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Doris G. Eibl, Caroline Rosenthal (Hrsg.)

Space and Gender

Spaces of Difference in Canadian
Women's Writing

Espaces de différence dans l'écriture
canadienne au féminin

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Préface

En novembre 2007, la section "Études de femmes et du genre" de l'Association des études canadiennes dans les pays germanophones et le Centre d'études canadiennes de l'Université d'Innsbruck ont organisé un colloque interdisciplinaire et bilingue portant sur le thème "Space and Gender. Urban and Other Spaces in Canadian Women's Fiction – Espace et genre. Espaces urbains et autres dans la fiction canadienne au féminin". L'idée de consacrer un colloque à ce thème était née quelques années auparavant lors d'une réunion des membres de la section "Études de femmes et du genre" dans le but de repenser le "spacial turn" de la fin des années 1980 en termes littéraires et en fonction de la catégorie "genre".

Ce livre présente les résultats de discussions engagées et fructueuses dans un contexte a priori complexe parce que bilingue. Nous remercions particulièrement Nicole Brossard et Danielle Fournier qui, lors du colloque, nous ont honorés de leur présence et d'une soirée de lecture inoubliable. Leurs nombreux commentaires et réflexions ont enrichi la discussion et nous ont permis de mieux cerner le point de vue de celles qui écrivent et qui, depuis quatre décennies, s'engagent dans la cause féministe.

Si ce livre voit le jour, c'est grâce au soutien financier de la "Philologisch-Kulturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät" de l'Université d'Innsbruck, de la HYPO TIROL BANK et *last but not least* du Centre d'études canadiennes de l'Université d'Innsbruck et de sa directrice Prof. Ursula Mathis-Moser qui, en outre, a consenti à le publier dans sa collection "canadiana oenipontana". Nous tenons à adresser nos remerciements à tous nos sponsors.

Enfin, nous remercions également tous ceux qui ont contribué à la réussite du colloque – Melanie Fessler, Margarethe Karl-Goodwin, Pascal-Anne Lavallée, Ingrid Niederwieser et Julia Stiebellehner – et à la mise au point de la publication des actes – Marcel Laqueur, Corinna Assmann et Claudia Schwarz. Marcel et Corinna ont assumé un travail rédactionnel fort exigeant, et Marcel, s'étant familiarisé avec le programme de mise en page, s'est patiemment chargé des détails et problèmes de dernière minute qui, inévitablement, se présentent au cours de la réalisation d'un manuscrit.

Introduction: The Difference Space Makes

Caroline Rosenthal, University of Constance
Doris G. Eibl, University of Innsbruck

Situating or locating gender [...] requires both a cultural and a geographical imagination: it requires that we attend to particular contexts, and it problematizes conceptualizations of space as well as gender.

Liz Bondi/Joyce Davidson, "Troubling the Place of Gender", 325

Space has become a highly politicized concept in our time. The theoretical approaches of Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, or Edward Soja have emphasized that space is not materially given, but rather is the product of social practices, of power formations, and of ideologies. Space does not precede social relations and symbolic orders but results from them and in turn shapes and sustains them. Spatiality has thus become a key factor in cultural studies for analyzing difference as a society's and a nation's gender, race, or class patterns manifest themselves in the organization of spaces. The essays in this collection look at how gender differences – often in correlation with differences of race, class, age, or ethnicity – manifest themselves in space and in spatial representations. The authors examine, for example, how the dichotomy of nature versus culture has served to legitimize gender and sexual difference or how the opposition of private versus public space has sustained gender patterns in society. The essays not only look at how spatial dichotomies create and maintain differences, however, but also investigate the excess of such dichotomies. Various authors in this volume investigate liminal, hybrid, third, or supernatural spaces that not only lie in-between oppositions but that call into question oppositions such as woman-man, nature-culture, or private-public. Such counter-spaces make room for the configuration of new identities and for the strategic re-inscription of space. Many articles also turn to the body as an intimate space and contested terrain of gender and sexual identity. The body, as critics like Judith Butler or Elizabeth Grosz have pointed out, does not exist as a *tabula rasa* onto which gender as a cultural construct is inscribed, but the body always already has a history and is immersed in discursive contexts that construct it in certain ways. Within the discursive field of the sex/gender dichotomy, Butler claims for example, the body is *made to appear* as a biological or given entity in

order to naturalize and legitimize sexual identity. To the same extent, geographical places, the feminist geographer Doreen Massey states, always already have a history, and because they are populated by subjects whose identity has also arisen on the sutures of various discourses, Massey speaks of "the double articulation of place".

Differences do not simply become inscribed onto space but spaces and spatial practices play an active part in making difference. As Sherene Razack, among others, has shown, racial and spatial practices often coincide, for example when black youths are stopped in fancy shopping malls simply for being the wrong race in the wrong place. To the same extent slums or housing development projects do not simply account for and reflect differences but contribute to making and sustaining them. Gender and sexual identity is also made in spatial practices. Gender identity is the effect of repeated acts, Butler has claimed; it is created in performances that have to be continuously reenacted in order to stabilize an individual's gendered identity. The potential for change and subversion lies in slightly altered gender performances, in deferrals of the gendered act. Not only symbolic and social, but spatial practices – the way spaces are used by whom – are a powerful way to maintain identities. Spaces are gendered by the activities taking place in them, as Liz Bondi for instance has illustrated, and by changing such spatial activities, the underlying social norms for constructing gender, sex, and sexuality are also called into question.

Many essays in this collection focus on representations of urban space and on the multilingual, multicultural contact zone of the contemporary metropolis. It is here that comparative approaches between English Canadian and French Canadian texts become especially fruitful. The city has played a minor role in English Canadian fiction until very recently because English Canada wanted to set itself off from the colonial power of Great Britain as well as from the overwhelming cultural influence of the United States, and instead claimed the wilderness and the small town as original and generic Canadian places. In French Canadian fiction, by contrast, the metropolis has always loomed large in the cultural imaginary as a means to establish a Francophone identity within the Canadian nation. Since the 19th century, the city has played a major symbolic role in the literature of Québec, first as a negative and since the late 1960s increasingly as a positive space. Because the city was identified with the Anglophone protestant colonizer as opposed to the Francophone catholic colonized, urban space and its specific cultural patterns had at first been labelled dangerous for an authentic "French" identity and a catholic

faith. Only in the late 1960s, after the so-called Quiet Revolution, when a majority of Québec citizens distanced themselves from traditional discourses and called for a modern laical society was the city perceived as a living space, admitting plurality and offering equal opportunities to the Francophone population. More recently, the representations of urban space in Canada's two major literary traditions seem to converge in the face of globalization, increasing pauperization, and various facets of what the French philosopher Étienne Balibar calls "néo-racisme".

The first section of the volume, "Nature-Culture Paradigms: Pastoral and Urban Iconographies", consists of four essays that look at how the dichotomy of rural, natural, or wild spaces versus urban, cultured, and civilized spaces is used to construct and sustain gender, ethnic, or national differences. **Florian Freitag** takes an intra-national comparative approach by looking at the Canadian "farm novel", an umbrella term he coins for English-Canadian prairie novels and the French-Canadian "roman du terroir", both genres that deal with agrarian issues and use nature-culture paradigms for the constitution of a distinct cultural identity. He concentrates especially on Patrice Lacombe's *La terre paternelle* and on Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*. The texts are similar, Freitag claims, in how they deviate from the success narrative of U.S.-American farm novels and instead depict a struggle for cultural survival. They significantly differ, however, in the kind of cultural identity they try to preserve by respectively claiming or setting themselves off from "wild" spaces. In both texts, rural space plays a decisive role in staking out an ethnic identity. *La terre paternelle*, in Freitag's opinion, uses "a rigid system of coded spaces (wilderness, farm, and city) and place-based identities to define the rural space (*la terre*) as the unique site of French-Canadian cultural identity". The land, Freitag illustrates, serves as a means of securing a collective Francophone identity as much as it is used to fashion a male identity by creating images of the French-Canadian farmer, lumberman, and trapper. In *Roughing It in the Bush*, in contrast, rural or wild space is perceived as a threat to both gender and class identity. As a Victorian woman of the upper class, Moodie feels alienated and shocked by the rough ways of Canadian rural society and consequently clings to her Britishness and to her role of being a lady. What is at stake in *Roughing It*, Freitag points out, is the loss of an individual's cultural identity rather than, as in *La terre paternelle*, the constitution of a collective intra-national identity. Both novels, however, use the representation of dichotomous spaces and spatial practices to establish a self against an Other. In Freitag's reading, *La terre paternelle* renders rural space as "paternal soil" while in *Roughing It in the Bush* it appears as a "prison-house".

Andrea Oberhuber examines the question of dichotomous spaces in the novels of Québec writer Élise Turcotte. In her work, the clichéd juxtaposition of rural and urban spaces, as known from much of the Québec literary canon, is replaced by a tension between interior and exterior space, between the private home and the voracity of urban life. In *Le Bruit des choses vivantes* (1991) and *La Maison étrangère* (2002), the female protagonists, both representing "sujets surmodernes" as coined by Marc Augé, recuperate from separation, solitude, and aimless wandering through a radical, though only temporary, retreat into the sphere of homely intimacy (*Le Bruit des choses vivantes*) or the realm of the past (*La Maison étrangère*). By distancing themselves from the chaotic, aggressive, and oppressive outer space, the protagonists allow themselves to redefine their female and human identity and to realize modes of positive existence in an urban living space doomed to catastrophe and chaos. In their quest for mental and sentimental recovery maternity and writing reveal themselves as key-experiences: They re-root the female protagonist in a nourishing and reassuring matrix. Oberhuber shows how the exclusive moments of giving, loving, and remembrance in Turcotte's novels reevaluate the restricted space of everyday life and increase the space of personal experience while the endless and uncontrollable space outside tends to corner the individual and reduces its capacity to act.

Andrea Stolz focuses on the polarity of "wild" versus "civilized" spaces as an underlying structural paradigm in the novelistic work of Margaret Atwood. Stolz reads Atwood's novels as fictionalizations of spatial discourses, especially of Henri Lefebvre's dialectic triad of spatial practices (*l'espace perçu*), representations of space (*l'espace conçu*), and spaces of representation (*l'espace vécu*). Stolz not only relates Lefebvre's triad to Atwood's oeuvre but to the theoretical approaches of geographers like Rob Shields, David Harvey, or Edward Soja and to the work of literary and cultural critics such as Northrop Frye. Atwood's protagonists, Stolz maintains, travel back and forth through the three dimensions of what Edward Soja called perceived, conceived, and lived space in order to reconstruct their identities and relocate themselves in the present. Besides tracing the space-and-time journeys of Atwood's characters, Stolz looks at the function of dystopian and heterotopian spaces in her books as well as at the gendering of place. By investigating the social practices that produce space in everyday life, Atwood reflects and often subverts spatial divisions such as wilderness and city, private and public, self and other, woman and man.

Nora Tunkel in her essay analyzes rural and urban iconographies with respect to individual memory and to the construction of cultural difference in Jane Urquhart's recent novel *A Map of Glass* (2005). The book is set both in rural southern Ontario and in the city of Toronto and, in Tunkel's opinion, opposes rural landscapes of the past – of Canada's history of settlement for instance – to the metropolitan space of present day Toronto where the two main protagonists resolve their personal histories and haunting memories in long conversations. For Tunkel, the nature-culture paradigm in *A Map of Glass* thus links the dimensions of space and time in the construction of identity: "The dichotomous structures of local and rural versus cosmopolitan and urban spaces – which can also be extended to the binaries of gender and other constructions of difference – are tightly linked with individual human remembering as well as collective narratives of the past". Tunkel approaches Urquhart's novel as historical fiction or as a "fiction of the past", a term she prefers for its broader outlook on an array of contemporary fictions dealing with memories and the past. A key term in her approach to contemporary "fictions of the past" is the concept of "(trans)cultural imaginaries", which investigates not only processes and strategies of identity constructions, like studies of cultural memory do, but also reflects upon the "results and expressions of these processes". For Tunkel, the protagonists in Urquhart's novel are involved in a "complex process of re-telling the past" that involves "the crossing of multiple space and timeframes" and allows them to "succeed in levelling binaries and re-constructing their identities". The concept of the transcultural imaginary allows Tunkel to analyse the "continuously redefined mindscapes" in *A Map of Glass* "which challenge socially gridlocked spaces by re-telling and re-writing personal and communal his- and her-stories". Like Strolz, Tunkel hence investigates how fictional texts correlate the dimensions of time and space for re-writing their characters' gendered identities.

The second part, "Space and Difference: Gender-Ethnicity-Space", deals with questions of displacement and identity. The protagonists of the respective novels are all immigrants who try to claim a place for themselves in Canadian society. Their quests for belonging in the multicultural Canadian nation while longing for the places they left behind illustrate Doreen Massey's aforementioned concept of "double articulation". The characters in the analyzed novels make a place for themselves in urban Canada by reverting to epistemologies and mythologies that challenge Western discourses by calling into question the real and plausible. Such counter-discourses create spaces that allow the female protagonists to transcend racial, sexual, or ageist limitations. In her essay on spirit possession and the transformation of urban as well as personal space in Dionne Brand's short

story "Blossom, Priestess of Oya, Goddess of Winds, Storms, and Waterfalls", **Marlene Goldman** looks at the uncanny role that haunting plays in the social production of space. Brand, in Goldman's view, adds another dimension to urban space by representing the possessed female body, which, just like the rituals and spiritual traditions Brand depicts, has access to a profound knowledge which differs from and exceeds Western epistemological patterns. Goldman scrutinizes spirit possession for its transformational potential and shows how Blossom, the female protagonist in Brand's story, uses this potential to liberate herself from the dire conditions she is living in as a female immigrant worker from the Caribbean. By turning to spirituality rather than to medicine or psychiatry, Brand's protagonist opens up a space that lies beyond rational paradigms of explanation as well as beyond the oppressive patriarchal and racial structures Blossom suffered from in the urban space of Toronto. By turning into a medium for Oya, the Yoruba goddess of transformation, Blossom gains a space of empowerment and social respect.

Eva Gruber explores emotional and spatial notions of longing and belonging in Tessa McWatt's novel *Dragons Cry*, which correlates personal, corporeal space with spaces of the nation and the Diaspora. Told alternately from the perspective of Faye, a Canadian musician, and Simon, a geologist and cartographer, whose roots are in Barbados, the novel investigates the construction of cultural and of gendered spaces. *Dragons Cry* deals with the effects of displacement and of a diasporic existence on the individual. Both Simon and his brother David – who, as Gruber shows, acts as a figure of the third in the book, a figure that unites and simultaneously disturbs Faye and Simon's relationship – suffer from a physical and spiritual homelessness which they try to compensate by loving Faye. Their desire to make Faye their "home" fails due to culture and gender disparities. While Faye, who grew up in and around Toronto, cannot really understand Simon and David's uprootedness, Simon misses that his need for Faye creates a hollowness in her that makes them drift further apart. Mc Watt's novel links experiences of national displacement and of gender inscriptions to experiencing the body: Faye and Simon are frequently described as fragmented, as shrinking and expanding; and both try to transcend the boundaries of the corporeal in their need for a new identity. To belong means that a person can be placed, can be contained in a place both in spatial and corporeal terms, but characters in Mc Watt's novel are pulled out of places and their bodies by a longing for something else.

In his analysis of Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Suzette Mayr's *The Widows* **Markus Müller** concentrates on the aging female body which in both

novels figures as a place for the re-signification of an identity. Both texts deal with old immigrant women who are pushed to the margins in a multicultural society but who also make new spaces for themselves in liberating and rejuvenating acts of corporeality which transgress sex/gender as well as spatial boundaries. In Mayr's novel, for instance, three octogenarian women empower themselves by plunging down Niagara Falls, a deed which challenges the expectations of society regarding gender and age patterns and which also exceeds the alleged limitations of the aged female body. Goto's grandmother-protagonist transgresses social norms by giving in to her awakening sexuality which mythically and magically transforms her into a new person. The protagonists' bodies, Müller illustrates, are represented as vehicles for "liberating escapes into liminal and other terrains" in order to negotiate "racist, ageist, and sexist prejudices" and to reach "a better understanding of transcultural/national belonging". In Mayr's *The Widows*, the women's jump frees repressed memories and makes them uncover hidden and lost aspects of their pasts and personalities. They emerge changed and empowered to transcend the limitations of race, sex, or age as well as to make a place for themselves in Canada. In Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* the transformation of the protagonist Naoe goes even further, Müller argues, because her sexual awakening in a mushroom farm's "wet, dark, humming mushroom houses" not only rejuvenates Naoe but makes her transcend the limitations of the real by becoming reminiscent of mythical and legendary Japanese figures. The female characters in both novels find their places of belonging by exceeding normative social behaviour for which the body often figures as a "natural" sign.

Part three of this volume "In-Between: Transcultural, Translational, and Counter-Spaces" is concerned with the spaces in-between oppositions and dichotomies, with hybrid or third spaces created in processes of translation and transculturation. Those spaces, as the three authors in this section show, are often highly creative spaces for producing other identities. Based on the assumption that the way in which space and spatial relations are represented in literature both mirrors actual spatial practices and influences the production of space in a given society, **Doris G. Eibl's** contribution explores the dynamics of heterotopic spaces in Anne Hébert's novel *Les enfants du sabbat* (1975). Hébert meticulously places major symbolic spaces of the "imaginaire québécois" such as the forest, the village, the town, and the ecclesiastic sphere and plays them off against each other. An isolated cabin in the forest and an urban convent are staged as heterotopic spaces in the economic depression of the 1930s and the Second World War period, the cabin functioning as a heterotopia of illusion, the convent as a heterotopia of compensation. They

are heterotopias not only to the rural and urban communities but also to each other as they hint at their respective phantasms and hidden inherent antagonisms. Eibl notes that Hébert clearly shows how, by means of space, a system asserts its continuity and how, in the perpetual process of the production of space, gender roles and identities are sorted in order to maintain a certain power structure. All female characters (the witch, the mother, the daughter, the peasant woman, the whore, the nun) are exploited in one way or another and finally victimized for the sake of archaic patriarchal authorities such as the Good and the Bad, the Divine and the Satanic.

Jessica Gevers closely analyzes a film by the Chilean-Canadian filmmaker Marilù Mallet and places it in the larger context of cultural productions by Latinas living in Canada. Mallet's *Journal inachevé* (1982), Gevers argues, is a prime example of how Latina films have deconstructed spatial dichotomies such as home/exile, center/margin, public/private and North versus South America in order to transcend gender limitations and to render a distinctly feminist Latina perspective on the urban environment of Canada. Rather than remaining in the marginal spaces of being exiled and lost in Canada, these women claim and produce new places and actively participate in making Canadian space. Latina authors, as Gevers shows, have used their displacement in productive ways: Theoretical concepts and urban paradigms originally developed in Latin America have "migrated" to Canadian discourses and places and have been transformed into articulations of cultural difference within the Canadian nation state via cultural productions such as Mallet's film. By mixing genres, by employing various languages, and by rendering a split subject, the film opens up third spaces, Gevers purports, spaces that transcend the above mentioned dichotomies and transform experiences of migration, exile and Diaspora.

Elisabeth Tutschek's contribution addresses the notion of a "third space" in Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve* (1987) and in Gail Scott's *My Paris* (1999). Both texts create hybrid discourses with respect to gender, space, narrative, and language by blurring genre as well as sex and gender boundaries, by engaging in various processes of translation and transculturation, and by dealing with marginal and exiled spaces. While in *Le désert mauve*, Nicole Brossard transgresses genre boundaries by way of *fiction/théorie* and refashions language and the female subject via "écriture au féminin", Gail Scott in *My Paris* uses "the comma of translation", to make room for cultural hybridity, as Tutschek illustrates

with reference to Sherry Simon. Brossard and Scott both stress processes of translation, not its products, Tutschek argues: "Brossard's 'pseudotranslation' and Scott's 'comma of translation' are means to articulate an in-between space that combines the English- and French-speaking cultures in Canada". Both authors mirror the female subject's linguistic and cultural disunity in a fragmented linguistic and narrative style which in its ruptures opens up third spaces for re-signifying identity. While Brossard uses the spatial metaphor of "l'horizon" as an in-between space of translation, Gail Scott in her travelogue *My Paris* explores the construction of a transnational Québécois/e identity. Paris serves as a site of cultural difference, an Other, or a "third space" which offers new vantage points on Québec and Canada. For elucidating notions of "third space" as well as of cultural hybridity, Tutschek draws on theoretical approaches by Homi Bhabha, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Sherry Simon and furthermore contextualizes Brossard's and Scott's writing within the historical and socio-cultural context of Québec and in the metropolitan contact zone of Montréal.

The book's final part, "Public Women: Space, Sex, and Corporeality," turns to nomadic female subjects as well as to women who in their unruly spatial behaviour change public space. **Isabelle Boisclair's** contribution focuses on the question of how space, or more precisely the place of prostitional exchange, determines the relation between the prostitute and the client ("le prostitueur"). It explores the prostitute's relation to the place of prostitional exchange and analyzes the representation of its spatial dimensions in three recent Québec novels by women: Nelly Arcan's *Putain* (2001), Marie Lafortune's *Salon* (2004) and Roxane Nadeau's *Pute de rue* (2004). The specific relationship that the prostitutes in the novels maintain with their place of work clearly identifies the characters' status in the prostitional system and valorizes or devalorizes the prostitute. Thus, Cynthia, Arcan's first person narrator, who works for an escort agency and receives her clients in a studio rented by the agency, figures so to speak at the top of the prostitional pyramid, while Lafortune's character Anna, who "practices" in a massage salon, and Nadeau's Vicky, who walks the streets, reflect the inferiority of their working place on their bodies and bear it like a mark of Cain. Space thus makes an essential difference in the way in which prostitution is represented in literary discourse, and Boisclair underlines that one of the novels' major characteristics is the prostitute's spatial dispossession and her financial dependence which both curtail her self-determination. Interestingly enough, the status of each prostitute also depends on where in Montreal she prostitutes herself.

This hints at the fact that not only the mere material quality of the place of work (studio, massage salon, street, car etc.) but also its geography (Côte-des-Neiges, Rue Sherbrooke, Hochelaga-Maisonneuve) decides the prostitute's status.

Julia Breitbach looks at two recent novels by Torontonion writer Catherine Bush. *The Rules of Engagement* (2000) and *Claire's Head* (2004) both correlate the reformation of the female subject's body and mind with exploring and experiencing different places, Breitbach argues. Both female protagonists are driven by the desire to leave behind a troubled past and self by moving to new places, an undertaking that turns out to be futile because places are created by the people living in them who bring their own histories and articulations of self to the place. Arcadia Hearne, the main character in *The Rules of Engagement*, tries to leave behind her traumatic experiences in Toronto by exchanging it for the city of London while Claire Barber in *Claire's Head* travels through an array of different urban places in North America and Europe in order to escape the great physical pain caused by her migraines. Both women's psychological and physical boundaries are brittle and their urban quests map out an unstable emotional territory. Bush explores exchanges between the city and the female body in her novels because time and again urban space invades the personal space of the protagonists. Arcadia moves to London because she wants to repress her violent past in Toronto and believes that unlike history, place is neutral, untainted, and one-dimensional. The urban space of London, however, powerfully surfaces the repressed; it turns into a "palimpsest of loss" (*RoE* 294) as "beneath its streets, sites, and architecture, London is made to reveal its twin, Toronto", Breitbach illustrates. Arcadia's violent past occurred in places beyond and beneath civilized urban glamour, in the ravines of Toronto, and she recalls those experiences when she walks along the London canals, another residual urban place. These "wild places inside cities, the places that break cities open", as Bush described them in an interview, serve as non-urban heterotopian places, Breitbach claims, because these liminal spaces offer other places of subject formation. *Claire's Head* (2004), Breitbach shows, dissolves the opposition of body and mind as well as of subjective physical and urban space: "*Claire's Head* traces how a body in pain 'migrates' from place to place, how it interrelates with these places, and how this interrelation between tormented body and changing places is constructive of the protagonist's sense of self."

Caroline Rosenthal's contribution looks at the figure of the *flâneur* in Dionne Brand's latest novel *What We All Long For*. Set in the vibrant multicultural city

of Toronto, Brand's novel focuses on four youths of mixed ethnic origin in their early twenties who all try to find their place of belonging in the transient city. Brand not only shows how racial and spatial practices often coincide but how spaces become gendered by certain gender-coded activities. Two of her female protagonists, Tuyen, a lesbian avant-garde artist, and Carla, a bi-sexual bicycle courier, in particular, challenge such spatial divisions and change the urban space of Toronto and its underlying social structures in their spatial behaviour. Tuyen's artistic interest in the desires of the "happening city" and Carla's ferocious bike rides across Toronto offer new routes for constructing sexual and racial identity. They are, as Rosenthal shows, *flâneuses* who transgress spatial, textual, and sexual boundaries alike. Originally a literary figure of modernist texts, the *flâneur* was an observer of and at the same time a participant in the urban spectacle. As a sensitive artistic figure, he not only watched, but interpreted and represented the city and hence turned into an authoritative figure for reading the city. In recent decades, however, as Rosenthal claims, literary and cultural criticism on the city has recycled and rewritten the *flâneur*, using it as a vehicle for transcending the categories of gender, sex, and sexuality, as the unruly spatial behaviour of Brand's female characters shows.

Julie Spergel deals with *The Singing Fire*, a 2004 novel by Montreal writer Lilian Nattel set in London's East End at the fin-de-siècle. The novel touches upon a dark chapter in Jewish history by recounting the fate of the young Jewish girl Nehama, who, like many other girls at the time, was sold into prostitution by a Jewish mobster in London. By drawing on Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, Spergel shows how women in *The Singing Fire* challenge patriarchal systems through subtle subversion and gain a certain amount of control over their fates and identities. Through an act of female kindness, Nehama for instance manages to fade into a new identity as a seamstress and thereby becomes connected to a community of Jewish women who watch out for each other. The Jewish sweatshop, which Nehama ends up working in, is portrayed as a place of exploitation, on the one hand, but at the same time is shown to be a space of female solidarity and empowerment. In their buoyant celebrations of holidays such as the British Guy Fawkes Night or the Jewish Purim these women, according to Spergel, challenge patriarchal orders and produce their own spaces in London's East End at the end of the 19th century. While women in Nattel's novel do not rebel, Spergel concludes, they claim and inhabit different spaces which allow them to slightly alter the roles and fates offered to them by society.

I. Nature-Culture Paradigms:
Pastoral and Urban Iconographies

Ladies in the Bush and Paternal Soils: Gender and Space in Early Canadian Farm Novels

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1. Introduction

In contrast to "city fiction", "urban fiction", and the more general term of "rural fiction", "farm novels" may be defined as novels (1) whose main protagonists are farmers, (2) that are set on a farm, and (3) that also deal – to a certain extent at least – with agrarian or agricultural issues.¹ Within the context of Canadian literature, the term "farm novel" may be used as an umbrella term for English-Canadian prairie novels (such as those by Frederick Philipp Grove or Sinclair Ross) and the French-Canadian *roman du terroir* or *roman de la terre*. In Canada the genre of the farm novel emerged somewhat later than in the United States or in Western Europe;² two of the earliest and most interesting Canadian texts that might qualify as farm novels were published around the middle of the nineteenth century: 1846 saw the publication of Patrice Lacombe's *La terre paternelle*,³ and in 1852, 16 years after her sister's *The Backwoods of Canada*, Susanne Moodie published *Roughing It in the Bush, Or, Life in Canada*.⁴

Classifying *LTP* and *RI* as farm novels in the narrow sense of the term given above – that is, as *novels* – however, is somehow problematic: *LTP* has been categorized

¹ For a wider definition cf. Paul Vernois, *Le roman rustique de George Sand à Ramuz*, Paris 1962, 16; for a narrower definition cf. Roy W. Meyer, *The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century*, Lincoln 1966, 7-12.

² The beginnings of the American farm novel can be traced back to Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). Heinrich Zschokke's *Das Goldmachedorf* (1817) and Hans Casper Hirzel's *Die Wirtschaft eines philosophischen Bauers* (1774) mark the origins of the farm novel in Germany and Switzerland. Just as in Canada, however, the middle of the nineteenth century witnessed a new interest in farm-related writings in the United States and Western Europe, cf. Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home – Who'll Follow?* (1839; United States), Jeremias Gotthelf's *Der Bauernspiegel* (1837; Switzerland), Berthold Auerbach's *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten* (1843; Germany), or Balzac's fragment *Les paysans* (1844; France). Cf. Rudolf Zellweger, *Les débuts du roman rustique. Suisse – Allemagne – France. 1836-1856*, Paris 1941.

³ Henceforth referred to as *LTP*.

⁴ Henceforth referred to as *RI*.

by critics both as a novel and a nouvelle;⁵ and there have also been tendencies to see novelistic or romance characteristics in *RI*, chiefly by Carl Klinck, who analyzes the text as an apprenticeship novel,⁶ and Marian Fowler, who discusses the text as a sentimental romance.⁷ However, *RI* has also been classified as an autobiographical account,⁸ as a "collection of disconnected anecdotes"⁹, and as a "récit de la colonisation"¹⁰. To a certain extent, all these different points of view are tenable – *RI* contains poetry, sketches, elements of travel writing, autobiography, and fiction, thus defying any simple generic categorization. At best, it may be argued that the text constitutes a hybrid genre, for example a "geografictione" in the sense of Aritha van Herk.¹¹

What is more important here, however, is that both *LTP* and *RI* – be they novels or not – already display most of the characteristics which also determined later Canadian farm novels and may thus be considered paradigmatic texts or "prototypes" of farm novels. Just as later prairie novels, for example, the English-Canadian text focuses on settlers, whereas the French-Canadian text features a family that has been farming for several generations. And just as in later *romans de la terre*, the tone of *LTP* is explicitly didactic or moralisateur: Lacombe, at the end of the first chapter, quotes from Virgil's *Georgica*: "Heureux, oh! trop heureux les habitants des campagnes, s'ils connaissaient leur bonheur!"¹² – interestingly, the French author George Sand uses the very same quote at the end of the first chapter of her farm novel *La Mare au diable*, which was published, coincidentally,

⁵ Doris Eibl, "Die frankokanadische Kurzgeschichte", in: Konrad Groß et al. (eds), *Kanadische Literaturgeschichte*, Stuttgart 2005, 188.

⁶ Carl F. Klinck, "Literary Activity in the Canadas: 1812-1841", in: Carl F. Klinck (ed), *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*. Second Edition. Volume I, Toronto 1965, 158.

⁷ Marian Fowler, *The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada*, Toronto 1982, 106. Cf. Carl Ballstadt, "Editor's Introduction", in: Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush, Or, Life in Canada*. Carl Ballstadt (ed), Ottawa 1995, xli.

⁸ Sherrie A. Inness, "'An Act of Severe Duty': Emigration and Class Ideology in Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*", in: Rita S. Kranidis (ed), *Imperial Objects: Essays on Victorian Women's Emigration and the Unauthorized Imperial Experience*, New York 1997, 192.

⁹ Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Toronto 1970, 62.

¹⁰ Katherine A. Roberts, "Discours de la féminité dans 'The Backwoods of Canada' de Catharine Parr Traill et 'Roughing It in the Bush' de Susanna Moodie", in: *Tagence* 62 (2000), 37.

¹¹ Cf. Aritha van Herk, *Places Far from Ellesmere: A Geografictione*, Red Deer 1990.

¹² Patrice Lacombe, *La terre paternelle*, Montreal 1993, 30. All subsequent page numbers (*LTP*) refer to this edition. Cf. the original Latin verses: "O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, / agricolas" (*Georgica* II, 458-459).

in the very same year as *LTP*.¹³ At the end of his novel, through the voice of his main character, Lacombe again warns his readers not to quit agriculture and not to emigrate to the city:

Nous aimons à visiter quelquefois cette brave famille, et à entendre souvent au père Chauvin, que la plus grande folie que puisse faire un cultivateur, c'est de se donner à ses enfants, d'abandonner la culture, et d'emprunter aux usuriers. (*LTP* 81)

Ironically, leaving the countryside – or rather not even going there in the first place – is precisely what Susanna Moodie recommends to her genteel British readers at the end of *RI*:

If these sketches should prove the means of deterring one family from sinking their property, and shipwrecking all their hopes, by going to reside in the backwoods of Canada, I shall consider myself amply repaid for revealing the secrets of the prison-house, and feel that I have not toiled and suffered in the wilderness in vain.¹⁴

If the readers of the two texts ignore these pieces of advice (by leaving the paternal soil or by going into the "prison-house", respectively), they will not only experience physical hardship, Lacombe and Moodie argue, but, even worse, they will also experience a loss of cultural identity. Because this is what unites *LTP* and *RI* and simultaneously sets them apart from (prototypes of) American farm novels such as the "History of Andrew, the Hebridian" from Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782): In contrast to the American text, which tells an almost proverbial success story, both *LTP* and *RI* depict a struggle for (cultural) survival, a struggle in which the rural space plays a decisive role. What is at stake in the French-Canadian text is the survival of French or French-Canadian culture on the North American continent. The rural space – or more precisely "la terre paternelle", suggesting comfort, safety, and care – is defined as the unique site or the stronghold of this culture. Consequently, abandoning or losing *la terre* functions as a symbol of abandoning or losing one's French-Canadian identity. In *RI*, by contrast, it is precisely the rural space – the "prison-house", suggesting

¹³ Just as Lacombe, Sand translates the original Latin verses into French; unlike Lacombe, however, she marks them explicitly as a quote. Cf. George Sand, *La Mare au diable / François le Champi*, Paris 1962, 15.

¹⁴ Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush, Or, Life in Canada*, 515. Carl Ballstadt (ed), Ottawa 1995. All subsequent page numbers (*RI*) refer to this edition.

confinement and misery – and its demands on the immigrant gentleman or gentlewoman settler that threaten the class and gender identity of British genteel immigrants to the backwoods of Canada.

In the following, the struggle for cultural survival and the role of the rural space in this struggle in *LTP* and *RI* shall be examined in more detail.

2. *La terre paternelle*

LTP tells the story of Jean-Baptiste Chauvin, a French-Canadian farmer on the island of Montreal, his wife, his three children, and, of course, his *terre*. The text was first published in two journals (*La Minerve* and *L'Album littéraire et musical de la Revue canadienne*) in 1846 and appeared in book form in 1871.¹⁵ It may be considered a novelistic response to the various external as well as internal demographic and political forces that threatened the survival of French-Canadian cultural identity on the North American continent during the first half of the nineteenth century; namely, (1) the massive emigration of French-Canadian farmers to Canadian cities and the industrial centers of New England, (2) starting in the 1830s, a rising number of immigrants from Great Britain and Ireland to British North America (among them the Strickland sisters and their husbands), and finally (3) English-Canadian attempts at assimilating the French-Canadians (the Durham Report was published in 1839).

From the very beginning, *LTP* inextricably links French-Canadian cultural identity – a social "space" – to the figure of the farmer and a geographical space – *la terre*, or the rural space: In the first chapter, Lacombe painstakingly emphasizes the fact that Chauvin's farm has been handed down from father to son ever since Jean Chauvin took it up in 1670. In fact, the farm and the various Chauvins who owned it are introduced to the reader even before Jean-Baptiste or his family:

Parmi toutes les habitations des cultivateurs qui bordent l'île de Montréal, en cet endroit, une se fait remarquer par son bon état de culture, la propreté et la belle tenue de la maison et des divers bâtiments qui la composent. La famille qui était propriétaire de cette terre [...] appartenait à une des plus anciennes du pays. Jean Chauvin, sergent dans un des premiers régiments français envoyés en ce pays [...] en avait été le premier concessionnaire, le

¹⁵ Michel Biron et al. (eds), *Histoire de la littérature québécoise*, Montreal 2007, 131.

20 février 1670, comme on peut le constater par le terrier des seigneurs; puis il l'avait léguée à son fils Léonard; des mains de celui-ci, elle était passée par héritage à Gabriel Chauvin; [...] Enfin, Jean Baptiste Chauvin [...] en était propriétaire comme héritier de son père François. (*LTP* 28-29)

Hence, one may consider the farm the main protagonist of the novel – which, after all, is called "La terre paternelle" and not "Jean-Baptiste Chauvin". The latter is but one more in the long line of Chauvin patriarchs who owned this farm.¹⁶ His name – which alongside "Jack Canuck" for English Canadians, "Uncle Sam" for Americans, and "John Bull" for the English has often been used to designate (stereo)typical French Canadians, for example in Napoléon Aubin's journal *Le Fantastique* (1837-1849) or in Félix Leclerc's play *Qui est le père* (1977) – indeed indicates that – quite in contrast to Susanna Moodie – Chauvin is a type rather than an individual.

