, effort pour guérir.
–Frédéric Worms

When a ghost appears,
it is making contact with you ...
Offer it a hospitable reception we must,
but the victorious reckoning with the ghost
 always requires a partiality to the living.
–Avery Gordon

So far, the novels discussed dramatize different types of struggle and their related caring

solutions, using human characters to illustrate resistance strategies and the need for geo-emotional

alternatives when facing the invalidation of personhood through the interconnected dynamics of

"inequalities and other power relationships" (Barnes 128). Notions of vulnerability, responsibility,

and interdependent relationality have been used to theorize the presence of care – its failures and

successes – in these novels that explore the metaphoricity of space to uncover interconnections

between care and lived experience, between relationality and precarious life. And while the two

preceding chapters served to explore how certain texts trouble, with a language and an imagery of

care, prescriptive, patriarchal and oppressive systems of power as well as show some of the ways

care affects the characters' negotiation of boundaries and capacity to live on their own terms, this

fourth chapter shifts the attention to the place and function of healing in geographies of care, to

healing as modality rendered visible by the geographies of care.

Similar to how the novel *Housekeeping* uses spectral figures to help and deepen Ruth's

search for meaning as she develops an interdependent relationship with Sylvie, the two novels that

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[16] In Mavrikakis, p. 254.

I examine in this chapter use ghostly figures to illustrate memory and responsibility. They explore "what happens when pain is witnessed rather than felt" (Mintz 3). Toni Morrison's *Home* and Catherine Mavrikakis' *Le ciel de Bay City* use haunting and remembering as narrative strategies that draw attention, when read with a perspective of care, to questions of invisibility. They also bring attention to the different "forms in which accounts of pain can come to us" (3) and, accordingly, to healing processes particular to the literary form. The presence of the dead, of ghosts, and of traumatic events and encounters opens the conversation about the ethics of care in literature by uncovering a wider range of relationships marked by care gestures. The chapter thus addresses posthuman questions about the multiple shapes and forms involved in the death/life continuum and about the potential for the nonhuman to provide care and healing to those who witness and suffer. It is thus a discussion that brings us further into the domain of posthuman care and posthuman ethics through the figuration of geographies of care.

In *Home* and *Le ciel de Bay City*, representations of healing are symbolized by bodily and ghostly experiences of place. They expose interconnections between trauma, memory, corporeality and lived space. The novel *The Birth House*, for instance, fictionalizes healing figures through the characters of Dora and Miss B. Here, the focus is on the dramatization of healing processes through nonhuman figures that haunt human characters and through the latter's capacity to respond to the demands of those figures of the past to shape new and more appropriate geographies of care in the present. The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines the intransitive verb "to heal" as to "become sound or healthy again" and "(of a person) to recover from mental trauma" ("heal"). It defines its transitive counterpart as "repair, correct (an undesirable condition, esp. a breach of relations); put right (differences, etc.)" and as "alleviate (sorrow, etc.)" ("heal"). Healing thus pertains to both physiological and psychological repair. Healing also shares attributes and themes with caring, and both are difficult to define (Gesler, *Healing Places* 3). The two terms are often described as

multidimensional, emphasizing how "getting well is not limited to a physical cure" (3). Hence my readings of these novels centre on the gestures of care that provide healing. In both novels, what triggers those gestures are the apparitional, haunting figures of the dead.

In *Home* and *Le ciel de Bay City*, healing processes are made possible by haunting figures and ghosts that shed light on a new dimension of care. The latter complicates acts of remembering and the geo-emotional consequences of trauma by uncovering the protagonists' shared and interdependent constituency with the nonhuman. In the two novels, geographies of care are illustrated by hospitable and attentive gestures, along with a sense of responsibility that is exacerbated when the protagonists make ghostly encounters and with which they come to terms when they accept that the haunting fosters healing and changes in the present (Gordon 65). How the texts use ghostly figures to dramatize "a symptom of what is missing" as well as "a future possibility, a hope" (64) augments the discussion on new forms of relationality and posthuman care in contexts of dispossession.

Drawing again on care theory and emotional geography, I suggest that geographies of care procure, maintain, and reinforce healing possibilities in the texts. Reading geographies of care uncovers "hidden emotional [and ethical] experiences" (Davidson, Bondi & Smith 8) and illustrates how "environment might ameliorate or exacerbate troubling emotions" (9). Accordingly, I would add that the representations of ghostly figures in the characters' living spaces, in the places where relational, interdependent processes of identity formation take place, appeal to care ethics' concern by making the invisible visible. They also bring attention to what pulls the characters "affectively into the structure of feeling of a reality [the protagonists] come to experience as a recognition" (Gordon 63). This "structure," this network of relationships in which the human characters are immersed, extends to the nonhuman. I also suggest that this "feeling of reality" represented in both texts appeals to moral categories and feelings such as grief, solidarity, responsibility, love, and

bonding (Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other" 411) experienced with and because of the presence of ghosts. These ghosts are nonhuman figures that demand care and recognition, and that want to be seen and become visible. More precisely, the figure of the ghost operates a shift in the narratives and, like the ambiguous care and racial, genocidal and war-related trauma it symbolizes, it slowly becomes more comprehensible to the protagonists, more admissible. Thus, reading the geographies of care in the two novels exposes how the presence of ghosts triggers the necessity of care, its inevitability as well as its invisibility.

The haunting and the ghostly figures point to the residual presence of the vanished, to the effects of invisibility and the apparitional on the protagonists' sense of responsibility and care towards others and towards themselves. In addition, theory on haunting and spectrality helps to configure this dimension of care by interrogating the recognition of haunting as "a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening" (Gordon 63). It also uncovers new elements of healing environments that can bear meaningful change and affect one's intersubjective experience of place (Gesler, *Healing Places* 104-05). Hence, the analysis centres on the spatial and caring elements that produce healing as well as on the material, corporeal, social and cultural elements that, when they lack, complicate the intersubjective relationships and cause or intensify exclusion and suffering. This chapter thus engages with two novels to better understand how the healing properties of geographies of care are traversed by a persisting spectral element that, once visible and acknowledged by the protagonists, facilitates the path to recovery and more effective forms of caregiving. The characters symbolize, physically and psychologically, traumatic wounds and struggles that often "can be healed only after coming to terms with the very history that inflicted [them]" (Ifowodo xv). Coming to terms with trauma and suffering is dramatized through care practices and attitudes: forms of care-taking, caregiving, and care-receiving that impact the materiality, affect and psychosocial charge of the living spaces in which the characters live. One

of my intentions is thus to identify and analyze links between geographies of care and the posthuman by shedding more light on the participation of the nonhuman in the cultural representations of the intersubjective experience of being.

Moreover, I want to suggest that, not unlike the designs of architects that Esther M. Sternberg associates with peaceful places in *Healing Space: The Science of Place and Well-Being*, the writers imagine "carefully situated landmarks" and "places that work with ... bodies to maintain health and promote healing" (Sternberg 291), allowing marginalized subjectivities to find comfort and to improve, on their own terms, their living conditions. The two novels carefully dramatize social and historical contexts that situate the subjects in diverse structures of exclusion, alienation, and oppression, stressing the tensions between power forces that, in the words of Lefebvre, produce and conceive space and those who experience it. They also illustrate the healing potential of places as well as their destructive and aggravating capacities, shedding light on the continuum of moral consequences on which geographies of care operate.

Accordingly, the objectives of this chapter are to investigate, in the different texts, how the corporeal subjects find healing – psychological, emotional, physical, affective, socio-cultural – through different places and encounters that provide care and to which these subjects reciprocally respond with care. In the form of specific locations, embodied others, ghosts and memories, affects, and objects, these healing places are revealed through the geographies of care and participate in the transformation of the characters' lives, if not in the shaping of the environment itself. These places illustrate a particular sense of belonging shaped by the spatial, the emotional and the moral – a valid, acknowledged, and somehow comfortable experience of lived space – marked by "the interplay between and among people and environments" (Davidson, Bondi & Smith 8).

Ghostly figures are often associated with the psychoanalytic perspective and Derridean spectral dynamics. However, I mostly draw on Donna Haraway's and Rosi Braidotti's posthuman

ethics to read the ghostly presences in the texts to understand better how the human subjects respond to their demands. I am also interested in how these ghosts – either through dreams, apparitions or haunting – provide a certain care and participate in a geo-emotional trajectory towards healing. These haunting figures engage with a posthuman framework as they complicate anthropocentrism by "replacing the priority of being" (Davis 373) with the necessity of response and responsibility for the nonhuman. These caring responses and responsibilities foster the best environment possible and heal wounds of the past, subsequently transforming the present. As Line Enriksen suggests:

> the spectral might be of interest to posthuman ethics, in which the conscious, rational human subject is no longer at the centre of things, but rather embodied, embedded, entangled with its surroundings as well as different from them. The world is not a static slap of matter, but in constant transformations, and engaging with it thus takes responsibility and respect in the sense of looking back and trying to see the world from another position – a position with which one is entangled yet still other. (50)

Also, contemporary literary analyses of posthuman ethics usually focus on cyborgs, monsters, and hybrid creatures.[17] However, I suggest that the ghostly figures dramatized in *Home* and *Le ciel de Bay City* provide solid ground on which to further configure an idea of geographies of care characterised by presence and absence, nearness and distance, life and death, and shaped by caring gestures—such as hospitality, recognition, responsibility and healing—that weave rather than polarize these different dichotomies.

In both novels, haunting processes participate in the construction of healing and suffering spaces, bringing attention to internalized geo-emotional processes of identity construction. They

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[17] See Garcia Zarranz for a posthuman perspective on Canadian literature and affect studies. See also Vint and Hayles for key discussions on posthuman bodies.

also illustrate geographies of care that extend beyond the living and that unfold therapeutic qualities despite initially triggering negative feelings and traumatic reminiscences. Memory is thus a site where issues of racial and genocidal trauma are addressed with a relational sense of responsibility both towards the living and towards the dead. The protagonists use and seek living space to provide care and to find healing, to make a liveable place for interdependent relationships that they initially refused. Geographies of care expose the subjects' attempt to come to terms with a traumatic historical burden and personal experiences in a complex set of caring interactions that blur the boundaries between past, present, life and death.

The caring practices at times succeed and lead to better living conditions. They also sometimes put an end or a halt to the suffering of the characters. The readings, however, will also show how relational, cultural, social, and spatial inequalities affect the potential of healing and the power forces that produce "a lack of healing elements in some places" (Curtis 36). Reading with a perspective of care brings attention to the healing power of relationality and the healing power of places characterised by caring relationships. Some of the figures of healing and care show the damaging and abusive power that having a capacity or authority to heal and provide care can cause: "Il n'y a pas de soin sans une faiblesse qui appelle à l'aide, mais qui peut devenir une soumission, et une capacité qui permet le secours mais qui peut devenir un pouvoir, et donc aussi un abus de pouvoir" (Worms 19). Questioning the potential for healing that geographies of care bring to attention is another way of exploring how care practices and attitudes participate in the co-constitutive configuration of space and intersubjectivity.

"In Spite of His Care"[18]*: Responsibility, Ghosts and Repair in* Home

In her 2012 novel *Home,* Toni Morrison uses traumas of war, childhood and racism, along with the nourishing and healing powers of filiation, love relationships, and responsibility to dramatize the interpersonal identity search of her protagonist Frank Money. Frank is a war veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and alcoholism who embarks on a journey back to his home state of Georgia to rescue his sister Ycidra. Referred to as Cee in the text, Frank's sister is the reason why he goes back to Georgia: abused by a doctor who employed her but who wanted to use her as guinea pig for medical experiments, she risks dying: "My sister. Now my only family. When you write this down, know this: she was a shadow for most of my life, a presence marking by its own absence, or maybe mine. Who am I without her—that underfed girl with the sad, waiting eyes? ... The letter said 'she be dead'" (Morrison, *Home* 133). Stressing the interdependent connection shared by the brother and sister, this excerpt also illustrates one of the two narrative voices in the novel as Frank addresses an unidentified person who seems to be writing his life story.

The concern with care ethics in this text is twofold. First, the story centres on the interdependence between Frank and Cee. Their relationship is shaped by their respective search for a sense of belonging and exposed when Frank realizes that his sister is the embodied place that provides him with a comfort and stability that his different home spaces have failed to provide. The text also uses blurry frontiers between life and death by intersecting Frank and Ycidra's life courses with ghosts that haunt their memories, illustrating the shared space where their subjectivity develops as well as rendering visible the ghosts' pain and healing function. Indeed, Frank's body is tired and hurt: the war, the random fights, the alcoholism, the post-traumatic stress disorder, and the guilt affect his corporeality and his mental health. The letter informing him of his sister's

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[18] In Morrison, *Home* p. 79.

distress and the haunting presence of the dead in his nightmares trigger his journey back home, a painful trajectory towards healing that also reconciles past and present. As Marisa Parham suggests in *Haunting and Displacement in African American Literature and Culture*, haunting in fiction makes visible "how the pain of others shades our own subjectivities" (7). Drawing on Parham, I argue that this embodied and situated pain unfolds through the presence of the ghosts in the text and sheds light on a related, interdependent and caring vulnerability negotiated between the living and the dead. The nonhuman participates in the geographies of care by affecting the characters' interrelated healing processes and moral decision characterized by care—care for themselves and care for others, both alive and dead.

The novel begins with a chapter told in the first person, in which Frank tells how he and his sister, children at the time, witnessed the inhumation of a dead black man, killed by a group of white supremacists. The caring and vulnerable dynamic between brother and sister is rapidly shown: "When we saw that black foot with its creamy pink and mud-streaked sole being whacked into the grave, her whole body began to shake. I hugged her shoulders tight and tried to pull her trembling into my own bones because, as a brother four years older, I thought I could handle it" (Morrison, *Home* 5). Only named in the second chapter, Frank quickly expresses his care for his sister, a care marked by a sense of responsibility as well as by his vulnerability. He also mentions that he was not able to support the sight of the dead man after all, which also exposes both his fragility and courage, two characteristics that his moral decisions illustrate throughout the novel.

The second chapter reveals a third person narrator to whom Frank is telling his story in the chapters told in the first person. This narrator tells Frank's story as he is traveling back to his hometown of Lotus to provide help to his sister. Cee's friend and coworker Sarah, was worried about "Cee's loss of weight, her fatigue, and how long her periods were lasting" (145). She "became frightened enough to write the only relative Cee had an address for" (145). Frank received

the letter and thus had to return to Lotus to save Cee from Dr. Scott, a racist and self-proclaimed scientist who "got so interested in wombs in general, constructing instruments to see farther and farther into them" that he lured young girls to work for him as medical assistants to then use them in his experiments. The town of Lotus is "the worst place in the world, worse than any battlefield" (103). The chapters told by the third-person narrator use Frank's narrative partly made of lies to tell a story that revisits his memories and eventually forces him to tell the truth.