Yet Jean-Baptiste Chauvin and his family are different from their ancestors and, as Lacombe perhaps wishes to argue, in that way representative of the French Canadians of the 1830s and 1840s, in that they choose to explore the alternatives to farm life which are offered to them. These alternatives mainly consist of two lifestyles, which are again inextricably linked to two geographical spaces: The first of these two alternatives to the life of the sedentary farmer on his *terre* is represented by the trapper (the *coureur de bois* or the *voyageur*) and by the wilderness (*la forêt*). In chapter two of *LTP*, Jean-Baptiste's younger son, Charles, decides to leave the family farm in order to join some of his friends and become a *voyageur*. With the discovery of Romanticism in French Canada, the figure of the *voyageur* had become a staple of the French-Canadian imagination, and it has generally been identified as a genuinely French-Canadian lifestyle:

One glorified the culture of the farmers and défricheurs, and literary texts proudly celebrated the adventurous spirit of the pioneers and trappers ("coureurs de bois") – exotic figures to the French eye – as a distinctive characteristic of French-Canadian culture.¹⁷

Even in *LTP* the narrator notes that "la passion pour ces courses aventureuses (qui heureusement s'en vont diminuant de jour en jour) était alors comme une

¹⁶ Cf. The ending of Ringuet's *Trente arpents*: "à des hommes différents [...] une terre toujours la même [...]". (Ringuet, *Trente arpents*, Montreal 1991, 466).

¹⁷ Dorothee Scholl, "French-Canadian Literature under the Union Jack", in: Reingard M. Nischik (ed), *History of Literature in Canada: English-Canadian and French-Canadian*, Rochester, NY 2008.

tradition de famille" (*LTP* 35). However, in *LTP* – as already hinted at by the rather wishful than historically accurate remark in brackets in the above quote – and to a certain extent in the roman du terroir in general, the *voyageur* becomes a decidedly negative figure:

Après avoir consommé dans ces excursions lointaines la plus belle partie de leur jeunesse, pour le misérable salaire de 600 francs par an, [les voyageurs] revenaient au pays épuisés, vieillis avant le temps, ne rapportant avec eux que des vices grossiers contractés dans ces pays, et incapables de cultiver la terre ou de s'abandonner à quelque autre métier sédentaire profitable pour eux et utile à leurs concitoyens. (*LTP* 35)

Yet not only does the *voyageur* escape paternal authority to become a useless member of society, but more importantly, he also betrays the French-Canadian cause. For Charles, of course, hires himself out to the British North West Company ("la compagnie du Nord-Ouest", *LTP* 33), thus collaborating with the English and helping them to maintain their economic dominance over the French Canadians.

The second alternative to the life of the sedentary farmer on his *terre* is represented by the merchant and the city. In contrast to what might be expected, however, it is not Jean-Baptiste's other son, but Jean-Baptiste himself who, out of pride and greed, decides to quit agriculture in order to "risquer les profits toujours certains de l'agriculture contre les chances incertaines du commerce" (*LTP* 56). Interestingly, this second alternative, too, is in a way depicted as a betrayal of the French-Canadian cause, because trading, commerce, and greed have traditionally – and especially in the *roman du terroir*¹⁸ – been associated with Anglo-American capitalism. Needless to say, Chauvin's business fails, which forces him to sell his farm and move, together with the rest of his family, to the city, where they lead a miserable life in extreme poverty.

Hence, *LTP* establishes the system of deterministic geographies and place-based identities which would become so characteristic of later *romans du terroir*. Lacombe sets up a contrast between the farmer and *la terre*, an "espace original", in itself quintessentially French-Canadian, on the one hand, and the *voyageur* and

¹⁸ Cf. Klaus-Dieter Ertler's illuminating analysis of Claude-Henri Grignon's *Un homme et son péché* (1933): Klaus-Dieter Ertler, *Der frankokanadische Roman der dreissiger Jahre*, Tübingen 2000, 260-283.

the merchant, the wilderness and the city, two "fausses portes de sortie"¹⁹, which are both somehow linked to the English, on the other hand. The position of *LTP* and the French-Canadian farm novel in general within this system is clear enough – to put it in a simple way, "terre égale bonheur" and "ailleurs égale malheur."²⁰

However, the worst result of the collaboration with the English in the fur trade or the imitation of their lifestyle by going into commerce is neither the disintegration of the family nor a miserable life in the city, but the loss of the family farm, and thus the loss of the unique French-Canadian cultural identity: When fifteen years later, Charles returns from the woods to his native village, he finds "la terre paternelle" in the hands of somebody else – and not just anybody else, but an *Anglais*, who, significantly enough, cannot even speak proper French:

No, no, moi non connaître votre père, moi havoir acheté le farm de la sheriff.
(*LTP* 74)

The loss of the farm to an Anglophone can be seen here as a symbol for the ultimate defeat of the French-Canadian cultural community and the loss of its cultural identity. This loss is rendered even more tragical by the fact that the soil was "rightfully" owned by the Chauvin family ever since their coming to North America, as Lacombe has laboriously argued at the beginning of the novel (see above).

Hence, leaving the paternal soil, for example by emigrating to the city or into the wilderness of the woods, Lacombe emphasizes, leads to a life of misery. But it also inevitably leads to the invasion of the rural space by Anglo-Americans, which symbolically stands for cultural assimilation by Anglophones and the loss of French-Canadian culture.

LTP, just as later *romans du terroir*, thus "celebrates the rural environment as the site of tradition, 'true faith' (i.e. Catholicism), and identity (by which was meant both family and the Francophone social family [...])."²¹ Or as Lacombe again warns his readers at the end of the novel, resisting the temptations from outside, keeping

¹⁹ André Vanasse, "Introduction", in: Patrice Lacombe, *La terre paternelle*, Montreal 1993, 18.

²⁰ Mireille Servais-Maquoi, *Le roman de la terre au Québec*, Québec 1974, 30.

²¹ William H. New, "Terrien Romance, Terroir, and Roman de la Terre", in: William H. New (ed), *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, Toronto 2002, 1096.

the land, and thus, in a way, forming a garrison are the only means to assure the *bonheur* of the individual as well as the survival of the collective French-Canadian cultural identity. As Georges-Etienne Cartier put it in 1855, nine years after the publication of *LTP*: "Canadiens français, n'oublions pas que, si nous voulons assurer notre existence nationale, il faut nous cramponner à la terre."²²

Inextricably linked with this rigid and highly evaluative spatial system of *terre*, *forêt*, and *ville* is an equally rigid and evaluative system of place-based identities. In his novel, Lacombe establishes the farmer, the *voyageur*, and the country merchant as gender role models for French-Canadian males. The latter two, as has been shown, together with their corresponding geographical spaces (the wilderness and the city) are, of course, rejected.

The farmer and the *voyageur* would resurface again in later *romans du terroir*, with the farmer as the only truly acceptable male gender role, while the *voyageur* would remain an ambiguous figure.²³ In Louis Hemon's *Maria Chapdelaine* (1914), for example, Maria prefers the *voyageur* François Paradis to the farmer Eutrope Gagnon and to Lorenzo Surprenant, who wants to take her to an industrial town in the United States. However, the *voyageur* Paradis dies in the woods and Maria ultimately marries the farmer Gagnon. Félix-Antoine Savard's *Menaud, maître-draveur* (1937), which can be considered an homage to or a "paraphrase magistrale"²⁴ of *Maria Chapdelaine*, goes so far as elevating the woodsman – here in the shape of a *draveur*, a raftsman – to the rank of the main protagonist, even though he, too, collaborates with the English in the timber trade. Nevertheless, the woodsman's daughter Maria, just as Maria Chapdelaine, marries a sedentary farmer.

In addition, both *Maria Chapdelaine* and *Menaud, maître draveur* feature characters who in a way continue the figure of the country merchant in *LTP* – the emigrant, who wants to leave the paternal soil in order to live and work for and among the Anglophones, for example in the United States. With the gradual decline of the fur trade in the late nineteenth century, the *voyageur* would become less important

²² Joseph Tassé (ed), *Discours de Georges-Etienne Cartier*, Montreal 1893, 65.

²³ Although Lacombe clearly rejects the lifestyle of the trapper, it is the money the latter has earned from the North West Company that allows him to buy back the family farm and thus restore *la terre paternelle* to its "rightful" owners.

²⁴ Servais-Maquoi 1974, 72.

in French-Canadian farm novels: Neither Claude-Henri Grignon's *Un homme et son péché* (1933) nor Ringuet's *Trente arpents* (1938) feature *voyageurs* among their main characters. Simultaneously, however, the figure of the emigrant and the corresponding geographical spaces (the city and New England) would come to be featured even more prominently when the number of emigrants from French Canada rose in the early twentieth century – the last part of *Trente arpents*, for example, is entirely set in New England.

It is important to note that all of these figures – the farmer, the *voyageur*, the country merchant, and the emigrant – are, on the one hand, defined by their corresponding geographical spaces: "Who am I" and "where is here" are indeed the same question here. On the other hand, these figures can also be categorized according to their stance on the French-Canadian cause: As Northrop Frye noted, "[i]n a perilous enterprise one is either a fighter or a deserter."²⁵

3. *Roughing It in the Bush*

If Susanna Moodie can be associated with any geographical space, it is certainly England, and her stance on the English-Canadian cause, the British imperialist project, is fairly clear. The following are the first lines of the introduction to the 1852 edition of *RI*:

In most instances, emigration is a matter of necessity, not of choice; and this is more especially true of the emigration of persons of respectable connections, or of any station or position in the world. [...] Emigration may, indeed, generally be regarded as an act of severe duty, performed at the expense of personal enjoyment. (*RI* 3)

Susanna Moodie followed this call of duty, and she did so also in order to "reassert the system of authority that sanctioned such actions"²⁶, but there is no doubt that she does not, as she claims to do, leave it to her readers to draw their own conclusions from her picture of a life in the backwoods of Canada:

²⁵ Northrop Frye, "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*", in: Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*, Toronto 1971, 226.

²⁶ William H. New, "Tense/Present/Narrative: Reflections on English-Language Short Fiction in Canada", in: Arnold E. Davidson (ed), *Studies on Canadian Literature: Introductory and Critical Essays*, New York 1990, 35.

To the poor, industrious working man [life in the backwoods of Canada] presents many advantages; to the poor gentleman, *none!* (*RI* 514)²⁷

Thus, Susanna Moodie appears to be a perfect example of what, amongst others, Carol Fairbanks has identified as the (myth of the) reluctant female emigrant.²⁸ Note that Moodie, however, identifies class and not gender as the main source of her reservation about emigration to Canada: Indeed, throughout the text the fact that rural Canada is no place for English gentlemen and gentlewomen is repeated again and again by various persons from all classes – by English gentlemen themselves as well as by American squatters.

To further support her own conclusion, Moodie offers her readers a number of examples of poor and not so poor gentleman immigrant settlers who all failed in Canada; these are – in order of appearance – Tom Wilson (chapter 4), Brian, the still-hunter (chapter 11), Mr. Malcolm alias "the little stumpy man" (chapter 22), and Captain N--- (chapter 26). Not only do all these gentlemen settlers fail economically, but, as John Thurston notes, especially Tom, Brian, and Mr. Malcolm have all gone mad:

Tom, asked if he is going mad, replies, "I never was sane, that I know of" [...]. Brian, in another's words, is "as mad as a March hare!" [...] Malcolm asks Moodie "Don't you think me mad?"²⁹

Hence, Tom, Brian, and Mr. Malcolm provide yet another example of a deterministic geographical space: In rural Canada, a British gentleman – if he has not already been – will certainly go mad.

²⁷ Moodie's sister Catharine Parr Traill, although generally – and rightfully – considered more optimistic and less melodramatic than her sister, comes to the very same conclusion. In *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836), Parr Traill quotes a "naval officer of some rank in the service: "[Canada] is a good country for the honest, industrious artisan. It is a fine country for the poor labourer [...]. But it is a hard country for the poor gentleman, whose habits have rendered him unfit for manual labour" (Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada*, Toronto 1989, 117-118).

²⁸ Carol Fairbanks, *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction*, New Haven/London 1986, 5-8.

²⁹ John Thurston, *The Work of Words: The Writing of Susanna Strickland Moodie*, Montreal 1996, 148-149.

Susanna Moodie herself, during the eight years she spent in the backwoods of Canada, was more than once certainly about to go mad. In a way, she sadly fulfilled the prophecy of her sister Catharine Parr Traill, who in *The Backwood's of Canada* (1836) noted:

For persons of this description [wives and families accustomed to the daily enjoyment of every luxury that money could procure or fashion invent], Canada is the worst country in the world. And I would urge any one, so unfitted by habit and inclination, under no consideration to cross the Atlantic; for miserable, and poor, and wretched they will become.³⁰

Indeed, in most cases the study of the text *RI* has, to a certain extent at least, also involved a pathological study of its author. For example, Susanna Moodie – as well as Canada as a whole – were diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia by Margaret Atwood.³¹

Clearly, what is at stake in *RI* is not the survival of a collective cultural identity, as in *LTP*, but the cultural identity of an individual.³² Moodie's identity and thus her sanity strongly rely on the perception of herself as a British gentlewoman, even in Canada. As Carol Shields aptly put it: "Although Moodie never returned to England, in a sense she never left."³³ Entering a society that ignores or rejects class as a category and as a hierarchical principle threatens the very core of Moodie's self and causes a cultural shock, which in turn leads Moodie to cling even more persistently to her own values (i.e., those of the British genteel class), thus turning her into, in Frye's words, a "one-woman garrison".³⁴

Both Moodie's adherence to British values and the British class system as well as the absence of any such system in rural Canada are apparent right from the beginning of the text. While still on the ship that brought her to Canada, Moodie observes that the

³⁰ Parr Traill 1989, 147.

³¹ Atwood 1970, 62-63.

³² It may be argued that the French-Canadian *roman de la terre* generally emphasizes the collective (i.e. the French-Canadian cultural community) over the individual; cf. the decidedly negative portrait of Séraphin Poudrier in *Un homme et son péché* (1933).

³³ Carol Shields, *Susanna Moodie: Voice and Vision*, Ottawa 1977, 68.

³⁴ Frye 1971, 237.

sight of the Canadian shores had changed [some of the steerage passengers] into persons of great consequence. The poorest and the worst-dressed, the least-deserving and the most repulsive in mind and morals, exhibited most disgusting traits of self-importance. (RI 31)

Amused, she notes "[...] I left it to time and bitter experience to restore them to their sober senses" (RI 31). And when the ship has an accident, she tries to calm her panicking fellow passengers by telling them that "British sailors never leave women to perish" (RI 36).

However, when she goes on shore for the first time on Grosse Island (where the quarantine station is located and where a large number of recent immigrants is busy washing their clothes), it is Moodie who panics:

The people who covered the island appeared perfectly destitute of shame, or even of a sense of common decency. [...] Our passengers [...] no sooner set foot upon the island than they became infected by the same spirit of insubordination and misrule. (RI 21)

Moodie goes on to describe the immigrants on the island as "insolent," "noisy," "rebellious," "wild savages," and as "uneducated barbarians, [...] far behind the wild man in delicacy of feeling or natural courtesy" (RI 20-22). In contrast to class, gender is but of little importance here, for the female immigrants seem to be even "worse" than the men. In the words of the soldier who accompanies the Moodies on Grosse Island: "We could, perhaps, manage the men; but the women, sir! – oh, women! Oh, sir!" (RI 23).

In "Carnival and Violence: A Meditation"³⁵ Robert Kroetsch uses Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnival to characterize Moodie's rendering of the people on Grosse Island. Bakhtin notes:

The laws, prohibitions and restrictions which determine the system and order of normal, i.e. non-carnival life are for the period of carnival suspended.³⁶

³⁵ Robert Kroetsch, "Carnival and Violence: A Meditation", in: Robert Kroetsch, *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New*, Toronto et al. 1989, 95-107.

³⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, transl. by R.W. Rotsel, Ann Arbor 1973, 101.

And indeed, the soldier who accompanies the Moodies remarks:

[The immigrants] have no shame – are under no restraint [...], and they think they can speak and act as they please. (*RI* 22)

Hence, on Grosse Island, Moodie has entered a North American carnival; and she is shocked, not only because the immigrants are "perfectly destitute of shame" (*RI* 21), but also because class barriers seem to be completely ignored: According to Bakhtin, one of the most important features of carnival is the fact that "[a]ll *distance* between people is suspended and a special carnival category goes into effect – the *free, familiar contact among people*."³⁷ And indeed, Moodie quotes one of the immigrants as saying "Whurrah! my boys! [...] Shure we'll all be jintlemen!" (*RI* 23).

In contrast to Bakhtin's carnival, however, the North American carnival is not restricted in time – throughout *RI*, there are two more carnivalesque scenes, namely the charivari in chapter 12 and the logging bee in chapter 18. In each of these scenes, Susanna Moodie is confronted with what appears to her as a mass of people "gone wild"; and while Bakhtin asserts that a carnival is a "pageant without a stage and without a division into performers and spectators, there no spectators,"³⁸ Moodie remains just that – an irritated, incredulous, and shocked spectator.

It is interesting to see, however, what happens when Moodie is confronted not with a mass of people, but with individuals. Marian Fowler has noted that throughout *RI*, Susanna Moodie cries on no less than 23 occasions.³⁹ Yet when confronted with individual carnivalesque figures or with animals in situations that appear to her as carnivalesque, Moodie regularly laughs. She laughs, for example, when an American squatter, in a very unusual fashion, tries to "borrow" some whiskey from her (*RI* 89), or when a squatter supposes that she, too, swears when she is alone (*RI* 151); she laughs when she discovers a skunk in her log hut (*RI* 177), when her husband fights with a bear (*RI* 428), and when mice run over her in her bed (*RI*

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Bakhtin 1973, 100.

³⁹ Fowler 1982, 107.

178). These are all, as she herself terms it, "no laughing matter[s]" (*RI* 178), but still she cannot help laughing.

The question is, of course, how to interpret Moodie's laughter in these situations. On the one hand, especially when animals are involved, her laughter might be directed at herself: It expresses her utter disbelief at the fact that she, a British gentlewoman, finds herself in the middle of the Canadian backwoods with bears, mice, and skunks, thus showing that Moodie was somehow aware of the irony of the position of a gentlewoman settler. On the other hand, and especially when she interacts with squatters, Moodie does not seem to laugh at her own situation, but rather at what she thinks of as Canadian values and the Canadian way of life. Her laughter may be analyzed as a "counter-carnival" that ridicules the Canadian order, just as the North American carnival ridicules the order of the old world. Incidentally, Moodie's carnival is neither a "one-woman carnival" nor is she a "one-woman garrison," as she expects her British gentlemen and gentlewomen readers to join in her laughter.

Nevertheless, note that virtually all these situations make Moodie laugh "until [her] sides ached" (*RI* 178) and "until the tears ran down [her] cheeks" (*RI* 428). She laughs, but this laughter hurts, literally as well as metaphorically, because what she laughs at is precisely what threatens her identity as a British gentlewoman and, hence, her cultural survival.

4. Conclusion

(Early) Canadian farm novels may be regarded as studies on cultural survival: Both the British gentlewoman settler and the French-Canadian people struggle for their cultural survival in an environment that they perceive as hostile. The rural space – in the shape of the "prison-house" and the "paternal soil," respectively – plays a significant role in these struggles: Undermining male imperialist discourses (which generally supported emigration) in the one case⁴⁰ and English assimilationist discourses in the other case, *RI* and *LTP* construct the rural space as a threat to the individual cultural identity of a British gentlewoman immigrant and as the stronghold of the collective cultural identity of the French-Canadian

⁴⁰ Cf. Roberts 2000, 39-40.

people, respectively. And although both Moodie and Chauvin ultimately survived, this struggle would continue in later Canadian farm novels.

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Le gynécée urbain d'Élise Turcotte

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1. Espace public et non-lieux, intériorité et lieux symboliques

On le sait, le postmodernisme nous oblige à repenser la perte d'un centre fixe et de récits fondateurs, à reconsidérer les thèmes séculaires de la littérature, en particulier ceux de l'Histoire, de l'identité et de l'espace. Dans le prolongement de cette idée philosophique, les deux récits d'Élise Turcotte, poète et romancière québécoise, dont il sera question dans l'analyse qui suit – *Le Bruit des choses vivantes*¹ et *La Maison étrangère*² – sont révélateurs des transformations qui bouleversent la perception de l'espace depuis les années 1970. Sans vouloir faire *cadrer* Turcotte dans le courant postmoderniste ni l'y enfermer, car son écriture est trop singulière voire atypique,³ l'espace, son habitation par les protagonistes et l'identité féminine sont étroitement liés dans les deux romans. S'il est vrai que, comme le constate Marc Augé, notre époque se caractérise par la raréfaction des "lieux anthropologiques", soit des lieux relationnels, identitaires et historiques, dotés d'une géographie intime et permettant à l'être humain de se *reconnaître* dans son monde,⁴ l'espace du sujet "surmoderne", pour rester dans la terminologie augéienne, est tissé d'une panoplie de non-lieux,⁵ dont le corps lui-même peut faire partie. Aussi, face à l'absence grandissante d'un espace de la subjectivité, d'un

¹ Élise Turcotte, *Le Bruit des choses vivantes*, Montréal 1991.

² Élise Turcotte, *La Maison étrangère*, Montréal 2002.

³ Je suis en principe d'accord avec Pierre Nepveu qui affirme à propos du *Bruit des choses vivantes* que le roman d'Élise Turcotte n'est pas "porté sur les jeux postmodernes" et qu'il n'y a "pas d'autoréférence ici, aucun jeu sur la pluralité des voix narratives". Pierre Nepveu, *Lectures de lieux*, Montréal 2004, 216. J'ajouterais toutefois à cette lecture du premier récit turcottien que, dans *La Maison étrangère*, la romancière n'échappe pas aux enjeux du courant postmoderniste, notamment en ce qui concerne les références intertextuelles et le traitement de l'espace tant public que privé. Pour plus de détails, je renvoie le lecteur à l'article que j'ai consacré à ce roman à la première personne: Andrea Oberhuber, "La Maison étrangère d'Élise Turcotte", in: Klaus-Dieter Ertler/Gilles Dupuis (eds), *À la carte: le roman québécois contemporain (2000-2005)*, Frankfurt a.M. 2007, 427-451.

⁴ Marc Augé, *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Paris 1992, 57-59.

⁵ Dans le chapitre intitulé "Des lieux aux non-lieux", Augé définit le non-lieu comme le contraire d'une demeure, d'une résidence, d'un lieu au sens commun du terme. Augé 1992, 97-144.

côté, et de l'excès d'espaces transitoires, de l'autre côté, le sujet "surmoderne" se réfugie-t-il souvent dans la solitude et l'errance. La surmodernité conduit en vérité le sujet, toujours selon Marc Augé, vers "des expériences et des épreuves très nouvelles de solitude" se manifestant sous forme de "déplacements du regard", de "jeux d'images" et d' "évidements de la conscience".⁶ Pour ce qui est du sujet littéraire, c'est-à-dire les personnages de romans contemporains, ces hommes et femmes de papier, ils se sentent bousculés, selon Pierre Nepveu, dans un monde de "déplacements", de "croisements", de "traverses", de "passages", bref de multiples "entre-deux"; l'individu ne trouve que difficilement "son assise en soi-même et n'a pas de lieu propre".⁷ Reste comme dernier repaire l'intimité la plus stricte, le cocon familial ou le *chez soi*, au double sens du terme. C'est ce que la narration met en lumière dans les deux récits à l'étude: des sujets féminins désemparés – l'une, Albanie, mère monoparentale à la suite du départ du père de Maria; l'autre, Élisabeth, nouvellement célibataire après le départ de Jim. Confrontées à l'effritement de leurs anciennes valeurs éthiques et sociales, pour la plupart transmises de parents à enfants, les deux narratrices-protagonistes se créent des lieux de refuge, s'incorporent elles-mêmes au lieu traditionnel de la féminité, à savoir la maison. Que ce soit sous la forme plus concrète d'un gynécée urbain ou sous la forme plus imaginaire de lieux de mémoire littéraires et visuels, ces intérieurs réconfortent les sujets féminins et répondent à la nécessité d'une retraite sentimentale temporaire. Le lyrisme de l'écriture turcottienne rend palpable, dans les deux récits pourtant très différents, une nette tendance à l'introspection et au rétrécissement de l'espace de vie, conditions *sine qua non* du retour sur les origines d'un malheur généralisé mais indéfini, sur les lieux d'enfance. Dans ce jeu spéculaire entre le soi et l'Autre, entre le dedans et le dehors, entre l'ombre et la lumière, les sujets finiront par se révéler à eux-mêmes.

2. Le gynécée mère-fille dans *Le Bruit des choses vivantes*

Avec *Le Bruit des choses vivantes*, "roman familial"⁸ d'une mère monoparentale et de sa fille en quête d'un enracinement personnel et social, Turcotte s'est affirmée en 1991, sur la scène québécoise, comme une romancière fort originale. Dans ce

⁶ Augé 1992, 117.

⁷ Nepveu 2004, 209.

⁸ Je renvoie bien évidemment au concept freudien développé en 1909 dans "Le roman familial des névrosés".

roman de l'espace psychique en métamorphose par où sont filtrés les événements extérieurs, la maison constitue la toile de fond devant laquelle le lecteur prend connaissance de la relation symbiotique entre la bibliothécaire Albanie et sa fille Maria. C'est au sein même de ce huis clos qu'il apprend à partager, avec les deux protagonistes, les "choses vivantes" à travers leur bruissement quotidien. Que ce soit sur le lieu de travail d'Albanie, à la garderie de Maria, dans la maison voisine où habite le petit Félix ou chez la mère et la fille qui rêvent d'un voyage en Alaska, dans le froid et le silence des grands espaces septentrionaux, les aléas de la vie de tous les jours acquièrent une grande valeur en raison même de leur caractère anodin. La maison est ici un point d'ancrage et d'enracinement pour les deux personnages principaux au même titre que réceptacle du monde médiatique s'imposant de l'extérieur et menaçant l'équilibre frêle des personnages féminins. L'événement clé du *Bruit des choses vivantes*, à savoir le départ du père de Maria, a lieu hors du temps de la narration, mais il influe sur la tonalité nostalgique dont est empreint le récit de Turcotte. La rupture renvoie la narratrice à sa demeure, à l'espace-temps qu'il s'agit d'aménager autrement et de reconstruire avec l'aide de Maria. L'expérience de la rupture, outre le fait d'actualiser le traumatisme de l'abandon et de la séparation, donnera lieu à une redéfinition identitaire: cet auto-engendrement à partir d'une nouvelle donne se fera loin des bruits de la ville, loin du regard extérieur, au sein de deux espaces bien délimités, soit la cuisine, lieu québécois traditionnel s'il en est un, et la chambre de la mère. La nouvelle identité sera construite sur la base de l'image, des images, et de l'écriture, bref sur l'imaginaire. Car, en réalité, *Le Bruit des choses vivantes* est traversé par la brûlante question du "comment vivre".⁹ Ce comment être-au-monde, le comment vivre *dans* le monde est décliné de façon fragmentaire, sous forme d'éternels questionnements de la part d'Albanie, non seulement en ce qui concerne son passé personnel et sa vie au moment présent, mais aussi l'Histoire du monde qui se déroule comme à l'extérieur de sa vie.¹⁰ C'est dans cette logique de dissociation entre le dedans et le dehors, entre l'intime et le social que la narratrice opte pour une attitude protectrice vis-à-vis de Maria, symbole de l'univers de l'enfance.

⁹ Turcotte 1991, 52.

¹⁰ Ayant déjà consacré un article à la problématique de l'H/histoire et de ses enjeux identitaires pour les protagonistes dans *Le Bruit des choses vivantes* et *La Maison étrangère*, je ne reviens plus sur les liens intimes qu'entretient en principe l'espace avec l'histoire personnelle, donc subjective et intime, et l'histoire collective. Voir à ce propos, Andrea Oberhuber, "Au nom de la mère, du père et de Hildegarde: des histoires de filles et de filiation chez Élise Turcotte", in: Lucie Hotte (ed), *(Se) raconter des histoires. Histoires et histoires dans les littératures francophones du Canada*, Sudbury (à paraître).

Chaque moment passé avec sa fille devient pour Albanie un instant privilégié; Maria est son espace récréatif par excellence, son îlot, son porte-bonheur. C'est parce que le monde extérieur, hors l'univers de l'enfance, ne semble plus vraiment exister que la mère est simultanément en proie à la crainte de ne pas profiter suffisamment du présent et de passer à côté d'un élément essentiel de la vie: "Depuis quatre ans, cette petite fille emplît l'air de ses mots, de sa voix, de sa présence qui éclate partout comme des feux d'artifice. Depuis quatre ans, je la regarde vivre".¹¹ Si les moments de bonheur correspondent sans conteste à l'enfance, les états d'inquiétude et d'étrangeté au monde appartiennent à l'univers des adultes. La relation fusionnelle entre la mère et la fille qui, vue et jugée de l'extérieur, pourrait paraître problématique, évolue au fil de la narration. Au fur et à mesure que la fille grandit et commence à devenir une entité plus autonome, les deux identités se dessinent de plus en plus clairement, tout comme diminue au même rythme la hantise de la perte chez la narratrice. Dès lors, l'horizon d'Albanie s'élargit; dès lors, l'espace de la narration s'ouvre non seulement sur les événements extérieurs mais également sur de nouvelles personnes dans l'entourage des deux filles: il s'agit d'abord du petit Félix délaissé par ses parents, ensuite d'Agnès réfugiée dans une vie solitaire, et finalement de Pierre, travailleur social et futur compagnon, qui sert de pont entre l'extérieur et l'intérieur, entre l'amour maternel et l'amour "intime".

L'ouverture à l'entourage immédiat puis au monde semble mettre fin à la nécessité de se protéger d'une "vie urbaine contemporaine, avec sa parade de déterminismes sociaux que sont la déshérence du couple, la séparation entre l'être et le travail, l'enfance cloîtrée dans la dépression parentale",¹² observe très justement Daniel Laforest. Le gynécée urbain, construit au milieu d'une vie tumultueuse et entretenu soigneusement par la mère et la fille, est d'une durée limitée. À la fin du récit, Albanie et Maria réalisent leur projet de voyage dans le grand Nord, lieu de rêve et, surtout, espace de tous les possibles parce que, au fond, ce paysage de glace et de silence est hors-territoire et hors-temps. "Nous allons entrer dans notre rêve d'une année, puis nous en sortirons. Plus tard, nous entrerons peut-être dans un autre rêve et, alors, l'espace s'agrandira dans notre

¹¹ Ibid, 184.

¹² Daniel Laforest, "Du poème au romanesque. L'espace problématique de l'image dans l'œuvre d'Élise Turcotte", in: *Voix et images* (dossier "Élise Turcotte" préparé par Denise Brassard) 31,3 (printemps 2006), 70.

corps",¹³ note la narratrice prise d'un élan prospectif. La maison aura servi de transit, donnant à la mère et à la fille refuge et leur accordant un temps de repos avant qu'elles ne s'orientent vers un nouvel ailleurs.

3. L'intimité sauvée des eaux dans *La Maison étrangère*

Il se trouve que l'incident qui engendre la narration dans *La Maison étrangère* soit également une rupture amoureuse. Si cette rupture suscite bien le long travail de deuil qui lui est propre, la séparation de Jim amplifie chez Élisabeth le sentiment de désorientation, de déséquilibre physique et psychologique, d'un glissement vers le bas. En même temps s'accélère un processus de dégradation déjà en cours que, d'entrée de jeu, la narratrice-protagoniste semble constater froidement, comme de l'extérieur: "Mon histoire ne prend pas sa source dans la rupture. Au contraire, comme un nœud devenu trop lâche, elle a seulement continué à se défaire."¹⁴ Pourtant, malgré cette apparente indifférence, Élisabeth erre d'un lieu clos à un autre ne retrouvant nulle part ses repères: ni dans son appartement, dont elle repeint les murs du bureau en vert foncé afin d'y supprimer l'ancienne clarté, ou dans la maison de la bibliothécaire Lorraine, ni dans la chambre du père, qui loge dans une maison de retraite, ou à la bibliothèque universitaire, lieu de travail où la narratrice étudie les manuscrits anciens. La perte de l'objet de l'amour s'incarne différemment à travers ces lieux privés et publics; mais ils sont tous chargés de signification pour Élisabeth qui ne cesse de chercher dans le passé le sens profond lui permettant de comprendre enfin son désarroi présent. Les lieux et aussi certains objets sont hantés par des fantômes appartenant à différentes strates du passé. De ces lieux redimensionnés par le souvenir, il y a d'abord l'appartement vide d'Élisabeth, qui, à travers de nombreux objets, conserve la trace de la présence de Jim. Il y a ensuite l'intérieur du bureau, espace de recherche sur le désir amoureux au Moyen Âge – lieu par ailleurs décoré de miroirs, gages d'amour offerts par Jim –, sans oublier le lit des deux ex-amants. Outre ces lieux anthropologiques, pour reprendre le terme d'Augé, le lecteur fait connaissance de la chambre d'hospice où s'est enterré prématurément le père d'Élisabeth après la mort de son épouse. Cet espace dénué de tout objet, meuble, vêtement ou trace du couple symbolise le vide en même temps qu'il signifie une

¹³ Turcotte 1991, 224.

¹⁴ Turcotte 2002, 11.

mise en présence de la disparition, plus précisément du passé familial de la narratrice prise entre une mère catholique, très croyante et moralement sévère, et un père porté plutôt sur les plaisirs de la vie. Finalement, le lecteur pénètre dans la bibliothèque, espace fermé sur le monde extérieur: avec ses textes et manuscrits, ce lieu de recherche et de lecture devient pour Élisabeth une sorte d'abri, marquant immanquablement un temps d'arrêt dans son errance. Et ce lieu-abri de livres est aussi à l'origine de la rencontre entre la chercheuse Élisabeth et la bibliothécaire Lorraine, aux prises avec de graves troubles d'anxiété qui deviendra une sorte d'*alter ego* de la narratrice. Face à cette myriade d'espaces et de sujets en tous genres qui les occupent, face à la solitude des êtres humains et à la maladie mentale de Lorraine, la narratrice se rend à l'évidence: "J'étais redevenue moi-même. Une étrangère. Ce n'est pas ce que je voulais. Mais j'étais étrangère."¹⁵ Étrangère à elle-même et aux autres, Élisabeth leur demeure toutefois attachée, par la présence ressentie de leur absence. Une présence paradoxale qui hante d'ailleurs les lieux de *La Maison étrangère* et qui ont en particulier de se répondre à distance, faisant écho au corps désincarné d'Élisabeth.

Dans un jeu de correspondances entre lieux et personnes qui les habitent, entre individus et objets symboliques,¹⁶ les espaces intérieurs accentuent la scission au monde d'Élisabeth et l'y rattachent en même temps comme un lien invisible, comme une seconde peau. Ne pas leur appartenir devient ne pas s'appartenir. Élisabeth se sent étrangère à elle-même, mais surtout à son corps qui ne redeviendra lieu d'échange(s) qu'au bout du voyage d'introspection. Durant de longs passages, la narratrice se complaît dans le divorce entre son idéal courtois et le réel d'un monde contemporain inhospitalier. Plonger dans le silence afin de mieux le rompre, chasser les fantômes qui viennent la hanter jour et nuit, assembler les morceaux du puzzle d'une tranche de vie passée et s'en débarrasser pour céder la place à une nouvelle vie, combler le vide et s'investir dans de nouveaux échanges interpersonnels, avoir prise sur le réel par le toucher – c'est ce qui mettra fin à l'étrangeté du corps d'Élisabeth et, par conséquent, à son inquiétante étrangeté au monde.

¹⁵ Turcotte 2002, 79.

¹⁶ Dans son compte rendu de *La Maison étrangère*, Michel Biron parle d'un "symbolisme *soft*" à travers lequel est recréé l'univers médiéval avec son système de correspondances et sa pensée cosmogonique des liens qui existeraient entre le macrocosme et le microcosme: "Le symbolisme *soft*", in: *Voix et images* 28,2 (hiver 2003), 167-169.

4. Espace-temps de la commémoration: l'écriture comme lieu de récréation et de recréation

Dans les deux romans, le retrait du monde est propice à l'écriture ou, tout court, à la création. Espace-temps de la réminiscence, l'écriture et l'image permettent en effet aux sujets féminins de faire abstraction du chaos du monde extérieur et de relier le passé au présent. Écrire et (se) raconter des histoires, faire des photos et coller des images dans un album constituent des moyens de reconnaissance de soi, d'abord en tant que personnages d'une mythologie familiale et d'un récit sociétal sur lesquels on peut intervenir, puis comme actants d'une vie aux contours nouveaux.

Ainsi, dans *Le Bruit des choses vivantes*, la "petite" histoire d'Albanie et de Maria, construite de mots, de phrases et d'images propres à leur gynécée urbain, tente d'ériger une digue contre "la marée envahissante du Tout historique",¹⁷ de ce "grand récit" dont il paraît *a priori* impossible de saisir le sens. L'Histoire du monde est ainsi radicalement séparée de l'être au monde d'Albanie. Aux images télévisuelles, menaçantes et insupportables, arrivant d'un monde extérieur directement dans le cocon familial et perçues par la narratrice comme autant de drames (ouragan, tremblement de terre, entre autres catastrophes) s'opposent des images positives. D'origine mémorielle ou fabriquées de toutes pièces par la mère et la fille, ces images fixent le présent et combattent l'oubli. Les souvenirs qu'Albanie grave dans sa mémoire, les citations collées sur le réfrigérateur, les photos et les vidéos qui figent un instant de leur existence sont autant de façons de lutter contre la perte des moments de bonheur. Préoccupée par l'ancrage des souvenirs dans sa mémoire, Albanie se met à créer un album de photos prises pendant les moments importants de sa vie avec Maria, comme par exemple lors de la fête d'anniversaire de la petite fille. Mais à côté de cet album contenant de vrais clichés photographiques, la mère constitue dans sa tête une sorte de musée imaginaire où elle tente de rassembler ce que l'on peut appeler des images mémorielles, des images-souvenirs qui s'imprègnent dans sa mémoire maternelle. Car il s'agit pour elle de vaincre l'oubli, de pouvoir compter sur une mémoire infaillible que le passage du temps ne peut déformer ou transformer. Le moyen ultime par lequel Albanie parvient à retenir les souvenirs, à retracer sa vie avec Maria, à laisser quelques signes visibles, est l'écriture. Albanie connaît

¹⁷ Laforest 2006, 68.

le pouvoir des mots et elle cite de nombreux extraits tirés des romans qu'elle classe à la bibliothèque pour illustrer un instant important de sa vie. À plusieurs reprises, elle place une phrase sur la porte du frigo, tout comme elle rédige avec Maria des listes et des cahiers où la mère et la fille se racontent leurs rêves, où elles planifient avec assiduité et passion leur voyage au pôle Nord. Dans le choix des phrases à noter, Albanie s'inspire des livres qu'elle range à la bibliothèque: "J'ouvre le livre de Joyce Carol et je lis la première phrase que je place le soir sur la porte du frigidaire à côté d'une recette de gâteau pour la Saint-Valentin. La phrase peut dire n'importe quoi, du moment qu'elle est comme un grand désert blanc offert devant moi."¹⁸ À cette construction d'une mémoire scripturaire s'ajoute une autre stratégie visant à pallier les failles de la mémoire, en faisant appel à des supports visuels. En effet, Albanie comble les lacunes possibles avec des images photographiques.¹⁹ En somme, grâce à l'écriture et aux médias (audio) visuels, Albanie et Maria se réinventent une vie à deux, marquée par des instants de bonheur de plus en plus nombreux. Grâce aux mots et aux images, le deuil de la perte peut faire son chemin; le fait d'écrire et de rassembler des images permet à la narratrice et à sa fille de réintégrer le monde des êtres vivants!

Confrontée au vide, à l'apogée de son sentiment d'étrangeté au monde et à son corps vieillissant, la narratrice de *La Maison étrangère* décide de commencer la rédaction du *Livre d'heures d'Élisabeth*, synonyme d'un retour aux sources. Fidèle à une pratique d'écriture médiévale, en lisant, en relevant par écrit certaines phrases, en écrivant elle-même sur les secrets de la vie et de la mort, de Jim et de l'amour, de l'âme et du corps, mais surtout en lisant à voix haute ces passages, Élisabeth se rapproche davantage de son projet véritable. Nourrie de la spiritualité de Hildegarde de Bingen, la protagoniste fait dialoguer le passé et le présent, le sensible et le physique, l'en-deçà et l'au-delà. Elle finira même, sous l'emprise d'une corporéité chargée positivement, par détruire tout son travail de recherche, par effacer dans les fichiers de l'ordinateur toutes les traces de ses lectures antérieures, autrement dit d'une quête de sens qui aurait été à l'origine du sentiment de bonheur et d'accomplissement. Dans ce récit enchâssé dans le récit

¹⁸ Turcotte 1991, 97.

¹⁹ Voir à ce propos l'excellente étude de Corinne Larochelle, "Lire l'image: *Le bruit des choses vivantes* d'Élise Turcotte", in: *Voix et images* 23,3 (printemps 1998), 544-557. Ajoutons à l'importance des images photographiques que, plus tard, comme si l'image "statique" n'était pas suffisante, avec l'aide de son amie Jeanne, Albanie a recours à la vidéo maison afin d'enregistrer le son et le mouvement.

principal, la narratrice-auteure s'adonne à la remémoration de ce qu'elle appelle le "poids du bonheur"²⁰ de sa relation amoureuse avec Jim, alors que, à l'extérieur de cette bulle d'écriture, le "vaste monde continu[e] à mourir".²¹ Nul ne s'étonnera que ce projet d'écriture mémorielle prenne forme à l'intérieur des quatre murs du bureau d'Élisabeth, pièce témoin à la fois de ses recherches doctorales sur l'amour courtois et de son passé érotique avec Jim. Nul autre lieu possible pour se livrer à l'introspection, pour se recueillir, se laisser envahir par les spectres du passé avant de les confier au flux de l'eau, autrement dit à l'oubli. Dans le bureau d'Élisabeth, symbole auparavant d'une certaine exterritorialité et de la séparation du réel, l'écriture déploie son pouvoir de convoquer les êtres absents auxquels la narratrice est restée attachée malgré sa double étrangeté. Dans un jeu de miroir entre lieux de mémoire et êtres fantomatiques, entre souvenir et réalité, la scission entre la narratrice et autrui se fait de moins en moins douloureuse. Par le truchement de l'écriture, Élisabeth réussit à se reconnecter à son corps en métamorphose, à mettre des mots sur l'absence de Jim, de sa mère morte et aussi de son père qui est sur le point de partir pour la Suède. L'écriture conserve ainsi, par le biais du souvenir spectral, les traces de ceux qui ne partagent plus la vie d'Élisabeth, d'une autre époque et d'une perception autre du monde. Ultimement, elle est, dans les longs moments de solitude et de *réflexion*, tributaire d'une nouvelle identité en émergence: une identité féminine *et* humaine pleinement assumée.

5. Conclusion

Plusieurs critiques littéraires, dont Pierre Nepveu, ont constaté que le roman québécois de la fin du millénaire réagissait au désordre du monde contemporain par une forte propension à l'intimité peu bruyante et à la subjectivité souvent fragile et rêveuse, révélant sur le plan des thèmes aussi bien que sur le plan esthétique une modestie qui cherche à "aménager le quotidien et à y créer des points de résistance, des rituels d'habitation ou d'évasion"²² plutôt qu'à refaire le monde. La fin des grands récits, coupant court à l'imagination romanesque des décennies précédentes, se manifeste dans *Le Bruit des choses vivantes* et dans *La Maison*

²⁰ Turcotte 2002, 102.

²¹ Ibid, 103.

²² Nepveu 2004, 212.

étrangère sous la forme d'un rétrécissement du social en faveur de l'intime et de l'individuel. Au-delà des lieux communs, la narration met en scène des sujets féminins "casaniers", en quête d'un espace qui leur soit propre, récusant l'extérieur de la maison comme un espace de perdition à proscrire avant de réintégrer la vie sociale, le présent et le monde des vivants.

Cette nouvelle subjectivité que nous donne à lire Élise Turcotte prend ses racines dans un être-là bien féminin. Élisabeth, comme Albanie auparavant, trouve dans un enchantement apaisé sa manière personnelle d'habiter le monde et d'intervenir sur la vie d'autrui. L'intérieur investi par les deux narratrices donne préséance aux valeurs intimes, domestiques par rapport à la vie extérieure, peu contrôlable. Cette préséance privilégie indubitablement l'espace privé en accordant aux lieux publics – bibliothèque, garderie, école, bar ou musée – le seul rôle de décor urbain. Néanmoins, à la fin du repli sur soi, réconciliées avec elles-mêmes, les protagonistes turcottiennes parviennent à construire des rapports d'intersubjectivité basés sur la confiance, la conscience d'une responsabilité envers soi et la sympathie, au sens premier du mot, de l'autre. Voilà qui peut surprendre le lecteur d'aujourd'hui, à l'ère du soupçon et de l'ironie postmoderne: une auteure, poète de renom²³ et romancière en train de bâtir un imaginaire fort singulier, qui semble vouloir prôner certaines valeurs dites "humanistes"... sans paraître pour autant "vieux jeu".

²³ Il suffit de penser aux nombreux recueils de poésie, comme par exemple *La Terre est ici*, *La Voix de Carla* ou *Sombre ménagerie*, s'étant mérités des prix littéraires prestigieux. On lira avec intérêt l'analyse que propose François Paré de la poésie turcottiennes: "Pluralité et convergence dans la poésie d'Élise Turcotte", in: *Voix et images* 31,3 (printemps 2006), 35-45.

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Spatial Practices, Representations of Space, and Spaces of Representation in Margaret Atwood's Novels

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"Perhaps [...] the key question about space and place is not what they are, but what they do."¹

"We produce literature not to re-create physical reality in our image but to invent fictional realities/fictional versions of a reality as we imagine it and as we want it to be."²

1. Introduction

Toronto-based author and literary icon Margaret Atwood spent a considerable amount of her upbringing in the Canadian wilderness. The stark contrast between rural and urban space she experienced when growing up is a dichotomous feature in her fiction, which lends itself well to show how Atwood deconstructs the seeming polarization between pastoral and urban space, wilderness and city life, private and public, self and other, woman and man. In this paper, however, I want to look at Atwood's novels³ as fictionalizations of a theoretical discourse on (dimensions of) space in order to show how lived, remembered, and imagined experiences of space are interrelated; they condition and overlay each other and form, according to Henri Lefebvre, a dialectical triad⁴ (or a triadic dialectic). Lefebvre's perceived space, conceived space, and lived space condition, complement, and extend on each other and are thus the formants of a space defined as the outcome of a

¹ Phil Hubbard, "Space/Place", in: David Atkinson et al. (eds), *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, London/New York 2005, 47.

² Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, 1963, Toronto 1993.

³ Atwood's novels are: *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Life Before Man* (1979), *Bodily Harm* (1981), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Penelopiad* (2005), and *God's Gardeners* (forthcoming in September 2009).

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, transl. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford 1991, 33. If not stated otherwise, all subsequent references are to this translation.

dynamic and continuous process. Traveling through – and deliberately back and forth – these three dimensions of space, Atwood's protagonists reconstruct their identities to relocate themselves in the present. In doing so, they implicitly reflect on space as a dialectical triad. I will trace their journeys and look at the function of heterotopias in her novels – which exemplify and illuminate Lefebvre's dialectical triad and show the subversive potential of literature that creates an imagined literary space. More than creating a sense of place and constructing a sense of identity, Atwood's novels show how difficult it is to share real spaces, when it is impossible to share imaginary ones.

With their detailed naming and realistic depiction of districts, streets, and buildings, Atwood's Toronto novels⁵ are part of an emerging urban discourse in Anglophone Canadian literature – a discourse, which only started in the latter part of the 20th century. 36 years ago Atwood claimed that Canada was "an unknown territory for the people who live in it [...] I'm talking about Canada as a state of mind, as the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It's that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost".⁶ The characters we encounter in Atwood's Toronto novels have grown up in Toronto. Atwood's Toronto is presented through the eyes of her women characters, who depict and also value the presence of pastoral settings within the city, i.e. the city's parks,⁷ Toronto Island, the city's ravines,⁸ and its trees. In her analysis of "Home and Nation in Margaret Atwood's Later Fiction"⁹ Eleonora Rao shows how even in Atwood's more recent novels her characters

⁵ *The Edible Woman, Lady Oracle, Life before Man, Cat's Eye, The Robber Bride, Alias Grace, and The Blind Assassin.*

⁶ Margaret Atwood, *Survival*, Toronto 1972, 18. In *Survival* Atwood also emphasizes that "literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. For the members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive" (19).

⁷ Characters take momentary escapes from society and city life in the pastoral setting of Queen's Park. Parks are distinguished from the ideal pastoral settings of gardens since parks are built by city planners too and enclosed by the city (for a further analysis of parks and gardens in Atwood's novels see Ene-Reet Soovik, "From the Bush to the City: Resistant Land and Reflective Women in Margaret Atwood's Works," in: Virve Sarapik/Kadri Tüür (eds), *PLACE and LOCATION: Studies in Environmental Aesthetics and Semiotics III*, Tallinn 2003, 323-25).

⁸ Ene-Reet Soovik sees ravines "not so much as a place but rather as an extension of undivided and uncontrolled space around which the controlling human mind has created places" and believes that "in the ravine [...] the social rules at work in the orderly and therefore safe city do not seem to hold" (Soovik 2003, 325).

⁹ Eleonora Rao, "Home and Nation in Margaret Atwood's Later Fiction", in: Coral Ann Howells (ed), *The Cambridge Guide to Margaret Atwood*, Cambridge 2006, 100-113.

still feel homeless in their hometown Toronto. By mapping the interrelation of their lived, remembered, and imagined experiences of their (gendered) space in their retrospective accounts, i.e. by tracing their journeys, which placed them where they are, they spatialize their surroundings and relocate themselves in the present. When Atwood's fiction maps Toronto, her texts also become maps to be read. By mirroring the social space and spatialization of Toronto, Atwood's novels also illuminate how we spatialize our lived, remembered, and imagined experiences of the world we inhabit.

Before considering theories of space and analyzing the protagonists' quest narratives or travels through dimensions of space, let us first see what kind of picture of urban space emerges in Atwood's Toronto novels. An important aspect in the author's depiction of Toronto's cityscape is the city's neat division into districts: its compartmentalization. When old Iris returns to Toronto, she remarks that "Toronto is no longer a Protestant city, it's a medieval one" (*Assassin* 291) – stressing its division into districts that differ sharply. There is the old-money district of Rosedale, the Annex, Yorkville¹⁰ (a Victorian-era neighbourhood along Bloor Street West between Avenue Rd. and Yonge Street, which was once an independent village and is now part of Toronto), Toronto Island (which is really a group of islands), and there are the ethnic areas such as Chinatown. The districts illuminate the characters' social status and identity. The lives lived in the districts differ significantly, each social space being subject to its own spatial practices. By running her car over a bridge in *The Blind Assassin*, for example, Laura runs from the hypocrisy and greed of her family and that of the wealthy upper class: "Laura's decision to die in the Vale of Avoca, close to Rosedale, fits the story and reflects her tragedy" for "the life from which she's making a final definitive escape is a specifically Rosedale life, and it has destroyed her soul."¹¹ Atwood also emphasizes the historicity of Toronto's districts, where temporality is shining through. She draws a picture of Toronto as "an urban space of palimpsestic layers, a spatialization in time, which shows the city's historical and contemporary multiplicity – the competing visions and discourses that formed it, as well as the

¹⁰ In the early 1970s Yorkville was "a hippie hangout" (Guylaine Spencer, "The Allure of Atwood's Toronto", in: *Américas*, November 1, 2005, 16). Present-day Yorkville is a place of designer boutiques and nice restaurants and bars.

¹¹ Robert Fulford, "Column about Toronto & Margaret Atwood", in: *The National Post*, August 24 2000.

many modes of habitation and use that still jostle within its porous boundaries."¹² In *The Robber Bride* the location of each main character's home and workplace is a key to her social status and identity. In her analysis of "good" and "bad" women characters in Atwood's *The Robber Bride* Shelley Kulperger outlines how "each woman's home keys into the way the city itself divides spaces and identities"¹³: Charis (Karen), the New Age Hippie,¹⁴ lives in the pastoral setting of the Toronto Island; Roz (Rosalind) lives in the WASP, old-money district of Rosedale, and Tony (Antonia), the academic, is part of the historical university community with its turreted Gothic buildings (or ivory towers) and homes. Zenia, the women's alter-ego and shadow-self, a *femme fatale* linked with the city throughout the novel, invades the women's domestic space, stealing their men and shattering their private lives. Kulperger calls Zenia "a literal homeless fringe-dweller [...] of no fixed address", who invades the women's private spaces, appearing on balconies, in windows, and on doorsteps, while "Roz, Tony, and Charis are 'homebodies'."¹⁵ Eventually recognizing Zenia as a part of their selves, the women link themselves to the city, to the space around them, when jointly spreading Zenia's ashes over lake Ontario.¹⁶

An important aspect in Atwood's depiction of Toronto is that the cityscape as a whole can only be grasped from the outside or from a bird's eye view from above: the position and perspective of the critic, that is. A critical stance should allow seeing both external and internal cityscape – the material space and the imaginations of the city. Robert Fulford believes that the "imagined city" or "memory-city" is "the work of everyone, but first of all the work of artists. They must invent the city before we can inhabit it. Their work is a great collective creation, a thing of many layers: we can picture it as a geological slice of rock, an irregular object of infinite surprises"¹⁷; he further specifies that "usually the most powerful art connected with city life is not visual but literary. And if that's generally true of cities in Europe and

¹² Linda Warley/John Clement Ball/Robert Viau, "Introduction: Mapping the Ground", *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne* 23,1 (1998), 5.

¹³ Shelley Kulperger, "Mapping Lived Spaces and Spaces Between 'Good' and 'Bad' Girls in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*", in: *Altitude* 1 (2001).

¹⁴ Charis first worked as a clerk at the provincial Ministry of Natural Resources (near Queen's Park) before she takes a sales position at Radiance, a New-Age crystal shop.

¹⁵ Kulperger 2001.

¹⁶ See Kulperger for an analysis of "each woman's practice as *flanêuse* of the city streets."

¹⁷ Robert Fulford, "The Invention of Toronto: A City Defined by Its Artists," William Kilbourn Lecture, Toronto Historical Board, June 12, 1996.

North America, it's especially true of Toronto."¹⁸ According to Fulford, Atwood is the "true successor to Robertson Davies as chief mythologist of Toronto life, past as well as present".¹⁹

The Park Hyatt Hotel on the western border of Yorkville is one of the tallest buildings in the city. Its rooftop bar on the 18th floor features in some of Atwood's novels as a place where characters meet for a drink, enjoying a panoramic view of the cityscape and "a sense of the vertical, which is rare in the city".²⁰ In *Cat's Eye* Elaine meets her teacher and lover Josef there. Watching the panorama below, she observes "the trees spreading like worn moss, the lake zinc in the distance". The words she uses to describe the panorama below underline that what she sees is similar to a painting; it is an image of reality, an imaginative representation, a construct. Significantly, the character's perspective is from Yorkville, from a Victorian site, i.e. from a colonizer's position. When Queen Victoria died in 1901 the sun never set on the British Empire. The character's perspective might stand for the colonizer's point of view, i.e. the position of the WASP critic mapping territory and not acknowledging that there are social spaces beyond the visible space.²¹ However, at the time when these meetings for a drink took place, i.e. in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Yorkville had already turned into "a hippie hangout"²² and into a space for emerging Canadian artists with coffee shops and art galleries. So I think Atwood's point here is also that in those days a distinctly Canadian perspective was only taking shape, that there was an emerging Canadian literary scene, defining itself from within, a Canada no longer mapped from outside, but a Canada beginning to answer the question "Where is here?"

2. The Production of Space

In order to analyze how Atwood's novels discuss space as process and how Atwood's protagonists travel through dimensions of space to construct narratives of identity, one needs to be familiar with theory of (social) space as process. In

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Fulford 2000.

²⁰ Qtd. in Spencer 2005, 16.

²¹ See in particular *The Robber Bride* for reflections on mapping territory, historical sites, or mapping as an imaginative construct.

²² Spencer 2005, 16.

his influential study *The Production of Space*, 1991 (*La production de l'espace*, 1974), Lefebvre shows that space is not an abstract, empty container, in which we move. Space is never simply there from the start "but is *produced* through signs – visual, gestural, architectural, literary, and so on."²³ Lefebvre suggests that space is fundamental to our lived experience of the world; we cannot conceive of our existence outside of space and time.²⁴ More precisely, Lefebvre suggests that every experience of the world is comprised of three interrelated aspects of space, which are: spatial practices (*l'espace perçu*), representations of space (*l'espace conçu*), and spaces of representation (*l'espace vécu*). His model of the production of space distinguishes three formants of space and unites physical, mental, and social space. Lefebvre links spatial practices to the perceived, representations of space to the conceived, and spaces of representation to the lived. His three dimensions, which were appropriated and further developed by Edward W. Soja, David Harvey, Rob Shields, Stuart Elden, and many others, are interrelated and form a dialectical triad (or a triadic dialectic).²⁵ The following outlines Lefebvre's three dimensions drawing parallels to critics who appropriated his theories. Even though their categories are never completely interchangeable, their basis of a three-dimensional model allows for analogies:

Spatial Practices (of physical transformation of the environment): *l'espace perçu* (Lefebvre); "perceived space"/"Firstspace" (Soja); "experienced space" (Harvey). This is the materialized, socially (re-)produced, and empirically observable (real) space.

²³ Warley et al. 1998, 2

²⁴ Stuart Elden believes that the use – or rather, the *abuse* – of Lefebvre's work on space by Anglo-American scholars has led to an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of Lefebvre's ideas. He holds the opinion that "Lefebvre's work has suffered as a *result* of being read in English and appropriated for a certain type of academic work by certain types of scholars" who did not consider Lefebvre's work as a whole and his position as a Marxist *philosopher* ("Politics, Philosophy, Geography: Henri Lefebvre in Recent Anglo-American Scholarship", in: *Antipode* 33,5 (2001), 820). When appropriating Lefebvre's ideas on space, for example, the question of temporality must not be disregarded. *The Production of Space* does account for temporality or space-time "in terms of the processes and history of space's production and in terms of how individuals function through and within space as well as how they experience space" (Peter Bratsis, "Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life*", in: *New Political Science* 28,1 (2006), 144). Elden sees Lefebvre's idea of rhythmanalysis as an extension of Lefebvre's work on space [and time] and as a corrective to the overly narrow and "too disciplinary" appropriation of his work; Lefebvre wants "to get us both to think space and time *differently*, and to think them *together*" (Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible*, London 2004, ix).

²⁵ Lefebvre 1991, 33-46.

Representations of Space: *l'espace conçu* (Lefebvre); "conceived space" / "Secondspace" (Soja); "perceived space" (Harvey). Representations of space form a conceptualized (imagined) space, i.e. the space of scientists, urbanists, and other rationalizers, "all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived".²⁶ Representations of space imply representations of power and ideology. According to Lefebvre, *espace conçu* is the dominant space in any society.²⁷

Representational Spaces²⁸ or Spaces of Representation²⁹: *l'espace vécu* (Lefebvre); "lived space" / "real-and-imagined places" / "Thirdspace" (Soja); "imagined space" (Harvey). Spaces of representation are "directly lived through its associated and symbols."³⁰ They are symbolic meanings enacted in spatial form. This is "the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space" of inhabitants and users, "which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" and "it overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects".³¹

In Phil Hubbard's words, "Lefebvres trialectics of spatiality explores the intertwining of cultural practices, representations and imaginations" for "space is 'made up' through a three-way dialectic between perceived, conceived and lived space."³² Space is created through acts of naming as well as through the distinctive activities and imaginings associated with particular social spaces. How can this be applied to Atwood? Or rather, how does Atwood discuss dimensions of space, i.e. the formants of space? The following table attempts to answer this, by grouping theorists and theories of space in chronological order of publication and illuminating how Atwood fits in. All theories of space make use of a three-dimensional model and seem to be based on a theory of the linguistic sign.³³ Interestingly enough, Atwood's teacher and mentor Northrop Frye's idea of the "three levels of the mind"³⁴ seems to fit in here, too:

²⁶ Ibid, 38.

²⁷ Lefebvre 1991, 39.

²⁸ tras. Nicholson-Smith (1991)

²⁹ trans. Soja (1996) and Shields (1999)

³⁰ Lefebvre 1991, 39.

³¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.

³² Hubbard 2005, 42.

³³ Regarding the problem of three-dimensionality see Christian Schmid, *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft: Henri Lefebvre und die Theorie der Produktion des Raumes*, Stuttgart 2005, 231-45.

³⁴ Frye 1993, 8-9.

Theory of the linguistic sign³⁵

	object
Northrop Frye's "three levels of the mind" ³⁶	level of consciousness and awareness (everyday language or "the language of self-expression" ³⁷) object
Henri Lefebvre	<i>l'espace perçu</i> spatial practices
David Harvey	experienced space
Edward W. Soja	Firstspace perceived space
Margaret Atwood	lived experience of space the here and now of any space "Canadianness"

³⁵ See Christian Schmid's in-depth study of Lefebvre's work, which points out that Lefebvre relies, among other theories, on theories of language, and in particular on Nietzsche, for his trialectics of the production of space (Schmid 2005, 235-7). What I reproduced in the first row results from Lefebvre's theory of space but is not its foundation, according to Schmid.

³⁶ Frye 1993, 8-9. Frye – like Lefebvre, who stresses the dynamic process of these spaces and places literature in representations of space and spaces of representations – points out that there is no clear-cut boundary: "A highly developed science and a highly developed art are very close together, psychologically and otherwise" (9). The difference is that "literature begins with the possible model of experience" (9). Implicit in Frye's depiction of the level of imagination in "The Motive for Metaphor" (Frye 1993, 1-16) is the subversive potential of literature. Lefebvre explicitly locates literature with a subversive potential only in his spaces of representation.

³⁷ Frye 1993, 8.

concept	symbol
level of social participation, ("language of practical sense", ³⁸ i.e. working or technological language)	level of imagination, "which produces the literary language" ⁴⁰ literary space
science, which according to Frye begins with "the world as it is" ³⁹	art, ⁴¹ which according to Frye begins with a vision of the world we "want to have" ⁴²
<i>l'espace conçu</i> representations of space	<i>l'espace vécu</i> spaces of representation ⁴³
perceived space	imagined space
Secondspace conceived space	Thirdspace lived space ("real-and-imagined places")
remembered experience of space (a retrospective look into the past)	imagined experience of space (a prospective, visionary look into the future)
the historicity of space, f.e. temporality shining through Toronto's cityscape with its neat compartmentalization	art (a-temporal, timeless)
nation – a construct with man-made boundaries	home – a real and imagined space

³⁸ Frye 1993, 8.

³⁹ Ibid, 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 8.

⁴¹ Frye defines art as a vision of the world transformed by the imagination (The Educated Imagination).

⁴² Ibid, 9.

⁴³ Referred to as "Representational Spaces" in the 1991 translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith.

How is this model of the production of space – of space as process – illustrated in Atwood's novels? Through her novels Atwood moves our focus from the dominant space in our world, Lefebvre's *espace conçu*, to a Thirdspace, showing its interrelation with the other two formants of space. She manages to achieve this by showing the interrelation between lived, remembered, and imagined experiences of space. Reconstructing their identities, Atwood's protagonists travel through different dimensions of space in order to relocate themselves in the present. An outer journey is always paralleled by an inner, psychological journey. Most clearly in *Surfacing*, where the unnamed narrator-protagonist's quest narrative is paralleled by her journey into the Canadian wilderness of northern Québec; it is a narrative in the course of which she becomes one with nature and also re-establishes her link with society by deciding to get pregnant. In Atwood's more recent novel *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman recollects Crake's planned apocalypse and extinction of the human race and the role he himself played in it, when traveling back to the place of its origin, the Paradise Dome – the Garden of Eden, where God-like Crake played dice. In the early novel *Surfacing*, the narrator's journey into the interior is an exploration of her "home ground, foreign territory" (*Surfacing* 7). Best read within the context of *Survival*, published in the same year, *Surfacing* still explores the garrison mentality⁴⁴ of Canadian writers. *Oryx and Crake* turns to a more universal exploration of how social space is zoned in terms of class, community, and culture.

The journeys the protagonists take are never linear but are a continuous jumping back and forth in time – or in dimensions of space – in the course of which women protagonists recognize their gendered space as a source of liberating power and eventually counter-patriarchal power structures. In Atwood's other novels, the narratives of identity are constructed through a journey that is more symbolic. All protagonists make sense of their here and now through a momentary escape into an imagined space – the Thirdspace of art. They reconstruct their pasts by refusing the human need to eat (*The Edible Woman*), refusing language (*Surfacing*), telling (in the sense of *oral* storytelling: *Lady Oracle*, *Bodily Harm*, *Oryx and Crake*), painting (*Cat's Eye*), quilting (*Alias Grace*), or writing (*The Blind Assassin*) their lives, or generally by constructing alternative realities (e.g. through lying in *The Penelopiad*). Countering the dominance of our Secondspace,

⁴⁴ In *Survival* Atwood turned the garrison mentality (Frye 1993) into thematic criticism, i.e. into an exploration of the theme of survival in Canadian literature.

i.e. becoming aware of our conventional modes of perception and of the power politics in society, and momentarily "escaping" into a Thirdspace – symbolized by the protagonists' escape into imagined spaces of alternative realities – which they initially perceive of as a space cut off from the real (gendered) space around them –, the protagonists eventually begin to realize the relation of imagined experience of space to the other two dimensions of space. While not all characters manage to relocate themselves in a new space in the present, they all recognize the subversive potential of art – usually through the art forms they themselves produce. They make sense of the space they inhabit through various art forms which are a combination of remembered and imagined experience, i.e. the world how it is (the past life they remember) and the world how they want it to be.

Examples of art forms with a subversive potential, which the characters produce, are Marian's cake in *The Edible Woman*, the embedded *Lady Oracle* poems in *Lady Oracle*, Lesje's (re)construction of the life of the dinosaurs, which depict both her ideal vision of their life and mirror the lives of the characters in *Life before Man*, Elaine's paintings in *Cat's Eye*, Grace Mark's quilt in *Alias Grace*, and the dystopian story the unnamed lovers construct in the embedded novel in *The Blind Assassin*. *Oryx and Crake* shows that even when a society privileges science over art, the need to construct art forms cannot be extinguished since it is the defining characteristic of humanity.⁴⁵

3. Heterotopias

Heterotopias also form an integral part in the protagonists' experience of space. In "Of Other Spaces"⁴⁶ Michel Foucault discusses "utopias" and "heterotopias" as two sites that are linked to other spaces and at the same time also in contradiction to those other sites to which they are linked: utopias (sites with no real place, unreal

⁴⁵ Even the non-human Crakers show their need for stories when they constantly urge Snowman to tell them how they came into this world; in time they also begin to develop their own religious rites.

⁴⁶ In: *Diacritics* 16 (1986), 22-7. Johnson notes that "Des espaces autres" has been translated into English as "Of other spaces" and "different spaces" (Peter Johnson, "Unravelling Foucault's 'Different Spaces'", in: *History of the Human Sciences* 19,4 (2006), 76). See his article for a further analysis of the problematic translation of Foucault's terminology.

spaces) and heterotopias (real places, counter-sites,⁴⁷ which are simultaneously mythic and real). Heterotopias can be distinguished into heterotopias of crisis (e.g. honeymoon hotels) or heterotopias of deviance (e.g. prisons, rest homes, psychiatric asylums). Soja describes Foucault's analysis as "frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent"⁴⁸; however, the fragmentary nature of the published speech lends itself well to being appropriated by other critics. Foucault outlines six principles of heterotopias:

1. all cultures constitute heterotopias
2. their functions, positions, and meanings can change over time within a single society (e.g. the cemetery)
3. they may juxtapose within a single, real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other (theatres, cinemas, gardens, carpets – a contradictory site in the representation of a sacred garden as a microcosm of the world in the patterns of a Persian rug)
4. they are linked with a break in traditional time (spaces that represent quasi-eternity, e.g. museums (the ROM); or are temporal, e.g. fairgrounds)
5. heterotopias are not freely accessible (entry is compulsory, e.g. in prisons, or based on ritual and purification, e.g. the hammans): "they presuppose a system that both isolates them and makes them penetrable"
6. heterotopias have a function to all the space that remains: there are heterotopias of illusion (brothels) or heterotopias of compensation (e.g. the Jesuit colonies; or the Republic of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale*)

In *The Blind Assassin* Iris is literally "sold off" to Richard, who by marrying her also takes over her father's button factory. Looking at her steamer trunk, Iris remarks: "It was tidily packed, with everything complete for the honeymoon voyage, but it seemed to me full of darkness – of emptiness, empty space" (*Assassin* 237). Marrying Richard cuts Iris off from her sister; she becomes disembodied and can no longer relate to the social space around her. Her wedding night does not take place in a "placeless place", however, but in a real place. In "Of Other Spaces" Foucault describes what he calls "crisis heterotopias", which in our society "are persistently disappearing, though a few remnants can still be found." He mentions

⁴⁷ I.e. "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986).

⁴⁸ Soja qtd. in Johnson 2006, 81.

the tradition of the honeymoon trip, where "the young woman's deflowering could take place 'nowhere' and, at the moment of its occurrence the train or honeymoon hotel was indeed the place of this nowhere, this heterotopia without geographical markers". After the wedding ceremony Richard steers Iris towards "the getaway car": "No one was supposed to know our destination, which was assumed to be somewhere out of town" (*Assassin* 240); ironically however, they are only driven around the block to the side entrance of the Royal York Hotel, where the wedding reception had just taken place. Atwood lays bare the hollowness of this social practice and – by implication – invites the reader to critically examine all social practices.

Embarking on her honeymoon, Iris further retreats into an imaginary space of an alternative reality. She floats in space, which is illustrated by her entrance of the heterotopian site *par excellence*, the ship, a "placeless place" according to Foucault: "the boat is a floating piece of space, a placeless place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea." Iris and Richard cross over to Europe on the *Berengeria*. Suffering from sea-sickness, Iris feels "bodiless [...] like a deflating balloon" (*Assassin* 244). Standing at the railing and looking into the ocean, Iris recalls parts of a poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson⁴⁹:

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

The poem was written in memory of Tennyson's friend, Arthur Hallam, who had died. This intertextual reference illustrates the relational disruption in time and space of a heterotopic site; it is a temporal disruption that links the infinity of the ocean to death.

In Europe, Iris visits various places and buildings – museums, in particular – and she remarks: "I would walk briskly in, through whatever gate or door" (*Assassin* 302) – referring to Foucault's 5th principle that heterotopias are not freely accessible. Iris goes on to say: "I would stare and stare, so I would have something to say later. But I could not really make sense of what I was seeing. Buildings are only

⁴⁹ From "Break, break, break" (first published in Tennyson's *Poems* in 1842)

buildings. There's nothing much to them unless you know about architecture, or else about what once happened there, and I did not know" (*Assassin* 302). Iris fails to see space as process and only perceives an empty container, a container to which she cannot relate. She fails to see spaces beyond the visible space or, in other words, she fails to see temporality shining through visible spaces.

What is illustrated here, through Atwood's use of the heterotopic sites? Peter Johnson points out that "heterotopia is originally a medical term referring to a particular tissue that develops at a place other than is usual. The tissue is not diseased or particularly dangerous but merely placed elsewhere".⁵⁰ It is a dislocation. The textual examples discussed above show how Iris becomes dislocated from her own body and from the social space around her. For Foucault, the heterotopian site *par excellence* provides a passage to and through other heterotopias: brothels, colonies, gardens. Iris will only later in the novel realize the relation between spaces, or the interrelation of dimensions of space, when after a dream-like sequence envisioning her lover Alex Thomas leave her, she wakes up determined to subvert her gendered space and take revenge on Richard.