The different ghosts who haunt Frank and with whom he shares traumatic memories and places shape his recalcitrant return to Lotus. Enrolled in the army with his best friends Mike and Stuff, Frank ran away from Lotus with them, seeking to escape racism and a difficult family life: "They, along with my little sister, kept the indifference of parents and the hatefulness of grandparents an afterthought" (104). Frank is the only one who survived the war, witness to the death of this two friends and of children in Korea. The deaths of his friends, of an innocent Korean girl, as well as the deaths of Lotus inhabitants he witnessed as a child haunt Frank and mark his daily life with guilt, shame, and anger; pushing him to destructive behaviours and patterns of denial that come to an end when he receives the letter about Cee. His decision to travel back to Lotus, to face his demons, to rescue his sister, and to take control of his past symbolize his struggle to "handle it after all" and his reciprocal need for care and healing. The novel ends with Frank and Cee going back to the place where they saw the burial, in a final, symbolic gesture of spatial and emotional appropriation, somehow reclaiming the traumatic experience they share.

Bringing to attention the circular shape of the story, this final scene, set where the novel opens, functions as a symbolic closure for the protagonists. They respectfully dig out the bones of the man they saw get killed to put them into Cee's handmade quilt. They make him a proper burial site, appropriating the place where he was brutally murdered and carefully placing and identifying his resting place:

Carefully, carefully, Frank placed the bones on Cee's quilt, doing his level best to arrange them the way they once were in life. ... Together they folded the fabric and knotted the ends. ... Brother and sister slid the crayon-colored coffin into the perpendicular grave. ... One nail bent uselessly, but the other held well enough to expose the words he had painted on the wooden marker. Here Stands a Man. (187-88)

Morrison's use of care is manifest both in language and in representation. Not only does the choice of words reinforce the caring in the narrative, but the characters' gestures and interactions testify to the place of care in their healing process and journey home. The novel ends on a peaceful, almost reconciled experience with death, whereas the series of events that led to Frank and Ycidra's separation and their respective life courses marked by abuse are inscribed in killing, murder, and destruction of life.

Indeed, the first event of the novel foreshadows Frank and Ycidra's close relationship with death throughout the novel. Frank's best friends die during the war, he kills a young Korean girl, and he risks his life fighting with other men when under the influence of alcohol. He attempts to forget these haunting and traumatizing events with drinking, which makes him aggressive and dangerous, a level of violence that allows him to feel alive and to express his anger, to unwind, but which also leads him to the psychiatric ward: "It was unlike the rage that had accompanied killing in Korea. Those sprees were fierce but mindless, anonymous. This violence was personal in its delight. Good, he thought. He might need that thrill to claim his sister" (132). Seeking to protect his sister and to make up for the lost lives of his friends, of the buried man, and the Korean girl, Frank goes South to save Ycidra: "No more people I didn't save. No more watching people close to me die. No more" (134). Ycidra must also deal with different forms of death. As a child, she sees a man being killed and buried; later in life she loses a child following an unhappy and abusive

marriage; she risks her life under the damaging care of Dr. Scott; and she must face sterilization following his experiments on her body. The different figures of death devitalize the lives of the protagonists and complicate this "home" of the title that haunts the text in which home, as experienced by the characters, consistently gives way.

The majority of the chapters are told from a third person point of view, telling Frank's story in the past. The other chapters are told in the first person, as Frank is talking to who seems to be an interviewer, a psychologist or a journalist who possibly is the narrator of the other chapters. Frank narrates eight of the seventeen chapters, which legitimizes his subjectivity and his story, complicating the third person narrative with questions of reliability and bias. Frank expresses worry about this other voice's selection of content – "Write about that, why don't you?" (48) – and about the author's capacity to describe his perceptions – "Trees give up. Turtles cook in their shells. Describe that if you know how" (49). Later in the text Frank confronts the writer, not only imposing his version of the story but affirming his voice and his capacity to resist the imposed version:

> Earlier you wrote about how sure I was that the beat-up man on the train to Chicago would be around when they got home and whip the wife who tried to help him. Not true. I didn't think any such thing. What I thought was that he was proud of her but didn't want to show how proud he was to the other men on the train. I don't think you know much about love. Or me. (86-87)

Morrison addresses the authority of experience by opposing and going back and forth between these two narratives, creating a conflict between Frank and the writer and questioning one's capacity to tell a story and to share an experience without denying the other's subjectivity. The narrative structure of the novel also raises question about accountability, responsibility, and careful storytelling, as Frank, in eight of the seventeen chapters, is sharing life events with a mysterious writer who, in the other nine chapters, narrates the events in a third person voice.

Frank's lies to this mysterious person, revealed towards the end of the novel, confront him to his initial resistance to fully share his story as well as to his guilt and responsibility. Frank also expresses concerns about his accountability and participation in the death of the Korean Girl, unable to support the guilt of accusing fellow soldiers of her death, which leads to his confession to the writer: "I shot the Korean girl in her face. I am the one she touched. I am the one who saw her smile. I am the one she said 'Yum-yum' to. I am the one she aroused. A child. A wee little girl. I didn't think. I didn't have to. ... What type of man is that?" (174). Frank finally comes to terms with what really haunts him and confesses to the murder of the girl. The third person narrator suggests that Frank's moral stance is disturbed by his post-traumatic stress disorder and guilt, that he lied and used the death of his friends as an excuse to avoid dealing with his actions: "He had covered his guilt and shame with big-time mourning for his dead buddies. Day and night he had held on to that suffering because it let him off the hook" (175).

Frank's mourning conveniently occupied all space, leaving none for dealing with his actions and for acknowledging the shared experience of pain he inflicted on the little girl. He eventually tells the writer that it was Cee's vision of "a baby girl smile all through the house" – a haunting reminder of her miscarriage and sterilization by Dr. Scott – that confronted him with this source of shame: "Maybe that little girl wasn't waiting around to be born to her. Maybe it was already dead, waiting for me to step up and say how" (173). From the man killed and buried in front of them as they were children to their respective experience with loss and violence, Frank and Cee share their experience of lived space with different spectres, with figures of death that participate in their process of decision making and identity formation. These interactions illustrate the "spatial dimension of memory" and "the ways in which memories are experienced as visions of place" (Lordi 967). Drawing on Parham, who writes that the African American "subject position. . . has historically required that one understands at least a small part of oneself as beholden to the memory

of others who share that position, as remembering often works in places of absence, for instance in lieu of homeland—or political power" (6), I suggest that *Home* dramatizes, by its representations of this shared position, geographies of care in the shared spatiality of memories through care practices.

I would add that these haunting memories are caring "visions of place" (Lordi 967) marked by the subjects' interdependent relationships with the haunting figures and their feeling of responsibility at remembering and acknowledging their pain. As Parham suggests, haunting is to "experience someone else's memory" (Parham, *Marisa Parham*), focusing on remembering an experience of "being somewhere" instead of being "back in time" and thus stressing the shared space with that other without necessary sharing the lived experience. In the context of Morrison's novel, Frank reminisces about his lost friends during the war, about the man buried in front of his eyes, about the sexualized Korean girl through the space he shared with those characters. His character expresses empathy and responsibility for their fate, carrying the burden of their deaths and suffering, as these figures are bleeding "without ever blending" into his self (Lordi 67). This use of haunting in *Home* illustrates the fundamental intersubjectivity of the human construct, testifying to the moral, affective, and embodied experience of relationality. Frank is not responding adequately to the ghosts' painful demands, drowning the presence of their absence in alcohol and violence, attempting to render his experience and the experiences of racism, sexual exploitation, and death that he witnessed invisible and undetectable. The presence of ghosts makes clear Frank's intersubjective vulnerability and stresses his guilt for failing to save, protect and honour the significant people who shape his blurry sense of home and homelessness (Ycidra, his two best friends, his girlfriend Lily, the man whose death he witnessed as a child). Also, the use of ghostly figures illustrates a demand for a recognition of the suffering caused by war, racism, and sexual exploitation.

Frank's body is thus a site of memory marked by its relationality to other racialized and suffering bodies and places that demand care in the form of recognition and hospitality, that require his honest recollection of events and that provide him with knowledge about himself and with a possibility for healing. His trauma dealt with alcoholism and violence prevents care attitudes and practices to unfold, and the ghosts underline a dependency to others that he denies, a dependency with which he reconciles through his sister Ycidra, whom he seeks to prevent from dying, from becoming another ghost. These ghostly bodies are "visions of places" in how they bring Frank back to the different sites that caused trauma and change his perception. He is suspicious as he returns to his home town for he perceives the town as being brighter: "It was so bright, brighter than he remembered. ... This feeling of safety and goodwill, he knew, was exaggerated, but savoring it was real" (Morrison, *Home* 151-52).

I suggest that geographies of care express how Frank and Ycidra experience, as racialized and interdependent bodies, displacement, escape, isolation, solidarity, and togetherness. They illustrate how brother and sister struggle to cope with the absence of the other by first leaving Lotus, risking their lives in dangerous situations where each other's body is objectified (Frank during the war, Cee as a guinea pig in the eugenics experiment of Dr. Scott). Different painful events also shape the politics of care in the text. Frank's sense of responsibility echoes intersectional issues of racism, sexism, class, and poverty. The objectification of Ycidra's body under the attention of a doctor, one of care's strongest symbols, is the trigger to Frank's journey to Lotus. Also, how their family life does not correspond to normative and conventional expectations of caregiving structures their individual search for other caring relationships.

The "emotional relationality of people and environments" is dramatized in *Home* through the personal life story of Frank as well as it is "patterned and shaped by a sense of sharing with those others whose bodies are similarly placed" (Davidson, Smith & Bondi 4). This does not mean

that the characters and the ghosts share a similar experience. Rather, they experience suffering, vulnerability and the need for others — what a language of care ethics describes as "the ways in which vulnerability may enable an openness and receptiveness to alternative imaginings of the embodied self, relations and places in ways that can enhance capacities" (Atkinson, Lawson & Wiles 568).

Care ethics favours and gives central place to the recognition of a diversity of experience and the interaction of different sources of domination. Ina Praetorius, in *Essays in Feminist Ethics*, describes the ethics of care as a necessary attention towards the many forms of oppressions. She also specifies that not all feminist thinkers have recognized the importance of an ethics of care based on universal values shared by all but experienced/lived differently: "The central point of reference for ethical reflection is not the 'mainstream' of academic ethics but the tradition and historical and personal experience of particular groups" (Praetorius 18). Praetorius uses the example of Katie G. Cannon, who, in *Black Womanist Ethics*, argues that African-American women do not necessarily identify with a universal feminist ethics. Similar to Morrison in her article "Home," Cannon stresses the importance of taking the particular and singular experiences of oppression in consideration: "Black women have created and cultivated a set of ethical values that allow them to prevail against the odds, with moral integrity, in their ongoing participation in the white-male-capitalist value system" (Cannon, qtd. in Praetorius, 19). Accordingly, the moral constraints and socio-spatial traumas in *Home* participate in the geographies of care in how they affect the relationality of the protagonists and their interconnections to other characters. In reaction to careless family life, to an invisibility caused by poverty and racism, Frank and Ycidra develop destructive and healing strategies of mobility that illustrate their agency, their intersubjective vulnerability that, through caring attitudes towards one another, allows the transformation and the making of more comfortable living spaces and caring relationships. This transformative continuum

echoes Massey's claim that "the identities of places are the product of relations which spread way beyond them" ("Geographies of Responsibility" 11).

The characters' agency, manifest in their capacity to leave and return to Lotus, to make attempts at improving their living conditions and forging their identity, is also represented in their "responsiveness", what Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou define as "a disposition toward others" (104). Their discussion of "responsiveness as responsibility" in context of precarity is useful to think further how the characters in *Home* cope with trauma and how the novel itself challenges a discourse of victimhood by dramatizing human constructs. These subjects reclaim that trauma (113) and come to terms with their respective experiences of violence by reuniting and by responding to the ghosts. They also appropriate the burial of the man whose murder and inhumation they witnessed when they were kids, a tragic event that not only opens the story but that also marks the loss of their innocence.

Butler and Athanasiou ask questions that Morrison's novel explores as her dispossessed protagonist struggles to respond to another's suffering and dispossession. Indeed, the text exposes a network of interdependence and mutual care through Frank's response to the letter and his journey to save his dying sister, as he himself is struggling to make money and stay sober following his stay in the psych ward: "The question might be whether there can be a way to answer the call of the dispossessed without dispossessing them further. ... Are we supposed to be 'at home' to receive a call? (Butler & Athanasiou 112). Morrison's representations of "intertwined violence, vulnerability, affliction, states of emergency, [and] reparation" stress how both Frank and Cee "summon responsiveness" from one another (117). His difficult decision to respond to her suffering is his way of accepting his own, of acknowledging his pain that alcohol, fights, and Lily, his girlfriend, have not been able to eradicate. As Butler and Athanasiou remark, it is not only that we are hailed or called upon to respond, but also that we ourselves may be among those who summon

responsiveness" (117). Frank's trajectory back home to his sister is an expression of his call for help as well as it is a manifestation of his responsibility towards his sister, and towards those ghosts whom he could not save. The novel's title thus operates on different levels: it addresses a first home, one that does not correspond to a conventional sense of belonging or wellbeing, but that is rather characterised by racial and social exclusion, suffering and homelessness; and a home that is to be built, a utopian place Frank and Cee both symbolize in their embodied togetherness, "the body as consummate home" (Morrison, "Home" 8).

In addition, the characters' living spaces are places of negotiations between an initial desire to escape and tragic consequences. The Korean war is not, after all, an easy way out for Frank: he loses his two best friends on the battlefield, one dying in his arms and the other bleeding to death. Lotus is a site of contradictions: home to his abusive family members, symbol of poverty, hunger and racism; it is also the place where he returns, where he finds, surprisingly, a certain comfort and an opportunity for healing. Embodied sites of negotiations, the two characters are not solely portrayed as victims, as they are confronted with ghosts and pushed to take a caring responsibility for their actions with the possibility of being reunited and of finally "going home" as Ycidra tells Frank in the final lines of the novel.