Other heterotopias in Atwood's novels function as counter-sites. They are related to the spaces the characters inhabit in the sense that they represent, contest, and subvert this space. Atwood explicitly stresses that parks function as counter-sites when she lets Nate jog around Queens Park "clockwise" but "against the traffic, the cars meeting and passing him owl-eyed, dark and sleek. Behind him are the Parliament Buildings, squat pinkish heart of a squat province" (*Life before Man* 48). While Nate moves in time, he counters the cityspace and society on his run – with the Ontario government in his back but out of sight. Guylaine Spencer notes that "the name Queen's Park is often used as shorthand for the Ontario government, because the Provincial Legislature Building squats on the southern reaches of the grounds"; the Building "replaced the demolished Hospital for the Insane, leading some to suggest that the city's usage has changed little since earlier days".⁵¹

⁵⁰ Johnson 2006, 77.

⁵¹ Spencer 2005, 18.

Other examples are modern museums, which "accumulate and protect all time on one place"⁵²: the Royal Ontario Museum (the ROM) in *Life before Man*, *The Edible Woman*,⁵³ and *Cat's Eye*⁵⁴; or cyberspace in *Oryx and Crake*. In *Lady Oracle* the maze in the Villa d'Este, housing a statue of the many-breasted Earth-Goddess Diana of Ephesus, takes the form of a contradictory site (Foucault's 3rd principle): She had a serene face, perched on top of a body shaped like a mound of grapes. She was draped in breasts from neck to ankle [...]: little breasts at the top and bottom, big ones around the middle. The nipples were equipped with spouts, but several of the breasts were out of order. I stood licking my ice-cream cone, watching the goddess coldly. Once I would have seen her as an image of myself, but not any more. (308)

Joan compares the silent Goddess's "serene face" to its grotesque and malfunctioning body. It is the statue of an Earth-Goddess who offers her breasts, her substance, for public consumption⁵⁵ when she is gazed at by people licking ice-cream cones. The Goddess seems out of place in contemporary society. She is defined by the essential characteristic of nourishment; this is to indicate that society both captivates and exploits nature and, by implication, women (artists), who are represented in the fountain of the Goddess here. Joan knows this: "I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in a cage, as a fat whore, a captive Earth Mother for whom somebody else collected the admission tickets" (*Lady Oracle* 398). Just like the ROM allows Lesje the space to parallel her life and relationships with those of the dinosaurs, the park (and also the maze) in *Lady Oracle* function as a counter site for Joan, who in its space encounters and counters the social practices and power structures in society that delimit her gendered space and define her identity.

Ravines are another powerful and significant heterotopian site, in particular in Toronto's city fiction. Fulford points out that "the ravines have become inescapable in the literature of Toronto"⁵⁶; they "are the chief characteristic of [Toronto's] local terrain, its topographical signature. They are both a tangible (though often hidden) part of our surroundings and a persistent force in our civic imagination. They are

⁵² Johnson 2006, 79.

⁵³ Marian and Duncan kiss in the Mummy Room in the ROM.

⁵⁴ Elaine takes classes in art and archeology at the ROM.

⁵⁵ See Marylin Patton, "*Lady Oracle: The Politics of the Body*", in: *Ariel* 22,4 (1991), 44.

⁵⁶ Fulford 1996.

the shared subconscious of the municipality, the places where much of the city's literature is born".⁵⁷ It is thus that Atwood "turns Laura's suicide [in *The Blind Assassin*] into a specifically and uniquely Toronto event by placing it over a ravine".⁵⁸ Atwood's protagonists Joan and Elaine suffer from traumatic experiences that take place in ravines: "In *Cat's Eye*, that painfully brilliant account of the viciousness of children, a ravine is where Cordelia tortures her alleged friend, Elaine. Here, in the secrecy of the trees, away from the eyes of teachers and parents, the girls can mistreat each other at will, in an Atwoodian female version of *Lord of the Flies*".⁵⁹ Implicit in Fulford's analysis is what Soovik states in her discussion of the ravines in Atwood's Toronto novels: "The threats posed by the ravine do not originate from nature, but from human activities. It seems that the socially constructed image of the place unleashes vicious impulses even in young girls who abandon their niceness in this disorderly non-city".⁶⁰

Atwood's novels create a sense of place and show how difficult it is to share real spaces when it is impossible to share imaginary ones. This concerns class distinctions within society and different cultures in general. What may happen if we fail to share our worlds or, in other words, a vision of the world we want to live in, is shown in the speculative fiction *Oryx and Crake*, where society has been divided into rich and poor, segregated into privileged, sheltered Compounds and marginalized Pleeblands⁶¹. In *The Blind Assassin* the unnamed lovers in the embedded novel *The Blind Assassin* subvert various historical accounts and ancient myths for their construction of a dystopian story, which they need to make sense of the power structures that shape their relationship. Their momentary escapes into an imaginary Thirdspace help them reconsider spatial practices (power politics in society) and representations of space (historiography and conventional modes of perception, in this case) and let them become aware of the interrelation between literary productions and cultural traditions.

The accounts the lovers draw on are also interdependent on each other. Biblical myth has it that the Garden of Eden was to be found in the basin between Tigris and

⁵⁷ Fulford 2000.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Soovik 2003, 326.

⁶¹ The "Pleeblands" seem to be named after "plebeian", a member of the class of landowning Roman Citizens in Ancient Rome.

Euphrates, i.e. the land called Mesopotamia. The accounts in the Old Testament, and especially the Book of Moses, draw upon myths of the peoples living in Mesopotamia: the Chaldeans, Sumerians, Babylonians, and the Assyrians. Uruk, capital of the Sumerian Empire, gave birth to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (written around 2000 BC), which contains the mythical Flood, the Tree of Knowledge (as a tree of pomegranates), the snake that brings about the downfall, and various other elements from the Bible. The lovers' discussions raise the reader's awareness of the interconnection between literary texts and cultural traditions and they also show to what extent our understanding of the past is dependent on written accounts and how historical accounts themselves are interdependent on each other. From a present-day perspective Eastern and Western cultures seem to be as far apart as can possibly be, but both cultures originated in the same place. Atwood reminds us of the untenable nature of "pure" cultures, i.e. she stresses the hybridity of any culture;⁶² she emphasizes the necessity to interact and share our worlds or a vision of the world we want to live in. Since we can only share real spaces when we can share our stories, Atwood's palimpsest novels replete with intertextual references always invite us to trace our stories back to their origin to see the interdependence of literary texts and of our cultures.

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⁶² Homi K. Bhabha argues that all cultures are constructed in a "Thirdspace of enunciation" and that claims to the inherent purity and originality of cultures are untenable ("Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference", in: Bill Ashcroft/Gareth Griffiths/Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, London 1995, 209). It is in this Thirdspace "that we [may] find those words with which we can speak of ourselves and the others" and "perhaps we can escape the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our own self" (Ibid 209). Note that Tony, the historian in *The Robber Bride*, busies herself with visualizing hybridization by using different spices for different ethnic groups, which she pins on her war maps in her cellar. Tony's activity lays bare that national identities are constructs.

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Mapping the Glass Labyrinths of the Past – Re/Constructing Identities in Jane Urquhart's *A Map of Glass*

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This contribution is part of a larger project, my Ph.D. thesis, which attempts to undertake an interdisciplinary investigation of the impact of globalization on contemporary Canadian literature and suggests alternative ways of reading Anglophone Canadian historical fiction, which for reasons explicated later, are here referred to as "fictions of the past".¹ While the corpus analyzed in my thesis includes diverse novels by recently immigrated writers, by Native Canadian, and by non-Native, non-immigrant Canadian writers, the present essay will focus on one novel only: Jane Urquhart's *A Map of Glass* (2005).

I have somewhat become weary of reading studies on historical fiction, especially those dating from the genre's most prolific period, the mid-1980s to the late 90s; the desire for new ways of interpretation is one of the aspects that keeps my research going. As far as historical fiction in Canada of the past decades is concerned, there is one dominant narrative: that of postmodern "historiographic metafiction" which emerged in Canada between the 1960s and 80s. Historiographic metafiction gets defined as self-reflexive, as dealing with epistemological and aesthetic issues, as promoting a revised understanding of historiography, and as rewriting history in a postcolonial, subaltern vein.² I would like to reconsider this perspective because many historical fictions, in my reading, no longer fit the description.

¹ The idea behind this term is to open up the genre of historical fiction in order to integrate and embrace the plurality of its contemporary expressions. See later passages for more detail.

² A very recent example of approaches that center on these features, with a focus on women's writing, can be found in Ann Heilmann/Mark Llewellyn (eds), *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing*, Basingstoke 2007. Cf. also Marie Vautier, *New World Myth: Postmodernism and Postcolonialism in Canadian Fiction*, Montreal 1998; Martin Küster, *Framing Truths: Parodic Structures in Contemporary English-Canadian Historical Novels*, Toronto 1992; and Jutta Zimmermann, *Metafiktion im anglokanadischen Roman der Gegenwart*, Trier 1996; Herb Wylie, *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History*, Montreal 2002, and Herb Wylie, "Introduction", in: Herb Wylie (ed), *Speaking in the Past Tense: Canadian Novelists on Writing Historical Fiction*, Waterloo 2007, 1-24.

Certainly, there have recently been exceptions in criticism on historical fiction, which approach the genre from new perspectives. They rethink what Linda Hutcheon defined as historiographic metafiction in works such as *The Canadian Postmodern* in the 1980s.³ I am thinking, for example, of Middleton and Wood's *Literatures of Memory*, Gordon Bölling's *History in the Making*, or of Birgit Neumann's "Fictions of Memory."⁴ All develop conclusive strategies to handle recent historical fiction. Neumann, for instance, with the help of a detailed typology, takes into account one highly important feature and discrepancy of the genre in its contemporary form: the increasing closeness of present and past, history and memory, myth and story, all of which are strongly linked to the construction of collective and individual identities.

Due to the diversity of the genre in contemporary Canadian literature, and also due to the problems related to the out-datedness of established definitions for the novels I am dealing with, I propose for my analysis the term "fictions of the past" – which goes far beyond what is normally understood by the terms "historical fiction" or "historical novel", and also, most importantly, far beyond historiographic metafiction,⁵ thus shifting the focus towards new possibilities of interpretation.

1. The Glass Labyrinths of the Past

The most evident alteration in the genre is the fact that since the 1990s the fictional focus on alternative, forgotten histories has gradually moved from the rewriting of more official, public accounts of the past to the increasing though not exclusive negotiation of again more personal, private, and individual narratives.

³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, Toronto 1988.

⁴ Peter Middleton/Tim Woods, *Literature of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing*, Manchester/New York 2000; Gordon Bölling, *History in the Making: Metafiktion im neueren anglokanadischen historischen Roman*, Heidelberg 2006; Birgit Neumann, *Erinnerung – Identität – Narration: Gattungstypologie und Funktionen kanadischer "Fictions of Memory"*, Berlin/New York 2005.

⁵ For a more detailed discussion and critical evaluation of the term, cf. Bölling 2006, 38-48, and, for additional reflections on "fictions of the past", also see Nora Tunkel "Deconstructing the Multicultural Myth – Transcultural Imaginaries in Madeleine Thien's *Certainty*," in: Klaus-Dieter Ertler/Martin Löschnigg (eds), *Inventing Canada – Invention le Canada*, Canadiana Bd. 6, Frankfurt a.M. 2008, 113-126.

This tendency can be interpreted as the echo of revolutionary re/actions⁶ to the increasing historical complexity, quantity, and denseness of information available to most contemporary individuals, and as a consequence of a post-national longing for identity⁷:

Because the cultural references of these newest writers are often larger than national, they are producing work that challenges the nationalist assumptions built into the earliest form of the postcolonial model, and they may be moving Canada a step beyond the postcolonial to a true postnationalism.⁸

In the process of perpetual evaluations of identity-forming cultural images and discourses, definitions of self and otherness have become more complicated and harder to grasp. Separate identity entities of ethnicity, race, gender, and class are merged and – despite the efforts of a whole generation of subaltern critics to theorize and essentialize repressed identities – eventually in/form transcultural expressions of existence as one possible, also ethically more viable solution to the crisis of deconstructed and dispersed global identities. In the words of Kalogeras, Arapoglou, and Manney:

The invention of a transnational global sphere has not made the concepts of ethnic communities and bounded localities obsolete; rather, it has necessitated a reconceptualization of the politics of community, identity and cultural difference that sanctions new dynamics in a translocal world.⁹

Within the realm of individual imaginary, which also comprises memory and other forms of mind-constructions, collective binaries are transgressed and reinvented; through this process, oppositional spaces are de-, re-constructed, and combined and lead to the reformation of identities.

Jane Urquhart's *A Map of Glass* is a wonderful example for the genre of historical fiction in a contemporary form, as it unites several features that ought to be

⁶ Depending on the perspective, it can be seen as either positive or as a negative re/action.

⁷ For an in-depth discussion of the issue from a sociological perspective, cf. Mike Featherstone, "Postnational Flows, Identity Formation and Cultural Space", in: Eliezer Ben-Rafael/Yitzak Sternberg (eds), *Identity, Culture and Globalization*, Leiden 2001, 483-526.

⁸ Donna Bennett, "Nation and Its Discontents: Atwood's Survival and After", in: J.I. Oliva et al. (eds), *Canadística Canaria (1991 – 2000): ensayos literarios anglocanadienses*, La Laguna 2002, 27.

⁹ Yiorgos Kalogeras/Eleftheria Arapoglou/Linda Manney, "Introduction", in: *Transcultural Localisms: Responding to Ethnicity in a Globalized World*, Heidelberg 2006, xiii.

discussed and critically evaluated, but are usually neglected, such as the novel's transcultural imaginary, which is primary to my interpretation. Other features are very much debated, although they seem no longer as appropriate as they used to be (one example would be the novel's postmodern deconstructive aesthetics, though it appears in a less radical form).

A Map of Glass is set in Toronto and in rural southern Ontario. Sylvia, the main protagonist, is a middle-aged woman, who suffers from social and mental instabilities. She escapes from the Ontario countryside and from her closed-minded husband to Toronto where she wants to meet the young artist Jerome, who found the corpse of her lover Andrew Woodman. Eventually, they both succeed in overcoming their haunting memories through their prolonged and increasingly intimate conversations – this part of the story is dealt with in the first and third part of the book. The middle section of the novel consists of something close to a historical account or family history, which was written by Sylvia's dead lover: a collection of notebooks that Sylvia gives to Jerome to read and which eventually also plays an important role in both their recovery.

The novel sets up an obvious opposition between the "bounded localities" of rural versus urban space. Rural Ontario is where Sylvia comes from, where she grew up, a place that she could only really explore when she got to know her lover, the landscape historian Andrew, who suffered from Alzheimer and ultimately also died because of it. The urban realm, the city of Toronto, is the place where the conceptual artist Jerome lives in a basement loft with his girlfriend of South East Asian descent, Mira.

The rural landscape is also dominantly connected to the past, to Canada's settlement history, represented in the middle part of the novel, which really tells a story of its own about the owner of a timber business situated on an island in Lake Ontario and the life of his two children, a boy and a girl, who were Andrew's ancestors. The narration of this middle section centers on an island on which English and Irish traders live side-by-side with French *coureurs de bois* – the depiction is in many ways stereotypical and romanticized, which might be regarded as a weakness of the novel.¹⁰ However, we must not forget that this "story within"

¹⁰ Interestingly, most reviews that appeared after the publication of the novel criticized the parts set in the present as being implausible, and rather praised the middle section. Cf., for example, Cynthia Sugars, "The Hands of Chance and Change", Review of *A Map of Glass*, in: *Books in Canada*,

fictionalizes Andrew Woodman's notes and subjective re-creation of his family's history as well as – possibly – Sylvia, Jerome, and Mira's interpretations. The interaction of the three parts is considerable, especially as the first and third sections constantly refer to (memories of) stories told in the second part. The expression and rewriting of local hi/story can in this instance not be interpreted as backward nor sentimentalist,¹¹ but rather as the expression of and possibility for transcultural re/action and, at the same time, resistance to globalizing cultural processes: "Indeed, as Michael Watts has revealed, transnationalization has, on the one hand, contributed to local revitalization, while on the other it has triggered new modes of resistance".¹² Exactly the same rural landscape depicted in Andrew's "histories", plays an important role in the present for the cosmopolitan artist, Jerome – the aforementioned island was adapted as an artists' retreat, and this is where Jerome goes to spend a few weeks alone, away from the bustling lights of Toronto, in order to work on a new project. It is also there that he finds the corpse of Andrew, who had lost his way and frozen to death. Eventually, the boundaries of temporal and cultural spaces break away as the cycle of history, memory, and narration temporarily come full circle:

Outside was the constant hum of the city, the unknown world. Inside the young man shifted his position now and then on the old couch, leaning forward, or nodding to indicate that he was listening. Sylvia found herself speaking slowly and carefully, as if rehearsing a speech she had memorized. "The day that you found Andrew you became the present, the end of the story, the end of my story, the reply to the last unanswered question," she told him. "And you were the end of Andrew's story as well. You were, in a way, the last thing he told me. Toward the end, one of the very last things he said aloud was something about a hook of the past sewing us together."¹³

The dichotomous structures of local and rural versus cosmopolitan and urban spaces – which can also be extended to the binaries of gender and other constructions of difference – are tightly linked with individual human remembering as well as collective narratives of the past: Both, constructions of difference and fictions of the past, are essential building blocks of identities. To speak of

online, http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=4558. June 24, 2008.

¹¹ In their introduction to *Spaces of Culture* (London 1999) Featherstone and Lash fear that "from the perspective of the self-identified hybrid inhabiting the world cities, local identities seem backward" (12).

¹² Kalogeras et al. 2006, xiii.

¹³ Jane Urquhart, *A Map of Glass*, London 2005, 74-75. All further quotes refer to this edition.

identities in terms of a narrative underlines the probability of fictional elements in any construct (of self-awareness) of the individual mind and social collectives alike and also suggests a relation of these constructs to particular (not necessarily chronological) points in time. This latter aspect is significant as it explicates why any preoccupation with and analysis of issues related to the (de- and re-) construction and depiction of identities and hi/stories – whether in literature or in other realms and levels of human existence – will inevitably lead to questions of cultural, collective or, depending on the perspective, individual memory.

2. Exploring the In-between

Since the beginning of the 20th century, memory studies across the disciplines have emerged as a highly active field of research, which despite certain limitations must be taken into consideration for the present theoretical reflections. As Aleida Assmann has observed, the term "cultural memory" has not only been turned into a hackneyed expression in the past decades, it has also been prone to confusions in definition due to the side-by-sidedness of two independent scholarly discourses: the French school and the Anglo-American tradition. The former (P. Nora, M. Halbwachs) arose from the "center" of society and saw the impact of modernity on society as a backlash,¹⁴ while the Anglo-American tradition rooted its scientific perspective in and from the margins of society, thus initiating Holocaust studies and in later years strongly marking subaltern studies.¹⁵ The most influential perspective for contemporary literary scholarship remain the cultural studies approaches to memory research represented most dominantly by Jan and Aleida Assmann, whose ideas on the historical-contextual development of collective remembering and the memory-dependent forms of culture(s) in general¹⁶ have been used and

¹⁴ Both Nora and Halbwachs focused on collective memory; Pierre Nora was especially interested in the construction of national identities, which he theorized in his famous "lieux de mémoire". Cf. Roxanne Rimstead, "Introduction: Double Take: The Uses of Cultural Memory," in: *Essays on Canadian Writing*, Special Issue on Cultural Memory and Social Identity 80 (Fall 2003), 4; Michael Rossington/Anne Whitehead (eds), *Theories of Memory: A Reader*, Edinburgh 2007, 5, for short overviews; and Patrick Schmidt, "Zwischen Medien und Topoi: Die *Lieux de mémoire* und die Medialität des kulturellen Gedächtnisses", in: Astrid Erll et al. (eds), *Medien des kollektiven Gedächtnisses: Konstruktivität – Historizität – Kulturspezifität*, Berlin 2004, 25-43.

¹⁵ Aleida Assmann, "Zur Mediengeschichte des kulturellen Gedächtnisses", in: Erll et al. (eds) 2004, 45f. For a more detailed account of the relation of subaltern and memory studies, cf. Rossington/Whitehead 2007, 8f.

¹⁶ Assmann 2004, 46.

extended in the narratological school of Vera and Ansgar Nünning, the media approaches of Astrid Erll, and in the works of their academic followers.¹⁷

The kinship between the analysis of the genre of historical fiction and memory research can be traced in the shared interest in human interpretations of the past and its relation to identity-constructions, as well as in the relation of these elements to specific "historical" circumstances. It can also be found, however, in the possibilities of analytical approaches, as both, the academic perspectives on cultural memory and the literary form of (Canadian) historical fiction (as a medium of a specific cultural memory),¹⁸ have to a similar degree experienced the multifaceted impact of (post)modern critical theories.¹⁹

The complexity of the genre of historical fiction, and the difficulties that therefore result in its interpretation, are due to the fact that it stands in the midst of a multi-dimensional, intricately layered crossroad of contemporary developments, which themselves are right now at a crossroad of their own development. At the center of many contemporary discussions on Canadian literature, one finds the issue of postcolonial identities, and of sameness and difference in spite, or because of Canadian multiculturalism.²⁰ However, as Frank Schulze-Engler has highlighted,

the sometimes blatantly nostalgic politics of anticolonialism that have dominated much of postcolonialist critical discourse are hardly adequate

¹⁷ See Erll et al. (eds) 2004; Astrid Erll/Marion Gymnich/Ansgar Nünning (eds), *Literatur – Erinnerung – Identität: Theoriekonzeption und Fallstudien*, ELCH Bd. 11, Trier 2003; Neumann 2005.

¹⁸ This might sound like a generalization – however, the idea of one specific "Canadian" cultural memory is more of a temporary working concept: Of course we have to be aware of the fact that there is never *one single* "Cultural Memory", in the same way as the "Cultural Imaginary" is always plural and fluid.

¹⁹ A fact that is reflected in publications on memory, where one finds, for example, subchapters on "Collective Memory", "Jewish Memory Discourse", and "Trauma" on the one hand, and "Gender", "Race/Nation", and "Diaspora" on the other (Rossington/Whitehead (eds) 2007), or a stronger emphasis on the thematic organization of approaches (Counter-memory, Collective Memory Acts, Memory-Maps and Migrancy), with extensions of the sphere of remembering to include visual memory (Rimstead 2003), and finally, sections on general interdisciplinary methodological propositions, as well as in-depth case studies from narratological, generic, and (historical-) contextual analytical viewpoints (Erll/Gymnich/Nünning (eds) 2003). However, such structured approaches are not to be found in criticism on historical fiction.

²⁰ Cf., for example, Christl Verduyn (ed), *Literary Pluralities*, Peterborough 1998; Chelva Kanaganayakam (ed), *Moveable Margins: The Shifting Spaces of Canadian Literature*, Toronto 2005; Sneja Gunew, *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*, London 2004.

for coming to terms with the complicated conflicts and constellations in many parts of the "postcolonial" world that encompass the politics of multiculturalism, civil society and new democratic movements as well as a "micropolitics of modernity". All of these negotiate intimate questions of personal identity, gender relations and family life that turn out to be as decisive for the dynamics of modern societies as the macropolitics dominating public discourse, which focus on questions of economic policy, political systems and ideological conflicts.²¹

The *in-between*-spaces between definitions of "us" and "them", for which re/constructed memories, too, naturally are substantial elements,²² has for some years been receiving increasing attention, as for example in Homi Bhabha's strictly post-colonial perspective and concept of "hybridity",²³ or even more recently, in theories that attempt to conceptualize the in-between from a more "neutral" (poststructural) perspective, as for example the theories on "transdifference" introduced by Breinig and Lösch.²⁴ Another possible way to deal with contemporary cultural manifestations that move beyond dichotomous visions of reality is that of *transcultural theory*, which I am applying here. I am referring especially to the perspectives heralded in the work of Frank Schulze-Engler in recent years, to the critical work of Canadian author Janice Kulyk Keefer, and to my personal reflections and extensions of what might be termed "transcultural imaginary."²⁵

²¹ Frank Schulze-Engler, "Theoretical Perspectives: From Postcolonialism to Transcultural World Literature", in: Lars Eckstein (ed), *English Literatures Across the Globe: A Companion*, Paderborn 2007, 28.

²² Cp. Rimstead 2003, 2.

²³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London 1994.

²⁴ Helmbrecht Breinig/Klaus Lösch, "Introduction: Difference and Transdifference", in: Helmbrecht Breinig/Jürgen Gebhart/Klaus Lösch (eds), *Multiculturalism in Contemporary Societies: Perspectives on Difference and Transdifference*, Erlangen 2002, 11-36. Also cf. Frank Schulze-Engler's critical evaluation of this approach in "What's the Difference? Notes towards a Dialogue between Transdifference and Transculturality", in: *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 13,2 (2006), 123-132.

²⁵ Schulze-Engler 2007; Frank Schulze-Engler, "From Postcolonial to Preglobal: Transnational Culture and the Resurgent Project of Modernity", in: Geoffrey V. Davis et al. (eds), *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Society in a 'Post'-Colonial World*, ASNEL Papers 9.1, Amsterdam 2004, 49-64; Idem, "Von 'Inter' zu 'Trans': Gesellschaftliche, kulturelle und literarische Übergänge", in: Heinz Antor (ed), *Inter- und Transkulturelle Studien: Theoretische Grundlagen und interdisziplinäre Praxis*, Heidelberg 2006, 41-53; Janice Kulyk Keefer, "From Dialogue to Polylogue: Canadian Transcultural Writing During the Deluge", in: Peter Easingwood/Konrad Gross/Lynette Hunter (eds), *Difference and Community: Canadian and European Cultural Perspectives*, Amsterdam 1996, 59-70; Idem, "Writing, Reading, Teaching Transcultural in Canada", in: Hans Braun/Wolfgang Klooss (eds), *Multiculturalism in North America and Europe: Social Practices – Literary Visions*, Trier 1995, 180-197; Nora Tunkel, "Historical Fiction in the Light of Globalization

The adjective "transcultural" must be clearly set apart from prevalent uses of the expression, whether as undefined and bland attribute in quite a few publications, or as marginally used term in serious attempts to capture the complexities of cultures and large-scale cross-cultural movements.²⁶ Here, it particularly refers to the potential evolvment and consequent fluidity of identity-defining cultural discourses of one specific group or individual, through the impact of those of other cultural collectives, again either represented by one person or several, as opposed to the intercultural static side-by-sidedness frequently ascribed to multi-cultural societies²⁷:

The act of moving across borders and connecting disparate voices into what I have elsewhere called a polylogue – this is the *sine qua non* of "transculturalist" aesthetics and of multiculturalism itself. Border-crossing, not in order to arrive at some totalized, monolithic ideal of Canadianness, but rather to establish a dialogic rather than oppositional field of discourse, to conflate margin and mainstream, dominant and emergent group into an everchanging choreography of differences.²⁸

One major factor that distinguishes the approach applied here from other strands of transcultural criticism, as for example found in analyses of *littérature migrante*,²⁹ is that, from my perspective, it is a concept that can well be applied to non-migrant authors and texts³⁰ – a fact which to my knowledge has only been discussed in Québécois criticism, in what Gilles Dupuis has called "littérature transmigrante"

– Transnationalism, Transculturalism & Identity", in: Klaus-Dieter Ertler/Paulina Mickiewicz (eds), *Transcultural Perspectives on Canada*, Canadian Studies in Europe Vol.7, Brno 2007, 157-174.

²⁶ Cf. the definition of "transcultural" prominent in media and communication studies, as in Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, "Globalisation et transculturalité – les années soixante et leur redécouverte (inter)médiatique au Québec", in: Klaus-Dieter Ertler/Martin Löschnigg (eds), *Canada in the Sign of Migration and Trans-Culturalism – Le Canada sous le signe de la migration et du transculturalisme: From Multi- to Trans-Culturalism – Du multiculturalisme au transculturalisme*, Frankfurt a.M. 2004, 195-206; and Andreas Hepp, *Transkulturelle Kommunikation*, Konstanz 2006. For an example from literary studies, cf. Carmen Birkle (ed), *Migration – Miscegenation – Transculturation: Writing Multicultural America into the 20th Century*, Heidelberg 2004.

²⁷ Consider the static "mosaic" metaphor (multi- and intercultural side-by-sidedness) versus Janice Kulyk Keefer's (very early) vision of the "kaleidoscope" (transcultural exchange). Kulyk Keefer, "From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope: Out of the Multicultural Past Comes a Vision of a Transcultural Future", in: *Books in Canada* (Sept. 1991), 13-16.

²⁸ Kulyk Keefer 1995, 197.

²⁹ Cf., for example, Klaus-Dieter Ertler, "Migration et transculturalisme dans le roman *Les amants de l'Alfama* de Sergio Kokis", in: Ertler/Löschnigg 2004, 131-140.

³⁰ This perspective is shared by Frank Schulze-Engler, cf. Schulze-Engler 2007, 23.

(which must not be confused with what anthropologists refer to as transmigration studies).³¹

At the very center of my approach to contemporary fictions of the past, lies the concept of (trans)cultural *imaginaries*, which, however, still needs to be compared to and distinguished from definitions of cultural memory. The closeness of the two terms is obvious, in that both attempt to grasp the complexity of (collective or individual) identity formations through the collection of cultural images and discourses.³² However, and this distinguishes my approach substantially from contemporary research on memory, the emphasis of my theoretical reflections and the analysis in this contribution is set not upon (elements involved in) the *processes and strategies* of – mainly collective – memories, identity constructions, and the media applied (as common in memory theories), but on the actual, both individual and collective, *results and expressions* of these processes, which additionally are narrowed down by the attribute of *transcultural*. Cultural remembering thus is here regarded as one of the socio-mental forces exerting influence on the constantly renegotiated interspaces of the imaginary. The insights gained by memory theories on the methods and means of cultural remembering (and forgetting, for that matter) can profitably be integrated into readings of a transcultural imaginary, as the specific form and contents of identity-founding discourses of cultural groups, represented in this instance by specific cultural memories (and the processes that lead to them analyzed by memory studies), interact, and result in transcultural articulations.

3. Everlasting Re- and De-Construction-sites: Identities

Read in the light of the above-discussed concept of transcultural imaginaries, Jane Urquhart's novel displays a number of dichotomies, next to the opposition of rural and urban space, in various identity-defining spheres, which however are continuously deconstructed and redefined in the course of transcultural interaction. It is thus interesting to observe how the two main characters Sylvia and Jerome move across conflicting spaces of difference in order to come to terms with their present realities.

³¹ Gilles Dupuis, "Le commis voyageur – L'émergence des écritures transmigrautes au Québec", in: Ertler/Löschnigg 2004, 39-46.

³² Cf. Assmann 2004.

As a child Sylvia grows up completely imprisoned and isolated due to her mysterious illness, which is described as a form of autism. Worried about her well-being and future, her parents leave Sylvia, now a young woman, in the custody of a friend of the family, a doctor, who eventually marries her. He not only restrains her freedom due to his idea of female frailty, but additionally sees her as a medical experiment. Until the very end of the novel, he does not change this perspective and refuses to accept his wife as somebody capable of inhabiting an autonomous, self-determined space. Nevertheless, Sylvia herself takes several steps in the deconstruction of her constricted identity, the first by establishing a secret relationship with the historical geographer Andrew, who drives with her into the countryside and shows her places he is studying, and also tells her the history of the places which are strongly linked to his personal family history. Their relationship liberates her sexually, emotionally, and spatially from her husband:

"What was it," asked Jerome, "what was it you were grateful for?"
 "I don't think I'd ever really felt anything before ... before him." Sylvia said.
 "And then there were the stories he told about his family, his ancestors." She leaned over and reached into the bag at her feet, running her fingers for a moment over the smooth leather of one of the journals. "They were like a gift, really these stories, a gift from him to me." (136)

Many years later, after Andrew's disappearance and assumed death, Sylvia reads about Jerome's discovery of the corpse and finally decides to take another step, which ultimately leads to the final deconstruction of her restrained identity. She runs away from her husband and travels to Toronto all by herself where she wants to meet the artist, with whom she shares a connection through the death of her former lover: "I am now in the world", she whispers to herself at her arrival in the city (41). In an oppositional direction, Jerome feels very much at home in the city and only decides to go to the countryside because he is suffering from a creative blockage – for him it is the rural space that has liberating effects, for his art and consequently also for himself. However, the actual de- and subsequent re-construction of identities is only achieved when the two characters meet. In long conversations, the strange, middle-aged woman Sylvia and the young, cynical artist Jerome talk to each other, hesitantly at first, yet gradually becoming more self-assured, exchanging memories and stories. It is in this complex process of re-telling the past and thus the crossing of multiple space and time frames that the two succeed in levelling binaries and re-constructing their identities.

For Sylvia the urban space becomes a space of freedom and liberation from her memories as well as from patriarchal structures, despite the fact that she decides to return to her husband in the end. Jerome, through Sylvia's narrations and the reading of Andrew's family history, rids himself of his own haunting memories and, in his own right, also from negative emotional and patriarchal structures rooted in his childhood and in the bad relationship to his father, an alcoholic, who died tragically during a quarrel. Towards the end of the novel, he finally begins to open up, a reaction that is triggered by Sylvia's (and Andrew's) stories.

"Stability was what I always wanted", said Sylvia, "More than you know."
 "Perhaps. But you ... you lost someone. And I'm worried." He cleared his throat. "I worry about that." He paused. "About you."
 "Oh, don't", said Sylvia quietly. "You're so young. And all of this ... it's well ..."
 For the first time it occurred to her that she might have troubled this young man. "You'll forget this", she said.
 "No. No, I won't." Jerome looked solemn for a moment, then glanced at Sylvia and smiled. "I won't want to forget. Not the story. Not the things we've talked about." He moved over to the couch and slowly sat down. "And the truth is, I want to know, I guess I always wanted to know what happened to him. And now I want to know about you."³³

After their final encounter, the story culminates in an ultimate resolution of memories or in this specific case personal history appropriated into her-story, through which an affirmative reconstruction of identities is achieved. This resolution finds its expression in Sylvia's imagining and writing down of the final part of Andrew's story, Mira's reading, and Jerome's listening to it. Initially, Jerome does not understand why Sylvia decides to return to her life as well-guarded wife, and struggles to let her go; she reminds him of his mother, who had suffered under his father's tyranny and alcoholism. However, after hearing her version of the "story's" ending – of which the fact that she dares to imagine it expresses Sylvia's newly achieved freedom – Jerome allows for his own memories to resurface and reconcile his present identity:

Jerome remained silent while Mira folded up the papers and placed them on the arm of the couch. He was trying to remember the last time he had been read to, who had done the reading. It would have been during his childhood, but the feeling associated with the faint memory was good, warm. There had been an encircling arm, so it would have been early on – his early childhood.

³³ Urquhart 2005, 327; incidentally, this passage also refers to the transgression of another, far too often ignored marker of difference, that of *age*.

Sometimes there had been stories, he suddenly knew, sometimes poetry. "God," said Mira. "How sad, how terribly, terribly sad. Do you think we'll ever see her again?"

[...]

"Wait", he said, not looking at her, then slowly turning his eyes wide. "I think it was him."

Mira was searching his face.

"I think it was him." He closed his eyes, then opened them again and grabbed Mira's arm. "It was my father," he said with amazement, the shock of something resembling pain, or perhaps joy, making it necessary for him to have to steady himself. "He read to me", he said with wonder in his voice. "It was my father who read to me." (370)

The transcultural imaginaries depicted in the novel, as exemplified above, are not, as might be assumed, limited to the exchange of cultural mindscapes in terms of ethnicity or race, but extend to include the transgression and transformation of constructions of time, space, and, most importantly, also of established notions of gender.

4. Transcultural Mindscapes

In this essay I have tried to pinpoint and explain the closeness and difference as well as possibilities of interaction between theories on cultural memory and the concept of transcultural imaginary. The latter, which in a globalized world promises effective insights in the wake of increasingly unascertainable individual and collective constructions of identities, as some examples have shown, offers potential ways for the understanding of continuously redefined mindscapes which challenge socially gridlocked spaces by re-telling and re-writing personal and communal his- and her-stories.

In the final section of this essay, I would like to consider and exemplify some options for concrete approximations to the analysis of transcultural imaginaries, which due to the subject matter nonetheless remain a vague and abstract realm of inquiry. As Marie Vautier has suggested one might distinguish three factors that contribute to what she calls a "transcultural sense of flexible, contingent identities": linguistic, rhetorical, and ideological code-switching; iconography; alternate

religious systems and mythologies.³⁴ I would like to extend her suggestions by differentiating three simplified spheres of analysis, the boundaries of which forcibly merge:

1. *space and place*: how is (historical) space negotiated; what places mark this space and how do they interact to form transcultural imaginaries;
2. *voice and perspective*: in how far are characters with different cultural backgrounds integrated; do different cultural voices and perspectives stand in opposition and/or merge and how;
3. *transfer, exchange, and layering*: how are identity-founding cultural constructs integrated, re-written or re-defined within a narrative; how are cultural transfer, exchange, and layering reflected in thematic constellations and temporal movements.

The above roughly sketched spheres of analysis already hint towards one specific feature of interest, the appearance of what might be referred to as "transcultural figures", who mediate and translate (in the Latin sense of carrying across) between various cultural spheres. In *A Map of Glass* such a mediator figure is represented by Jerome's girlfriend Mira. She displays a diversity of cultural mindscapes, being equally concerned with her own South-East Asian heritage and Jerome's European roots as well as their different religious background, which in fact is a greater concern to her than to him:

"The lion", Mira said suddenly. "Saint Jerome in the wild with his lion." Along with a tiny plaster figure of Krishna, Mira had tucked into his pack a small poster of Joachim Patinir's sixteenth-century *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness*, an image she always insisted Jerome take with him when he disappeared into what she called "the wild", which, to her mind, was located anywhere beyond the city limits. Brought up as a Hindu, she was fascinated by the Christian saints and their stories were, for her, as distant and compellingly exotic as the various Hindu gods and warriors were to him. When they began to get to know each other, she had been delighted to discover that his mother and father had given him the name of a famous saint, though he assured her that religion would have been the last thing on his parents' mind. (25)

³⁴ Marie Vautier, "Religion, Postcolonial Side-by-sideness, and *la transculture*", in: Laura Moss (ed), *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*, Waterloo 2003, 277.

Mira also has an impact on those surrounding her, changes them as she mediates between the binaries that initially separate Andrew and Sylvia, and pushes them towards the dialogue that will eventually change both of them. She is the missing link that breaks the solitudes in an actual and in a metaphoric Canadian sense.

The process of movement between and transgression of binaries is evident also on another level of the novel. The aspect of change and transformation³⁵ that is inherent in the concept of transcultural is not only strongly expressed through the medium of time, through longer and shorter movements between pasts and presents. It is also reflected on a thematic level through the metaphor of change that repeatedly emerges: Both Andrew and Jerome are depicted as being obsessed with the impact of time on objects and on landscapes. While Andrew was committed to the investigation of settlement history and the signs and traces left behind on landscapes, Jerome relentlessly attempts to capture change and the effects of time passing in his art. At one instance, Jerome tells Sylvia about a train ride that inspired his interest in changing landscapes:

When the tracks had swung away from the highway, Jerome had become aware of the fencelines of the fields that were passing, one after the other, by the train window. It seemed to him that these frayed demarcations made up of rotting cedar rails, fieldstones, rusting wire, and scrub bush were the only delineating features in an otherwise neutered landscape. [...] He had reached for his sketchbook, had drawn a series of overlapping lines on three or four pages, had made some notes about how these lines might be transformed into a three-dimensional installation within the confines of a rectangular room [...]

He quickly became obsessed by the ruined fences, and a few weeks later he had borrowed a car, driven out of the city, and begun to search out remnants of rails, boulders, and stumps [...] He began to think of fences as situations rather than structures. Like an act of God or a political uprising, they seemed to him to mark the boundaries of events rather than territories. (16-17)

Sylvia, in contrast, is initially imprisoned through her own desire for and obsession with consistency and stagnancy, and eventually comes to understand that she can only change her situation by accepting changes in her surrounding and by taking over agency, a fact which is also reflected in her writing down of *her* version of the last part of Andrew's notebooks mentioned earlier. The following passage

³⁵ Cp. also Sugars, "The Hands of Chance and Change".

articulates this liberation, which she finally achieves in the urban surrounding, (shortly before her husband arrives to take her back):

No one paid any attention to her, and she knew then that the city had opened its indifferent arms to her, that she could move or stand entirely still, respond, or refrain from responding, and a strange calmness came over her. The feeling was not foreign, not new to her, but here in the city she did not recognize it for the contentment that it was. It was not happiness; she had experienced that particular exhausting state of alert only three or four times, always in the company of Andrew. Now in the midst of the kind of constantly altering stimuli she had believed she could never incorporate into her life she knew only something she had always known: that this kind of tranquility could never be brought to her in the hands of others. (149)

The analysis of transcultural imaginaries in contemporary "fictions of the past" reveals the resurging importance of the re-construction of individual identity, and in relation to it of personal, small-scale versions of his- and her-story, which increasingly replace the formerly prevalent focus on alternative moments in National History. The "I" of individual identity has moved to the very center of Canadian fictions of the past. This development relates to other recent tendencies towards an understanding of reality that moves beyond complete fragmentation towards a belief in the transcendental meaning of existence, to be grasped through the surpassing and layering of binaries of difference:

After all, as we read and interpret, as we attempt to make meaning, the possibility for connection, for community, for relationship looms before us. What binds human to human, community to community, country to country are our stories. The chasm of everyday existence can only be bridged as we listen to one another, as we judge the relative worth of differing artistic and scholarly voices.³⁶

These developments are reflected in what has been termed "transcultural imaginary", as a mode that does not suggest the brewing of some unspecified soup of identities, but instead proposes at least partial openness to (trans)cultural metamorphosis, operating side by side with more separatist entities such as multi- and interculturalism. It is, in fact, at once a consequence of and reaction to the globalizing forces of contemporary modernity, as it hands over cultural agency

³⁶ Todd F. Davis/Kenneth Womack, "Introduction: Necessary Negotiations", in: *Postmodern Humanism in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Reconciling the Void*, Basingstoke/New York 2006, xvii.

to the individual and the local, thus in itself a reciprocally dependant yet self-resolving contradiction.

In this sense, even though readings of constructions and deconstructions of space and gender in literature are not dominant issues in my approach to historical fictions, it is obvious that they are integral parts of formations of identities; as I have tried to show it might be profitable for all parties involved to include such readings underpinned by perspectives gained through theories on cultural memory, into the concept of transcultural imaginaries, opening up new possibilities of thinking about the increasingly dynamic and (to borrow from linguistics) agentive mindscapes of the literary and non-literary self.

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II. Spaces and Difference: Gender-Ethnicity-Space

Spirit Possession and the Transformation of Space in the Fiction of Dionne Brand

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My fascination with the production of space began with my first book, *Paths of Desire*,¹ which traced the motif of maps and map-making in contemporary Canadian women's writing. There I argued that the presence of maps signaled a self-conscious strategy to revise the patriarchal and colonial plots that inform the Canadian nation-state. My current project entails analyzing the often uncanny and unconscious role haunting plays in the social production of space. In using the term "haunting", I am referring to what Avery Gordon describes as the "living effects, seething and lingering, of what seems over and done with".² In what follows, I consider a single short story by Dionne Brand in order to explore her distinct approach to haunting and space. Although I focus on only one example from Brand's entire corpus, I hope to shed light on the more pervasive and uncanny facets of Brand's transformation of mainstream Canadian geographic and narrative space.

Caribbean-Canadian poet, novelist, and essayist Dionne Brand was born in 1953 in Trinidad. Brand immigrated to Toronto at the age of seventeen and became immersed in the black and feminist liberation movements of the 1970s. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, she worked as a cultural critic and community worker for a variety of organizations. Although she is best known for her award-winning poetry and fiction, her non-fiction includes a collection of oral histories about the struggles of people of colour in Toronto, a history of black women, and an autobiographical meditation on Blackness in the Diaspora. Brand's work is particularly relevant to considerations of haunting and questions of visibility and invisibility because the majority of her texts concern themselves "with mapping a black Canadian poetics

¹ Marlene Goldmann, *Paths of Desire: Images of Exploration and Mapping in Canadian Women's Writing*, Toronto 1997.

² Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis 1997, 195.

of space."³ Brand's ability to transform mainstream spatial and temporal paradigms is grounded in what Rinaldo Walcott terms Brand's "diaspora sensibilities" – a perspective that, to borrow Paul Gilroy's words, breaks the "simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location, and consciousness".⁴ According to Walcott, Brand redraws and remaps the Canadian urban landscape "to announce and articulate a black presence that signals defiance, survival and renewal".⁵ In essence, this paper traces the ghostly, subjugated knowledges that instigate and facilitate Brand's transformation of urban space; to do so entails grappling with the notion of haunting and, more specifically, Afro-Caribbean spirit possession.

Critics have helpfully contextualized Dionne Brand's writing within a wide range of black-Atlantic texts haunted by the specter of the Middle Passage and the ghosts of trans-Atlantic slavery. In her memoir, Brand refers to this type of haunting when she describes her early life in Trinidad: "I knew that everyone here was unhappy and haunted in some way. [...] I did not know what we were haunted by at the time. [...] But I had a visceral understanding of a wound much deeper than the physical."⁶ For Brand, the Door of No Return – her term for the forts located along the Guinea coast where captive Africans awaited transport to the Caribbean and the New World – serves as a synecdoche for the disaster that continues to haunt subsequent generations:

The door exists as an absence. A thing in fact which we do not know about, a place we do not know. Yet it exists as the ground we walk. Every gesture our bodies make somehow gestures toward this door. [...] The door casts a haunting spell on personal and collective consciousness in the Diaspora. Black experience in any modern city or town in the Americas is a haunting. One enters a room and history follows; one enters a room and history precedes. History is already seated in the chair in the empty room when one arrives. [...] How do I know this? Only by self-observation, only by looking. Only by feeling. (*Map* 2001, 25)

Embodied feeling supersedes empirical knowledge because the violence and repercussions of transatlantic slavery represent the dark and unspoken facets of the Age of Enlightenment that exceed reason's apparatus. In literature that

³ Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada*, Toronto 2003, 46.

⁴ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Cambridge 2000, 123.

⁵ Walcott 2003, 45.

⁶ Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, Toronto 2001, 11.

explores this legacy, ghosts signal "a form of memory that is lived only through the body".⁷

My contribution to the discussion of the role played by haunting in Brand's corpus lies in suggesting that her fiction is not solely informed by embodied experiences of trauma and dispossession. Instead, I argue that Brand's early engagement with Afro-Caribbean understandings of spirit possession, evident in her first short story collection *Sans Souci*, provides the foundation for her critique and transformation of the racist, classist, and sexist dimensions of Toronto's urban space. While scholarly accounts of Brand's work informed by Western paradigms of poststructuralist performance and trauma theory remain helpful, Brand's fictions exceed these paradigms because they self-consciously explore the muted consciousness of volatile, possessed female bodies and, in so doing, demonstrate a profound knowledge of alternatives to Western epistemology and ontology afforded by Afro-Caribbean possession rituals and spiritual traditions.⁸

⁷ Diana Brydon, "Postcolonial Gothic: Ghosts, Iron and Salt in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*", in: Zbigniew Bialas/Krzysztof Kowalczyk-Twarowski (eds), *Ebony, Ivory, Tea*, Katowice 2004, 217. Katherine McKittrick, for example, traces Black women's struggle to define space and place, and draws specifically on Norbese Philip's concept of "bodymemory" to explain how this genealogy is transported from one generation to the next. According to McKittrick, "bodymemory is passed down and reinterpreted through generation remembrances, teachings, forewarnings, and advice" (Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, Minneapolis/London 2006, 49). As these comments suggest, however, McKittrick somewhat paradoxically conceives of "bodymemory" as a conscious, discursive process.

⁸ A range of critiques rely on poststructuralist notions of performance. Rinaldo Walcott, for example, locates Brand's work within black writing in Canada, and he grounds his analysis within Western rational "traditions and notions of performance, performativity and performer" (Walcott 2003, 75). Commenting on Brand's poem "No Language Is Neutral", for instance, Walcott writes: "Here she is performing the displacement of immigrantness" (ibid, 85). Diana Brydon cites Manthia Diawara's definition of blackness as "a *compelling performance* against the logic of slavery and colonialism by those people whose destinies have been inextricably linked to the advancement of the West, and who, therefore, have to learn the expressive techniques of modernity – writing, music, Christianity, industrialization – in order to become uncolonizable" (Brydon 2004, 221; my emphasis). In her essay on orality and the body in Brand's poetry, Maria Caridad Casas relies on and extends Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Meira Cook's "The Partisan Body: Performance and the Female Body in Dionne Brand's *No Language Is Neutral*" concludes by stating that "Brand's writing constructs the female body as a site of performance" (Meira Cook, "The Partisan Body: Performance and the Female Body in Dionne Brand's *No Language Is Neutral*", in: *Open Letter* 9,2 (1995), 91). Finally, Charlotte Sturgess, commenting on the short story "Blossom," argues that the protagonist "chooses performance over silence" (Charlotte Sturgess, "Spirits and Transformation in Dionne Brand's *Sans Souci* and Other Stories", in: *Études canadiennes/Canadian Studies: Revue interdisciplinaire des études canadiennes en France* 35 (1993), 225). In her essay on Brand's novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Erika Johnson interprets the characters' behaviour solely within Western paradigms of trauma and, as a result, pathologizes characters who commune with spirits as melancholics who "cannot mourn" (Erika Johnson, "Unforgetting

Brand's short story "Blossom, Priestess of Oya, Goddess of Winds, Storms, and Waterfalls" provides a useful case study because it portrays an actual case of possession by the ancient Yoruba deity Oya. In the story, a woman named Blossom from Trinidad immigrates to Toronto, and after years of hardship, becomes a medium. The story opens with a description of the eponymous protagonist's home in Toronto that alerts readers to the centrality of Yoruba deities and possession rituals: "Oya and Shango and God and spirit and ordinary people was chanting and singing and jumping the place down."⁹ Prior to Blossom's transformation into a medium, as one of the many dispossessed black female immigrant workers from the Caribbean, she struggled for several years to make a living. Shortly after arriving in the city, Blossom finds work in the home of a wealthy family. But her "white man boss-man", a doctor, "make a grab for she", (B 33) and his wife, rather than side with Blossom, watches her "cut eye" (B 33). We are told that a "craziness fly up Blossom head and she start to go mad on them in the house" (B 33). In contrast to the paralyzing impact of trauma and depression, this "craziness" inspires Blossom to try to drown the doctor in his swimming pool. It also prompts her to parade in front of his house, holding a placard proclaiming: "the Dr. So-and-So was a white rapist" (B 34). This same spirit motivates her to "rough [him] up" when he returns in his car (B 34).

Later, Blossom finds herself possessed by a similar bout of uncanny, explosive energy when she is married to Victor, a selfish, exploitative man "really lacking in kindness", who "had a streak of meanness when it come to woman" (B 36). One morning, Blossom wakes up "feeling like an old woman. Just tired" (B 37). Victor, on his way out to meet a friend, asks her pointedly why she is not at work, and, once again, "something just fly up in Blossom head and she reach for the bread knife on the table" (B 37). Knife in hand, Blossom chases Victor from the house, running down Vaughan Road "screaming loud, loud" (B 38). After spending the night crying, Blossom wakes the next morning "feeling shaky and something like spiritual" (B 38). For the next two weeks, she retreats to the Pentecostal Church, where she was married, fasting and speaking in tongues "that she didn't ever

Trauma: Dionne Brand's Haunted Histories", in: *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 2,1 (2004), 12; http://scholar.library.Miami.edu/anthurium/volume_2/issue_1/johnson-unforgetting.htm.

⁹ Dionne Brand, "Blossom, Priestess of Oya, Goddess of Winds, Storms, and Waterfalls", in: Dionne Brand, *Sans Souci and Other Stories*, Toronto 1989, 31. All page numbers refer to this edition. The story will be abbreviated as *B*.

learn, but she understand. [...] The tongues saying the name, Oya. This Oya was a big spirit Blossom know from home" (B 38-39).¹⁰

As Teresa Washington explains, Oya, the Yoruba Orisa of transformation and wife of Shango, was especially significant to enslaved Africans and to their descendents living in the lands to which Africans were forcibly exiled: "Whether wielding Power of the Word or a man-disintegrating staff, Orisa Oya is the embodiment of purposeful transmutation."¹¹ Unlike other female Orisa, Oya is extremely assertive. In fact, "Oya was said to have been male in the past and became female, though still exhibiting a virile personality."¹² Scholars, however, categorize Oya first and foremost as a "personification of natural forces and phenomena."¹³ She "manifests herself in various natural forms": the river Niger, tornadoes, strong winds generally, breath in the lungs, fire, lightning, and buffalo."¹⁴ In addition, she is associated with specific cultural phenomena among the Yoruba people (the first to follow her), most importantly, the cult of ancestral worship known as Egungun, named after Oya's child of the same name, as well as births and funerals. As one of Oya's praise songs puts it: She "guards the road into the world and out of it."¹⁵ Thirdly, Oya is also renowned for championing women. She is said to offer the leader of the market women in Yoruba communities "special protection and encouragement in negotiation with civil authorities and arbitration of disputes"; thus one may speak of Oya as "patron of feminine leadership, of persuasive charm reinforced by Àjé – an efficacious gift usually translated as 'witchcraft'.¹⁶ Finally, Oya is known for her revolutionary fervour; she refuses "to stay out of areas of cult and culture preempted by male authority": "Though she might stay for a time in her corner (which is where her altars are always placed), suddenly she's storming all over the place, a revolutionary."¹⁷

¹⁰ The fact that Blossom finds asylum in the church highlights the syncretic nature of Afro-Caribbean spirituality in North America.

¹¹ Teresa Washington, *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts*, Bloomington 2005, 48-49.

¹² Rita Laura Segato, "The Factor of Gender in the Yoruba Transnational Religious World", in: *Série Antropologia* 289 (2001), 10.

¹³ Omosade J. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, London 1979, 46.

¹⁴ See Judith Gleason, *Oya: In Praise of the Goddess*, Boston/London 1987, 1; Kokahvah Zauditu-Selassie, "I Got a Home in Dat Rock," in: Toyin Falola/Ann Genova (eds), *Orisa: Yoruba Gods and Spiritual Identity in Africa and the Diaspora*, Trenton, NJ 2005, 382.

¹⁵ Qtd. in Gleason 1987, 4.

¹⁶ Gleason 1987, 1.

¹⁷ Ibid, 9-10.

For Brand, a lesbian writer and activist concerned with women's place and power, Oya may well have been an especially compelling deity because she wields the "Power of the Word."¹⁸ In her account of the process of writing "Blossom", Brand admits that she and her fellow Caribbean/Canadian writers "talked about whether we would write in the demotic or whether we would write in standard English."¹⁹ As she explains, "there was always the pull of the demotic", but "Blossom" was her "first attempt at formally practicing it, and seeing if I could do it. [...] And I think I was successful at that."²⁰ In "Blossom", then, the trope of possession marks both the content and the form, the moment when the demotic possesses standard English.

Before going any further, it might be helpful to review the central features of possession rituals since an understanding of these is integral to my argument and since the once-prevalent appearance of possession in the Western world has been successfully marginalized, medicalized, and socialized out of existence, in part because capitalism and imperialism together came to value the *self-possessed man*" (my emphasis).²¹ Typically, possession begins with primary episodes of involuntary possession, followed by a phase of more chronic bouts, and concludes with a phase in which the possessed recognizes and accepts the deity and assumes the position of medium.²² "Blossom" traces the familiar phases of possession and invokes many of Oya's attributes. In possession states, these attributes do not arrive in the form of conscious thought, but as embodied cultural memory. Possession involves what anthropologists term "soul-loss" or the "unseating of the ego" which prepares the body for its occupation by the deity.²³ This initial stage transforms the subject into "a horse" or "house" to be ridden or

¹⁸ Brand, of course, is not the first female writer to invoke Oya. In 1927, Zora Neale Hurston, known for her great respect for and deep personal and professional relationship with African-American spirituality, was initiated by Luke Turner into the sect of hoodoo doctors. In this ceremony, Turner named Hurston "a child of Oya" (Washington 2005, 167-168).

¹⁹ Qtd. in Pauline Butling, "Dionne Brand on Struggle and Community Possibility and Poetry", in: *Poets Talk*, Edmonton 2005, 71.

²⁰ Qtd. in Butling 2005, 71, 73.

²¹ See Mary Keller, *The Hammer and the Flute: Women, Power, and Spirit Possession*, Baltimore/London 2002, 6.

²² I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 1971, New York/London 1989, 83.

²³ *Ibid.*, 49-51; Sheila Walker, *Ceremonial Spirit Possession in Africa and Afro-America*, Leiden 1972, 28.

inhabited by a god.²⁴ Moreover, in possession cults, each deity has "a distinct character and the behavior of his devotees is determined accordingly."²⁵ No one has to tell possessed people how to behave, however, since "all members of the society have from childhood seen the deities manifest themselves in people" and "they are familiar with the behavior pattern of each deity."²⁶

As these comments suggest, possession seemingly overlaps with poststructuralist notions of performance. Yet although possession and performance share some common elements, possession exceeds traditional understandings of performance. For one, Western paradigms of performance theory do not accord legitimacy to the notion of ancestral spirits, gods, or nature spirits. Second, Western paradigms implicitly or explicitly presuppose and privilege a conscious agential actor who plays a role. In his groundbreaking study of possession (1930), T.K. Oesterreich identifies a key difference between possession and acting when he observes that, in the case of possession, the so-called "actor" often has no memory of the performance:

Autodescriptions of possession are [...] extremely rare [...]. This poverty of autodescriptive narratives has a profound psychological reason which springs from the very nature of possession. We are to some extent dealing with states involving a more or less complete posterior amnesia, so that the majority of victims of possession are not in a condition to describe it.²⁷

²⁴ In the Haitian belief system, the explanation of possession trance provided by disciples indicates that spirits called *loa* have the power to take over the minds and bodies of the devotees: "A *loa* moves into the head of an individual having first driven out 'the good big angel' (*gros bon ange*) – one of the two souls that everyone carries in himself. The eviction of the soul is responsible for the tremblings and convulsions which characterize the opening stages of trance. Once the good angel has gone, the person possessed experiences a feeling of total emptiness as though he were fainting. His head whirls, the calves of his legs tremble; he now becomes not only the vessel but also the instrument of the god. From now on it is the god's personality and not his own which is expressed in his bearing and words. The *play of his features, his gestures and even the tone of his voice all reflect the temperament and character of the god who has descended upon him*. The relationship between the *loa* and the man seized is compared to that which joins a rider to his horse. That is why a *loa* is spoken of as 'mounting' or 'saddling' his *chual* (horse)." (Metraux qtd. in Morton Klaus, *Mind Over Mind: The Anthropology and Psychology of Spirit Possession*, New York 2003, 59).

²⁵ Walker 1972, 28.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ T.K. Oesterreich, *Possession: Demoniactal and Other among Primitive Races, in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times*, transl. by D. Ibberson, London 1930, 12-13.

More recently, Michel de Certeau grappled with the same enigma regarding the medium's agency (his work concerns the mass possession of the nuns of Loudun in 17th-century France). He concluded that the medium's speech is "doubly lost", first, because the possessed person's voice emanates from a deity and, second, because in most cases, the medium works with an attendant who witnesses and translates the meaning of the experience for the community.²⁸ At bottom, theories of possession states and mediumship contrast with theories of performance because the former focus on an experience defined as "any complete but temporary domination of a person's body, and the blotting of that person's consciousness by a distinct alien power of known or unknown origin."²⁹ As a result, the status of the mind and body in states of possession forcibly challenges Western norms of subjectivity.³⁰

Following the lead of possession studies, my analysis of Brand's work focuses less on the performance or praising the actor or uncovering the ruse than on exploring possession's transformative capacity. This capacity is underscored in Brand's first collection of fiction due to her self-conscious invocation of Oya, the Yoruba goddess of transformation.³¹ Again, possession's capacity for transformation is not predicated merely on its theatricality or the agency of the actor, but on what Keller calls the medium's "instrumental agency".³² Used as "an instrument" by ancestral

²⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, transl. by Michael B. Smith, Chicago 1992, 252.

²⁹ Keller 2002, 3-4.

³⁰ Rather than installing images of black "self-possession" in her writing, Brand heeds Talal Asad's warning that the quest for and the celebration of agency in conditions of oppression "may unwittingly imitate the very construction of subjectivity upon which the oppression rested; agency merely reverses its magical flow (see Keller 2002, 63). Brand, like Asad, recognizes the profound challenge to consciousness posed by embodied knowledge. "One does not have to subscribe to a full-blown Freudianism", Asad writes, "to see that instinctive reaction, the docile body, and the unconscious work in their different ways, more pervasively and continuously than consciousness does. This is part of the reason why an agent's act is more (and less) than her consciousness of it" (Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, Baltimore 1993, 15). Resisting the temptation to affirm Western norms of self-possession, rationality, and conscious forms of behaviour, Brand invokes possession and raises the vexing question of how to evaluate the agency of the body whose consciousness is muted and whose volatile body is controlled by ancestral and other spirits.

³¹ De Certeau likewise insists that what is at stake in the mystic's account of possession is not so much a performance or a distinction between truth of falsity of the spiritual encounter, but "the transformational operations": "These stories depict relations. They do not treat statements (as would a logic) or facts (as in a historiography). They narrate relational formalities. They are accounts of transfers, or of transformational operations, within enunciative contrasts" (De Certeau 1992, 44-45).

³² Keller 2002, 9.

spirits, akin to a hammer or a flute, the medium's body serves as the conduit for politically-charged historical and cultural information legitimized by an ancestral authority. In specific instances, this information has had the power to challenge both colonialism's and global capitalism's competing modes of possession.

In *The Possessed and the Dispossessed*, Lesley Sharp argues that historical and other forms of knowledge and power are embedded in possession rituals, so that the ritual operates as a force of resistance and change against the state. As Sharp explains, spirit possession is "significant to individual, social (as well as cultural), and political experiences."³³ Historically, possession cults have galvanized and sustained revolutions in Zimbabwe, Malaysia, and Madagascar. During the 1947 revolt against the French forces in Madagascar, according to one informant, possession cults ensured that both the "dead and living forces united against the colonial government."³⁴ Anthropologists who have studied the possession cults insist on their power to "attack the real" and, in so doing, to transform "both local and state politics."³⁵ Viewed within the context of a vital global practice in which possession has demonstrated the power to transcend and transform capitalist economic relations, possession cannot be dismissed as a performance or an archaic or oblique form of protest.

Keller documents, for example, how episodes of possession countered contemporary global capitalism in Malaysia:

In the 1970s, hundreds of incidents were recorded in the free-trade zones of Malaysia in which women who worked in the technologically sophisticated manufacturing plants were possessed by *hantu*, spirits, often harmful to human beings, associated with a place, animal, or deceased person. Fifteen women, possessed by a *datuk*, an ancestral male spirit associated with a sacred place, closed down an American-owned microelectronics factory in 1978. The possessed women were so volatile that ten male supervisors could not control one woman.³⁶

³³ Lesley Sharp, *The Possessed and Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town*, Berkeley 1993, 17.

³⁴ Qtd. in Sharp 1993, 48.

³⁵ Paul Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power and the Hauka in West Africa*, New York/London 1995, 20, 37.

³⁶ Keller 2002, 1; see also Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*, Albany 1987.

In these instances, the possessed woman becomes "a place in which the spirits exert their will, bringing to the workplace the territoriality of traditional Malay culture. Through the women a reterritorialization has occurred, creating the heterogeneous situation of an altered reality on the shop floor to which the managers must respond."³⁷

In Brand's narrative, Oya's possession of Blossom likewise transforms the latter's home into sacred space, an "obeah house and speakeasy on Vaughan Road" where candles glow "bright on the shrine of Oya, Blossom's mother goddess", similarly fusing secular North America with traditional sacred space (*B* 31). Just as the Malaysian spirits found the workers in the free-trade zones, readers learn that the Yoruba goddess Oya traveled from Africa to the New World: "Quite here, Oya did search for Blossom. Quite here, she find she" (*B* 41). Echoing the Malaysian spirits that prevented the erasure of indigenous tradition and countered the forces of capitalism, in "Blossom", Oya, the deity of the river Niger and of strong winds and tornadoes likewise transmits embodied knowledge that directs the protagonists' protests against similar forces of patriarchal, capitalist exploitation.

Oya's attributes and behaviour patterns are evident in Blossom's episodes of "craziness". Recalling the Malaysian spirits that pounce on the workers' bodies and, in the process, transform the physical and temporal dimensions within Malaysia's free-trade zones, Oya similarly tempers and transforms Blossom's body. As the narrator explains: "Sometimes, she [Blossom] crawling like a mapeepie snake; sometimes she walking tall, tall like a moco jumbie through desert and darkness, desert and darkness, upside down and sideways" (*B* 39). But possession does not simply alter the body; time as well as space is transformed by Oya since as guardian of the ancestors and founder of the cult of ancestor worship, she opens the channel between the living and the dead. Oya explicitly fractures the temporal dimension when she forces Blossom to confront the history of black people's suffering: "The face of Black people suffering was so old and hoary that Blossom nearly dead. And is so she vomit. She skin wither under Suffering look; and she feel hungry and thirsty as nobody ever feel before. Pain dry out Blossom soul, until it turn to nothing" (*B* 39-40).

³⁷ Keller 2002, 120.

The cultural and philosophical implications of Brand's invocation of Afro-Caribbean possession cults are profound because, to borrow Paul Stoller's words, possession "attack[s] the real" and profoundly reorients both participants and audience members alike (*B* 20).³⁸ For one, the frontiers between natural and supernatural no longer exist.³⁹ Second, possession changes our understanding of subjectivity from an autonomous self to a shifting composite that spans time and space.⁴⁰ As a result, "the entire community of deracinated Africans affirms, in possession by deities who come from Africa for the occasion, its awareness of its historical origins and its belief in the continuing existence of the mythical community of the ancestors."⁴¹

Of course, if a Western psychological and pragmatic overlay of individual mental health were to be applied to Blossom's behaviour, her possession would be interpreted either as symptomatic of post-traumatic stress disorder or as a guise to retaliate safely against her oppressors. On one level, trauma theory resonates profoundly with Brand's depictions of haunting and of possession because both trauma theory and possession studies conceive of the body as instrument or screen for an experience that is "doubly lost". In Cathy Caruth's conception of trauma, this doubleness arises because, in the first instance, the traumatic event is never registered consciously, and when it returns, it does so in the form of nightmares and flashbacks. As Caruth explains, trauma is an event that "*has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood."⁴²

But just as performance theory cannot adequately capture the dynamics of possession, trauma theory likewise remains limited because it, too, does not credit the belief that communal gods and spirits speak through the body. Trauma theory also fails to capture the dynamics unleashed by possession because of its tendency to focus on individual, passive notions of injury, victimization, and pathological and melancholic forms of haunting. That being said, some theorists, most obviously Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, posit a "transgenerational view of trauma in which the secrets of ancestors are encrypted in the body of the possessed. As

³⁸ Stoller 1995, 20.

³⁹ Walker 1972, 123.

⁴⁰ Sharp 1993, 172.

⁴¹ Walker 1972, 123.

⁴² Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction", in: Cathy Caruth (ed), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore 1995, 153.

their translator", Nicolas T. Rand, explains: "The concept of the phantom moves the focus of psychoanalytic inquiry beyond the individual being analyzed because it postulates that some people unwittingly inherit the secret psychic substance of their ancestor's lives. [...] Here symptoms do not spring from the individual's own life experience but from someone else's psychic conflicts, traumas, or secrets."⁴³ Torok, however, explicitly describes the phantom as a result of "*a direct empathy with the unconscious or the rejected psychic matter of a parental object* [...]. The phantom is alien to the subject who harbors it [...]. The diverse manifestations of the phantom ...we call *haunting*."⁴⁴ Their description of transgenerational haunting is thus limited to the abject psychic material of the parental object. Consequently, it does not account for the broader historical dimension and the positive and therapeutic aspects of possession which are valued by the individual and her community.

Significantly, at the moment of crisis, Blossom does not seek the help of a psychiatrist to consolidate her rational subjectivity. Instead, she learns how to empty herself more fully so as to become suffused with the spirit of Oya. Without minimizing the psychic wounds resulting from slavery and the ongoing violence associated with racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia, I argue that, viewed in terms of Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices, Brand's early writing invites readers to transcend notions of performativity and trauma, and the related concepts of the individual and the autonomous self. Understood in this light, Blossom's uncanny experience signals the redemption of threatened ritual knowledge and the re-sanctification of place. Through the receptive, open channel of Blossom's "emptied and occupied body", and through Brand's writing more generally, Afro-Caribbean cultural memory is transported to Toronto and imprinted in the body of Canadian literature, instigating a profound change in its orientation.

⁴³ Nicolas T. Rand, "Editor's Note", in: Nicolas Abraham/Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. and transl. by Nicolas T. Rand, Chicago/London 1994, 166.

⁴⁴ Abraham/Torok 1994, 181.

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"Changes in Relative Space": A Reading of Body, Nation, and Relation in Tessa McWatt's *Dragons Cry*

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1. Introduction

Dragons Cry is the second novel by Caribbean-Canadian author Tessa McWatt. Born in Georgetown, Guyana in the 1950s, McWatt grew up in Toronto, where her family migrated to when she was only three years old. She worked as a musician, an editor, and a teacher in Toronto and later Montreal, increasingly also devoting herself to writing, before moving to London, England. She now divides her time between England and Canada as well as between writing and teaching. McWatt's own background as a Caribbean-Canadian author who moves between various national, ethnic, and cultural spaces – in interviews she makes statements such as "I feel I belong elsewhere"¹ or "I just feel like [...] home is something I have to make in the moment"² – strongly informs her writing, which addresses questions of identity and belonging. Published in 2000 and short-listed for the Governor General's Award as well as the City of Toronto Book Award, *Dragons Cry* is set in Toronto and Barbados. With close attention to issues of space and place, the complex novel quite literally "maps" the complex patterns of migration, self-perception, and self-positioning of its protagonists: Faye, a Canadian musician, her husband Simon, an originally Barbadian geologist and cartographer, as well as Simon's brother David, who – in a convoluted triangular relationship – in a sense both connects and separates the couple. Told alternately from Faye's and Simon's point of view and mostly in flashbacks, the novel, in various respects, exemplifies the relativity and subjectivity of spatial conceptualizations and notions of place and belonging. At the same time, it shows how Canadian traditions of

¹ Susan G. Cole, "Tessa McWatt: Guyanese Author Unleashes Colonial Demons at Word on the Street", *Now Magazine* Online Edition Toronto, April 18, 1998, <http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/18/04/Ent/cover.html>, October 17, 2007.

² N.N. "An Interview with Tessa McWatt", *Literature Alive* Online, October 17, 2007. http://literaturealive.ca/images/stories/html/Audio_html/MCWATT.html.

writing about space, the uses of geographical tropes for aesthetic effect, are partly adopted yet adapted by an author of non-European background.

2. Space, Place, Identity: Longing and Belonging

Throughout, *Dragons Cry* is marked by a concern with the intricate dynamics connecting space/place and identity, i.e. questions of rootedness and belonging or the impact of displacement and Diaspora on the individual. Of the book's characters, especially Simon is not easily "placed" – both in the literal sense of the word in terms of his transitory residencies (almost nomadism) and figuratively in terms of his shifting allegiances. From an increasingly chaotic Guyana, Simon's family during his childhood had moved to the orderly British Barbados, yet his father's unceasing attachment to the homeland determines much of Simon's childhood. As an adult, Simon moves to Canada to go to university, exhibiting the same guilt-mixed nostalgia for Barbados that his father felt for Guyana.³ As a cartographer, Simon is fascinated with Canada, its sheer expanse as well as geological and geographic diversity. Yet Canada fails to materialize itself as place or home for him, making for a continued sense of Diaspora. In an allegedly postnational age and in a multicultural society, as Canada conceives of itself as being one, the notion of Diaspora – which forecloses the idea of a singular or clearly bounded citizenship, but instead always involves multiple spaces and boundary crossings – may present itself as an opportunity to achieve an almost liberating state of multiple *belonging*. For Simon, however, it merely results in a constant and ultimately unanswerable *longing*.⁴ This longing originates in the fact that Simon's self-conceptualization is, on the one hand, bound to place, but that on the other hand he neglects to see place as a function of time. Indeed, after having lived in Canada, which, despite its fascination, intimidates him in its coldness and spatial unboundedness, he resolves to "go back to Barbados to build a place for himself *outside of time* – a place preserved in salt" (148, emphasis added).