The particular coexistence between ghosts, Frank, and Ycidra, co-constitutive of their subjectivity and experience of lived space, plays a significant role in the articulation of their healing strategies in and out of Lotus. These interactions also impact Frank's difficult decision to return to be present (not only spatially, but to be temporally back in the present as well) for the last person alive for whom he cares. About this negotiation of distance and proximity, Nicolas Dungey remarks: "[t]he withdrawal of being creates an ethical gravity of care with which individuals are carried forward, and through which their relationships to others are held together" (Dungey 242). Once more, imagined geographies of care make clear that the experience of lived space is constituted of

a "plurality of positionalities" through which the "kind of accepted understanding that we care the most for those nearest" is complicated (9).

"Contre mon corps-bouclier"[19]: *Healing Trauma in* Le ciel de Bay City

In *Le ciel de Bay City*, Catherine Mavrikakis tells the story of Amy as she recollects her memories from childhood to motherhood, revisiting her movements across different frontiers. Amy struggles to cope with the burden that comes with her Jewish origins as she learns about the deaths of her family members in the concentration camps. She narrates her search for meaning by negotiating different sets of boundaries: between America and Europe, life and death, self-care and a sense of responsibility towards her family, and between the shiny plastic furniture of a small metal house and its dirty basement where secrets are kept, Amy is trying to make sense of the different forms of death that inscribe her life. The relatively ordinary life of Amy, who is isolated and feels rejected, changes drastically when her aunt asks her to help clean the house. In the basement, Amy makes a strange discovery: she finds the ghostly bodies of her grandparents (who disappeared in Poland during the Second World War) in a large, dirty cupboard. Rather than questioning their presence, Amy is immediately sensitive to their well-being. She does what she can to protect them while trying to come to terms with their deathly existence, expressing both a feeling of responsibility for her deceased family members as well as a feeling of despair for being confronted with "l'abjection de la vie" (44).

Amy's discovery in the basement triggers a sense of responsibility both towards the ghosts and towards herself. On the one hand, she feels the need to respond to the demands of the ghosts, to acknowledge and recognize their existence. On the other, she seeks to protect herself and

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[19] In Mavrikakis, p. 284.

eventually her daughter Heaven from the traces of the past in the present, attempting to escape by flying the sky as a pilot, burning the house and her other family members, and by moving to arid Rio Rancho, in Texas. Death and the trauma of survivors affect their relationships, as they try to forget where they come from: "Ma mère et ma tante chuchotent. L'une dit à l'autre de se taire, de ne rien craindre. Ces deux-là tentent d'oublier ce à quoi elles ont échappé" (Mavrikakis 36).

Growing up, Amy struggles to understand the behaviours of her mother Denise and aunt Babette, who have left Europe and moved to Bay City to escape the traumatic memory of the Holocaust. Among those behaviours are the indifference and inhospitality shown toward her by her mother: "Ma mère ne va pas me voir et ne tient pas à venir me chercher. . . . À ce moment-là, les travaux du *basement* occupent toute la maisonnée. Personne n'a vraiment le temps de s'occuper d'une enfant qui, de toute façon, depuis sa venue au monde, n'est qu'une source d'ennuis" (Mavrikakis 13). In reaction to such inhospitality, Amy feels unimportant in Bay City, feeling out of place and describing her teenage years with cynicism. She qualifies her life as mediocre and dreams of leaving the town in any way possible: "Souvent je me promène au bord de la 75. Je fais du stop en espérant qu'on m'embarquera, me kidnappera, me ravira à la médiocrité de ma vie et que je pourrai me retrouver ailleurs" (17).

Amy's life changes when she is forced to help her aunt clean the house—when she participates in the labour of care as the other women in the family to keep the metal house clean and free from the traces of the past. This care work serves to protect the family members from their past. It is performed so that they can continue to pretend that the dirty secrets from Europe have not invaded the house. In fact, as they do chores together, the dryer explodes and takes fire. Amy directs herself towards the "cagibi," a storage room where her aunt keeps her many fire extinguishers in anticipation of a catastrophe: "Je me précipite vers le cagibi où sont habituellement

entreposés les extincteurs que ma tante affectionne et collectionne. . . . Babette qui vit à tout moment sous la menace d'une catastrophe de grande envergure" (79).

Despite Babette's request not to open the storage room, Amy goes in and makes a strange discovery: "C'est alors que j'aperçois sur une paillasse sale, une femme très, très âgée, assise à côté d'un vieillard grabataire. Ils sont là terrés dans le noir et ont l'air absolument terrifiés" (80). Amy has somehow woken them up: "je retourne auprès des deux créatures que je viens, je le vois bien, de sortir d'une torpeur indéfinissable. Je les scrute alors que ma tante leur demande de ne pas avoir peur de moi" (81). The word "créatures" stresses the strange aspect of these bodies, and the excerpt also suggests that Amy's aunt was aware of their presence in the storage room. It is thus worth noting that Babette's obsession with cleanliness and housework is opposed to her knowledge of the extremely dusty and dark "cagibi." Her caring work for the house clashes with her careful concealment of this dark secret. It illustrates how care is both a tool for preserving and protecting a certain materiality that compensates for emotional struggle, and an expression of her deeper concern for the vulnerable, for an ethical commitment that demands negotiation between shame and obligation: "Dans la maison de tôle tout est toujours si propre. Bay City est une ville si astiquée, si nette. L'Amérique se veut si rutilante en surface. Je ne connais pas une telle saleté et cela me rappelle instinctivement quelque chose de l'Europe, des poussières et des débris accumulés de l'histoire" (81). Amy understands how the contradiction between the "cagibi" and the rest of the house is symptomatic of a broader situation, commenting on the polished aspect of the city and on the hypocrisy of a country haunted by the dead and that shares responsibility for the world's genocides. Amy suggests that her experience is part of a larger historical haunting:

> Je ne vis les choses que par procuration. Je suis hantée par une histoire que je n'ai
>
> pas tout à fait vécue. Et les âmes des Juifs morts se mêlent dans mon esprit à celles
>
> des Indiens d'Amérique exterminés ici et là, sur cette terre. Ils sont tous là présents

en moi, parce que l'Amérique, du Michigan au Nouveau-Mexique, c'est cela. Un

territoire hanté par les morts d'ici ou d'ailleurs, venus de partout. . . (53)

Angry at her aunt for keeping them in the storage box and angry at the world for allowing such

suffering, Amy destroys the basement with her fists, in tears. Powerless, she goes back to cleaning

the house mechanically and repairs the walls of the basement: "Je me lève précipitamment ... Je

retourne à mes tâches ménagères ... Tout, tout y passe à l'exception du petit cagibi du *basement*.

J'ai besoin de m'activer, de sentir une fatigue physique encore plus violente que celle qui me

tenaille depuis que j'ai détruit les murs du sous-sol" (89). Amy works relentlessly in an effort to

numb the pain.

The storage box, isolated from the rest of the basement, is where Babette has hidden her

ghostly parents, who exemplify the taboo of the past related to the Holocaust that Denise and

Babette cannot jettison despite systematically cleaning the house and filling it with plastic furniture

and objects to conceal traces of their past in Europe. This part of the basement is both where the

dead bodies are kept as well as the place where the family should find protection during storms.

The "cagibi" is the site of a disowned memory and where protection is found. The basement is part

of a geo-emotional and ethical weaving: while Amy's family seeks to free itself from traumas

associated with the Holocaust and to find a better life in America, it is also where the ghostly bodies

are kept as an indelible mark of that past, an inevitable haunting that creates a tension between

forgetting and protecting the past. The family is thus incapable of healing despite their efforts, and

Amy both suffers the consequences of their choices as well as feels responsible for everyone. Her

mother's lack of care and Amy's own feeling of placelessness in Bay City participate in her

ambivalent feelings and in her decisions following the discovery of the ghosts in the basement. The

storage box is therefore a paradoxical space that illustrates the difficult negotiations between life

and death and complicates Amy's obligation to care. She understands her mother and aunt's desire

to forget, and yet she feels a responsibility to liberate the ghosts that are locked in the basement. Indeed, Amy understands that the ghosts' physical presence is proof of the unforgettable past and that "les morts continuent leur existence" (52). Her decision to burn down the house is a violent and unsuccessful attempt to resolve this conflict, making clear that the haunted living spaces affect her ability to care.

Amy is not only attentive to the ghosts. Early in the text her aunt mentions her gift for providing care. According to Babette, Amy is special: "Ma tante ne peut s'empêcher de voir dans mes difficultés respiratoires post-natales le signe d'une élection, celle d'une race qu'elle ne veut plus nommer" (20). Babette asks a reluctant Amy to massage her feet, and the latter feels an obligation to provide this form of care for her aunt who somehow believes in her, whereas her mother Denise suggests that she is mentally challenged: "Ma mère ... lui répète que tout cela, ce sont des balivernes. 'Cette gamine n'a aucune grâce. C'est simplement une attardée, une simple d'esprit'" (20). Amy has "un don de guérisseur des corps et des âmes" (19), but she is reluctant to acknowledge it before discovering her grandparents in the basement. Nevertheless, Amy complies with the demands of her aunt and accomplishes the chores and the massages. She alleviates her aunt's anguish and pain, relieving and comforting her while feeling awkward, used, and underappreciated.

The text, in the form of a long monologue during which Amy revisits past events and encounters, is built around her inability to liberate her family from the deaths of Auschwitz and to ignore the presence of the ghosts. The first part of the story centers on her feelings of entrapment and loss, leading to a radical act—arson—that she hoped would free her family from the heaviness of the sky, which serves as metaphor for the guilt, responsibility, and History that prevent the family from moving forward despite living in a new place, on a new continent. Amy sets fire to the metal house while everyone was sleeping. Amy survives the fire and is found, traumatized, in the

backyard. The fire claims the house, killing all family members. Amy confesses to the crime: "J'ai avoué à qui voulait l'entendre ... J'ai eu beau crier que j'avais connu une joie horrifiée, une immense joie en voyant la maison partir en fumée, dans le monde des homes, dans l'espace des vivants, je suis innocente" (45). She takes responsibility for the deaths of the family members, suggesting she wished to liberate them from the burden they had been carrying since the Holocaust: "Il me faut du courage pour accomplir la fin de notre destin et délivrer tous les miens du poids du temps" (247). There is thus a desire for death that Amy expresses over and over as an answer to her meaningless life, to her incapacity to deal with the past in the present. Unsure what her life, defined by death, means, she reflects on the meaning of her surviving the fire, on that tragic event that marks the beginning of her existence: "Je vis depuis le 5 juillet 1979, lendemain de mes dix-huit ans, avec dans ma tête un songe qui ne m'appartient pas mais qui m'a permis d'expliquer quelque peu ma présence dans ce monde. La vie, comme on dit, continue..." (47).

The fire problematizes Amy's care towards her family, suggesting that one's ability to care also comes with risky power. The murder of the family members suggests an ambivalence in Amy's caring gestures: is she attempting to liberate them or to liberate herself from the burden of the Holocaust and the haunted house? It might be difficult, in this context, to argue that murder is a form of care, but with the language of relief and belonging, such as "délivrance" and "tous les miens," it seems possible to read the murder scene as a radical, desperate attempt to heal the family. Accordingly, the narrative connects Amy's everyday struggle with the distant family members who died in the concentration camp in a set of caring, guilty, ambivalent relational negotiations that affect and are affected by different spaces. Amy's practices and attitudes of care towards her family, along with her destructive tendencies, inscribe and participate in the construction of spaces where the living and the dead coexist, forging geographies of care characterized by ambivalence and

struggle, but that nevertheless encourage her, albeit with difficulty, to live: "Il faut quand même croire à la vie et lui donner une quelconque importance" (35).

In the novel the geographies of care are shaped by those negotiations between life and death. They are also characterized by Amy's struggle to cope with her responsibility towards the dead, her discomfort and sense of placelessness in the metal house and in the small American town. Her new house in Rio Rancho, where she finally comes to terms with her sense of shame for being alive, also configures those geographies of care by providing a space of reconciliation for the living and the dead. Amy's geo-emotional self-narrative of the self is closely related to the history of her distant family killed in the camps in a set of relational and interdependent attachments that trigger different interrelated expressions of care and guilt. These expressions impact living spaces: the family house is set on fire; Amy is admitted to a psychiatric facility; she explores the purple sky, filled with ashes, as a pilot; she attempts to protect her daughter Heaven by moving to a new house in Rio Rancho; she visits Auschwitz and travels the world; but she nevertheless fails to liberate the ghosts and to protect her daughter from the haunting. Amy admits her emotionlessness, devoting her admiration and care entirely to her daughter:

> Je n'ai jamais eu de sentiments, sauf pour Heaven et je crois ressentir quelque chose comme ce qu'éprouve Dieu, s'il existe, pour ses créatures. De l'émerveillement et une terrible impuissance. Une culpabilité, aussi. Celle d'avoir mis quelqu'un dans ce monde, sous ces horribles cieux qui, qu'on le veuille ou non, seront ceux de notre mort. (48)

Amy travels the country and flies the skies of the world in an attempt to escape "le ciel du Nord" (49). The protagonist's movements participate in her tentative healing, in her search for answers to the deaths that shape her life: "On me dit que Dieu, bien sûr, n'existe pas et que je dois me contenter de ne jamais trouver de réponses aux questions qui se pressent encore, malgré l'âge, dans

ma tête. Mais je ne fais pas exprès de vivre avec les morts. C'est simplement ainsi. Je ne décide pas de ce qui me hante" (50). As a pilot, Amy's confrontation of the sky by exploring its immensity and its haunting colours does not provide the expected healing: "Je n'ai pas été en mesure de trouver ce que je cherchais là-haut" (48). The geographies of care thus illustrate Amy's interdependent relationships with ghosts and a posthuman sense of inhabiting the world as the dead continue to live and provide Amy with a new perspective with which to contemplate the life-death continuum: "les morts continuent leur existence" (52). Accordingly, the demands of the dead expose a posthuman care, a new set of values to understand the disposability of life symbolized by the ghosts of the Holocaust and other genocidal mass slaughters that haunt the world of the living:

> Le ciel de l'Amérique est multicolore, mais il ne porte que les couleurs d'une peine.
>
> Il héberge l'extermination des Amérindiens, abrite les désespoirs et les génocides de
>
> tous les exilés venus trouver refuge dans le grand cimetière qu'est cette terre. Ils sont
>
> venus de partout pour enterrer leurs espoirs, pour enfouir leur douleur dans les
>
> réserves des autres, de ceux dont les ancêtres naquirent ici, avant d'être massacrés.
>
> (54)

Amy's response to the demands of her dead grandparents uncovers a new form of hospitality, a form of care that is not limited to other humans but also to nonhuman others that have a role in how Amy experiences lived space and interacts with the world.