Thus, not only is he torn between different allegiances and desires, thinking of Barbados as home when in Canada ("He wanted to go home", 120) and missing

³ See Tessa McWatt, *Dragons Cry*, Toronto 2000, 152. If not indicated otherwise, all page numbers refer to this edition.

⁴ It is difficult to determine in how far this might also be read as a critique of Canada's failure to realize its high ideal of a multicultural society in terms of integration.

Canada when in Barbados ("he suddenly missed Canada", 121); he also has to realize that the place he wants to return to, the Barbados of his childhood and youth, no longer exists. On the occasion of his one attempt to resolve this constant tension by actually trying to go "home", Simon experiences this absence almost physically: "During the months Simon spent on Barbados trying to imagine a place for himself there, he started to feel himself slipping out of his skin, as though the space between bone and flesh had widened with nothing to fill it up. Home had become a hollow, echoing word" (152). In his nostalgia for the lost Barbados he knew, Simon falls into the trap of seeing place, in Doreen Massey's terms, as

bounded, as in various ways a site of an authenticity, as singular, fixed, and unproblematic in its identity [... when in fact] the identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. [...] All attempts to institute horizons, to establish boundaries, to secure the identity of places, can in this sense therefore be seen to be attempts to stabilize the meaning of particular envelopes of space-time. They are attempts to get to grips with the unutterable mobility and contingency of space-time.⁵

In contrast to utopias, the unreal and ideal spaces which never exist anywhere but in people's imagination, places in this sense can be both real and imagined, in that their existence is always defined by individual perception at a particular moment. As Simon cannot go back in time, he cannot return to his idea of home, so that

Home became a craving, not a place. He wanted to run away then, to return to Canada or to go somewhere even farther away – Australia, China – so as to justify the space now echoing between bone and flesh. This was the answer to the puzzle of ageing. It wasn't gravity mixed with time that caused the body's peeling; it was prolonged homesickness. The farther we go from home, from a vital source, the more yearning we put between ourselves and our bodies, the more our skin sags. (153)

Outer topographical distance is thus perceived as a mere function of an inner distance, as literally being "embodied" in the inevitable dissociation the mind experiences as a consequence of the process of growing up, of losing one's innocence, of reaching greater self-reflection. Simultaneously, the body as the physical site of identity no longer "fits", as Simon's identity is jeopardized by his feeling of disorientation and loss.

⁵ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, Cambridge 1994, 5.

The constant tension between longing and belonging (and implicitly between a disturbing present and an idealized, no longer attainable past) not only reverberates through the novel itself, it also dominates its paratexts. The cover photograph by Pamela Williams, showing the fractured face of an angelic sculpture which looks up to the hand that caresses it, is tellingly entitled "Longing"; and the epigraph, an excerpt from Isak Dinesen's *Anecdotes of Destiny*, spells it out explicitly:

Until this day, nobody has seen the trekking birds take their way toward such warmer spheres as do not exist, or the rivers break their course through rocks and plains to run into an ocean which is not to be found. For God does not create a longing or a hope without having a fulfilling reality ready for them. But our longing is our pledge, and blessed are the homesick, for they shall come home.

Such an optimistic view of longing is only born out to a very limited extent within the novel itself. While Simon does find home in Faye – although just to lose it again –, for Simon's brother David his homesickness is his nemesis. Having left Barbados for New York and later Toronto, always in search of fulfilment, David experiences an even more severe uprooting than Simon. A conversation he has with Faye alludes directly to the epigraph, yet darkly re-encodes longing as a curse, rather than a blessing: "He began to speak of longing like a curse. Longing that was like the pull of warmer climes on migrating birds, or the inexorable flow of a river to the ocean" (127). Most importantly, in contrast to Simon, David realizes early on that his is "a kind of homesickness that had nothing to do with place" (127) but rather originates in his failure to root himself in a meaningful context. It is this realization – that his homesickness is not to be answered by any possible place – that will eventually cause him to commit suicide. Asking Faye "When will it stop?" (127), he himself is fully aware that the answer to this question is likely to be "Never".

3. Gendered Takes on Space?

Characteristically, it is Faye who is shown to provide "home" in a literal and/or metaphorical sense for both Simon and David. She thus appears to embody traditional attributions of "place" as female, domestic, stable, in Catherine Nash's

words "secure nests of timeless, maternal and essential femininity."⁶ When David sleeps with Faye, his brother's wife, for the first and only time, he tellingly admits having "wondered if you were like the ruby slippers... [...] you have them with you all the time but don't know they're the thing that *gets you home*" (159, emphasis added). David imagines Faye, as his reference to fairy tales shows, as the *locus mirabilis* that puts an end to his unceasing yearning – a yearning which is, as pointed out above, metaphorically stated in terms of space and place (a mythical "home"), yet never to be fulfilled by physical movement or the arrival in a particular topographical place. Rather, David, like Simon, engages spatial discourse to describe his search for a mental and psychological state of peace and completion. And just like David imagines Faye as the means to "come home", for the shiftless Simon Faye constitutes an anchor to stop him from drifting and fills up the empty spaces within him:

After leaving Barbados for the last time, Simon came to think of home as a yearning fulfilled only by love, which transformed yearning to belonging. When he met Faye – tall, fair, with frightened eyes – he felt full, complete and without cavernous reverberation. He was home in her strength and softness, contradictions like the soul of a bird. His skin began to tighten; excitement rushed blood to all his organs. (159-160)

This idea of finding home (in the sense of clenching the "craving" that home had become to be, see 153) and completion in the other – interestingly here also the uppercased "Other", since Faye's Nordic appearance is in no way reminiscent of Simon's and David's Barbadian origins –, first reads like the description of an ideal relationship. Yet with Simon and Faye, it describes a one-sided process: In the passages told from Faye's point of view – once more emphasizing the importance of the shifting narrative focalization in this novel – readers come to learn that filling Simon's empty spaces seems to create them in Faye.

In contrast to Simon, Faye has spent all her life in the Toronto area and neither experiences Simon's homesickness for a remembered place, nor David's acute and constantly driven search for meaning and purpose. Her experiences are, in fact, inversely congruent to those of the two brothers: While for the drifting/lost male characters Simon and David relationships offer places of belonging, for Faye it is relationships themselves which seem to open up the very spaces longing

⁶ Catherine Nash, "Looking Commonplace: Gender, Modernity and National Identity", in: *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 39 (1996), 62.

arises from, most visible in her desperate wish for a child, but also in terms of a completion of the self through an ideal beloved other. Simplifying for the sake of argument, where the male characters find completion, the female character faces dissolution, as blatantly obvious in Faye's first marriage to Michael, her conductor, which threatens the integrity of her individual psychological and physical space: "At first she had been happy with Michael, learning from him, oblivious to the slow osmosis, the subtle melting of her own ego. The only obstacle to becoming him seemed to be the formality of skin and bone separating fluids, yet her blood needed his heart to keep it flowing rhythmically" (88). Faye even compares her existence with Michael to a species of sea worms which ingest larvae of their own species to keep them as internal sperm donors. Yet inverting the pattern, she finds that Michael "had filled up his distant parts with bits of her, and she was living inside him" (180) – which makes Michael yet another instance of male completion through a female who in the process is inevitably fractured to "fit" the male's particular needs, to fill in the "blank spots" on the male map. Consequently, for Faye, breaking up this symbiotic relationship, reinvoking the boundary between self and other, and reconstituting herself is "like leaving part of herself, a trapped coyote chewing off its own leg" (107). Faye seems unable to negotiate a balance between distance vs. closeness in relationships, so that this painful process of self-mutilation to some extent repeats itself when she meets Simon. Entering into a new relationship and allowing for closeness constitutes a centrifugal force impacting on her identity, a threat to her previous safe (since self-contained and closely circumscribed) existence: She "felt the need to leak out again" (107). So with Simon, as with Michael before him, "when they made love she felt fragments of herself clinging to his centre and shedding from her insides so that sometimes it hurt" (138).

These images of diminishing and fragmentation in relationships are contrasted with an almost tragicomic passage in which Faye, due to hallucinations caused by a hormone treatment she undergoes to become pregnant, feels herself growing to absurd dimensions and consuming the space around her:

While sipping tea with Mary in a café, she felt her body expand, grow out of the chair, out of her clothes. Believing everyone was witnessing her flesh bursting out of her shirt, Faye excused herself. She felt like Alice, unable to be contained by the space around her which was insufficiently feeding her desires. *'Goodbye feet! ... o my poor little feet, I wonder who will put on your shoes and stockings for you now, dears... how queer everything is today... who in the world am I?'* (105)

As with opening up in the space of her relationships, giving in to her desire for a child makes Faye's previous clear-cut self-containment impossible, creates a (necessarily fuzzy) interface with the outside world, and consequently causes her to conceive of herself in altered spatial terms. (Only this time it is her, instead of her partner, who begins to "take up more space").

Faye's "shrinking and growing" (107), her fragmentation, dissolution, and reassembly to fill her own, but more blatantly her lovers' needs, at first glance suggest a "typically feminine" pliability and dissolution of identity ("she had lost all sense of who she was", 104). Moreover, the almost hysterical irrationality⁷ and emotionality in Faye's ever-changing perception of space, especially when contrasted with Simon's allegedly scientific approach, as well as the way in which Simon connotes Faye with place and home, seem to imply highly conventional or even essentialist takes on space in terms of gender. Yet the novel's use of spatial discourse on the other hand also complicates or even undercuts such clear-cut gendered attributions in various respects. An association of Simon with the rational, abstract, universal, and conceptual – traits which in the context of Western spatial thinking are coded masculine⁸ – becomes increasingly impossible. Simon, as already became apparent in some of the previously quoted sections, like Faye conceives of his body in shifting terms,⁹ describing cavernous spaces, fragmentation – "There are pieces of Simon all over the basement. He wants to refasten himself" (192) – and the sensation of slipping out of his skin (see 152). And in the same way Faye had thought of herself as symbiotically living with or even inside Michael, Simon states about Faye that "she had stolen a beat of his life, replaced every two seconds of life with the thought of her, the smell of her, the flutter of her laugh. He had begun to live inside her" (48). What is yet more, Simon's reason-based and scientific outlook on space increasingly gives way to acknowledging contradictions, changes, and emotionally charged perspectives. Thus Faye's perception of Simon in the aftermath of his brother's death is that "he who has always relied on reason is now full of contradictions" (8).

⁷ This impression is exacerbated by the fact that Faye at one point uses the exact same words which her mother had repeated like a mantra during her nervous breakdown and subsequent mental deterioration and hospitalization (see 50-54, 82, 93-94). Faye is very much aware of these parallels and thinks to herself: "Each of us our little madness we must handle" (52).

⁸ Cf. Massey 1994, 9.

⁹ The same holds true for David, who in a countermovement to Faye's extension feels himself "shrivelling" (157).

This development towards emotional complication (also in terms of the perception of space) is anticipated by the novel's title and indicated in its chapter titles. Both Simon and his father are rational, scientific-thinking males. Yet both are born in the year of the dragon according to the Chinese calendar, and, contrary to the force and ferociousness usually associated with dragons, this suggests that they are "very sensitive" (70). As a friend points out in the eponymous statement: "Dragons cry" (112).¹⁰ Additionally, while six of the novel's chapters are alternately entitled "Salt" and "Water", due to Simon's life-long fascination with salt and the sea (see e.g. 75-78), the final chapter title merges these objects of Simon's scientific inquiry to result in "Tears" (175), which are inherently emotional. These symbolic references accompany and underline a development in which, slowly but inexorably, Simon in his profession as a cartographer for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources realizes the instability of the scientific and allegedly objective and universal frames of reference that govern Western spatial thinking. Space and place, he comes to understand, are more complex phenomena than maps can account for: "All maps are generalisations. A map cannot portray reality: detail is lost at the reduced scale. *I long for release from simplification, smoothing, displacement, and classification*" (73). In the developments of its characters and in its use of spatial and body imagery, McWatt's complex and multilayered narrative thus sets up but simultaneously upsets gender-based dichotomous attributions and associations with space and place, body and mind, reason and emotion.

4. Positions, Positionings, Possibilities

While the novel is told alternately from the perspectives of Simon and Faye, and it is their relationship that dominates the text, in many cases, David acts as a third – a third which can both forge a link and build a wall between the two of them. It is David who introduces Simon to Faye, but also David who invades the space of their marriage, and David who through his suicide becomes the prism through which Simon and Faye re-evaluate their lives and their relationship. Once again thinking in spatial terms, Simon conceives of knowledge about David as "suspended between them like a bridge" (84), a simile which suggests transcendence and

¹⁰ It is furthermore an especially fitting sign for both Simon and his father in their shared lifelong yearning to return to a remembered place (Barbados and Guyana, respectively) since dragons are the only sign in the Chinese calendar which, in contrast to dogs, pigs, rats etc., are, as Simon realizes, "not real. They came from nowhere, belonged nowhere" (112).

connection, yet also presupposes distance and separation, that there *is* a gap to *be* bridged in the first place.

The relative distances in Simon and Faye's relationship, their "positionings" towards each other, are in fact reflected in their actual positions throughout the novel. One year into their relationship, the two of them move together into a one-bedroom apartment – a move which interestingly is commented upon with: "*Before that, they struggled for space*" (137, emphasis added) because Faye had been living in a small studio and Simon had been living with David. This initial closeness somewhat widens when the two of them move to a more spacious house, and after Faye's short affair with David, Simon even moves out to a basement apartment by himself. He returns one year later to begin an incredibly slow process of rapprochement, which comes to a sudden halt with David's death. The night of David's funeral – the only time period in the novel told in the present tense and the vantage point from which past events and developments are evaluated – finds Faye and Simon retreating to the extremities of their Torontonion house: "Faye sits in the studio, remembering, just as Simon sits in the basement, even as she wishes for the gift of amnesia, a gentle erasing of time" (174). As in Grimm's fairy tale about the Two Kings' Children, the space between them – two sets of stairs – appears to become insurmountable, although they clearly long for each other: "He extends his arms up to the ceiling, stretching his tightened muscles, releasing his joints. Up, up onto his toes, stretching high, higher..." (73), while she is "*afraid to go down. I reach down through the floor, across the ceiling, my pointed fingertip reaching, reaching... just to touch...*" (108).

"Distance", as William H. New points out, "is less empirical than systems of measurement might imply, for 'acceptable nearness' varies from culture to culture, and even within cultures varies with circumstances."¹¹ Distance within Simon and Faye's relationship – like the expanse of the protagonists' bodies – becomes relative, stretching and expanding with betrayal and retreat or collapsing to an intimidating proximity. For the most part, the (mutual) wish for closeness and intimacy expressed in the thoughts of both Simon and Faye is frustrated by the impossibility to overcome the abovementioned gap. Thus Simon, while being in the same house with Faye, cannot feel close to her: "No sounds from Faye's studio, as if it's sealed off. [...] It feels as though pockets of air separate him

¹¹ William H. New, *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing*, Toronto etc. 1997, 7.

from Faye. Bubbles that promise to burst open and allow them to breathe freely and deeply of each other, but never do. He just keeps bumping into them and bouncing away like a stray balloon" (9). And Faye, synaesthetically linking spatial to auditory perception, thinks of herself and Simon as being "even further apart. Wide, wide noises" (47).

The novel's references to distance, disorientation, one-sidedness, and longing are balanced, however, by elements tentatively alluding to the possibilities of resolution, connection, and belonging. Throughout the night, which they spend in their respective rooms in the basement and the studio, music becomes the desperately needed bridge between them: The sound waves of Bartok, Dvorak, and Mozart, Percy Sledge, Marvin Gaye, and Nina Simone transcend the "wide, wide noises", the gap between Simon and Faye, as – still avoiding each other – they alternately put on CDs in what almost resembles a balanced dialogue (see 145). In continuation of this "dialogue", they each resolve for themselves: "*I will go down again*" (190) and "*I will go upstairs. Perhaps we will talk*" (192). The two separate "I"s eventually even merge in the still tentative question "*Can we be?*" (195), suggesting that love may become belonging for both Simon and Faye. Moreover, sitting in his basement, Simon fingers the antique compass which David had given him at their last meeting. What first appears to be a highly ironic gift – while more forceful and daring and thus overshadowing the hesitant Simon,¹² the chaotic and ambivalent David has never been an older brother whom to turn to for orientation – eventually refers Simon to what David obviously saw as his only chance for belonging: The compass "points Simon back to the cemetery, to David's coffin" (188). Underlined by Simon's observation that "The space between bone and flesh seems to widen, collapsing again in death: home at last" (170), this connotes David's death almost positively. While it takes on widely different shapes, each of the three main characters therefore appears to have found or to be at least under way towards some sort of home in the end. McWatt explains about the novel in an interview, "Longing can become belonging in love. Or in David's case, in death, in that place where nothing is separate."¹³ Simon and Faye's attempt at a new beginning, their decision to create a new life by having "*a child...*" (195), and David's decision to end his life, rather than being diametrically opposed, in

¹² Cf. the beginning of the novel, p. 6.

¹³ In Geoffrey Cook, "Longing and Belonging: An Interview with Tessa McWatt", *The Danforth Review*, January 2002, http://danforthreview.com/features/interviews/tessa_mcwatt.htm, October 17, 2007.

this particular case can consequently be read as constituting alternative ways of finding belonging.

5. Remapping a Canadian Tradition?

Discussing the novel in the context of space in Canadian literature and culture, a final question to be addressed here is in how far this text by a Caribbean-Canadian writer aligns itself – or strays from – a Canadian tradition of writing about space and the land.¹⁴ On the surface Simon's feeling of Diaspora could be read as echoing the sense of loss initially experienced by European settlers faced with the vastness and wilderness of the Canadian continent. Such parallels suggest themselves when Simon during his work as a geologist in northern Ontario "was lost in deep woods, frightened and the most alone he'd ever felt in his life" (147); and through juxtapositions between Canada and Barbados, in which the homeland appears as the warm haven, whereas Canada appears first and foremost hostile and cold, as epitomized by the evaluation Simon's Barbadian girlfriend Edith provides when visiting him in Canada during his studies there: "I'd never live in such a horribly cold world with cold people" (120)

Such an alignment of the recent Barbadian immigrant with early European settlers is marred by several fault lines, however. The most obvious, of course, is the Barbadian status as a colony of the Empire, whereas British settlers in their encounter with the new continent constituted the colonizing force themselves. Yet if this aspect and its impact on the social construction of space play a role in the novel at all, it is not very prominent, and Simon never sees his profession as surveying the continent as incongruous to his position as a "colonial subject". Furthermore, in its reading of a changing Barbados, the novel focuses more on the inevitable consequences of modernization than directly on the process of colonization. More interesting, therefore, are the differences in the mode of representation used in reference to the actual space. While initially Canadian writers partly struggled to

¹⁴ I am, of course, aware, that there is no "one Canadian tradition" of writing about space; yet it is interesting to attempt to situate the novel with regard to some observable tendencies. In an interview, McWatt explains: "I feel like as a writer I am definitely a Canadian writer. And my life as a writer wouldn't have been possible anywhere else. As an immigrant had my family moved to England or stayed in the Caribbean, or whatever I wouldn't have done I think what I have done. But then again some if [sic] people call me a Caribbean writer, I'm really happy to be a Caribbean writer as well" (McWatt in *Literature Alive*).

ignore the incongruity between the actual landscape they saw themselves faced with and the pastoral representational inventory brought along from Europe,¹⁵ many later Canadian writers instead resorted to a sober geographical terminology for describing the Canadian setting – a strategy which both provided a way out of the impasse of incongruity and simultaneously allowed them to break free from European traditions and norms.¹⁶ That McWatt's novel, through the character of Simon, also uses the discourses of geology and geography to depict the Canadian landscape, rather than resorting to a more picturesque and metaphorical register, thus possibly aligns it with a general tendency in "contemporary English-Canadian fiction [to] use [...] physical geography to alter and renovate the conventions of landscape writing"¹⁷ – as represented by writers such as Robert Kroetsch, Rudy Wiebe, Jane Urquhart, or Aritha van Herk. And just as Omhové in her concept of "sensing space" postulates that a shift of focus in (postmodern) geography to encompass mutability rather than stasis¹⁸ has contributed to a conception of "landscape as an event rather than as an object" (162) in the works of these writers, McWatt within the character of Simon endows the geographical/geological register with both temporal and emotional components (cf. above), thereby undermining its status as a merely mimetic device. Rather, spatial discourse within this novel provides the language for narrating or a structural grid for situating such encompassing issues as identity and dissociation, longing and belonging, isolation and relationship, life and death. Its links to the physical "space" of the body, which lend a peculiar intimacy to Simon's geographical descriptions especially of Barbados, moreover appear to echo Robert Kroetsch's apparently incongruous aphorism "I wear my geography next to my skin",¹⁹ collapsing the

¹⁵ Omhové points out that 19th-century Canadian "fiction and poetry [...] proceeded to the aestheticizing of Canadian space into landscape, following – no matter how uneasily – covenants of beauty elaborated elsewhere, either in the British romantic tradition or in American transcendentalism". (Claire Omhové, *Sensing Space: The Poetics of Geography in Contemporary English-Canadian Writing*, New York 2007, 17-18).

¹⁶ Cf. Omhové 2007, 21.

¹⁷ Ibid, 161.

¹⁸ As Edward Soja explains: "Modern geography was reduced primarily to the accumulation, classification, and theoretically innocent representation of factual material describing the areal differentiation of the earth's surface – to the study of outcomes, the end products of dynamic processes best understood by others. Geography thus treated space as the domain of the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile – a world of passivity and measurement rather than action and meaning". (Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, 1989, London 1998, 36-37).

¹⁹ Robert Kroetsch, *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New*, New York/Oxford 1989, ix.

opposition between distanced scientific neutrality and the involvement of personal experience and thus pointing to the subjectivity and cultural conditioning of spatial perception.

6. Conclusion

Simon's job at the Ministry consists of

cross-referencing maps with their immediate predecessor, the careful monitoring of changing topography. This process winds back to original land surveys done at the time of Lord Simcoe, and Simon finds the process prismatic, with each frame of change on a map refracting whole ways of living we can no longer imagine. Rock has become brick and siding. Land adjusts to its users. *Terra* is not *firma* but rather the gentle accident of time, wind, and machines reshaping sediment and water. (9-10)

Resonating with both Henri Lefebvre's postulation of space as culturally constructed – "refracting whole ways of living" – and with Doreen Massey's observations on the correlation of space and time, this passage seems to comprise many of the central issues of McWatt's novel. In its concern with the shifting and changing landscapes of life and relationship, of longing and belonging, the text un/covers what Doreen Massey describes as "a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces: cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism."²⁰ Simon at one point realizes: "When you juxtapose cartograms from different times for identical coordinates it is possible to see *changes in relative space*" (62, emphasis added). In view of the preceding reading of McWatt's novel, his observation must be complemented by the aspect that the same occurs by juxtaposing cartograms not only from different times but from different cultures and by different people, as each individual's (culturally conditioned) experience of space may result in a different map.

Both these individual experiences and the social and cultural constructions of space and place are inherently structured along lines of gender, class, and ethnicity. In a reciprocal process, essentialist notions of ethnic and gender identities enter into conceptualizations of space and place, just as these gendered and ethnicized

²⁰ Massey 1994, 3.

concepts of place and space in turn affect ideas on gender and ethnicity. McWatt's novel not only exposes this culturally conditioned mutual constitution, especially the way in which gender difference has been inscribed into notions of space; the text juxtaposes this process with the idea of the coexistence of a multiplicity of spaces and layered strata as well as multiple, intersecting attributions, thereby effectively foreclosing simplistic or essentialist ascriptions along predetermined conceptual lines. McWatt's elaborate use of spatial discourse, of spatial metaphors, and of the terminology of geography, therefore, can be said to present readers with a new cartography that in its mapping of spatial conceptualizations takes into account, yet fails to acknowledge, a culturally conditioned gender-divide in spatial thinking.

The question of whether the text's use of geographical discourse places it within a Canadian tradition of "landscape" writing – intentionally put in quotation marks to indicate that postmodern Canadian writing bears little resemblance to traditional representations of "landscape" – in its complex colonial entanglements admittedly could only be glanced at, tentatively indicating some parallels between tendencies in contemporary Canadian fiction about space and the particular text at hand. Taking into account more than just an individual novel, this question would certainly merit further research in the future.

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Coming Across: Aging Female Bodies & Liminal/Other Spaces in Suzette Mayr's *The Widows* and Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*¹

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In his *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Edward Soja outlines his "belief that the spatial dimension of our lives has never been of greater practical and political relevance than it is today".¹ After a century largely given to exploring the *historical* dimensions of our social relations, Soja implies, cultural criticism now investigates the constructions of race, class, and gender more in relation to and through *space* – which as part of a larger cultural network of signifying practices is itself a complex construct. Space, Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift assert, "is actively constitutive of [...] grounding and re-placing meaning".² Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, while debating spatial politics as central for feminist resistance to patriarchal structures, stress how historically, "gender difference was [...] seen as inscribing spatial difference".³ Beyond the colonial trope of feminizing new, unknown land to be entered and appropriated by a heroic male colonizer, a modern-day version for "gendered spaces" is, of course, the division of the private/domestic sphere as feminine, and the public arena as masculine. Like many others, Blunt and Rose criticize this binary for being reductive and essentialist. They point out how a more flexible, differentiated sense of female identities depends on what Adrienne Rich has termed the "politics of location"; in other words, on the situatedness of the phenomenological subject in "a space that is fragmented, multidimensional, contradictory, and provisional".⁴ The idea of a spatialized identity corresponds with often overlapping, and often mutually influential, concepts, such as: Rosi Braidotti's notion of "feminist nomadism"; Michel

¹ Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Cambridge 1996, 1.

² Steve Pile/Nigel Thrift, "Mapping the Subject", in: Pile/Thrift (eds), *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*, London/New York 1995, 49.

³ Alison Blunt/Gillian Rose, "Introduction: Women's Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies", in: Blunt/Rose (eds), *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, New York/London 1994, 1.

⁴ Blunt/Rose 1994, 7.

Foucault's "heterotopias" with their related "trialectics" of space, power, and knowledge; Homi Bhabha's "hybridity" and subject positionality; Soja's "Thirdspace" as combining and transcending the material and mental dimensions of spatiality.

To view the body as central vehicle for approaching and crossing spaces has a long tradition. Topoi of wandering, Diaspora, and pilgrimage, for instance, with their narratives of crucial insights, loss, and metamorphosis, abound across cultural histories. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in 1962, reasons that "our bodily experience of movement [...] provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, with a "praktognosia" which has to be recognised as original and perhaps as primary".⁵ If we set aside the problematic implication of corporeality as a predis-cursive origin, the body still appears as phenomenological nexus of identity-constitutions. This process of construction, Kathleen Woodward points out in *Aging and Its Discontents*, can be understood, in Freudian psychoanalytical terms and for the infant/child, as "the integration of the body parts into a whole"; but if this renders "the body [...] in phantasy (or in Lacan's imaginary) the principle of unity", Woodward contends, then "the body also represents the principle of disunity".⁶ For with increasing age, the images and experiences of physical change and fears of fragmentation affect the disintegration of the former (imagined) union. Can this explain why in the 20th century the "cultivation of youth" has run parallel with the "ghettoization of old age"?⁷ The *aging* body has only recently become a real presence in feminist writing. To date, still, stereotypical depictions of the final stages of the human life course as a time of decline and wisdom would project retired men as retaining fitness and attractiveness, while women – if represented at all – would appear a lot more deteriorated.

Two contemporary Canadian examples interrogating such elisions and misrepresentations are Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Suzette Mayr's *The Widows*: In both novels, old(er) immigrant women suffer from invisibility and marginalization in their respective domestic and work-related spheres within a hierarchical multicultural society. Their bodies are essential to liberating escapes into liminal and other terrains, to negotiating racist, ageist, and sexist prejudices toward a

⁵ Steve Pile/Nigel Thrift, "Introduction", in: Pile/Thrift (eds) 1995, 6.

⁶ Kathleen Woodward, *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1991, 171, 187.

⁷ Chris Gilleard, "Cultural Approaches to the Ageing Body", in: Malcolm L. Johnson (ed), *The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing*, Cambridge 2005, 157.

better understanding of transcultural/national belonging. While Mayr's protagonists suffer less from overt racism than from "home-made" attitudes that become enlarged by age and immigration, Goto's characters share what she calls "my Canadian racialized position of historically reinforced weakness".⁸ Both books chart multiple movements toward and between sites of different, overlapping symbolical encoding and decoding – such as versions of home, restaurant, road, theatre, stampede ground, nature. With an itinerant gaze among these territories, this paper traces how the representations of the private and public spheres, with their reductive cultural constructions, are transgressed by alternative allocations of gender and age to space that help the heroines in coming across as emancipated, vital, life-affirming beings.

Mayr's *The Widows* is rich in body and water imagery that suggests states of becoming and transformation. Wavering between past and present, and graphing a parodic cross-Canadian journey in 1996, the book focuses on three elderly immigrant ladies from Germany. Hannelore Schmitt, the major narrative consciousness, visits her son Dieter and his newly-born daughter Cleopatra Maria for the first time in "Kanada" in 1971. Hannelore is entranced by the "wondrous, monstrous" Niagara Falls framed by the "forest and wilderness".⁹ While she will return repeatedly to this site of excessive symbolism, of sublime, untameable, yet commodified nature, the rushing Falls make her subconsciously project herself as a future citizen of multicultural Canada, with "her mind a maple leaf on the surface of the water" (*W* 21). Upon her second visit in 1980, the Falls also make her register her becoming old and lonely, indicating the need for new future directions. Cultural relocation is successively fostered by this national icon, which the spectator naively equates with smooth assimilation to an assumedly homogenous cultural mainstream: Hannelore and her 10-year-older lesbian sister Fräulein Clotilde Starfänger "land" in Canada in 1984 to be closer to their relations.

Upon Dieter's suggestion, the two sisters move in with the young family in Edmonton, "that crappy city on the other side of the country nowhere near Niagara Falls" (*W* 51). Dislocated from her "real" destination – the Falls with their unspoken promise of integration – Hannelore is quick to criticize and does not suppress

⁸ Hiromi Goto, "Translating the Self: Moving Between Cultures", in: *West Coast Line* 30,2 (1996), 113.

⁹ Suzette Mayr, *The Widows*, Edmonton 1998, 20. All further references in the text refer to this edition. *The Widows* will be abbreviated as *W*.

prejudice or long-harboured tensions: She starts a row with her daughter-in-law of Afro-Caribbean background, the artistically inclined Rosario, whose "strange foreign smell, acidic, corrosive", and wearing of a short skirt and high heels "just like a prostitute's" she detests (*W* 86-87). Rosario ends up crying vis-à-vis a sexually repressed mother-in-law incapable of New World *Gemütlichkeit*. "Hannelore's overt attempts to transform their home into a replica of ideal domesticity"¹⁰ only serve to enhance cross-cultural and cross-generational animosities, transferred from Germany to their shared private space in Canada. Stubbornly, the mother adheres to outmoded patriarchal notions; the Nazi regime's perverted racism still lingers: She thinks of Rosario's interior decorations as "Jew art" (*W* 88), displaying a German mind-set bred by darkest domestica. The young family decides to leave behind the old, as-yet-unsettled sisters and move to another urban location.

By way of contrast, Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* opens with a more tender scene in the city: Murasaki, the teenage narrator, is in bed with a young lover – "actually a man", Goto explains in an interview, who is deliberately "described in very gender-fluid ways [so] that anyone could read the gender of their choice".¹¹ The young woman is asked to tell a "true story" about her Obāchan, the eighty-five-year-old grandmother Naoe, and begins with "*Mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukāshi ...*"¹² These Japanese words are repeated each time Murasaki opens a new story, and they echo Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), which focuses on the internment of Japanese Canadians between 1942 and 1949 and their transgenerational efforts to process the collective trauma of having been dispossessed, uprooted, "racialized". The related spaces detailed by Kogawa – especially the imprisonment camps – would thus correspond, in Foucault's survey of "counter-sites" to "all the other real sites that can be found within [a given] culture", to the "crisis heterotopias"¹³; this crisis, however, is not so much radiating from the individuals collectively segregated in these places rather than enforced upon them on the basis of rigorous racial prejudice. Taking this beyond moments of mere crisis located in "other spaces", Goto's

¹⁰ Doris Wolf, "Dividing and Reuniting Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters: The Black Motherline, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* Studies, and the Road Genre in Suzette Mayr's *The Widows*", in: Heinz Antor et al. (eds), *Refractions of Germany in Canadian Literature and Culture*, Berlin/New York 2003, 280.

¹¹ Goto adds: "And that also implied that the lover was the reader, so that the reader becomes the lover." Interview by Markus M. Müller. August 20, 2006. Unpublished manuscript.

¹² Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Edmonton 1994, 1. All further references in the text refer to this edition. *Chorus of Mushrooms* will be abbreviated as *CM*.

¹³ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", in: *Diacritics* 16,1 (Spring 1986), 24.

novel enters into dialogue with and simultaneously departs from Kogawa's canonical Asian-Canadian text: While *Obasan* offers a translation of "Mukâshi, mukâshi, ômukâshi ...", "In ancient times, in ancient times, in very very ancient times",¹⁴ *Chorus of Mushrooms* deliberately does not decode the Japanese phrases it contains. Average English-speaking readers thereby encounter their own limits of cultural translation – but are simultaneously drawn into an erotics of story-telling that loosely follows a dramatic five-part structure, as it blurs past and present, fact and imagination, grounded in myth while mixing many generic elements and literary traditions; the book operates within its own chronotope: "time is not measurable by historical or geographical periodicity but can only be accessed by the fairy tale, just as the story is identified through its invocation of 'once upon a time'."¹⁵

Within her sensuous narrative frame, Goto uses a mushroom farm in Nanton, rural Alberta, as the site of Naoe's departure into a transcultural adventure. Naoe becomes a very untypical elderly female defying the laws of reality. As members of the middle generation, her daughter Keiko, who anglicizes herself as Kay, and Keiko's husband Sam (Shinji) Tonkatsu run the family business with the help of Vietnamese "Boat People" and of their own daughter, whom the mother insists on calling Muriel. The adolescent Muriel/Murasaki constitutes the novel's centre, struggling to map her own cultural ground amidst her social environment's stakes on assimilation. This process is mirrored and enhanced by intermittent, even telepathic, exchanges with and Japanese stories by her Obāchan, with whom she shares traditional food and Saki in their imagined "bed of tales" (CM 18). In the course of the novel, Murasaki and Naoe, narrator and narratee, become increasingly overlapping ontologies and engage in a fusion of identities. If Naoe possesses the "powers as integrators and mediators" that Carol Matthews attributes to those "grandmothers [who] provide a structural matrix for their granddaughters' development",¹⁶ Murasaki makes explicit the process of fictionalizing her grandmother.

This act of imaginative reconfiguration places Naoe first in a "chair of incubation" (CM 76): In an interior monologue that opens part one, she remembers childhood

¹⁴ Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*, Toronto 1983, 54.

¹⁵ Mark Libin, "Lost in Translation: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*", in: *Canadian Literature* 163 (Winter 1999), 127.

¹⁶ Carol Matthews, "A Powerful Presence: Images of the Grandmother in Canadian Literature", in: *Canadian Journal on Aging/La Revue canadienne du vieillissement* 15,2 (1996), 266.

days in Japan with her father's pride in the family's seal, the *hanko*, as emblem of their regional rootedness. Now, Naoe evokes the prairie wind: "I am an old woman and I must speak" (CM 5), she asserts, reiterating "I am" – a mythopoeic incantation normally voiced by young and male deities at the beginning of creation stories, but also associated with healing and renewal: Simon Biggs, in taking recourse to D. McAdams, underlines how "defining the self through myth" is part of "narrative therapies [which] aim to provide techniques whereby a multiplicity of possibilities for identity can be negotiated in the absence of binding cultural guidelines".¹⁷ As part of this female myth-making as a reflection of socio-psychological responsibility, the grandmother unveils her feigned inability to understand English as methodical madness, and ponders the effect of suicide. She explicitly echoes *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's domestic tragedy, allegorizing a national malaise and situating a newly emerging self at the threshold of modern consciousness. Because Naoe has been threatened by Keiko with the much-dreaded Silver Springs nursing home, she must – like Hamlet – choose the path of action.