If this representation of posthuman care is not centred on reshaping the biopolitical order or appealing to a techno-scientific remodeling of the human perspective, it nevertheless rescripts human knowledge as well as it ethically and politically challenges how fleshy bodies have mainly been at the core of the definition of care ethics. Indeed, Joan Tronto's definition of care ethics remains paradigmatic despite the several subtopics of care ethics that explore ethical, caring interrelationships between humans, other species, technology, and other forms of matter. Tronto,

with Berenice Fisher, defines care ethics as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (*Moral Boundaries* 103). Recent work in bioethics, environmental studies and animal ethics[20] have widened the scope of care ethics to include other forms of interdependent relationships between human and nonhuman, and I think that literary studies, in which there is a long tradition of ghostly matter and haunting/haunted subjects, share care ethics' objective of making the invisible visible and of shedding light on "the elided histories and resistance of the other" (Goldman 306). Reading the presence of ghosts and haunting in *Home* and in *Le ciel de Bay City* augments the discussion on the posthuman as well as it solidifies the bridge between critical posthumanism and care ethics. Not only do the novels address negotiations between the living and the dead, but they also tie this uncanny relationality with other interdependent asymmetries that problematize human understanding of life and death and that brings attention to an ethical responsibility of humans towards other forms of slaughter and towards the oppressive patterns of violence across time:

> Il y aura toujours quelqu'un pour entendre dans la nuit, les cris affolés, bestiaux du peuple animal conduit à l'abattoir. Il restera toujours une âme qui entendra, malgré elle, la violence des exterminations qui ont lieu ou qui ont pris place de par le monde. Il restera toujours les plaintes des morts qui résonneront bien après eux, qui feront vibrer l'air et le ciel. (52)

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[20] See Donovan and J. Adams for a key collection of essays at the intersection of feminist care ethics and animal ethics. See also Larrère for a discussion of care and environment ethics, and Casselot for an inspiring analysis of ecofeminism and new materialism that stresses "the inevitability of care" in the posthuman perspective.

Animal disposability and world-wide exterminations are other textual manifestations of a posthuman discourse of care that echoes recent work on the political and public functions of care ethics, broadening the scope of its implications. As Laugier remarks,

le développement actuel de la notion du *care* engage des modifications profondes dans la réflexion éthique, politique et juridique: notamment autour des animaux non humains, des humains handicapés, de l'environnement. Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'un élargissement, ou d'un nouveau terrain, du *care* – dont on connait bien, déjà, la pluralité et la diversité ... C'est ce changement de focale qui rend possible, mais aussi détermine un déplacement du sujet du *care*. (Laugier, *Tous vulnérables* 7)

Laugier adds that such a change allows thinking shared vulnerability beyond the human to include "une nouvelle vulnérabilité humaine à partir de celle du non-humain" (12).

If the presence of ghosts in literature often pertains to a psychoanalytical discourse for it stresses tropes of "repression and psychological ramifications" (Keller 4), and while I agree with Catherine Lord that the transmission of intergenerational trauma in *Le ciel de Bay City* is well explained by psychoanalytical notions (18), I suggest that the anthropomorphic ghosts—they are represented as fleshy bodies that Amy can hold in her arms (22)—are also expressions of demands for care and uncover new functions and narrative strategies when read with a perspective of care. Indeed, how Amy takes care of the ghosts symbolizes strategies of repair both for her and for them: they create a double sense of responsibility for Amy who is, on the one hand, compelled to help them, and, on the other, feels the need to protect her daughter from the unavoidable legacy:

Et c'est bien là toute la tragédie des vivants, ne pas pouvoir vivre dans l'ignorance de ceux qui sont venus avant eux. C'est bien là mon terrible fardeau que d'être née de ceux qui ne sont plus et de ne rien pouvoir faire pour eux. Sauf accepter de les

entendre se plaindre et hurler. Quand cela finira-t-il ? Et comment empêcher ma fille

de porter en elle les morts qui ne se décomposent pas ?" (Mavrikakis 52)

The metal house, with the omnipresent death that shapes and haunts its foundations and its affective

charge, is at times referred to in the text as "chez-soi" and as "prison de tôle," and it expresses the

socio-spatial tensions that shape Amy's experience. But like Sylvie and Ruth's house in

Housekeeping, Amy's house is not a place where she thrives. Suicidal, with little faith in life despite

being a survivor in many ways, Amy wanders: "Si je n'ai pas de place dans ce monde, je n'en ai

pas plus dans l'au-delà" (35). Between Europe and America, between those who died in the camps

and the survivors who migrated, and between Amy and her mother, Amy and men, her grandparents

caught somewhere between life and death, and between Amy and her daughter, Heaven, geo-

emotional ties are made and unmade. Amy remains stranded between life and death, between

togetherness and isolation. These ties find anchors in the superficiality of materiality, in the past,

and in the bodies that constitute the geographies of care, symbolically illustrating how space and

self are interrelated and how relationships are marked by interdependency. Amy expresses different

forms of care: she feels responsible, she pays attention to her family, to history, as well as to the

secrets of the house. She also shows responsiveness towards the ghosts and their wellbeing by

negotiating their place in the present and in the two houses. Combined with a reflection on living

spaces and the experience of being-at-home, her caring gestures confirm that space, as Massey

remarks, is "constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately

tiny" ("Geographies of Responsibility" 9).

Like the basement, the sky is another ambivalent space where past and present collide.

Whereas for her mother and aunt the sky symbolizes an inescapable past, for Amy, who becomes

a pilot, the immensity of the sky provides a space of escape where a mix of pollution and gasoline

conceals the odours of the past: "Sur le tarmac, je suis transportée par les relents qui s'exhalent des

avions et des camions-citernes . . . J'aime conduire les avions dans le ciel et si celui-ci n'était pas contaminé par la pollution, il sentirait trop le passé rance, infect" (Mavrikakis 259). Amy soon realizes that the comfort she finds in the sky does not compare to the healing space represented by her relationship with her daughter. It is indeed through this mother-daughter relationship that Amy finds solace, as it was when her mother and aunt revitalized their lives by coming to the United States and starting their families: "ma mère et sa soeur s'étaient concertées pour tomber enceintes en même temps, pour donner vie à de petits Américains tout neufs qui leur feraient oublier les rages et les colères de l'Europe guerrière" (11). Amy searches for a place through which these two condemned identities will be able to heal, constantly carrying with her a historical responsibility that is never entirely hers as the ghosts accompany her.

Careful about protecting her daughter Heaven against "l'horreur insondable du monde" and surprised at finding possible healing and reconciliation with "l'existence et ses cieux livides, dépouillés" (262) in this bright relationship with her daughter Heaven, Amy learns to coexist with the dead and the story they share. The sense of escape she experiences when she flies is replaced by her desire to protect her daughter from the purple darkness of the sky and from "l'horreur insondable du monde quand le ciel devient noir": "J'ai vite opté pour des vols courts, des voyages éclairs, une carrière sans éclat pour habiter les nuits de mon enfant chérie" (283-84). Amy has devoted her time and space to the protection of her daughter against "les furies du passé" (Mavrikakis 284): "J'ai tout fait pour que Heaven ne subisse pas cet avalement nocturne, sauvage qui broie l'enfance, la déchiquette. Contre mon corps-bouclier, ma petite a pu se reposer et moi, souvent, alors que j'étais collée contre sa peau fraiche, j'ai pu oublier la brutalité du matin qui reviendrait, terroriste" (284). Amy is not only protecting her daughter in this relational "corps-bouclier," she receives care from this contact, allowing her to forget, albeit momentarily, the omnipresent traces of the "terrorist" past. Reading with a perspective of care ethics shows how

Amy is slowly healing herself through this loving relationship and her relationship with the world, seeing how it was somehow possible to occupy, to take possession of a new space: "Autour de ma fille, j'ai construit un rempart contre l'histoire, j'ai creusé des fossés gigantesques pour que les mauvais rêves, les cauchemars grimaçants, les souvenirs-croquemitaines ne puissant jamais passer. ... Sous le soleil de Rio Rancho, Heaven et moi avons pris possession de cette terre aride de l'Amérique" (284). She adds: "Nous avons appris à apaiser les esprits des Indiens d'Amérique qui hurlent parfois dans le vent du désert. Ils se lamentent. Nous savons les entendre, les honorer. ... Et Heaven saura recoudre les déchirures du ciel" (285-86). The language of care is revealing: Amy is not alone, the use of "nous" expresses the relational, shared, intersubjective imperative of the healing process unfolding in Rio Rancho. Also, that they, together, learn to listen and to pay attention to the lamenting voices of the ghostly presence of Natives are caring gestures that provide a sense of shared social, transcultural meaning to Amy's experience, that validate and reconcile her ghosts with others. Care bridges the gap between identifying and empathizing with others, allowing Amy to find a certain healing in honoring these ghosts that she has often compared with the ghosts of her grandparents in her narrative, coming to terms with the haunting in her life through her relationship with Heaven in Rio Rancho.

The name Heaven is doubly symbolic: not only is she a source of hope for Amy and gives her a sense of purpose, but Heaven is also the one through which the dead reunite, metaphor of a place, in the skies, where the dead are supposed to rest, to heal. That Heaven be so comfortable in the basement of the house symbolizes the impossibility, for Amy, to escape in the polluted, purple sky, since salvation can only be found "dans la terre rouge d'un sous-sol du Nouveau-Mexique" (292). And if Amy is the one who initiated contact with the ghosts in the metal house of Bay City, if she has accepted to hear their voices and to answer to their demand for action, she is also confronted to the difficulties of such caring gestures: post-traumatic excesses of violence, a life

marked by death, a sense of placelessness. Because of Heaven, there seems to be another form of care possible, a care that makes place for healing and for a certain acceptance – not a resignation – of the presence of the ghosts as part of their identity. Heaven revitalizes the relationship between the dead and living, between the ghosts and Amy, fostering geographies of posthuman care that allow her mother to heal, that allow everyone to stop wandering: "nous cessons ici d'errer" (292). These interrelated human and nonhuman trajectories – shaped by complex connections between the two basements, sites of memory, and the vulnerability of corporeal and ghostly subjects – reveal an intersubjective process of healing that evolves through the geographies of care, from the moment Amy accepts the demand of the ghosts, and thus finds, in this posthuman relationship, a source of meaning and of identity that, not without pain and suffering, allows making a new account of the world.

As social figures, the ghosts – similar to their presence in *Home* – shake Amy's ordinary life with a sense of responsibility that comes with a heaviness, a feeling of suffocation: "Je me fais pousser dans une fausse commune . . . Je sens le poids de nombreux corps sur le mien. Un étouffement horrible. Une charge monstrueuse . . . C'est moi qui porte sur mes épaules, mon ventre et mon visage, tout le peuple des morts qui s'infiltre" (112). Her solution is to burn down the metal house and to escape by flying planes, whereas Heaven has an opposite reaction that confounds her mother. The two protagonists, by making themselves available for human and nonhuman others during transitional life moments, by making care gestures towards different figures that make demands for recognition, also receive a certain care in the reciprocity of transformational relationality. The ghosts symbolize an ever-lasting presence that triggers change, responsibility, identity construction and acceptance. Amy and Heaven's recognition symbolize how a perspective of care makes visible the invisible and brings attention to what really matters rather to what seems

"fair," touching on Amy's wondering why she is the one having to deal with the "charge monstrueuse" of the dead.

The language of care and the representations of care gestures are tightly connected to the spatial imagery, which is expressed by the two protagonists taking possession of a new place, by Heaven being able to stitch the sky, by Amy using the image of the rampart and of the ditch to symbolize her commitment to protecting her daughter from the past, and by their organisation of the Rio Rancho house basement into a small apartment. These geo-emotional expressions forge the geographies of care as a network of "sites of memory [that] anchor experience" (Parham, *Haunting and Displacement* 21) and that participate in Amy's healing process of identity construction and acceptance, which culminates again in this "nous" as she lays with her daughter and the ghosts of her entire family, including dogs, in the basement of her house in Rio Rancho: "Je me décide enfin. J'enjambe les corps sans les réveiller. Je me couche à même le sol parmi les chiennes et les humains. ... Tout est doux. ... Nous cessons ici d'errer" (Mavrikakis 292).

Care and Ghosts: Breaching Boundaries

Le ciel de Bay City weaves together complicated mother/child relationships with social structures of haunting and worldly responsibility. It emphasizes the political charge of care for thinking relationships between memory, space, time, and the transmission of affect, but also illustrating how care is compelling for rethinking the public/private continuum. While the care ethics perspective is rooted in feminism and is predominantly concerned with empowering marginalized groups and valuing the experiences and voices of those groups, it has often been reduced to "une éthique féminine" (Molinier, Laugier & Paperman 10):

> La féminisation de l'éthique du *care* est à la source du succès de Gilligan comme des
>
> critiques nombreuses qui lui furent adressées. ... Gilligan propose des mots, des

concepts qui donnent cohérence à l'expérience de nombreuses femmes, et participe

ainsi à élever la confiance qu'elles peuvent avoir dans cette expérience. En ce sens,

le livre de Gilligan contribue, pour utiliser un autre terme anglais consacré, à

l'*empowerment* des femmes, c'est-à-dire à l'augmentation de leur sentiment de

puissance dont découle leur pouvoir d'agir. Pourtant, la féminisation de l'éthique du

care recèle un piège ! . . . La féminisation . . . ne parvient pas à extraire la voix

morale différente du domaine privé. Les sentiments moraux et les femmes y restent

confinés et l'éthique du *care* et ses contenus . . . restent à l'écart du domaine public.

Le politique continue ainsi à les dévaloriser et encore plus sûrement à les ignorer.

(10-11)

Molinier, Laugier and Paperman in *Qu'est-ce que le care: Souci des autres, sensibilité,*

responsabilité also take the time to situate their ethical and political stance by making an important

distinction between this shared human vulnerability and "l'assimilation du *care* à la dyade mère-

enfant ... toujours encastrée dans un réseau de relations qui concourent au travail éducatif. ...

Limiter le *care* à cette seule relation, c'est occulter tout ce qui converge à designer la mère comme

principale responsable du bien-être de l'enfant" (Molinier, Laugier & Paperman 16-17). First,

drawing on psychology, psychoanalysis and moral philosophy, some first-wave care ethicists

theorized an initial relational state shaped on the child/parent relationship and that operates on an

ontological level. For instance, Sara Ruddick, recognized by many care ethicists[21] as the first

thinker of the field, has explained "how the practices of 'maternal persons' (who may be men or

women), exhibit cognitive capacities or conceptions of virtue with larger moral relevance" (Sander-

Staudt). Nel Noddings, Virginia Held and several others, as detailed by Peta Bowden in *Caring:*

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[21] For a genealogy of care ethics, see Bowden, Held, and Sander-Staudt.

Gender-Sensitive Ethics, use "mothering relations as the central model for [their] ethics of care" (22). Not unlike psychology and psychoanalysis, care ethics refers to parenthood and maternal activities as central to their development and certain theorizations have been controversial for universalist and essentialist claims. Recent work brings nuance and diversity to the experiences – other than a "set of emotionally privileged, white, middle-class mothering practices" – used to theorize the foundational relationality associated to "women's central physiological role in the bearing of children and our profound social implication in child-rearing" (37, 23). As Bowden argues, "[w]hether we are actual mothers or not, the possibilities of our lives are inevitably touched by the deep cultural and biological relations that characteristically conspire to connect us, at least indirectly, with mothering practices" (23).

And while I do not directly focus my attention on such interactions, it appears clear, in the corpus, that certain mothering spaces[22] occupy key healing functions and that mothering figures are used to disrupt conventional and idealized conceptions of the maternal and of female subjectivity. Not only do the mother/child relationships found in the selected texts challenge essentialist conceptions of motherhood by structuring the relationships around characters that are not literally mother and child (such as Sylvie and her nieces in *Housekeeping*, Miss B. and Dora in *The Birth House*, and Toby and Ren in *The Year of the Flood*) or by denaturalizing and deromanticizing maternal practices (such as in *Le ciel de Bay City* and *Sous Béton*), but they also symbolise this foundational "condition of a relational ethics" (Carrière, *Writing in the Feminine* 32).

Other care theorists suggest that another dimension of care operates at the level of the individual subject, but never in complete dissociation from foundational relationality, suggesting

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[22] For a discussion of feminist ethics as modelled on "a particular configuration of the maternal," see Ruddick, Carrière (2002), Held, and Fiona Robinson.

that concrete and social relationships, encounters and practices ensue from this foundational parental model. For instance, using the child/parent relationship to argue for this initial "genèse relationnelle" (25) that allows subjectivity to develop, Frédéric Worms, in *Le moment du soin*, explores the interconnections between the two models that he refers to as the "modèle parental" and the "modèle médical". Worms opts for the word "soin" to address the "diversité des relations concrètes de soin," from health care, technical and material assistance, to parenthood and fundamental forms of care. Worms uses "soin" rather than the English word *care* like Laugier or "sollicitude" like Fabienne Brugère to stress how the term "soin" allows understanding the complex dialectic between ontological, cultural, and medical care in the contemporary world:

> C'est aussi dans cette perspective plus générale qu'il importe de distinguer le soin comme relation primitive entre les hommes [sic], et la spécificité du soin médical, pour les articuler dans la diversité plus complexe que jamais des relations concrètes de soin, des plus intimes aux plus publiques. Ce n'est pas seulement le problème du soin en général, mais la structure complexe et précise qu'on peut décrire comme une société de soin, aujourd'hui, qui caractérise le présent (avec ses risques inverses, de la médicalisation à la parentalisation). On comprend alors en quoi, si le soin peut être un modèle général pour toutes les relations morales, il importe de distinguer des modèles précis du soin. (20)

Interested in the development of medicine, psychology and psychoanalysis to better understand Western societies' configurations of care, Worms brings attention to how "le parental comporte du médical et inversement" (35) as well as to how these caring relationships are inscribed in power relations and marked by asymmetrical positions:

> l'asymétrie même des sujets suppose désormais l'institution d'une communauté diversifiée du soin. ... Il y aurait violence à nier la part du parental ou du thérapique,

dans toutes les relations de soin, aussi bien que celle du médical ou de la thérapeutique ; et il nous semble propre à la société moderne, débarrassée aussi bien du paternalisme que du spectre du pouvoir médical (l'un et l'autre toujours cependant à l'horizon), de comporter tous les échelons, de la thérapie analytique aux soins palliatifs. (35).

Worms' language of healing, with words like "soin," "guérir," "thérapique" and "thérapeutique," is instructive for thinking this double movement of care relationships and, more specifically, for reading the representations of healing processes in the texts of fiction. If I do not agree with his claim that modern society is free of patriarchy and abusive medical practice—recent publications[23] in feminist bioethics, health care studies and feminist care ethics, despite acknowledging historical and social progress, show quite the contrary—, his philosophical and political work at the junction of "soin" and "care," facilitates an understanding of care "non seulement [comme] un secours, mais [aussi comme] une technique et une relation" (248).

I would add that instances of care and healing in pieces of fiction help understand this dual configuration. Indeed, by bringing to attention how "concrete and abstract symbols may become an important part of a healing environment," they uncover care as ordinary practice – a care "that is by no means extraordinary" (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 7) –, as moral responsibility, and as expression of relationality. Textual elements and symbols—such as the metal house, the ghosts, and the ash-filled sky in *Le ciel de Bay City* and the alcohol, the haunting figures of the dead, and the racism in *Home*—thus shape the relational geographies of care. These texts model compelling configurations of care that illustrate well the risk of subjugation of self or of others in caring practices. Hence Worms' "soin" as a "travail et un outil, une fonction et une médiation" allows

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[23] See Hamrouni, Clarke and Olesen, Nelson, Pinsart, and Phillips.

further understanding of the difficulty of healing in the novels' dramatization of trauma and haunting.

Subsequently, Worms' reflection on care also helps to decode the representations of memory in the texts, as he addresses relationality in terms of remembering and forgetting, two key elements in the treatment of trauma in *Home* and *Le ciel de Bay City*: "[l]e souvenir est constitutif de la relation; mais le 'devoir' de se souvenir, ou d'oublier, ou de pardonner, doit être tiré de ce qui est 'bon' pour la relation dont il est constitutif" (162). In the novels, what seems "good" for the relationships is the healing that results from the caring gestures, a healing that is also the result of how the protagonists deal with their role as witness but also as caregivers. In *Le ciel de Bay City*, haunting uncovers buried truths about the protagonist' family story as well as about her own identity, stirring up negative emotions associated with loss, genocide and dispossession. But the presence of the ghosts also reconciles Amy with her life. Through her sense of responsibility towards the dead as well as through her luminous, loving relationship with Heaven, what Worms calls "souvenir" remains overwhelming and hard to fathom, but is not strictly associated with death, powerlessness, and suffering: "si le souvenir est apparu comme inséparable du souci et de la relation, son étude concrète montre qu'il peut aussi la menacer et le détruire" (164).

DeFalco substantiates Worms' theorization by suggesting that trauma—"the experience beyond comprehension that returns to haunt its victim" (*Imagining Care* 80)—triggers memory and caring gestures such as responsibility and witnessing. She adds that "witnessing is daunting, even disturbing responsibility since it involves listening to suffering that can be neither discarded nor transformed. In other words, the witness can become a vehicle, hollowed by his or her role as receptacle for another's pain" (80). Drawing on Cathy Caruth, Kelly Oliver and Dori Laub, DeFalco remarks that being a witness is "an act of attention, of listening and accepting, an attestation of presence before the other that confirms the subjectivities of both the witness and the

other" (81). DeFalco's analysis of trauma and related care practices in Canadian narratives corroborates my reading of the protagonists' efforts "to heal the unhealable" (93) and to better understand how Frank witnessing the deaths of his friends during the war and Amy witnessing, indirectly, the impacts of the Holocaust on her family, alive and dead, come with demands that complicate their initial reaction to seek protection from the past.

In the texts, care makes possible a necessary, vital journey for the protagonists that provides healing beyond an initial relationship shaped around the parent/child symbolic bond: Frank's caretaking of Ycidra, and Amy's double position as neglected daughter and loving, protective mother. It allows a geo-emotional understanding of a foundational relationality that, when accepted, heals wounds. The fictionalization of care practices in the two novels brings attention to a "special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present—into the making of worldly relations" (Gordon, qtd. in Blanco and Peeren 120). Reading care helps to understand why and how the self develops relationally. In both novels, ghostly figures that haunt, inhabit and impact the lived spaces symbolize the primacy of this relationality. This emphasizes the geographical part played by caregiving and caretaking and complicates the possible interpretations of the places and of the types of relationships where care is dispensed. Healing thus becomes possible when the characters negotiate frontiers that seem impassable, when they let go of the normative rigidity of certain limits—alive/dead, past/present—by making place, more intimately, more attentively, for varied forms of posthuman interdependence.

Chapter 5

"For All the Works of Man Will be as Words Written on Water"[24]:
Variations on the Posthuman

The end of the human need not
necessarily entail a choice
between impersonal deterministic technologized posthumanism
and organic, unmediated, autonomous, natural subjectivity,
but may involve modes of post/humanity
in which tools and environments
are vehicles of, rather than impediments to,
the formation of embodied identity.
–Elaine Graham

The previous chapters have shown how reading representations of lived space with a care perspective introduces new avenues for examining the ways in which characters who struggle to fit in their environment experience psycho-social structures. A first objective was to discuss the geographies of care in seven novels to decode the functions of care in representations of lived experience of oppressive social structures. A second objective was to discuss the interconnections between care and posthuman perspectives, as a majority of the novels not only dramatize intersubjective relationships but also breach boundaries between human, nonhuman, life and death. I have thus weaved, through the literary analyses, a tentative, at times experimental, theoretical and textual discussion of posthuman care. This study culminates in this final chapter where I first revisit two novels that clearly dramatize posthuman concerns, and I conclude with an analysis of Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, in which themes addressed in the other chapters are also treated: trauma, preservation, healing, post-apocalyptic environments, solidarity, and responsibility.

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[24] In Atwood, p. 312.

More precisely, drawing on some of these pieces of fiction, I have been suggesting that care ethics shares points of tension with critical posthumanism. In the novels *Room, Sous béton*, *Home*, and *Le ciel de Bay City* representations of lived space "function relationally as sites of privilege and exclusion" (Friedman 23) and make visible, under certain reading strategies, care-related tactics of survival. They bring to attention human and nonhuman encounters that problematize naturalized social hierarchies and allow a differentiated attentiveness to socio-spatial power forces that govern majority ethics (man, white, human vs. female, non-white, animal). These stories thus bring to attention a "more than human ethical praxis" (Whatmore 160) by appealing to the relationality between human and nonhuman as a way of exploring new forms of life. They illuminate the importance of objects and nonhuman organisms in how "bodily and social spaces leak into each other or inhabit each other" (100). Each chapter has concentrated on a specific theme that attends to particular representations of ethical concerns regarding caregiving and caretaking in situations of struggle. The chapters also explore, gradually, links with the posthuman perspective, providing additional tools for thinking care as a more-than-human paradigm with which to revisit and problematize visions of subjectivity and humanity. Each study maps different points of interest in the posthuman perspective that appeal to more than "how the human might be changed by technology" (Vint 182).

Indeed, in each text, the embodied subject is problematized to deconstruct the dominant figure of the human as shaped by traditional liberal humanism. Gendered and sexualized, racialized, dehumanized, and traumatized, the different bodies represented in the texts bring attention to the impacts of a historical unidirectional model that favours the white, privileged male, and that tends to deny other subjectivities equal opportunity and agency. If the imagined worlds do not necessarily suggest a disappearance of "Man" and rather propose alternative and

resistant strategies that promote more inclusive and representative embodied intersubjectivities, they nevertheless challenge what Sheryll Vint identifies, in her discussion of posthuman embodiment, as "the range of bodies that matter" (187). The presence of these different vulnerable bodies in asymmetrical relationships brings to attention the inequalities in caregiving and caretaking as well as the inadequate care that some of the embodied subjects receive and provide.

In her analysis of Canadian fiction and memoirs, DeFalco substantiates my reading by writing that literary texts expose how "the circumstances of particular vulnerabilities and relationships mean that many give and receive inadequate care, and are overwhelmed by its demands" (*Imagining Care* 7). The analysis of those claims in the selected texts engages a reflection about the sustainability of the liberal humanist subject. The texts do so by fictionalizing interconnected bodies rather than independent individuals and by "providing a space for narrating agency for non-human subjects" (Vint 189). They also tell stories in which nonhuman others participate in the subjects' decision-making process regarding their moral dilemmas and appropriation of living spaces. Accordingly, the posthuman care that I circumscribe in these analyses is configured at the junction of care ethics and critical posthumanism. It is a critical posthumanism that is not confined, as Vint suggests, to a "crisis of species" (189). Rather, it means acknowledging "that self is materially connected to the rest of the world, in affinity with its other subjects" (189). What the novels expose is thus an "accountable posthumanism ... that can embrace multiplicity and partial perspective, a posthumanism that is not threatened by others" (189).

In addition to partially and tentatively bridging the gap between these discourses and literary analysis, I suggest that this approach to literature provides additional interdisciplinary

ground for reading the fictionalizing of difference and struggle. And, echoing Amelia DeFalco's remarks about the potential of literature for theorizing care, I suggest that both domains, because of their shared "resistance to abstraction" and emphasis on relationality, benefit from "narrative fiction [as] an ideal form for the study of care [and the posthuman] ... in [their] representation of particular scenarios of dependence, responsibility, compassion and care" ("Caretakers" 1).

Room: Affect

Critical reception of the novel *Room* has suggested that "Donoghue strategically employs relationship between mother and child, family and loss, violence and power to demonstrate her grit to preserve innocence" (Sharma 144). I would rather suggest that Donoghue's text, with its imbricated play on language and affect and its dramatization of a new intelligibility of the world through the limited point of view of Jack, does not so much address the protection of innocence as the preservation of circuits of feeling and response (Hemmings 552) that support, and somehow guaranty, the subjects' survival strategies and agency despite ambivalent spaces. More precisely, taking from Clare Hemmings' discussion about the "emergence of affect as critical object and perspective through which to understand the social world and our place within it" (548), I suggest that reading representations of attitudes of care – illustrated by Jack's relational intimacies with objects, with his mother's body, as well as by his preference for objects rather than for humans – alongside affect and posthuman discourses, exposes the emotionality of his lived spatiality rather than his "innocence."