If Naoe is about to transgress her role as old, allegedly incapable Japanese woman in rural Canada, the two sisters in Mayr's *The Widows* keep relapsing into regression: From 1971 onward, when Clotilde was aged sixty and in perfect health, she "went to Schönbachtal ["At the Pretty Creek"] whenever they had a fight, the nursing home [being] Clotilde's claim to space like it was some kind of hotel" (W 19). Foucault locates a retirement or nursing home "on the borderline between the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation".¹⁸ Clotilde misconceives of this site and subverts the topos of the reluctant elder desperately seeking to escape from what a nursing home ultimately symbolizes: An exile – and exile, Edward Said infers, is "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home".¹⁹ But in 1985, residing in the multicultural space of Silver Glade, Clotilde first watches "her future roommate try to kill herself", and then has a "British woman and a Yugoslavian" call her "a fraud [and] a spoiled idiot for coming here to run away from [her] problems" (W 95-96). She checks out – finally understanding that nursing homes represent "repositor-

¹⁷ Simon Biggs, "Psychodynamic Approaches to the Lifecourse and Ageing", in: Malcolm L. Johnson (ed), *The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing*, Cambridge 2005, 152.

¹⁸ Foucault 1986, 24-25.

¹⁹ Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile", 1984, in: *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Mass. 2000, 173.

ies for useless, old bodies",²⁰ which are subjected to a collective death sentence. Mayr's personal impressions in Germany sadly correspond: "It really distressed me that my aunt did not leave her room except to eat and when family members visited. It seemed that she deteriorated so much more when she left her home and left the things she was familiar with".²¹ Belonging to the heterotopias that are "outside of all places", are "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted",²² both the novelistic and real nursing homes seem far from being socially livable – not just conceived – spaces.

A more positive characterization applies to the Bavarian delicatessen, where various discourses intersect: The sisters marvel, during their first visit in 1973, at the "Dirndl dresses", the "navy marches [...] and schmalz folk-songs", the many "sausages, freshly fried Bauern-Schnitzel, stewed red cabbage" as well as "Packages of Lebkuchen, Mozart Kugeln, and Glücks-Käfer" (W 30). In this cuisine-and-kitsch imitation of home away-from-home, inside the Edmonton Shopping Mall with its consumer-oriented simulacra, the sisters are waited upon by Frau Schnadelhuber, a real German Southerner. But Hannelore, a Northerner, remembers a title from an old *Spiegel* magazine article, "Are Bavarians Stupid?" (W 31); she transfers inner-German tensions and stereotypes onto Canadian soil and ponders the personnel with their "German-American costumed mishmash covered with butcher's aprons" (31). She tries to position herself through what Himani Bannerji, in the context of non-white immigrant women, calls "the introjection of the idea of belonging" to a nation.²³ Hannelore weighs the stereotypes, viewing the "silly" Bavarians as "the only Germans in this very little Kanadian town" (W 31), and decides to come back to this delicatessen with Clotilde.

Across time, the two sisters form a triumvirate with Frau Schnadelhuber, who becomes Clotilde's lover. The two octogenarians engage in a relationship that defies the notion of old bodies as incapable of physical pleasure, starting out in an unusual location: They have their first-time sex in the Central Library. In its "spacious

²⁰ Sally Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narratives*, Columbus 2003, 57, xlvi.

²¹ Suzette Mayr in an interview by Markus M. Müller. August 23, 2006. Unpublished manuscript.

²² Foucault 1986, 24.

²³ Himani Bannerji, "Geography Lessons: On Being an Insider/Outsider to the Canadian Nation", in: Cynthia Sugars (ed), *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism*, Peterborough, ON 2004, 290.

bathroom cubicle with bars along the walls designed for people in wheelchairs", the lovers fumble their way toward *jouissance*: "Frau Schnadelhuber's glasses dipped into the toilet and Clotilde's hearing aid popped out" (*W* 111). These comical aspects, in "their speaking out against the uniformity and constraints of old-age", belie the standard images of seduction and desirability,²⁴ while the lesbian lovers' re-sexualized, re-activated bodies reflect a holistic concept of well-being. Such exuberance, however, must end: Frau Schnadelhuber, who "didn't feel old in her head until people [including her daughter Hedwig] told her she was old", loses the job she identified with as "more her home than her home" (*W* 169, 92). The depression she enters makes her feel paralysed, like a leg-less spider "with a dying body left to throb in the middle of the web" (*W* 169). Her fate demonstrates how human beings "are aged by culture",²⁵ in a process analogous to monstrous transformation.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the lonely grandmother avoids grotesque reduction, re-connecting with her bodily needs instead: "Eighty-five years old and horny as a musk-drenched cat" (*CM* 39). These are words of somebody much younger in spirit. Implicit in general portraits of older women, Thomas Walz reasons, "is a woman who is assumed to have outgrown her 'reproductive' sexuality" and thereby, automatically, to be disinterested and inactive; Walz adds: "84 percent of the [elderly] women in these [cross-cultural] societies were reported as sexually active".²⁶ Obāchan – who argues, "I don't want to die before I've ever fallen into my flesh or laughed myself silly" (*CM* 76) – further prefaces her impending journey: She tells Murasaki the story about a Japanese woman who, in light of her approaching sixtieth birthday, was supposed to retreat to her "ritual place of abandonment," but chose to have fun with her sister (*CM* 64-68). The non-conforming Naoe narates herself into a similarly mythologizing space of emancipation and resistance against the "re-territorialization of the aging body"²⁷: She leaves behind the house that symbolizes her being culturally constructed as old, ethnic, invisible.

²⁴ Charlotte Sturgess, *Redefining the Subject: Sites of Play in Canadian Women's Writing*, Amsterdam/New York 2003, 68.

²⁵ Margaret Gullette qtd. in: Woodward 1999, x.

²⁶ Thomas Walz, "Crones, Dirty Old Men, Sexy Seniors: Representations of the Sexuality of Older Persons", in: *Journal of Aging and Identity* 7,2 (June 2002), 100, 104.

²⁷ Jason R. Powell/Charles F. Longino, Jr., "Towards the Postmodernization of Aging: The Body and Social Theory", in: *Journal of Aging and Identity* 6,4 (December 2001), 206.

Naoe enters a liminal space that can be read as one of bell hooks' "location[s] of radical openness and possibility"²⁸: Inside one of the farm's wet, dark, humming mushroom houses, Obāchan experiences an "osmosis of skin and hair," with the "mushroom moisture filling her hollow body" and "her buttocks curving, swelling, with flesh and longing." The grandmother's climactic re-awakening into autonomous sexuality amidst this "chorus of mushrooms" (CM 84, 86) is presented as a blend of what is possible and impossible, real and supernatural; this is a fantastic event, according to Todorov's definition, in which the limits between subject and object are dissolved.²⁹ "That capacity to transform oneself is important, and that there are no limits to that" when "wanting to take up literary space for a powerful old woman" and for "strong women of colour".³⁰ The fantastic as a technique also has the power of "making visible the un-seen, of articulating the un-said", and can "*inscribe* social values within the text".³¹ Naoe will indeed inscribe her social environment in limit-transcending ways.

Traversing a symbolically white terrain in this mid-winter night of heavy snow, Naoe hitches a ride with a truck driver. In a miniature picaresque, becoming what Braidotti would term a "phantasmagoria of the unconscious",³² Naoe baptizes her new travelling companion Tengu, choosing the name of a Japanese trickster figure associated with the roles of protector and transmitter. While Naoe has him address herself as Purple, she quips: "I'm the best old woman you're going to find for many years to come!" (CM 111). Engaging in an increasingly performative sense of age identity, and "reconstructing herself as a translation of Murasaki",³³ Purple journeys with Tengu through a series of change-inducing spaces: Inside the driver's cabin, they share her Japanese snacks, his beer and cigarettes, converse in English and Japanese, while she takes over the wheel; outside, the RCMP effect a road check and ask her to walk along a white line – and when she pirouettes up in the air, the defied state authorities, one of whom "had the look of a racist", murmur: "World class gymnast" (CM 145); then Tengu and Purple continue "enjoying

²⁸ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, Boston 1990, 153.

²⁹ Cf. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Ithaca 1975, 25; and Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 1981, London/New York 1995, 48.

³⁰ Goto, interview by Müller.

³¹ Jackson 1995, 48, 53; her emphasis.

³² Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, New York 1994, 170.

³³ Libin points out that *murasaki* in Japanese means purple. Libin 1999, 128.

the sensual pleasures of the body in order to disrupt Western conceptions of the racialized body."³⁴ With a sensuous seafood dinner in a restaurant, followed by a hot bath and sex in a Calgary hotel, Purple further undergoes the transition – here toward a younger embodiment – that her self-attributed color name implies.

Whereas Obāchan is undergoing a fantastic rejuvenation, Keiko has fallen sick. Murasaki, in a journey echoing Naoe's escape, travels to an Asian food store in Calgary and brings home the necessary ingredients for cooking the dish that is synonymous with the family name, Tonkatsu. Her Japanese dinner helps nourish Keiko back to health. It marks a new cohesion of the core family, while the word *tonkatsu* helps Murasaki "recover her forgotten language and the abandoned route to a Japanese community".³⁵ Food and eating function as collective unifier – in Goto's words "a beautiful, symbolic way of ingesting and processing some small aspect of a culture". The passing on of culinary and literary traditions go hand in hand in *Chorus of Mushrooms*: "we need to eat our cultural food to nourish us, but we also need our stories to nourish us as well. [...] they are both fundamentally necessary"; moreover, the transfers from grandmother to granddaughter are essential to bridging an intergenerational gap, linking all three women: Naoe, before departing, "was building, like a chrysalis stage"³⁶; Murasaki argues, "it was a chrysalis time for Mom or me. Maybe for both of us" (CM 153).

If Naoe was intended as a personal homage to Goto's own grandmother – "the rock of the family [...] and foundation of the home"³⁷ – Mayr also used real-life models for her major characters. One of her most complex spaces is based on her own experience as an usher in Calgary's Jubilee Auditorium: Working among older women that were either widowed, divorced, or "with these really jerk men", Mayr learned "how rich and complicated their lives were". She continues: "It was part of me overcoming my own kind of ageist assumptions".³⁸ In the author's fictional Edmonton Royal Auditorium, Hannelore is part of the marginalized elderly female workforce. This social microcosm reflects how with increasing age the gender imbalances and related dependencies become more pronounced: "In

³⁴ Mark Libin, "'Some of My Best Friends...': Befriending the Racialized Fiction of Hiromi Goto", in: *Essays on Canadian Writing* 173 (Spring 2001), 108.

³⁵ Libin 1999, 124.

³⁶ Goto, interview by Müller.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Mayr, interview by Müller.

1996, three quarters of senior men were married compared to 41.4% of women, while 46% of senior women were widowed compared to 12.7% of senior men".³⁹ Hannelore is hit by the deeper socio-psychological implications only when in her favourite show, *Niagara! The Musical*, the young, drunken lead-singer is temporarily replaced by an aged understudy: She is profoundly touched by a performance about loneliness, poverty, and death that is becoming "too real" (W 123). She identifies with the historical figure misrepresented by this inaccurate musical – the (in)famous American widow, Annie Edson Taylor. Tucked away in a wooden barrel, the sixty-three-year old Taylor (officially aged forty-two!) was the first human being to survive the plunge down Niagara Falls in 1901. Exploited by her male manager, the impoverished widow soon received negative treatment from "a misogynist society that views the aging female body as ugly and the aging woman as valueless."⁴⁰ Widowhood, American feminist Betty Friedan reasons, can haunt especially older women like a "traumatic spectre".⁴¹ This socio-political fact is effectively obscured by the Auditorium, "a government-run theatre" (W 66), which puts on stage a commercially coded entertainment projecting both nationalist images and youthful (North) American culture's superiority.

In a theatre that not only generates illusion but that is "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible",⁴² Hannelore takes agency. In the basement, she gives in to the advances of Hamish, the Scottish lighting man, and rediscovers sex with him inside

³⁹ Government of Canada, "Canada's Aging Population: A Report Prepared by Health Canada in Collaboration with the Interdepartmental Committee on Aging and Seniors Issues", 2002, <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/seniors-aines.pdf>, 6, July 17, 2006. In 2001, senior widows outnumbered widowers four to one ("Canada's Aging Population", 6). The pattern of women aged over 85 as the "fastest-growing age group" that Betty Friedan diagnosed in 1993, not only for the U.S. (Betty Friedan, *The Fountain of Age*, New York 1993, 134), is also projected for Canadian seniors (aged 65 and over); their population will grow "from 13% in 2003 to 18% in 2021 with women predominating" (Chris Li, "Widowhood: Consequences on Income for Senior Women," Statistics Canada, July 2004, <http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/11-621-MIE/2004015/11-621-MIE2004015.pdf>, 2, September 13, 2006). For the period of 1971-2001, however, CIHR Director Anne Martin-Matthews points out, there is an overall decrease "in percentage of widowed women"; in effect, "a 10% drop in the proportions of women who spend their 'young senior' years as widows" (Anne Martin-Matthews, "A Long Look at Later Life: The Lens of Social Science, a Focus on Time," Plenary address, Canadian Association on Gerontology, Victoria, B.C. October 23, 2004, Unpublished manuscript, 21).

⁴⁰ Doris Wolf, "A Past Which Refuses to Become History: Nazism, Niagara Falls, and a New National Identity in Suzette Mayr's *The Widows*", in: *Studies in Canadian Literature* 27,1 (2002), 147.

⁴¹ Friedan 1993, 147.

⁴² Foucault 1986, 25.

the rubber ball he constructed for the musical. Her sexual functions keep evoking sensations of rushing water, memories of her visits to Niagara Falls. This affair is characterized by "mixed feelings, a fluid overlap of attraction and repulsion", before she decides to steal the ball – which is soon referred to as an egg, underlining a "concern for procreation as distinct from mere reproduction".⁴³ For this complex theatrical microcosm, divided into various spaces on stage and behind as well as below the scenes, confronts Hannelore with conflicting national as well as personal scripts of widowhood, old-age identity, and self-assertion. She is inspired by Taylor's tragic fate and by her hyper-intelligent granddaughter Cleopatra Maria, who at age twenty-six is still a virgin and considers herself "emotionally behind" but who effectively lectures Hamish on patriarchy: "I don't like the way you order my Oma around" (*W* 176, 163). Collecting Clotilde and Frau Schnadelhuber, Hannelore and Cleopatra Maria embark on a trans-Canadian journey from Edmonton to the Falls, toward another heterotopia or counter-utopia.

Thus prompted by the imitative auditorium to venture into space, the female quartet rollicks across the country in a pick-up truck with a trailer carrying their rubber ball. In that process, Cleopatra Maria's "fastidious pencil markings" characterize her attempts at navigation; with "the multicoloured veins all over the map indicating twisting roads and rivers" (*W* 219), the colonial history of mapping and the racist tensions behind official Multiculturalism are intimated, as the females of mixed ethnic heritage appropriate a (new) route for themselves: Motivated by protest against the condescending treatment of the elderly, they undergo "psychological healing via the masculine road genre."⁴⁴ In so doing, they "trace Canadian symbolic territory as irreducible to a singular interpretation".⁴⁵ When they arrive at Niagara Falls, tired but intent, Hannelore "wants to scream because at last she is *home*" (*W* 225). As a site of excessive water spouting, this "home" reflects what Bhabha calls "the recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity".⁴⁶ Trying, subconsciously, to help access this symbol for the quartet's national belonging, Cleopatra Maria uses her laptop to calculate the odds of braving the Falls – and figures that it can be done.

⁴³ Claire Omhòvère, "Sasquatch Quatsch: Cultural Hybridity in Suzette Mayr's *The Widows*", in: Martin Kuester/Wolfram R. Keller (eds), *Writing Canadians: Identity in Canadian Literature*, Marburg 2002, 129, 127.

⁴⁴ Wolf 2003, 288.

⁴⁵ Sturgess 2003, 76.

⁴⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994, London/New York 2002, 143.

With Cleopatra Maria coordinating from the shore, the three ladies of age 75 to 85 plunge down the Falls in October 1996. Their individual memories are unlocked; repressed content surfaces, represented on the page in three vertical columns that synchronize the women's streams-of-consciousness: Frau Schnadelhuber's work in the Resistance, her becoming impregnated by a white American soldier who left her with a coloured child; Clotilde's broken promise to her mother not "to let Hannelore go crazy with her dangerous ideas" (*W* 81). When the ball is suspended between descent and ascent, suddenly the "mud-coated, water-bloated corpse of Annie Edson Taylor" appears and shouts, "*Get the hell outta my water, [...] I was here first and I'm gonna be here last*" (*W* 83). In this sub-aquatic encounter, the ghost of the American Taylor – emblematic of widowhood – claims this geographical-national territory of the Falls as her own, on historical grounds, exactly when the three old German immigrants heroically inscribe themselves – in a matter of life or death – in this borderland as Canadians.

Although Mayr employs magical realism for the last leg of her heroines' journey, her main characters still verge on what is empirically possible. Quite differently, Goto's Naoe has already become a more mythological creature, a hybrid of legendary Japanese figures and of her narrating granddaughter's imaginative reconfiguration within a Western world matrix. Naoe's old body, though "not mired in a specific construction of reality", has become "the site for a cultural and intergenerational struggle."⁴⁷ In a daring finale, the book presents the rejuvenated Naoe further crossing the borders of race and gender, problematizing "the role of visual codes to construct cultural identities within a national framework"⁴⁸: She appears as "The Purple Mask" – a young, agile, assumedly *male* rodeo rider at the Calgary Stampede. Opposed to the fixity associated with the "heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time", such as museums, the stampede ground can be seen as a version of Foucault's "absolutely temporal" heterotopia.⁴⁹ This space, in which a bulletin on the "mysteeerious bullrider", "legend", and "cowboy" (*CM* 41) is announced on the loudspeaker, underlines the notion of identity *in process*, capable of transcending reductive national signifiers. Riding the bull ironically named Rev-

⁴⁷ Chivers 2003, 51, 49.

⁴⁸ Eva Darias Beautell, "Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*: Cultural Difference, Visibility and the Canadian Tradition", in: *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 16 (November 2003), 7.

⁴⁹ Foucault 1986, 26.

elation, in an "episode [that] is experienced with the intensity of an orgasm"⁵⁰ and that plays with "the Bible revelations",⁵¹ The Purple Mask reaches for "that place where the bull and I can move as one":

And I find it. I find it. That smooth clear space where the animal and I are pure as light and sound. Where stars turn liquid and you can taste sweet nectar in your mouth. The glide of the animal in your heart and in your lungs and the very blood of your body. Heat of the bull between your legs, riding on a crest of power. Tension and pleasure as fine as a silken thread. (CM 218-219)

In a Jungian reading, the bull as part of this union between man and animal can be interpreted as a variation of the Beast theme, symbolizing "a certain kind of woman's initiation", which "may appear at any age, when the union of spirit and nature has been disturbed".⁵² Underneath her/his appearance, the immigrant figure of The Purple Mask that is reminiscent of the popular culture hero, The Lone Ranger, embraces "the myth of the 'Cowboy' as icon of the West".⁵³ Goto's mythic character positions the performativeness of gender *and* age *and* race in the circle of the riding ring; there, only the spectators' eyes and the performance itself constitute the ground for this fantastic, utopian identity.

Thus, in both novels, elderly women move between liminal and other spaces and subjectivities with enhanced corporeality. To varying degrees, they arrive in what Soja, paraphrasing his idol Lefebvre, terms "the *lived* Spaces of Representation", which follow the first and second level of *perceived* and *conceived* space; this third level "can be described and inscribed in journeys to 'real-and-imagined' [...] places".⁵⁴ *En route* to and plunging down Niagara Falls, Mayr's marginalized characters undergo a symbolical death-rebirth in "a rite of citizenship to a newly envisioned nation".⁵⁵ Their return to Edmonton signals their new, self-determined claim to public and private space: Frau Schnadelhuber poses topless as "nympho granny" (W 242), once again transcending the bounds of social norms; Hannelore

⁵⁰ Beautell 2003, 39.

⁵¹ Goto, interview by Müller.

⁵² Joseph L. Henderson, "Ancient Myths and Modern Man", in: Carl Gustav Jung (ed), *Man and His Symbols*, New York 1971, 132.

⁵³ Sturgess 2003, 25.

⁵⁴ Soja 1996, 10, 11.

⁵⁵ Wolf 2002, 149.

moderates her prejudice toward Rosario, who, in teaching Clotilde how to paint landscapes that merge German and Canadian features, keeps fostering mutual acceptance; while the old ladies and the virgin granddaughter plot how they "will celebrate Cleopatra Maria's burst hymen" (248), they strike a 20,000 \$ book deal resulting from their sensational feat and exchange their rubber ball for ownership of the Bavarian delicatessen. Re-situating themselves at a site of culinary production, they now run their own transcultural show. More forcefully, and more fantastically, Goto's Obāchan/Naoe/The Purple Mask enters a version of Soja's Thirdspace where "issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other".⁵⁶ Naoe de-essentializes, de-racializes, de-territorializes herself in a process of radical transformation; traversing both physical and narrative spaces, the mythic grandmother-turned-rodeo rider becomes a subject that Braidotti would term – as a result of working through one's "multilayered structures" – "molecular, nomadic, and multiple".⁵⁷ Moreover, the narrative structures of both *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Widows* engage in multiple flashbacks and disruptions; in the course of their respective epistemological journeys, they privilege spatial over temporal/linear experience. With their movements, Mayr's and Goto's characters thus can be said to spatialize time, to interrogate historiography – both personal and collective. They embody a critique of the official national Canadian script as harbouring/normatizing racist, sexist, and ageist undercurrents. Equally important, with their aging female bodies as the most obvious markers of culturally constructed identities, they move away from restrictive spaces into more empowering ones. In so doing, they figure as guides for their granddaughters and other relations, coming across as individual loci of regaining pleasure, of agency, and resistance.

⁵⁶ Soja 1996, 5.

⁵⁷ Braidotti 1994, 171.

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III. In-Between: Transcultural, Translational, and Counter-Spaces

Les espaces hétérotopiques dans *Les enfants du sabbat* d'Anne Hébert

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1. De l'espace en littérature

Il est entendu que l'espace "concret" en littérature est toujours un espace symbolique, une narration de l'espace qui reflète et questionne la topographie du réel. Dans sa fameuse conférence "Des espaces autres", prononcée en 1967 devant le Cercle d'études architecturales, Michel Foucault démontre, dans un premier temps, que la perception de l'espace par l'être humain est étroitement liée aux importants changements de paradigmes dans l'histoire humaine. Si Foucault, de son côté, ne retrace que très sommairement les étapes de ce qu'il appelle "l'histoire de l'espace"¹, c'est à Henri Lefebvre que nous devons une analyse plus approfondie de l'évolution de la pensée de l'espace à travers les siècles, depuis la cité antique jusqu'à la deuxième moitié du XX^e siècle. Dans son œuvre majeure *La production de l'espace* (1974), cette analyse le mène à constater la triplicité de l'espace et à établir une distinction entre l'espace perçu (produit par la pratique spatiale), l'espace conçu (produit par les différentes représentations spatiales) et l'espace vécu (produit par les espaces de représentation) tout en soulignant la simultanéité de ces trois dimensions spatiales: l'espace est toujours, selon Lefebvre, à la fois perçu, conçu et vécu, ce qui souligne l'extraordinaire complexité à laquelle se voit confrontée toute étude de l'espace.²

Pour ce qui est la littérature, il est évident qu'elle opère à la fois au niveau de la représentation de l'espace, c'est-à-dire au niveau abstrait de la langue et du discours, et au niveau de la création d'espaces de représentation.³ Si l'on

¹ Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres", in: *Dits et écrits(1980-1988), tome 4*, Paris 1994, 753.

² Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, Paris 2000, 49.

³ Selon Lefebvre, l'espace *conçu* est "celui des savants, des planificateurs, des urbanistes, des technocrates 'découpeurs' et 'agenceurs', de certains artistes proches de la scientificité, identifiant le vécu et le perçu au conçu [...]". (48) Il nomme espace *vécu* celui que l'on vit "à travers les images et symboles qui l'accompagnent, donc des 'habitants', des 'usagers', mais aussi de certains artistes

suit l'argumentation de Lefebvre, on peut dire que les abstractions et créations littéraires, d'une façon ou d'une autre, marquent la pratique sociale et politique dans la mesure où, tout en dépendant de cette pratique, elles contribuent aussi à sa production. "[...] qui, demande Lefebvre dans *La production de l'espace*, peut atteindre le 'réel,' c'est-à-dire la pratique (sociale et spatiale) sans partir d'un espace mental, sans parcourir un trajet allant de l'abstrait au concret ? Personne."⁴ Retenons donc que les relations établies entre les objets et les personnes dans un espace représenté en littérature portent à la fois témoignage de la pratique spatiale et influent sur sa production, et qu'elles sont toujours idéologiques au sens où elles reproduisent et produisent du sens.⁵

La représentation de l'espace en littérature (ou en d'autres discours semblables) a ceci d'extraordinaire qu'elle propose un cadre à l'intérieur duquel des éléments, des détails épars et dispersés sont mis en relation de façon à ce qu'une espèce d'image d'ensemble de la réalité (et de la réalité spatiale) se présente à nous à travers la fiction, nous permettant, même si cette image est de l'ordre de la fiction, de mieux comprendre comment et dans quel but politique ou idéologique opèrent les relations à l'intérieur d'un espace socioculturel. Dans ce sens, la littérature est une des pratiques culturelles qui témoigne de nos pratiques spatiales, de la complexité des espaces sociaux et de la dynamique relationnelle entre et à l'intérieur de ces espaces. Retenons également que chaque espace (social) comporte en lui son histoire – "Le passé a laissé ses traces, ses inscriptions, écriture du temps."⁶ – et que les représentations de l'espace (social) en littérature confèrent une profondeur de champs particulière à l'histoire de l'espace (social) que nous ne trouvons pas nécessairement dans d'autres documents.

et peut-être de ceux qui *décrivent* et croient seulement décrire: les écrivains, les philosophes. C'est l'espace dominé, donc subi, que tente de modifier et d'approprier l'imagination". (49)

⁴ Lefebvre 2000, 477.

⁵ Tout au long de *La production de l'espace*, Lefebvre insiste sur la dimension idéologique de la pratique spatiale. Il y écrit notamment que "[l'] espace social n'est jamais une page blanche sur laquelle on (mais qui?) aurait écrit son message. L'espace naturel et l'espace urbain sont surchargés. Tout y est brouillon et brouillé. Des signes? Plutôt des consignes, des prescriptions multiples, interférentes. S'il y a un texte, une trace, une écriture, c'est dans un contexte de conventions, d'intentions, d'ordres, au sens du désordre et de l'ordre social. L'espace est signifiant? Certes. De quoi? De ce qu'il faut faire ou ne pas faire. Ce qui renvoie au pouvoir. Mais le message du pouvoir est toujours embrouillé, volontairement. Il se dissimule. L'espace ne dit pas tout." (167) Ceci s'avère particulièrement évident dans *Les enfants du sabbat* où Anne Hébert excelle dans la mise en scène des rapports relationnels entre le pouvoir/les pouvoirs et la femme.

⁶ Lefebvre 2000, 47.

En proposant une lecture des espaces hétérotopiques dans *Les enfants du sabbat* d'Anne Hébert,⁷ cette contribution a pour but de démontrer comment, par le moyen de l'espace, un système assure sa pérennité et comment sont agencés, dans ce processus perpétuel qu'est la pratique spatiale, les rôles et identités des sexes. Dans *Les enfants du sabbat* sont mis en jeu des espaces qui, dans la tradition littéraire du Québec, se voient dotés d'un symbolisme précis et font partie intégrante de la mémoire collective québécoise depuis le XIX^e siècle. Ces espaces ou ces emplacements, pour en parler en termes foucauldien, sont la forêt, le village (la campagne), la ville et l'église. Ainsi, Anne Hébert se sert d'un ensemble de concepts spatiaux dont la sémiose semble accomplie une fois pour toutes. Cependant, dans *Les enfants du sabbat*, roman qu'André Brochu qualifie de "livre le plus véritablement sacrilège de toute notre littérature"⁸, l'auteure transforme en champs d'expérimentation un terrain de jeu bien jalonné, s'inspirant à la fois d'un imaginaire catholique et "universel" et d'une mémoire proprement québécoise. Alors que toute logique spatiale établie y est mise en échec, celle des rôles traditionnels des sexes reste en vigueur. Autrement dit: la femme y est sacrifiée au profit du Bien et du Mal.

2. Les espaces hétérotopiques

Même si Anne Hébert a vécu plus de trente ans à Paris (1954-1957; 1967-1997) et n'est revenue vivre dans son pays d'origine qu'en 1997, c'est dans l'espace québécois que sont situées les histoires de ses grands romans comme *Kamouraska* (1970), *Les enfants du sabbat* (1975), *Les Fous de Bassan* (1982) ou *Le premier jardin* (1988). Dans une interview avec Lise Gauvin qui date de 1992, Anne Hébert insiste sur l'importance des "paysages" québécois dans son travail d'écriture: "J'écris sur ce que j'ai en moi. Le Québec est en moi profondément. Il est tricoté avec moi."⁹ Il est frappant, toutefois, que l'espace québécois mis en scène dans les romans cités est essentiellement celui d'un temps révolu par rapport au moment de la rédaction et publication des romans. Ainsi l'histoire des *Enfants*

⁷ Anne Hébert, *Les enfants du sabbat*, Montréal 1995 (Paris 1975). Lefebvre demande dans quelle mesure un espace se lit. Tout en soulignant qu'il n'y a pas "un code général de l'espace" il constate que l'espace "implique un processus signifiant" relatif au moment historique d'une communauté. cf. Lefebvre 2000, 25.

⁸ André Brochu, *Anne Hébert. Le secret de vie et de mort*, Ottawa 2000, 144.

⁹ Lise Gauvin, "Une entrevue avec Anne Hébert", in: Madeleine Ducrocq-Poirier et al. (dir.), *Anne Hébert, parcours d'une œuvre*, Montréal 1997, 226.

du sabbat, tout comme celle des *Fous de Bassan*, s'inscrit dans le Québec des années 1930 et 1940, celui des années de "jeunesse" de l'auteure. On pourrait établir l'hypothèse que c'était justement la distance à la fois temporelle et spatiale qui permettait à Anne Hébert d'élaborer, notamment dans ses romans, des représentations spatiales tout à fait uniques, reflétant, dramatisant, grossissant ou parodiant les relations spatiales au double sens du mot "relation" – celles de la forêt, du village, de la ville et de l'église – à partir desquelles "le Québec" a construit, défini et interprété "sa" réalité historique dans la première moitié du XX^e siècle et par opposition auxquelles il concevra plus tard sa "modernité". Si j'insiste sur le double sens du terme "relation", c'est pour souligner qu'il renvoie toujours à la fois à la narration, c'est-à-dire à l'histoire, et au lien qu'établit la définition (la conception identitaire) de l'un par rapport à l'autre.

Seront proposés par la suite quelques aspects d'une lecture des relations spatiales dans *Les enfants du sabbat* qui s'appuie sur l'hétérotopologie esquissée par Michel Foucault dans "Des espaces autres." Foucault conçoit l'espace dans lequel nous vivons comme "un ensemble de relations qui définissent des emplacements irréductibles les uns aux autres et absolument non superposables". (755) Or, parmi tous les emplacements, ceux qui l'intéressent avant toute chose sont les emplacements "qui ont la curieuse propriété d'être en rapport avec tous les autres emplacements, mais sur un mode tel qu'ils suspendent, neutralisent ou inversent l'ensemble des rapports qui s'y trouvent, par eux, désignés, reflétés ou réfléchis". (755) Parmi ces derniers, il distingue les utopies qui sont des emplacements sans lieu réel, et les hétérotopies qui, tout en ressemblant aux utopies, sont des lieux réels, des utopies réalisées pour ainsi dire, "des sortes de contre-emplacements [...] dans lesquels [...] tous les autres emplacements réels que l'on peut trouver à l'intérieur de la culture sont à la fois représentés, contestés et inversés". (755)

Ce qui s'avère intéressant pour l'analyse des relations spatiales dans *Les enfants du sabbat*, c'est le concept d'hétérotopie que Foucault définit à partir de six principes. Premièrement, il établit l'hypothèse que toutes les cultures constituent des hétérotopies, mais qu'il n'y en aurait probablement aucune qui soit universelle. Dans un deuxième pas, il renvoie au fait que "chaque hétérotopie a un fonctionnement précis et déterminé à l'intérieur de la société" (757) et que le rôle d'une hétérotopie dans une société est variable, peut changer avec le temps et selon les besoins de cette société. Le troisième principe de l'hétérotopie serait de pouvoir "juxtposer en un seul lieu réel plusieurs espaces, plusieurs emplacements qui sont en eux-mêmes incompatibles". (758) Suit son quatrième

principe qui relève de la relation de l'hétérotopie au temps: Foucault reconnaît, d'un côté, des hétérotopies du temps qui s'accumule comme c'est vrai pour les musées ou les bibliothèques, de l'autre, des hétérotopies liées au temps qui passe, incarnant un moment passager, celui d'une fête, par exemple. Le cinquième principe de l'hétérotopie serait qu'elle suppose "toujours un système d'ouverture et de fermeture qui, à la fois, [l'] isole et [la] rend pénétrable". (760) Une hétérotopie peut être un emplacement où l'on est reclus de force (prison) ou auquel l'on n'accède qu'en se soumettant soit à des rites soit à des purifications. Par moments, une hétérotopie peut avoir l'air d'être ouverte tout en cachant, comme dit Foucault, "de curieuses exclusions". (760) Finalement, Foucault souligne que chaque hétérotopie a une fonction par rapport à l'espace restant et que cette fonction se déploie entre deux pôles extrêmes: ou bien l'hétérotopie a "pour rôle de créer un espace d'illusion [...]" (761), ou bien elle crée un espace de compensation, ce dernier s'opposant, par sa perfection, au désordre de l'espace restant.

Pour mieux illustrer la fonction et le fonctionnement des deux hétérotopies principales que l'on repère dans *Les enfants du sabbat* – d'un côté, celle représentée par une cabane située dans la forêt de la montagne de B... et de l'autre, celle représentée par un couvent des dames du Précieux-Sang –, il m'importe de préciser la portée symbolique de tous les emplacements qui entrent en jeu dans ce roman et qui ont déjà été mentionnés plutôt, à savoir la forêt, le village, la ville et l'église. Dans un sens très général, on peut dire que, dans l'imaginaire québécois d'avant la Révolution tranquille et même au-delà, la forêt représente le sauvage, le non-civilisé, l'archaïque, le païen, la rencontre avec l'autre autochtone, le métissage, l'impur, l'obscur, l'instable, l'aventure, l'impie désir de liberté, la séduction aussi. Bref elle représente un certain danger pour le village et la campagne défrichée et labourée par l'habitant canadien-français. A cet espace de la forêt adhère une dimension féminine, mystérieuse et étrange, qui séduit l'homme et l'engloutit. Le village, de son côté, revêt l'authenticité de la "race française" et les prémices sine qua non de sa survivance en Amérique, à savoir le travail de la terre, l'obéissance, la foi catholique, le renoncement joyeux au service de la volonté divine et la procréation nombreuse assurée par la mère canadienne-française dont le corps tabouisé est sujet à l'économie de la reproduction.¹⁰ La ville est le lieu de l'autre

¹⁰ À ce sujet, je tiens à renvoyer à un essai de Jean LeMoine, "La littérature canadienne-française et la femme," rédigé en 1960, à un moment donc où la critique féministe émergente ne fait que commencer à porter un regard critique sur les représentations de la femme dans la littérature.

(surtout de l'autre anglophone), de l'exploitation et de l'aliénation du francophone, de sa perte matérielle, morale et spirituelle. D'ailleurs, les bordels qui ne se trouvent que dans la ville confèrent à cette dernière une aura prostitutionnelle et la stigmatisent en l'identifiant à la tentation.¹¹ L'église, enfin, figure comme pivot du peuple français en Amérique. Elle est le lieu de la purification au sens le plus large du terme et assure la transmission ainsi que la pureté de la race, tout comme le couvent, qui est en quelque sorte le rejet de la ville, assure la pureté de la femme, sa virginité. L'église est le lieu des rituels, de la répétition, celui du salut, mais également celui de l'exclusion de l'autre, de la surveillance et de la punition.