Indeed, a first assessment of the novel *Room* confronts the reader with the themes of trauma, kidnapping, survival, and interconnections between language and body, as Jack and Ma make their way out of the shed and into the world where they struggle to make their place. Jack's

narrative voice is at times difficult to decode, untouched by the outside world and grammatically deficient, a symbol of his very limited access to others. His fragmented language is analogous to his body: hunched back, androgynous look, difficulty in walking due to his confinement, Jack's embodied subjectivity is a constructed response to his oppressive living environment, where social norms do not prevail but where the presence and fear of Old Nick limit his thriving. But when reading the story with a perspective of posthuman care, what also seems to matter in the story is how Jack does not feel oppressed and how nonhuman things and a related circulation of affects participate in his somewhat happy existence. Indeed, the discussion on *Room* in chapter 2 has shown how Ma protects him by creating an imaginary world with the surroundings objects and with stories, using the material environment and daily objects to find alternatives sources of comfort, interaction, and joy. In the text, bodily movements and emotions experienced in close relation with objects and living structures place Ma and Jack in a dynamic where shame, dispossession, disruption, and promise of a better future intersect and impact one another. They render visible the ordinary caring gestures that both mother and son make to maintain an impression of normalcy and feelings of comfort and safety.

Accordingly, it would not be sufficient to argue that *Room* illustrates posthuman care because of how it uses objects to blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman. This novel makes use of ordinary things that occupy living places to provide help for Ma and Jack, but it also problematizes life by paying attention to what surrounds it, by making visible what participates in the comfort and oppression of those who inhabit places they did not build or choose. The interactions that the novel fictionalizes are thus not entirely in line with theoretical configurations of the posthuman perspective, but I claim that using critical posthumanism as a conceptual tool with which to read Jack's care towards objects and the supportive function of

objects exposes their therapeutic and collaborative potential.

The articulation of affect and care that operates uncovers particular strategies used by the characters to survive in the shed and the outside world. Also, the presence of those affects that circulate between human and nonhuman and that at times facilitate caring and healing expose further how the embodied subject is relational and dependent. What uncovers the representations of care in the text as posthuman are Jack's caring relationships with objects due to his mother's creative survival strategies. And while this interdependent relationship is central to their survival and their respective identity, the significant role of objects and places in the geographies of care suggests that care might reach beyond human interactions when the latter fail and threaten subjectivity. In her discussion of the fictionalizing of "[l]iterary speculations about the future of care, read in tandem with the prominence of actual robotic caregivers" DeFalco suggests that "human interaction is no longer an inevitable feature of care relations" (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 153). In *Room*, the speculation is not related to robots or machines, and human interactions are undeniably critical to the characters' survival and healing. Jack's autonomy when Ma is drugged in the shed or taken care of after the escape is due to his strong connection to objects, making clear that human interactions *might* not be "an inevitable feature" of strong care relations.

Moreover, Jack's struggle to express himself, his uncanny attachment to things such as the dirty rug and Ma's broken tooth, along with Ma's inaccessible body when Jack wants breast milk, her wounds, and her shame, are constitutive of the two subjects' geographies of care. How these two bodies transform and work differently in contact with objects constitutes a form of control that challenges Old Nick's dominance and entitlement. Jack and Ma's agency disrupts patriarchal violence and power. How these human subjects interact, in care, with the nonhuman,

and how they resist dispossession and abuse by producing alternative sources of care are expressions of their capacity for intervention.

I also categorize their relational experiences in and out of the shed as a form of posthuman care because, in parallel to Jack and Ma's central relationship, there is a certain decentering of the human performed through Jack's narrative voice. For instance, the text uses personification to qualify the objects that shape Jack's daily life, giving them a particular therapeutic and caring power that subsequently impacts Jack's subjectivity. Life oozes out of death, making clear how the text embodies strategies of resistance to dehumanization and oppression through objects' capacity to facilitate life and to answer demands of care. Using a posthuman perspective to read *Room* thus brings to light how the nonhuman can be dramatized as a source of care, as potential for revitalization. Jack's relationship with objects gives new meaning to a shed characterized by death, violence, fear, and loss, occupied at times by a zombie-like maternal figure when Ma is high on drugs. It becomes illuminated by Jack's affective and caring use of things, encouraging a "rethink[ing] our taken-for-granted modes of human experience, including the normal perceptual modes and affective states of *Homo sapiens* itself, by recontextualizing them" (Wolfe xxv).

Similar to DeFalco's conclusion about robots and machines in *Imagining Care*, I suggest that companion objects like Door, Tooth, and Rug provide Jack with a certain form of care, an "assistive" form of technology even if the objects are ordinary, broken, and dirty. I suggest that objects marked by affects of shame, pain, and vulnerability can also be part of a posthuman conversation that so far has tended to favour technologies and "technological beings [that] enter our homes, institutions, even our bodies" (166). The objects used to shape Jack's lived experience in the shed provide him with assistance, drawing attention to his embodied

vulnerability, "positing ... a continuum of care, in which the human and nonhuman could ... collaborate in responding to human dependency" (166). This textual strategy exposes a posthuman care in how it triggers an alternative path for modifying the characters' identity (Vint 173). This novel does not expose a posthuman "debate over the identities and values of what will come after the human" or over "the shape of the human future" (Vint 7). It is, however, an imagined world that fictionalizes the aftermath of liberation from an extreme form of abusive patriarchal control and that questions the limitations and malleability of the human body through the affective potential of the nonhuman and of caring gestures.

As Katherine Hayle writes, "whether or not interventions have been made on the body, new models of subjectivity ... imply that even a biologically unaltered *Homo sapiens* counts as posthuman. The defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components" (4). Indeed, the ability to construct the body through its relationship with objects does not necessarily put the boundaries of the human into crisis, but rather brings attention to how "changes to the body are one of the spaces where the posthuman may be literally made" (8). In the context of *Room*, this is illustrated by Jack's reliance on Door, Table, Tooth, and Rug, for instance, to find physical comfort and psychological support, for he has given them human-like qualities and considers them to be friends. Drawing on Hayle, I suggest that *Room* illustrates posthuman care in how it strategically makes use of the materiality and the affect of objects that cannot be separated from the embodied experience and that allow Ma to invent a new way of ordering her and Jack's world.

Sous béton: Embodiment

In Georges' novel, the protagonist's revitalizing process of disembodiment in the building of "Béton Total" is characteristic of a posthuman perspective that echoes quite precisely what Hayles identifies as one of the blind spots of the scientific discourse on the evolution of the concept of flesh. Suspicious of several posthuman trends that, in her opinion, reinscribe the liberal paradigm of abstraction rather than celebrate how "human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity," Hayles suggests thinking beyond a "deeply pessimistic" posthuman paradigm (283). She argues that such a model might encourage a fear of breached human boundaries (290) and the continuation of "an imperialist project of subduing nature" (288). Her image of the breach sheds important light on the representation of the breach that appears in the wall of the apartment where the child lives. I suggest that how the child reacts, in wonder and with particular attention, to this breach is symbolic of a different "kind of account" that Hayles' posthuman theory of embodiment brings to attention. It "evokes the exhilarating prospect of getting out of some of the old boxes and opening up new ways of thinking about what being human means" (285). Indeed, "l'Enfant" notices, after his "emmuration," a significant change but not a total transformation: "Je n'avais pas vraiment disparu. Au contraire, je sentais battre en moi quelque chose de nouveau. Une puissance qui grandissait" (Georges 135). Also, the novel dramatizes a post-apocalyptic environment in which humans compare to zombies. The authorities forcefully feed them the dead bodies of the sick or the slaughtered bodies of those they do not keep inside "Béton Total." These elements contrast with the child's sense of wonder towards the breach and his "singularité," suggesting that thinking in posthuman terms

is not to imperil human survival but is precisely to enhance it, for the more we

understand the flexible, adaptive structures that coordinate our environments and

the metaphors that we ourselves are, the better we can fashion images of ourselves

that accurately reflect the complex interplays that ultimately make the entire world

one system. (Hayles 290)

While Hayles' discussion centres on literary texts and cybernetics, her critical analysis of the

posthuman paradigm is useful for reading *Sous béton* and for decoding the complexity of the

child's shared embodiment with "l'Édifice." How she stresses the importance of "adaptive

structures" and "metaphors" in the shaping of one's environment echoes my configuration of

geographies of care and their posthuman implications.

Indeed, the geographies of care in Georges' text are characterized by problematic

caregiving and caretaking practices, violence, and isolation in an apartment described by the

narrator with words such as "cellule étroite," "cellule minuscule" and "dortoir." These words

evoke coldness, confinement, prison, and the invasion of the workplace in the home. The

parents move to their "cellule" to do their task, and the child's brain is plugged in a learning

machine that reminds propaganda tactics: "Chaque matin, le père s'enfermait dans sa cellule de

travail ... La mère disparaissait au même moment dans sa cellule minuscule, également

adjacente au salon ... Et je m'isolais alors dans mon dortoir, cerveau enserré dans le distributeur

du Savoir" (Georges 37). It is the child's uncanny relationship with the nonhuman – as he sees

the breach in the wall, manages to escape from this apartment, and develops a caring

attentiveness towards this mysteriously welcoming structure – that creates a place for thriving.

The child, in the last pages, comments on his merging experience: "J'émerge. Par-delà l'océan

du vivant fusionné. Un nouvel étage de l'Édifice déborde de l'astre" (183). In addition to this

significant relationship with the nonhuman, using the verb "to emerge" suggests a coming into existence, a coming into view that is made possible because of the child's interconnection with the building. It becomes apparent that the child cannot escape on his own, that he is dependent on his environment to find a way out. Drawing on care ethicists' argument that humans are fundamentally relational and indebted, in their vulnerable state, to others, and on the posthuman perspective that blurs frontiers between organisms, I read the child's attentive relationship with the breach and the building as an expression that concretizes the impacts of care on the narrator's identity.

The narrative also articulates geographies of violence and dehumanization in the representations of those spatialized relationships exempt of care. But the child's awakening and refusal to become like his parents create a space for a form of posthuman relationality that, in the building of "Béton Total," disrupts social conventions and expectations and allows the child's construction of identity within more hospitable configurations. I would add that the geographies of care illustrate well some of those complex interplays dramatized in the texts. The language of care as well the constellation of affects that trigger caring gestures participate, as I have demonstrated, in the identification of more inclusive structures and strategies put in place by subjects whose social positions and situated knowledge are devalued and rendered invisible. Moreover, reading these imaginary lifeworlds with a perspective of care allows "new kinds of cultural configurations" that reveal what Hayles names "the scarce commodity of human attention" (286). I suggest that complicating her theorization of the posthuman with a language of care helps to avoid "reinscribing and thus repeating some of the mistakes of the past" (289).

Attention is, again, a central feature of care ethics that sheds light on gestures and markers that would otherwise be invisible because of the invisibilized social status of care. That Hayles uses this word in her discussion supports my hypothesis that the concept of the posthuman provides solid ground for thinking and for reading human life in terms of care rather than in terms of justice, independence and disembodied subjectivity to configure social life. It is an attention to the ordinary and to particularities that affirms the importance of embodiment by focusing on the multiplicity of "ways of living as bodies in space" (Grosz, *Space, Time, Perversion* 93). It stresses the contextuality of experience rather than it "identif[ies] the experience of a specific group of subjects as the paradigmatic case of the human as such" (Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete" 406). As Laugier writes, this form of attention leads to the recognition of the historically unheard voices of marginalized others. This is echoed in the texts with characters like Georges' protagonist as well as Jack and his mother in *Room*, Toby and Ren in *The Year of the Flood*, the haunted and the ghosts in *Home* and *Le ciel de Bay City*, and the women in *The Birth House*. They each struggle to make sense of their existence: "l'attention nouvelle que propose le *care* est une attention à ce qui constitue ordinairement notre commun, question alors non plus métaphysique ou principielle, mais matérielle (le soutien de la vie, comme fil continu)" ("Le commun comme ordinaire" 112).

The posthuman perspective brings new material for understanding, in the corpus, ghostly and post-apocalyptic expressions of this "soutien de la vie" and for challenging the persistence of a "disembodied male ego" as generalized other (Benhabib 418). Posthuman care provides a suitable framework for reading these texts in which the political and embodied subjects (mostly women and children) can define their identity through care practices and gestures despite harsh

environments, finding and expressing their voices and their positionalities through geographies of care.

For instance, in *Sous béton*, the flesh and cement structures seem to merge to make a place for what would otherwise be invisible without this shared mutual attention. The body of "l'Enfant" is the site of multiple affective, caring, careless and violent gestures that lead to his uncanny emancipation from the apartment into the walls of "l'Édifice." His corporeal transformation expresses a necessity for new models of subjectivity that this text takes to an extreme while also stressing how "embodiment replaces a body seen as a support system for the mind" (Hayles 289). The child's physicality is not denied: it is revitalized and transgressed into a different embodied experience.

Hayles suggests that the narrative – especially the literary text – fosters an awareness of the significance of embodiment:

the literary texts do more than explore the cultural implications of scientific theories and technological artifacts. Embedding ideas and artifacts in the situated specificities of narrative, the literary texts give these ideas and artifacts a local habitation and a name through discursive formulations whose effects are specific to that textual body. (22)

She argues that the literary text can be "a resistance to disembodiment and abstraction," a textual illustration that "the abstract pattern [of the liberal humanist tradition] can never fully capture the embodied actuality" (22). She also claims that certain posthuman perspectives replicate "traditional ideas and assumptions" (6) by proposing a "disembodied immortality": "Although in many ways the posthuman deconstructs the liberal humanist subject, it thus shares with its predecessors an emphasis on cognition rather than embodiment" (5).

Sous béton complicates Hayles' theorization. What the novel does is complicate the understanding of the reader by never clearly establishing in which state "l'Enfant" is when the "singularité" appears. This process of identity trans/formation may be a sign that "l'Enfant" is dying, hallucinating voices he wished to hear, meeting welcoming, hospitable others that would make him feel wanted and accepted. Or, it may act as a posthuman shift in the configuration of life and death, stressing the disposability of human beings and their vulnerability in the face of technoscientific progress and patriarchal domination. The novel confronts the reader with moral, ethical, spatial, and social consequences of problematic uses of technology. It dramatizes, through the figure of the unwanted and vulnerable child, a possible transformation of the world order through his posthuman emancipation. The latter is possible because of strategies of resistance to "l'Édifice" that allow the Child to develop an apparently fluid self: "J'ai alors compris que je pouvais maintenant circuler. Autrement" (139). It is when "l'Enfant" can move more freely in and out of the apartment to discover the system of "l'Édifice" and to dwell on his newly found "singularité" that he finds purpose and comfort.

Georges fictionalizes a disembodied state of being with this character whose consciousness reaches beyond the traditional configurations of life and death and whose transformative experience, despite careless human relations and emotional deprivation, sheds light on the potentiality of the posthuman framework for new, "non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 6). For instance, "l'Enfant" realizes that "Béton Total" both preserves and destroys life. He quickly comprehends that "Béton Total," as it encages and enslaves its inhabitants and expulses the sick, the old and the rebellious, serves, ironically, to protect human life:

Il fallait comprendre que la construction d'un édifice indestructible avait occupé

toute l'existence de l'ancêtre initial et celle de sa descendance entière. Qu'on

avait tout mis en œuvre pour protéger la chair fragile … toutes les menaces du

vivant, pour créer un environnement protégé de tout pour toujours. (Georges 79)

Similar to the system of power forces at play in *The Year of the Flood*, the figure of "Béton Total" expresses a desire to protect human life but does so with violent, alienating, dehumanizing methods. Life must be protected, whereas human life, immobilized and micromanaged, becomes instrumental for the enterprise. In this confusing, oppressive and threatening environment, the child's encounters with nonhuman others (the breach in the wall, the rumble coming from within the walls of "Béton Total") make use of caring gestures. The latter encourage the development of a sense of belonging and safety that consequently allows an alternative home space for "l'Enfant".

The Year of the Flood[25]*: Rewriting World with Posthuman Care*

Margaret Atwood has shown concern with several ethical and environmental issues as well as with the social treatment of women in both her fiction and her nonfiction. Commentators have underlined how some of her fictional work explores how, to borrow the words of Amelia DeFalco, "ethical commitment can prove to be a high-wire act, a struggle to balance distance and presence, evaluation and interaction, abstraction and action, the needs of others and the self" ("Moral Obligation" 236). The same can easily be said about *The Year of the Flood*, which is the second novel of her latest trilogy.[26] However, my interest for this novel does not lie so much

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[25] I have published another analysis of *The Year of the Flood* (see Pivato & DeGasperi) that addresses how the fragility of caring interactions shapes the characters' sense of place. In this chapter, however, the discussion centres precisely on the posthuman relationality between human and nonhuman characters.

[26] The first novel of the trilogy, *Oryx and Crake*, was published in 2003. It is told from the point of view of Jimmy, who remembers his young adult life with Crake and his struggle following the pandemic. *The Year of the Flood* chronicles the same set of events but is told from the point of view of Ren and Toby, two female characters. It

in the losses that accompany ethical and moral imperatives. I am more concerned about how reading with an ethics of care framework brings new attention to how Atwood confronts the reader with the burden of responsibility and the pain of witnessing ("Moral Obligation" 260). I also pay attention to how the text illustrates the struggles that come with caring and with needing care when the frontiers between human and nonhuman are messy.

The dystopian narrative alternates between Ren's first-person narrative and Toby's story told by a third-person omniscient narrator. The two voices recall a pre-pandemic world in rich and disturbing detail. They both hold on to the words of Adam One, leader of their environmentalist, biosphere-friendly group called Gods' Gardeners, as well as to their need for a rewriting of the world: "For all the works of Man will be as words written on water" (Atwood 312). Suffering and solitude characterize Toby and Ren's daily lives, and their encounter with one another and with the Gardeners make place for solidarity and attachments. Their interactions also draw attention to the paradoxical space of caring as ambivalent dialectic between self and others, between "the selfishness and sacrifice that can arise within the praxis of care" (DeFalco 236). Ren and Toby's interdependent stories are told separately through seventy-seven short chapters, some that are flashbacks and some that are narrated in the present, stressing their distance and their proximity following a Waterless Flood that caused the death of most living creatures, both human and nonhuman. This Waterless Flood forces the remaining inhabitants, organized in hierarchical groups such as the Gardeners, to cope with their past and with an uncertain future. They do so by negotiating a new socio-spatial relationality between human and nonhuman, forcing interactions with hybrid animals and eventually with the Crakers, an

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provides certain answers to *Oryx and Crake* and centres on God's Gardeners. The third and final book is *Maddaddam*, published in 2013. It continues the story and focuses on Toby and Zeb, who again revisit the past to come to terms with the new civilization to be built.

"improved" version of the human created by Crake, who is also the person responsible for the Flood.

Atwood complicates the moral lesson that humans must treat other living creatures equally, respectfully and protect the environment. In a post-apocalyptic context that introduces new forms of life – animal and vegetal– and disrupted social boundaries and conventions, Atwood places into dialogue and confronts multiple intersubjectivities of the oppressed organized socially, in classes, and spatially, in safe and dangerous areas transformed by a mysterious pandemic and its ensuing chaos. She also uses different forms of care – care work, gendered tasks, and moral gestures such as solidarity, hospitality, and healing – to illustrate, on the one hand, the social pervasiveness of gendered and class-related roles and caretaking jobs. On the other, the text exposes spaces of solidarity that emerge in the particularity and context of each relationship. The two protagonists illustrate a negotiation of subjectivities in a dangerous world where new forms of life confront the figure of the human and the conventional boundaries that shape the living. The geographies of posthuman care that characterize Toby and Ren's experiences in the post-apocalyptic world imagine the modalities at play between constraining and rigid dominant structures of oppression and the transformative potential of a renewed attention to nonhuman forms of life. They expose alternative living spaces inscribed in a perspective of care. Mostly told in flashbacks of Toby's and Ren's life, the novel is built on the singularity, rather than on the individuality, of both characters. This singularity stresses the characters' interdependent relationships as they experience tragedy and healing while adjusting to the new world order. What stands out, as Toby and Ren try to cope with different forms of violence, is a manifestation of the complexities of care through crisis as well as an adaptation of caregiving and caretaking gestures and expectations in the post-apocalyptic environment.

The language of care used in the text brings attention not only to a relational proximity that fosters solidarity and care between the protagonists but also to the difficulty of generating new responses to vulnerability and to oppressive social institutions and structures that use science and technology to control further human and nonhuman beings. Drawing on Susan Dodds' theorization of the "relationship between situational vulnerability and dependency" (190), I read Toby and Ren's respective caring gestures and attitudes of care as responses to their shared vulnerable status as dispossessed women. They are also forms of response to the need for alternative spaces of hospitality and healing. But I also consider how their respective dysfunctional social environments, which they at times share, exacerbate their sense of isolation and their vulnerability and thus decrease their capacity to provide care and to resist oppression. The novel undoubtedly represents two active women who occupy significant places in their community and who manage to find and participate in "supportive networks [that] alleviate the isolation and dependency" (187). But it also carefully exposes the limitations caused by the social, institutional and patriarchal structures to the subjects' capacity to provide care for others and themselves (Dodds 187).

For instance, before being a Gardener, Toby worked in a SecretBurger where she was abused and exploited by a character named Blanco. Rescued by the Gardeners, given a place where to heal, Toby is initially both grateful and suspicious of the group, questioning their motives and keeping a distance: "She was accepting Gardeners' hospitality, and under false pretenses at that – she wasn't really a convert" (Atwood 45). Paradoxically, Toby eventually becomes the Gardeners' healer but keeps struggling to show her emotions and to take expressions of care. She is refusing to show vulnerability and to accept her need for others – her dependency –, two values that, to borrow the words of Genevieve Lloyd, have been traditionally

and historically qualified as weaknesses and obstacles to autonomy under rationalistic moral imperatives (3). One of those instances involves Blanco, whose extreme patriarchal violence and misogyny typify Atwood's concern with the historical disposability of women and with male entitlement, attacking Toby. The narrator expresses Toby's reluctance at receiving help from others, even in situations of extreme pain and danger: "Toby feels bludgeoned – that was brutal, it was horrifying – but she can't show her feelings to Ren" (380). Spaces of solidarity are not easy to build between female characters who struggle to come together and to liberate themselves from patriarchal expectations that place women as caregivers without considering their need for care. Refusing to commit fully to a relationship, afraid of vulnerability, Toby accumulates emotional distress and the need for care while she takes on greater responsibility as the Gardeners' healer. The asymmetrical relationship between Toby and her community leads to different conflicts that care practices and gestures partially solve, exposing how care is a response to vulnerability that might lead to new responses to individual and social crises (Dodds 187). The dystopian novel thus makes clear the moral difficulties that come with providing care when one is "exposed to increased situational vulnerability" (193).

The Year of the Flood exposes how caring relationships are not and should not be limited to exchanges between humans, and thus the protagonists' vulnerability that operates in the geographies of care is illustrated through strategies of survival that use nonhuman others. In the novel, these strategies include the healing relationships with bees and plants, emotional trajectories between Toby's parents' house and the bunker, her becoming a teacher and a healer as a Gardener and thus her participation in building and preserving caregiving and care-receiving spaces. They forge, along with more challenging encounters and events, geographies of posthuman care.

After the Waterless Flood, isolated from the Gardeners and unsure if there are other survivors, Toby lives on her own for several years in the Spa where she worked. She eventually becomes paranoid, hallucinates voices and develops a very close relationship with objects and animals surrounding the area. Toby finally ends up shooting at Ren, who is already in bad shape, and at her friends when they get to the Spa to see if she is there (355). Realizing it is her long-lost friend, Toby brings her inside the spa and demands that she does move: "'Stay here', Toby says unnecessarily: Ren isn't going anywhere" (355). This apparently unnecessary order to Ren is a symbolic demand for care that opens a new space for mutual healing, and that demonstrates the meaningful and productive interactions and interdependency of singularities.

Moreover, similar to what I suggest in an article about *Sous béton* and *Room*, Toby is a character with particular connections to nonhuman constructs. Her father's shotgun, the bees on the roof of the Gardeners' bunker, and the healing material "serve not only to introduce alternatives to normative forms of existence, but also provide fictional engagements with trauma, with experiences of precarity interwoven with the broader framework of male domination and with a dystopian, post-apocalyptic, biopolitical system of power forces" (Hétu, "Of Wonder and Encounter" 160). New types of animals and hybrid creatures also complicate the sovereignty of the human being by representing unique relational processes that do not posit the human as the hero and that stress the importance of caring interspecies encounters. The unusual relationships between Gardeners, hybrid animals, Crakers, and plants transform the characters' sense of belonging and alter their configurations of what it means to be living in the world. They also allow new socio-spatial experiences driven by care towards new embodiments and processes of becoming, what Braidotti calls "dislocations and re-assemblages of intersecting subject positions ... that express strong and affirmative recomposed subjectivities of those who were

previously labeled as other" (*Transpositions* 132-33*)*. All this resonates with a central proposition of both posthuman and care ethics, what Cora Diamond calls: "la reconnaissance d'une texture d'être ... [de] notre rapport humain à des fellow creatures qui partagent notre mortalité" (Laugier, *Tous vulnérables* 27).

The novel fictionalizes forms of posthuman care as Toby spends a lot of time on the bunker's rooftop where she cares for bees and plants, reciprocally caring for herself as the insects give her a sense of purpose. Her ritual with the bees is an expression of posthuman care in how her caring for bees, for nonhuman beings, provides them with healthy living conditions and in how this ritual provides her with stability, responsibility, and healing. Toby's body is another important site of struggle. She must heal it several times as well as modify it with particular technological suits that provide her with animal features, symbolically blurring further the boundaries between human and other living creatures. Because those physical changes occur in contexts where Toby and Ren are working in a men's club or attempt to escape dangerous men, Ciobanu argues that Atwood's dystopia exposes the risks of converging animal and women as disposable life if the posthuman perspective is about "replicating the human of its past" (156). In her analysis of the dichotomized representations of male and female characters in Atwood's trilogy, Ciobanu suggests that *The Year of the Flood* "is an affirmation that if the post-Anthropocene (post) human is to resist replicating the hu*man* of its past, it will have to think carefully—and differently—about how to structure the community of the living of which it forms a part (156). The female human body is, in several instances, represented as a disposable product. Toby modifies her body so that Blanco won't recognize her when she is forced to leave the Gardeners' bunker. Violent and voluntarily cruel, Blanco symbolizes the ongoing oppression of neoliberal and patriarchal dynamics by exploiting both financially and sexually the disposable

bodies of women workers.

Imagining a character such as Blanco, along with the technoscientific progress that seems to cause as much damage as it brings improvement, and with the man-made pandemic, echoes, it appears, what Vint names "the writing of reverse discourse" (170) in *Bodies of Tomorrow*. This reverse discourse is a tool to stress the need for "social and subjective change" (170). While Vint centres her argument on science-fiction texts, I borrow her notion of "reverse discourse" to argue that Atwood's text uses narrative strategies to comment on culture and science's participation in the production of identity. It is important to note that Vint does not refer to care ethics in her theory. However, when she writes that "rewriting the self through reverse discourse is only successful in the context of community belief," I am tempted to connect this "belief" to a sense of togetherness and solidarity that echoes values related to the paradigm of care ethics. Vint bridges further the gap between the posthuman and the underlying presence of care ethics in her argumentation when she concludes that "an effective model of posthumanism must be one of an engaged, social subject, not an isolated individual" (170). This statement supports my idea that care and posthuman perspectives share similar objectives for the formation of new relational subjectivities. Vint also writes that "the kinds of posthumanism that appear in SF [science fiction] texts function as both potential models for and current critiques of the ways in which technology and culture are producing a new model of human identity" (170). I would suggest that like science fiction texts, Atwood's dystopia and the other novels that I analyzed function in a similar way. As speculative dystopias, *Sous béton* and *The Year of the Flood*, for instance, probably do not offer "potential models" but they certainly imagine the undesirable effects of technoscientific progress and dramatize inhospitable environments, providing a comment on present and future possibilities for human life by

complicating conventional and traditional ideas of subject positions.

With this final chapter, I wanted to address posthuman care more directly, in novels that clearly "articulate the posthuman as techno-cultural concept" (Hayles 22). Careful and careless attitudes towards the living, combined with futuristic events that help readers imagine possible consequences to the "global commodification of living organisms" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 8) shape geographies of care as a non-linear, webbed ensemble of socio-spatial successes and failures. Again, they characterize the subjects as "nodes of attachments": "une conception – essentielle au *care* – de la personne comme noeud d'attachements qui font d'un être plus, et autre chose, que la somme de ses propriétés non-relationnelles" (Laugier, *Tous vulnérables* 107-08). Speculative fiction and dystopia allow the authors to imagine such intersubjective configurations and alternatives for understanding survival and thinking beyond the known, to some degree symbolically commenting on what is at risk if there are no changes made to our world system. Chaos, death, life and hopes of a better future "interweave with caring and careless environments to produce complicated and sometimes confusing emotional geographies negotiated by sufferers, carers and others" (Davidson, Bondi & Smith 4). These images of posthuman care provide fertile transformative ground for reading interdependent and mutually constitutive relationships between human and nonhuman. Posthuman care is also an assertive, malleable theoretical tool for interrogating the imagined conditions of possibility for better lifeworlds.

Conclusion

In the corpus, the survival strategies, spaces of solidarity, and recurring presence of obligation and responsibility in the processes of decision-making of the characters, whose lived experience of social spaces is marked by inhospitality, exclusion, and rigid social norms, expose the power of care to either alleviate or burden. As I wrote in the introduction, this project has focused on the fictionalization of caregiving and caretaking strategies as well as on the representations of relational responsibility and hospitality between humans and between the human and nonhuman. This dissertation was motivated by an interest in the interconnections and points of tension between fiction and care ethics, to read how the texts provide knowledge on "the illusion of independence produced by structural inequalities towards an acknowledgment of interdependencies" (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 166-67). Furthermore, the speculative dystopias and the nonhuman figures found in the novels have exposed the potential of care ethics for exploring human relationships with other forms of life and with the environment. The presence of posthuman care suggests that a complex set of negotiations between materiality and embodiment influences experiences of obligation, responsibility, vulnerability, and solidarity.

As the textual analyses have shown, reading geographies of care means questioning the symbolic gestures—especially regarding caregiving and care receiving—that authors attribute to their characters. It also means investigating what these gestures accomplish both textually and politically for the construction and development of a new model of subjectivity that constitutes a relational ethics. Textual and narrative elements, such as voice, thematic patterns, and spatial imagery operate to produce imagined alternatives to injustices and patriarchal oppression that moral philosophy and emotional geography cannot solve alone. Indeed, the novels under study fictionalize care-related struggle in the lives of humans whose relationships and embodied connections to the world – including their interactions with other humans, nonhuman living beings, objects, the environment, and the dead – problematize and attempt to resist structures that push them towards the margins of their respective community. These structures are shaped by patriarchy, racism, war-related trauma, family drama, and post-apocalyptic transformations.

It is my contention that the presence of care within these structures allows the subjects to take charge of their vulnerabilities. Similar to what DeFalco observes in Alice Munro's stories – that "[c]aregiving is a means to power" – I have noted that the characters negotiate their differences rather than they strictly comply as victims being denied opportunities (*Imagining Care* 138). While DeFalco's work centres on representations of disability, aging, and para-ordinary care, my project has addressed different forms of social exclusion, domestic struggle, and trauma in narratives that use particular spatial imagery to make clear the geoemotional interconnections between alterity and relational ethics. I have shown how the texts use spatial imagery as a strategy to interrogate subjectivity and to uncover the emotional entanglements of

lived space, to question the "socio-spatial mediation" of care-related feelings as well as the "emotional relationality of people and environment" (Davidson, Bondi & Smith 3).

The language of care and the care-related gestures illustrate how the representations of care serve to empower, geographically and morally, the human constructs. They also expose whether care can reproduce hegemonic patterns of oppression. The characters at times use complicit behaviours and strategies in order to find immediate comfort and provide or access care either to themselves or others. However, they also symbolize the transformative potential of care ethics by bringing to attention ordinary and often invisible gestures that foster inclusion, recognition, solidarity, and the validation of a multiplicity of voices and experiences. The chapters suggest that characters are both resistant and complicit with the systems in place, in reaction to structures and limitations that are often beyond their choices.

The chapters respectively investigated processes and movements that affect and are affected by care practices, complicating and augmenting the discussion started by Marion Barnes about "the issue of care in the context of people's relationships with their environments" (128). I have organized these chapters thematically. Each one maps the way towards posthuman relationality through the idea of geographies of care, a figuration that highlights the ambiguity of and interconnections between spatial, moral, and bodily boundaries. I could have easily expanded each chapter into a dissertation, but I opted for exploratory, tentative readings of care in varied texts of fiction by women, as I wanted to investigate different novels that shared similar concerns for lived space to cross-examine the many expressions of care. This structure also allowed me to participate more broadly in the emerging study of care in fiction by circumscribing different expressions and figures of care and connecting them under the umbrella

term of geographies of care. The latter, used in novels that address human and nonhuman interdependencies, unexpectedly lead to idea of posthuman care.

In this study, I have relied on the fields of care ethics, emotional geography, literary studies, moral philosophy, as well as theories of lived and embodied space, haunting, and healing. My primary objectives were to demonstrate the contribution of care ethics to literary analysis as well as investigate the use of fiction for complicating the perspective of care. My discussions of geographies of care in relation to protection and preservation strategies (chapter 2), rewritings of domestic space (chapter 3), processes of healing and haunting (chapter 4), and the posthuman (chapter 5) show that the presence of solidarity, responsibility, vulnerability, relationality, and care practices in the texts uncovers strategies of resistance to patriarchal ideologies, racial and medical oppression, dehumanizing tactics of control of the masses, and traumatic memory and experience. These contextualized representations of lived struggle help understand how subjects in crisis experience and use care, but they also make clear how dense systems of power forces constrain and mute certain subjects more than others. Using seven very different novels has allowed interrogating and comparing some of the many forms care gestures can take, along with the impacts they have.

Also, bringing together a plurality of experiences to investigate care diffuses the risks of homogenizing and generalizing the impacts and roles of care in intersubjective processes of identity formation and empowerment. This strategy builds on what Laugier describes as an "attention au particulier" that is advocated by care ethics. This attentiveness takes into consideration the particularities of contextualized, located experiences rather than a universal model (Laugier, "Care et Perception" 360). It shows the potential of care for transgressive behaviours and its function as illuminating, empowering device for the voices of those who are

historically absent from the dominant groups. Care ethics can thus be a subversive discourse in how it promotes differentiation: "il fait revenir sur le devant de la scène le différentialisme, par la radicalité de sa mise en cause des catégories masculines rehaussées en universel" (Laugier, "L'éthique du care en trois subversions" 113). Accordingly, reading these texts side by side exposes care ethics as "an alternative to prescriptive, justice-oriented patriarchal ethics, which tend to involve abstract principles and rules that have little relevance to the day-to-day lives of individual subjects" (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 12).

The underlying trope of home used in the novels brings attention to preservation and protection tactics that make use of material and physical places – such as the house and the forest in *Housekeeping*, the shed in *Room*, the birth house in McKay's text, and the haunted houses of Bay City and Rio Rancho in Mavrikakis'. These strategies serve to resist social limitations and imposed domestic conventions as well as to make space for new understandings of political agency shaped by a care ethics paradigm and its values of intersubjectivity, vulnerability, and relational proximity. Reading with a care perspective and a geo-emotional approach has shown how the characters are able, through their caring gestures, to take charge of their narrative and to foster meaningful and helpful interdependent relationships despite the different struggles that shape their living environments.

The chapters have also shown how caring comes with risks, may damage relationships and emphasize the hostility of some locations and communities. Ma's negotiations with Old Nick in *Room* and with Jack as she struggles to stay sane while being held hostage and after the escape suggest that caregiving and caretaking should not be glorified nor essentialized as expressions of maternal instinct. Similarly, Dora's care for her abusive husband Archer and her family leads to the denial of her identity as midwife and healer. Among other factors, the

hostility of the community and the arrival of Doctor Thomas also contribute to Miss B.'s departure from the village and Dora's difficulty to be herself. Miss B.'s departure symbolizes the silencing and disappearance of an authoritative female voice in the community and of values associated with care ethics such as solidarity and the recognition of women's knowledge. Conventional expressions of caretaking and caregiving as well as the lack thereof, like in *Sous béton* and *Le ciel de Bay City*, serve to dramatize the characters' exploitation and confinement and profoundly impact the outcome of their daily life. The oppressive figures, confining living spaces, post-apocalyptic environment, social conventions and contexts affect the agency of the protagonists and thus limit their movements, but reading with a perspective of care and of posthuman care refrains from a tendency to perhaps victimize and objectify the disenfranchised. In the texts, the protagonists are active despite their reduced power, and their geographies of care unfold their strategies of survival and adaptation, reinforcing how these characters function as symbols of the agency of the silenced, of the less important. Reading critically how the texts represent these characters and geographies of care is thus a way of seeking knowledge about the experience of injustice and exclusion and of the role of care in resisting alienation and silencing.

I have been suggesting that reading geographies of care in texts that use haunting and nonhuman figures—such as in *Home* and *Le ciel de Bay City* and in dystopian fiction such as *The Year of the Flood* and *Sous béton*—further complicates care ethics' fundamental notion of relationality. Indeed, they dramatize the impact of trauma, past events and encounters, and family tracing on one's ability for responsibility, hospitality, and care in the present. In these texts, haunting, ghosts, and other nonhuman figures serve to reimagine the world for subjects who develop alternative caring strategies and who need survival strategies to cope better with

or resist to systems of power forces that have historically denied them a voice, a place, and equal opportunity and agency.

By their language of care and representations of posthuman relationality, the texts themselves can be read as expressions of resistance to ideals of independence, autonomy, and justice that neglect "ethically significant ways in which we matter to each other" (Bowden 1) and as expressions of more-than-human responsibility, as suggested, for instance, in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*:

> What, Atwood's fictions seem to ask, might be the future of care? A posthuman interdependency that looks beyond species boundaries to acknowledge the responsibilities demanded by human dependence on and, more to the point, exploitation of non-human animals and the diverse ecological systems that sustain life on earth. (DeFalco, *Imagining Care* 158)

Accordingly, by posing the terms geographies of care and posthuman care, I have emphasized interrelations between the fields of care ethics, critical posthumanism, and emotional geography, which I believe provide solid ground on which to question normative cultures of traditional liberal humanism. The novels use a language of care that empowers the characters without negating the social structures that limit their opportunities and possibilities. Dora's daily struggle in *The Birth House*, along with Ruth and Sylvie's everyday negotiations in *Housekeeping* show how the language of care and the representations of ethical responsibility shed light on ordinary, daily strategies for survival in hostile and inhospitable communities. In *Home*, *Le ciel de Bay City*, *Sous béton*, and *The Year of the Flood*, dystopian tactics illuminate particular strategies for overcoming suffering, trauma and burden – such as haunting, ghosts, disembodiment, and nonhuman relationality.

Despite their different circumstances, I have shown how the characters share similar concerns about their place in the world and about their capacity for caring for others and themselves in spite of their limited means of action. In each text, the characters, instead of succumbing to hopelessness and helplessness, respond to demands for care. It is a care that they do not always wish to provide—such as Amy's gift for massaging her aunt Babette in *Le ciel de Bay City*, Toby's reluctance and sense of obligation towards others in *The Year of the Flood*, and Sylvie's initial response to being responsible for Ruth and Lucille in *Housekeeping*. But in each case, their responses suggest both the problem that comes with responsibility in moral situations where women are expected to care for others, as well as the positive relational outcome that may result. For instance, Amy remembers massaging her aunt's feet as a gift, as an expression of her ability for soothing others, which foreshadows her taking care of her grandparents as well as her ambivalent feelings towards caregiving. Despite struggling with God's Gardeners' beliefs and behaviours, Toby becomes their healer. She finds a sense of purpose and belonging in this community that initially took her in and provided material care when she escaped Blanco's club. In *Housekeeping*, much like Dora's initial refusal to accompany Miss. B to Mrs. Ketch's delivery in *The Birth House*, Sylvie is not keen on coming home and taking care of her two nieces Ruth and Lucille.

But what stands out from each text is how, despite an initial hesitation, the demands for care and help lead to the protagonists also receiving care. The relational processes are marked by asymmetry – for caregiving and caretaking come with an individual power over the other in need – but there is nevertheless reciprocity. In the novels, caregiving and care receiving lead to healing, to an increased or more truthful sense of belonging, as Frank's journey to help his sister Cee illustrates in Morrison's *Home*. Sylvie's reciprocal caring relationship with Ruth also

stresses the dynamics of relational autonomy as the two characters rely on one another while facing backlash and exclusion from the community. I have also argued that Amy's relationship with ghosts serves to embody the traces of the past in the present and to illustrate the possibility that attending to others – human or nonhuman – is a form of attending to selfhood. I have also suggested that the different contexts of struggle and situations of crisis make clear the need for care, and I hope that I have shown how the demands for care and the responsibility to provide care risk creating additional situational vulnerability rather than empowering those in need. In the novels, relationships of care expose the agency and healing that come with this nurturing, but they also shed light on the limits of care and the impacts of patriarchal, racial, and social privilege on the dynamics of care.

Placing standpoint theory – especially Sandra Harding's "view from below"[27] – and Haraway's "argument for situated and embodied knowledge" in dialogue (Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 191), I was careful not to romanticize the standpoint of the subjects nor to suggest that I share their experience. This project is indebted to their shared criticism of universal knowledge claims and theorization of empirical and radical knowledge. Throughout this dissertation I have carefully taken into consideration Haraway's argument that "there is a serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful" despite the importance of "establishing the capacity to see from the peripheries and the depths" (*Simians, Cybords and Women* 191). I have addressed the epistemic challenge of conceptualizing a care ethics approach to literature by problematizing the presence of care and relational dynamics in the selected novels. Subsequently, this dissertation canvasses representations of care and moral

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[27] In *Sciences from Below*, Harding argues that modern science and politics should be looked at "from below" instead of "from above", the latter point of view having historically excluded "women and the world's other least-advantaged citizens" (5).

demands of responsibility and hospitality critically, in an attempt to include, in academic discourse and literary studies, a counter discourse to scientific and political ideals of autonomy, independence, and usually male-biased structures.

Making use of and adapting Rimstead's claim that "[w]e need to authorize ourselves and others to speak emotionally about poverty and to claim a sense of solidarity with the poor" (62), and relying on some of the resistant theoretical encounters I experienced when presenting my research in conferences, I want to suggest that we, as literature academics, should also authorize ourselves to investigate further emotions and moral categories that involve care practices and attitudes of care, the latter always indirectly operating in the relationality of subjectivity and the building of spaces of solidarity. The trope of care is wide-ranging and uncovers many invisibilized sources of knowledge and intersubjectivities that, without necessarily resolving the historical inhospitality and silencing of women and other minority groups, at least allows mitigating dominant cultural scripts. Geographies of care and posthuman relationality expose the difficulties of caring and remind us, subsequently, how the importance of care cannot be denied or dismissed.

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