Dans *Les enfants du sabbat*, Anne Hébert met donc en jeu tous ces emplacements lourds de significations dans un contexte québécois. Chacun d'entre eux se définit a priori par stricte opposition aux autres et tâche de confirmer son caractère univoque et irréductible. Cependant, en tissant des relations assez spectaculaires entre les emplacements en question, l'auteure fait ressortir leur ambivalence, leur ambiguïté, et surtout leur côté fantasmatique.

3. La cabane et le couvent – hétéropie d'illusion et hétéropie de compensation

Retenons d'abord que l'histoire des *Enfants du sabbat* est une histoire de sorcellerie au propre sens du mot, et qu'elle fonctionne selon les principes de la sorcellerie, c'est-à-dire que la logique "normale" de l'espace et du temps y est suspendue. Cette histoire de sorcellerie¹² est construite autour de la protagoniste Julie, sœur Julie de la Trinité, qui, dans l'isolement d'un couvent, revit les événements clés de son enfance et de son adolescence passées dans une cabane située dans la

LeMoyné y insiste sur la réduction du personnage féminin au cliché du rôle maternel: "[J]e ne vois qu'un archétype à nos femmes imaginaires. [...] c'est la mère. Seule la mère peut rendre compte de l'interdit qui frappe nos héroïnes; la mère, respectable, vénérable, sacrée, intouchable, imprenable, la mère est bien le principe d'interdiction que nous chercherions vainement ailleurs. [...], la mère investit la femme de nos fictions. Elle l'investit et la détruit." Jean LeMoyné, *Convergences*, Montréal 1977, 103 et 105.

¹¹ Dans *Les enfants du sabbat*, ceci devient particulièrement clair lorsque sœur Julie, en compagnie de sœur Gemma, traverse la ville en voiture (15-16) ou à l'exemple du personnage de Marilda Sansfaçon, une prostituée qui se réfugie au couvent pour se protéger d'une tempête (164).

¹² Dans *La production de l'espace*, Henri Lefebvre renvoie expressément à la magie et à la sorcellerie dont il dit qu' "elles ont aussi leurs espaces propres, qui s'opposent en le supposant au religieux-politique [...]". (45)

montagne de B..., c'est-à-dire dans la forêt sauvage, à l'écart du village et de ses habitants dont la vie est orchestrée par l'autorité ecclésiastique. Au fur et à mesure que l'histoire de sœur Julie progresse, les visions et les rêves qui replongent la jeune novice dans son passé, intègrent la vie du couvent jusqu'à en subvertir l'ordre établi. Il est important de noter qu'à partir d'un certain moment, la limite entre le passé et le présent devient perméable, puis s'effrite lorsque ce que sœur Julie a vécu physiquement dans son passé se montre dans le présent comme une suite de signes empreints sur son corps dont seule sœur Julie connaît le secret, la vraie signification.¹³

Dès le début du roman, sont mises en place les deux hétérotopies auxquelles j'ai déjà fait allusion, celle de la cabane de la montagne de B... et celle du couvent des dames du Précieux-Sang. Chacune des deux révèle sa dimension exceptionnelle et sa différence d'abord par rapport aux emplacements que sont le village et la ville. Dans une première vision de sœur Julie, la cabane de son enfance est définie par la nature sauvage qui, à la fois, l'entoure et caractérise ceux qui l'habitent : "Un petit garçon ouvre sa culotte déchirée, pisse très haut, atteint le tronc d'un pin, dont la tête se perd dans le ciel [...]. La petite sœur l'admire pour cela. Assise sur un tas de bûches, elle fourrage dans sa tignasse pleine de paille, [...]." (7) Sont évoqués les parents, Adélarde et Philomène, leur sexualité exubérante, leur "odeur fauve [...], celle plus acide des deux enfants" (8), la puanteur à l'intérieur de la cabane, les poux, la crasse, ainsi que les couleurs symboliques, le rouge, le rose et le violet, qui désignent les "seuils", à savoir la bouche des parents, la porte d'entrée de la cabane et la courtépointe qui couvre le lit des parents où se répète la scène originaire de la pénétration.¹⁴

¹³ Retenons notamment le passage où Julie, en lavant le linge en compagnie de ses consœurs, s'endort debout et, dans son sommeil, revit un moment vécu avec son frère: "Ils se barbouillent de mûres, visages, bras et jambes, se lèchent mutuellement dans la chaleur moite des fardoques à midi". (59) En cette crise, la supérieure voit une danse de Saint-Guy, doublée de somnambulisme. Plus tard encore, lorsque les sœurs remarqueront les brûlures infligées à Julie par ses parents (67-74) ou les écorchures sur ses jambes (121-122), il sera question d'automutilation et de stigmates, alors qu'en vérité, Julie ne revivra que la cérémonie d'initiation et la fugue dans la forêt avec son frère.

¹⁴ Il est intéressant de noter que les couleurs mentionnées, représentant le monde de la cabane, suggèrent, dès le premier chapitre, une opposition prononcée entre la vivacité du démoniaque et la passivité étouffante du couvent. cf. Hébert 1995, 7-9.

Le scénario qui nous est présenté est donc assez archaïque. Ce qui caractérise la cabane au-delà de sa primitivité et de son archaïsme, c'est qu'elle est le lieu de la production illégale d'alcool. Les autres, c'est-à-dire les gens du village et de la ville, n'ont accès à la cabane et à l'alcool que lorsqu'ils disposent du mot de passe – "La Goglue, y es-tu?" (11) Cependant, la vraie fonction de cette hétérotopie ne nous est révélée que lors de la fête du sabbat à laquelle ne sont admis que "quelques fidèles complices" (35) et qui se déroule suivant la chorégraphie de la messe catholique. Une suite de gestes et de phrases prononcées au cours du sabbat nous renvoie directement soit à la bible, soit aux gestes rituels de la messe et mettent en relief, par un détournement de sens, la vanité et le cynisme latents des représentants de l'église face à la réalité humaine, la réalité vécue. Ainsi, Philomène, en regardant son fils et sa fille, proclame: "Ceci est ma chair, ceci est mon sang" (36), et confère, par cette déclaration même, une dimension purement charnelle à la consécration symbolique d'après le rite chrétien. "Bienheureux ceux qui ont faim et soif, car ils seront rassasiés" (36), dira-t-elle par la suite, citant, bien que de façon incorrecte, l'évangile selon Matthieu et signalant que, à l'opposé des vagues promesses d'un accomplissement spirituel faites par l'église, les fidèles présents à la fête du sabbat et dont la vie quotidienne est marquée par la précarité, mangeront à leur faim. Suit l'onction des corps nus des fidèles par Philomène, l'onguent contenant des drogues qui "délivrent l'esprit captif, le rend léger et capable de voyages hors du monde" (38), puis le sacrifice d'un petit cochon sur le dos de Philomène, bref des gestes rituels où les symbolismes catholique – les rituels de la transsubstantiation, de la communion, de l'onction, du lavage des mains etc. – et païen – "Adélard s'est attaché deux cornes de vache sur le front et une couronne de feuilles vertes". (39) – se superposent. Les fidèles dansent au rythme du blues, donnent libre cours à leur volupté et forniquent jusqu'à l'aube.

Dans l'ensemble des cérémonies de la fête du sabbat, l'ampleur de la signification hétérotopique de la cabane s'exprime par rapport au contexte relationnel dans lequel elle est inscrite: cette messe noire a lieu à un moment de l'histoire québécoise où les répercussions du krach de New York se font sentir, où sévissent le marasme et le chômage, où l'on prône le retour à la terre et où la "danse est interdite par le cardinal dans tout le diocèse de Québec" (35). Ceci est particulièrement bien illustré par deux personnages, l'étudiant et Pierrette, qui, dans la nuit de la fête du sabbat, se retrouvent pour oublier la précarité de leur vie quotidienne. L'étudiant et Pierrette s'adonnent au charme du blues – "Son ventre creux [celui de l'étudiant] résonne comme un tambour, mille trompettes et saxos poignent et tordent son

corps souffreteux, lui font une verge dure et des mains d'archange tout le temps que dure le blues". (40) Alors que la voix narratrice résume la miséreuse existence de Pierrette dans une fabrique de maroquinerie, son chômage et sa vision – elle voit le corps de son patron se changer en arbre –, l'étudiant s'écrie que "le rêve et la religion sont l'opium du peuple". (41) On dirait que la cabane, et par extension la fête du sabbat, incarne une hétérotopie où quelques initiés, le temps d'une nuit, échappent à leur piètre réalité, à la privation et à l'humiliation subies au quotidien, transgressent les interdits et ignorent les tabous. Elle correspond à une hétérotopie d'illusion en ce qu'elle constitue un emplacement qui, en créant grâce à la drogue et à l'alcool un moment de bonheur illusoire, dénonce comme plus illusoire encore les promesses des idéologies au pouvoir.

Tout en représentant, lui aussi, une hétérotopie, le couvent se situe à l'extrême opposé de la cabane et comprend tous les aspects qui nous permettent de le désigner comme une hétérotopie de compensation. Contrairement à la cabane dont le charme consiste en son pouvoir de prodiguer aux démunis les moments d'extase et de rêve qui les délivrent de leurs impasses existentielles, le couvent mise sur la réparation, c'est-à-dire qu'il s'efforce de compenser les déficits de l'existence humaine. Le couvent corrige le désordre du village et de la ville, leur dysfonctionnement et leur impureté en créant un espace de régularité, de perfection et de pureté.¹⁵ En effet, tout y est réglé jusqu'au plus petit détail, tout y est à sa place, surveillé, contrôlé : "Ne faut-il pas, dit la mère supérieure, que mes filles, sans exception, soient devant moi, comme des livres ouverts, afin que je puisse lire leur âme sans efforts?" (19) Y règnent le silence, la contemplation, "la distribution des tâches selon les nécessités mystérieuses du salut" (55), la soumission, le jeûne, la pénitence et une curieuse passivité liée au vœu d'obéissance qui dispense les sœurs de toute décision, de toute initiative. (50) Tout

¹⁵ Les principes de pureté et d'impureté marquent notamment ce que l'on pourrait appeler des "rituels" de lavage, pratiqués dans les deux hétérotopies. Est appelé "cérémonie de l'eau" (28) le rituel de lavage effectué au retour de Philomène dans la montagne de B... après un séjour de *travail* au bordel de la ville: "Après avoir placé la mère contre le mur de la cabane, à côté du tonneau plein d'eau de pluie, le père entreprend aussitôt de la laver, par-dessus ses vêtements neufs. Il lui verse quantité de seaux d'eau et de boue, joyeusement, sur la tête et sur tout le corps". (29) Tout comme la "cérémonie de l'eau" qui efface les traces de la ville et qui, en fait, ressemble davantage à une contamination qu'à la purification à laquelle on s'attendrait, la vision de lavage de Julie à son retour de la ville, ou plus précisément de l'hôpital, représente, elle aussi, un acte d'effacement de l'extérieur: "Un seau plein d'eau de Javel est là, soudain posé par terre. [...] Sœur Julie a déjà commencé de laver le parquet, selon les ordres reçus. La supérieure trempe la serpillière dans le seau et, sans tordre le linge, longuement, baigne le visage de sœur Julie qui éprouve à la fois une douleur et une volupté extraordinaires." (21)

dérangement y est étouffé dans son germe et ceux ou plutôt celles qui dérangent sont condamnées à la réclusion soit dans leur cellule soit dans l'infirmerie. Alors que la cabane est en quelque sorte un espace de consolation, celui du couvent peut être considéré comme un espace de sacrifice. Cependant, le sacrifice de renoncer à la vie grouillante extra muros n'est pas exempte d'une certaine volupté procurée justement par le renoncement et la réclusion qui permettent aux religieuses de garder intact les images de béatitude et de beauté, notamment celle de la béatitude de la maternité. Alors que la maternité, tant mythifiée par le discours traditionnel qui honore la famille nombreuse, s'avère, dans la réalité des femmes de l'époque, comme une peine insupportable – "C'est comme si on chiait des briques" (42), peut-on lire dans le texte –, les dames du Précieux-Sang ont le privilège de rêver d'un petit Jésus qu'elles bercent dans leurs bras.¹⁶

4. Dynamiques hétérotopiques

Les deux hétérotopies dont je viens de tracer le portrait s'opposent non seulement à l'espace restant du village et de la ville mais fonctionnent également comme des contre-emplacements l'un par rapport à l'autre. J'ai souligné plus tôt qu'en tissant des relations assez spectaculaires entre les emplacements, Anne Hébert fait ressortir leur ambivalence, leur ambiguïté, et surtout leur côté fantasmatique. Il est vrai que par leur confrontation les deux hétérotopies dévoilent l'antagonisme fondamental qui leur est inhérent et qui se joue entre les pôles les plus extrêmes de l'imaginaire chrétien: celui du mal démoniaque, d'un côté, et celui du divin, de l'autre.

Chacune des hétérotopies en question est investie par son contraire qui le met en échec. Ainsi, au cours du récit, nous comprenons que la présence de Julie dans le couvent est due à une promesse de fidélité faite à son frère Joseph lorsque les deux se sont sauvés de la cabane. Alors que Julie a été violée par son père Adélarde au moment de la fête du sabbat – ce viol peut être qualifié d'initiation au monde démoniaque de ses parents –, Joseph, de son côté, a résisté à l'inceste tant désiré par sa mère Philomène pour donner naissance au plus grand sorcier

¹⁶ Ce désir se manifeste indirectement au moment où les sœurs apprennent la grossesse de Julie. (cf. 183)

et magicien qui ne peut naître que de la mère et du fils.¹⁷ Ainsi, par son refus de l'inceste et son désir de pureté qui le rapproche de l'église, des emplacements catholiques, Joseph est à l'origine de l'effondrement du pouvoir d'attraction de la cabane. Par l'autre qu'il incarne à l'intérieur de l'espace de la cabane, il révèle la futilité du pouvoir magique de sa mère. Julie, de son côté subjuguée par la force magique du monde de la cabane, s'introduit dans le couvent des dames du Précieux-Sang où, à partir du moment où elle apprend la rupture de la promesse de fidélité de son frère, elle inverse systématiquement l'ordre des choses. Son statut d'autre actualise tout ce que l'ordre du couvent, qui n'est serein qu'en apparence, a réprimé en fonction de sa perfection, du perfectionnement de ses soeurs: "Aucune mort, si étrange fût-elle, ne s'appelait jamais suicide. Aucun amour entre religieuses, si déchirant fût-il, ne s'appelait jamais amour. Aucune caresse brûlante, fugitive et tendre, ne s'appelait jamais caresse". (76) Au contact avec soeur Julie de nombreux personnages sont soudainement confrontés à leurs désirs refoulés ou renouent avec leurs forces inconscientes. Ainsi, le Dr Painchaud, en soignant soeur Julie, s'aperçoit de l'autre face de son caractère "doux et compatissant": "Sa rage lui plaît. [...] Un homme peut-il se retourner tout d'un coup, comme un gant, et apercevoir, en un éclair, son double bicornu dans un miroir déformant?" (72) De même l'aumônier Léo-Z. Flageole, confronté à soeur Julie, cède-t-il à sa vanité en espérant la convaincre de magie noire:

Que soeur Julie de la Trinité soit prise en flagrant délit d'ébriété diabolique, aux yeux de tous, et je serai enfin justifié d'exister. Je pourrai enfin exercer, au grand jour, mon véritable ministère, celui dont je rêve depuis mon entrée au séminaire; pratiquer un exorcisme, en grande pompe, selon le rituel de la province de Québec. (131)

La soeur économe, de son côté, commence à fumer et se plaît dans des affaires hasardeuses qui perdent la fortune du couvent – "Sans consulter ni la mère supérieure ni la mère assistante, elle empoigne le téléphone, une cigarette au coin de la bouche, les yeux tout plissés par la fumée. D'une voix basse russe, elle

¹⁷ Il est étonnant que Lefebvre, en se questionnant sur l'"ultime fondement" de l'espace social invoque notamment "*l'interdit*" de la relation physique entre la mère et son enfant qui empêcherait non seulement "leurs relations les plus immédiates" mais aussi "leur corporalité" tout court. Tout en doutant de la justesse de ce diagnostic pour la pratique spatiale il concède que "*la verticalité phallique* [...] réclame une interprétation. De même le fait général que le mur, la clôture, la façade définissent à la fois une *scène* (où quelque chose se passe) et un *obscène*, ce qui ne peut et ne doit pas advenir dans cet espace: l'inadmissible, maléfique et interdit, qui a son espace caché, en-deçà ou au-delà d'une frontière." (Lefebvre 2000, 45-46)

fait des affaires". (139) – et le grand exorciste, convoqué pour guérir sœur Julie du mal qui l'habite, succombe au charme de la novice et à son propre faible pour les tissus les plus exquis dont la guerre prive le haut clergé québécois:

A chaque onction qu'il fait sur sœur Julie, il croit sentir passer sous ses doigts délicats toute la moelleuse opulence des tissus les plus beaux et les plus fins d'Europe, d'Amérique, d'Afrique et d'Asie; tout comme si sœur Julie [...] se trouvait subitement changée en un ballot d'étoffes somptueuses. (171)

Pendant, la présence de sœur Julie réveille non seulement les désirs et les angoisses les plus refoulés – "La supérieure des dames du Précieux-Sang vient de retrouver intacte la plus vieille terreur de son enfance lointaine: la certitude quasi absolue que le diable se trouve caché sous son lit et que, d'un moment à l'autre, il va la tirer par les pieds pour la dévorer." (61) Le comble de son œuvre destructrice consiste à introduire le crime dans le couvent lorsqu'elle accouche d'un fils et que celui-ci est tué par l'aumônier et la supérieure afin de sauver la réputation des sœurs du Précieux-Sang. En quittant le couvent elle constate avoir accompli sa mission: "Je leur ai donné le démon à communier. Le mal est en eux maintenant. Un nouveau-né étouffé dans la neige." (187)

On peut donc conclure que ce qui est vrai pour les hétérotopies face à l'espace restant (le village et la ville), à savoir qu'elles reflètent et dénoncent son côté illusoire et imparfait, ses abîmes et refoulements, est également valable pour la confrontation relationnelle des deux hétérotopies présentées: elles se réalisent l'une en fonction de l'autre et s'identifient l'une par rapport à l'autre. La fin du roman laissant supposer que le Mal l'emporte sur le Bien – Julie rejoint "[u]n jeune homme, grand et sec, vêtu d'un long manteau noir" (187) – il est évident que le Bien, de son côté, reprendra son essor en tant que *conditio sine qua non* du Mal.

5. En guise de conclusion

L'inventaire à la fois stéréotypé et subtil des dynamiques spatiales et relationnelles dressé par Anne Hébert dans *Les enfants du sabbat* renvoie non seulement à la complexité des pratiques spatiales, mais questionne également et avec insistance l'organisation des rôles et identités des sexes dans les différents emplacements. Dans tous les emplacements (forêt, village, ville, église), la femme est sacrifiée au profit d'un ordre établi et, au pire des cas, elle collabore, elle-même, à sa propre immolation. De la sorcière Philomène et sa fille Julie en passant par

Malvina Beaumont, une femme du village, Piggy, l'épouse de Joseph, et la prostituée Marilda Sansfaçon jusqu'aux religieuses du couvent et leur supérieure mère Marie-Clotilde de la Croix, tous les personnages féminins du roman sont instrumentalisées d'une façon ou d'une autre, puis sacrifiées en fonction des grandes instances ou principes antagonistes, à savoir le Bien et le Mal.

Dans un premier temps, l'on pourrait croire que les deux hétérotopies esquissées plus tôt procurent à la femme un espace lui permettant d'échapper aux réalités quelque peu sordides réservées aux femmes: celles de la maternité et de la prostitution. La première est représentée notamment par Malvina Beaumont qui meurt des suites d'un avortement – elle aurait eu un dix-septième enfant (114;118) –, la deuxième par Marilda Sansfaçon jugée sévèrement par la supérieure du couvent: "Il faudrait saisir cette femme avec les pincettes pour ne pas se salir les mains et la rejeter à la rue le plus rapidement possible." (165) A l'opposé de ces deux destins déplorables, Philomène semble vivre, dans sa cabane éloignée, une sexualité accomplie, disposer de son corps et agir à sa guise. Lorsqu'elle échoue à séduire son fils et que le village se dresse contre la cabane, nous comprenons, cependant, que la liberté de Philomène n'est qu'un leurre. Adélard la sacrifie sans compassion aucune et la laisse périr dans le feu: "Il se penche sur Philomène et la contemple froidement. [...] Il prend ses distances. Il lui dit vous. [...] Philomène accueille Adélard, une dernière fois. Il l'emplit de semence froide. Afin qu'elle sache à jamais qu'il est le dieu froid." (116) Alors que la "mise à mort" de la mère Philomène clôt un épisode dans la vie d'Adélard et met un terme assez violent à l'instrumentalisation de Philomène, le viol de Julie met en relief l'initiation de la fille qui est clairement une initiation à la dépossession du corps féminin par laquelle la fille continue le destin de sa mère:

L'homme dit tout d'abord à la petite fille qu'il la tuerait si elle criait. Il avait un couteau attaché par une ficelle autour du cou. L'homme ajouta qu'il était le diable et qu'il fallait qu'il prenne la petite fille. [...] Il prit dans sa main son sexe tout gonflé et le mit de force dans le petit sexe de la fillette qui hurla de douleur. (45)

Il est important de noter que la mère, sûre de sa place et séduite par l'importance que lui est accordé dans le cadre du rituel, sacrifie volontiers sa fille, tout comme cette dernière, ayant intégré la dépossession par le Mal, n'hésitera pas à sacrifier sa mère et à occuper sa place: "L'enchantement de la violence. [...] Satan dit que seule l'horreur mène à la plus grande volupté, et qu'il faut passer par là et par la haine pour devenir une bonne sorcière. Bientôt deux sorcières dans la maison, ce

sera trop". (110) Adélarde, l'incarnation du Mal, se sert donc de la mère contre la fille et vice versa pour assurer la continuité de son pouvoir, et l'on peut constater une stratégie semblable dans l'hétérotopie du couvent où, sous le prétexte d'un dévouement inconditionnel à la volonté divine et en prévision du salut éternel, les femmes perpétuent leur dépossession matérielle, physique et affective.

Tout en jouant sur d'autres registres, l'instrumentalisation de la femme dans le couvent relève des mêmes principes que celle pratiquée dans la cabane. L'aura protectrice et la gaieté naïve de la vie *intra muros* ne sont que les revers d'une interdiction physique et affective réduisant l'individu féminin à un état d'objet absolu: "Je n'ai plus qu'à traverser le monde, comme une aveugle [...]" (16), profère sœur Julie de la Trinité. Tout comme Julie face à son viol, les filles entrant au couvent ne font pas, la plupart du temps, un choix en prenant le voile: "Chaque année nous apporte sa cargaison fraîche de postulantes triées sur le volet. Une fille, deux filles, parfois trois filles par famille". (31) Ces filles, identifiées à des objets d'échange, sont confinées à un endroit où "rien ne se perd, sauf la raison. [...] Le vœu d'obéissance vous dispense de toute décision, de toute initiative. [...] La vie vient mourir ici, en longues lames assourdies, contre les marches de pierres". (50)

Au-delà d'une illustration fort impressionnante des dynamiques spatiales à l'œuvre dans l'imaginaire québécois, et par extension dans le système sociétal de l'époque en question, Anne Hébert propose également une mise en fiction éclairante de la répartition de l'espace entre les sexes. Celle-ci dénonce le fait que, malgré les apparences, la femme est dépossédée de tout droit à l'espace et souligne le fait que la question du pouvoir est toujours une question de l'espace, voire que la pratique spatiale décide de la répartition du pouvoir à l'intérieur d'une société. Ainsi, il n'y a pas de discours de l'espace neutre. Il est toujours idéologique et, par conséquent, "gendered".

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Reconfiguring Urban Spaces: Montreal as "Lettered City" in Marilú Mallet's *Journal inachevé*

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1. Introduction: Latino/aCanadá – City Culture

Since the 1980s, Latin Americans are culturally and intellectually present in metropolitan urban spaces in Canada, and their voices have been increasingly articulated via cultural productions and perceived by various publics. There is, more recently, also an academic interest in Latin Americans living in Canada, following the arrival and insertion of a considerable amount of Latin American academic migrants into Canadian academic and institutional work life during the 1980s/90s.¹ In my article, I will analyse a film by the Chilean-Canadian filmmaker (and writer) Marilú Mallet who came to Montreal as a political exile after the military coup in Chile in 1973. Mallet's films have been released and distributed in Montreal and are subtitled in French when Spanish or English is spoken (her short stories are published in French and English). When Mallet was forced to leave Chile she chose to go to Montreal, searching work as a filmmaker at the Canadian National Film Board (NFB); in 1980 she founded (with Dominique Pinel) the 'Films de l'Atalante', *Journal inachevé* (1982), which is one of the most remarkable productions of this company.²

My analysis focuses on the representations of urban spaces within Mallet's film *Journal inachevé* (1983) and on the dynamics of spatial practices, which mediate the critical inscription of the film into the debates on 'cultural difference(s)'. An important part of this process are the feminist (re-)formulations and practices regarding conceptualizations of 'home vs. exile', 'subjectivity vs. objectivity'

¹ Since the 1990s, regularly organized Film and Literature Festivals in the larger Canadian cities present Latino/a culture(s) from the Americas. Within the past decade there has been more research on Latin Americans living in Canada, cf. Jorge Ginieniewicz/Daniel Schugurensky (eds), *Ruptures, Continuities, and Re-learning: The Political Participation of Latin Americans in Canada*, Toronto 2006.

² *Journal inachevé* (55 min., 16 mm, color) received the 'Prix de la critique québécoise' and the 'Prix spécial du jury' of the Film Festival of Biarritz in 1983.

and living in various languages. The implicit discourse of (urban spaces in) the Americas, denoting a hemispheric construction, is both a strategy of authorisation, positioning the 'Latina'-voices in relation to those of other 'visible minorities', and a result of the 'Latina'-practices of urban artistic expression.

Analysing Mallet's film considering Anglophone North American discourses of urban spaces transporting the duality of 'good country' vs. 'sinful city',³ I would argue that this dichotomy does not form part of the cultural productions of Latinas in Canada. Within the Canadian context the 'North American mainstream' is challenged by the construction of an officially bilingual and multicultural nation state, where the different (Francophone or Anglophone) urban spaces are lived and represented differently by Latinas. In Québec the 'North American' duality of 'good country' vs. 'sinful city' was, in its own way, constructed until the *Révolution tranquille* during the 1960s. But the construction functioned differently, since the split opposed not only rural vs. urban space, but primarily catholic and Francophone (rural) space vs. protestant and Anglophone (urban) space.⁴ Today, the urban spaces of Montreal are characterized by complex dynamics and processes that are also present within the cultural productions of Latinas.⁵

During the 1980s, the Latina cultural productions emerged (and were received) in the context of feminist and postcolonial theory formation, where the critique of normativity – regarding race, class, gender and sexual orientation – and the critique of the conceptualization of subjectivity and agency is a central point of epistemological and empirical departure. I would argue that (feminist) Latina culture and art in Canada changes the perceptions and representations of spatial units and dimensions in/through their texts and films. They break up and dynamize dichotomies, i.e. bipolar spatial constructions and spatial frontiers. Especially in Montreal/Québec there has been an intensive discussion of migrant voices and perspectives within cultural productions.

³ This duality derives from the construction of a pastoral settler society, which is patriarchally and heteronormatively imagined (and re-constructed) as basically Anglophone, white, and protestant.

⁴ Cf. Mark Lajoie, "Imagining the City in Québécois Cinéma", in: *Cahiers du Gerse* 3 (2001), 37-39.

⁵ In *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, Montreal 2006, Sherry Simon analyses the linguistic and cultural transfers in Montreal's writing communities, in the context of the specific spatial, political, and cultural dynamics of the city, its history, and its intersection of languages. She shows how Montreal's early "culture of translation" for decades to come had an influence on its inheritors like e.g. the *littérature migrante* movement in the 1980's (also see publisher's website: McGill-Queen's University Press on-line, 23.10.2008).

In the following, I consider Latin American urban paradigms that have, in my opinion, 'travelled' to Canadian urban spaces with the Latino/a migrants and have been re-configured within the dynamics of migration, translation, and feminist articulations; inscribed into spaces and discourses via cultural productions, like *Journal inachevé*.

2. *La ciudad letrada* – Reconfigured in the North

Within the cultural productions of Latinas negotiating urban spaces in Canada there are, I would argue, certain Latin American urban paradigms to be considered. One of those is the idea of *La Ciudad Letrada* (*The Lettered City*), introduced through the essay of the Uruguayan scholar Angel Rama, who applies Foucault's concepts of power and discourse to his analysis of the Latin American colonial city.⁶ *The Lettered City* discusses the development of the (colonial) Latin American city as center for the power elites and the important role the *letrados* – the distributors of the written word – played within this setting.⁷

The City of Words and Signs

Rama shows how the lettered city developed and supported power structures of repression and dependence that are effective in Latin America until today: within the "norm city there was always another city: the lettered city, whose activity

⁶ Ángel Rama's *La ciudad letrada* was (posthumously) published in 1984 and has been an influential essay within Latin American Studies in Urban Cultures. It was published in English (*The Lettered City*) in 1996. In this article, I will quote from the following edition: Ángel Rama, "La ciudad letrada," in: Mabel Moraña (ed), *Ángel Rama y los estudios latinoamericanos*, Pittsburgh 1997, 565-588.

⁷ The idea of the Lettered City as the space of intellectual (and artistic) production can be traced back to another influential Latin American paradigm: that of 'civilization vs. barbarism'. The important foundational text that opens up the dichotomy "civilización (city) y barbarie (country)" is from the Argentinean Domingo Faustino Sarmiento: *Facundo – Civilización y Barbarie*, written and published in 1845 (first English version in 1868). Sarmiento being one example of a *letrado* as part of a powerful elite, that Rama's essay analyses critically. Rama and Sarmiento argue that one 'cultural heritage', through colonialism and independence until present times, for Latin American intellectuals and artists (as *letrados*), is the strong paradigm of the city as the only space of artistic and cultural production. According to Rama, the Greek urban ethos of civilisation (vs. barbarism of the non-urbanized) forms part of the new cities on the American continent; cf. Rama 1997, 575. The power of this urban feeling remains over centuries: in the era of the independent states, Sarmiento speaks of the civilised ('European') cities versus the barbaric (indigenous) country; cf. Rama 1997, 567, 577.

was accomplished with the order of the signs."⁸ The resulting 'superiority' of the (colonizer's) written word and Western forms of narration over (native) oral tradition and visual culture as one expression of colonialism and colonial structures is an important conclusion of Rama's analysis. According to Rama, the imposition of the form of the city in the 16th/17th century corresponded to the crucial moment in Western/Occidental culture, when, referring to Foucault, the "binarism of the *Logique of Port-Royal*" was introduced, theorizing the independence of the order of the signs.⁹ Rama compares the 'real city' (the society as a whole) and the 'lettered city' to the duality of the linguistic sign: the two cities are two different entities united, not arbitrarily like the sign, but forcibly and by necessity. One cannot exist without the other, but their nature and functions are different: the 'lettered city' produces significations and the 'real city' consists of signifiers.¹⁰ Rama points out that, even more than the letter, all the symbols initiated an increasingly autonomous writing, strongly visible in present times, aspiring to the double articulation of language.¹¹

Next to the power of the signs and words, the checkerboard design of American cities is a rigid principle of organizing urban space, filled with hierarchical power structures which ensure and make functioning a regime of transmissions, powerful until today: from top down, from Europe to America, from the head of power to the physical conformation of the city.¹² But its discourse and legitimacy have been challenged, I would argue, by a strong (trans-cultural) presence of 'the South' in 'the North', re-directing the flow of transmissions and re-configuring the symbolic order, and in consequence also the spatial one.

The *letrados*

Within the American cities, the writers of the word/sign became important and produced powerful scripts and inscriptions: the written word began "its splendid

⁸ Rama 1997, 580.

⁹ Foucault, cited in Rama 1997, 568-569.

¹⁰ Cf. Rama 1997, 587.

¹¹ Cf. Rama 1997, 586. One important representational form, having first crossed the Atlantic and today also the continent from South to North, is the baroque discourse. It combines words with emblems, hieroglyphs, numbers, etc. and transfers this complex enunciation to painting, sculpturing, music, dancing, colours, providing all the arts with the leitmotif that establishes the signification of diversity. Cf. Rama 1997, 585.

¹² Cf. Rama 1997, 571.

imperial career [...] on the American continent".¹³ The intellectuals and artists as *letrados* participated in producing the (power of the) city and "inscribed it into a cycle of universal culture" through their specific role as designers of cultural models, aimed at forming public ideologies.¹⁴ Within urban culture in America today, Rama analyses strong (colonial) dependencies, where the power struggles within the order of the urban sign continue and where the great majority of (Latin) American intellectuals and artists is "urban by vocation".¹⁵ When transposed to the North, I would argue, the space of production and articulation for Latin American *letrados* is also the city. But the possibilities and strategies of intellectual and artistic production change here, and its modes include new forms of spatial representations.

Re-narrating 'letradas' and 'travelling tales'

The long-term stabilizing of hierarchical power structures through the lettered city is, in my opinion, not the only possible effect of the *letrado's* activities. Rama himself stresses the 'double articulations of language', which hints to the fact that words and signs never carry one meaning only and that their various perceptions and usages open up new meanings and articulations, in order to let 'newness enter the world'.¹⁶ Therefore, the lettered city is also the space of transformation regarding power structures and articulations that had been repressed, silenced, excluded, 'dis-lettered' by the former – new narratives and discourses open up new spaces. Rama under-estimates, I would argue, the "perceptible modifications introduced incessantly" by "the common people" in everyday life as well as by intellectuals and artists through cultural productions which reconfigure urban spaces and spatial representations.¹⁷ The theoretical productions of the 1980s/90s, like postcolonial and feminist theory, partly introduced expanded notions of subjectivity (black/coloured, female, queer) that tried to assign the possibilities of enunciation and

¹³ Rama 1997, 572.

¹⁴ Cf. Rama 1997, 567, 583-584, esp. 573.

¹⁵ Rama 1997, 579.

¹⁶ Cf. Homi K. Bhabha' s essay "How Newness Enters the World. Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation", in: *The Location of Culture*, London/New York 1994, 212-235.

¹⁷ Rama 1997, 588. For the power of 'everyday urban practices' see also Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien: Arts de faire*, Paris 1986.

agency also to individuals and groups formerly excluded by the conceptualization of 'subjective agency' (white, male, heterosexual), thus opening up the possibility to imagine potentially new *letrados/as* within the lettered city.

The Latina *letradas* bring *la ciudad letrada* to North American urban spaces, but in combination with a gendered (and often racialized) subjectivity, articulating the "migrant's double vision",¹⁸ multiplying the effect of the 'double articulation of language.' The notion of participation in and appropriation of urban spaces in Latina writing and filmmaking in the 1980s/90s goes largely hand in hand with the experience of migration, exile, and Diaspora.¹⁹ Within those conceptualizations, the fragmentations (and losses) as well as the appropriations (and creations) of spaces take place at the same time and, I would argue, both phenomena cannot be conceived separately. In order to grasp these complex dynamics, the notion of a (post-colonial) in-between or third space is frequently used, (re-)produced, and newly defined.²⁰ Important are also the more dynamic conceptualizations of the seemingly opposition of 'here vs. there' towards a 'here and there at the same time'.²¹ Furthermore crucial is the relation of a dynamic spatial positioning to (anti-racist) notions of feminist subjectivity, in order to critically discuss e.g. the "outsider-within status" of (racialized) migrant women in Canada.²²

¹⁸ Bhabha 1994, 5. Even though the cultural productions do carry implicit elite *letrada* liberal/cosmopolitan attitudes, re-producing the dichotomy of civilized city/barbarian country, the Latinas re-create urban spaces and re-negotiate the tension-laden relation of 'city' and 'nation' – striving to participate in both as 'citizens/citoyennes/ciudadanas', a linguistic concept that expresses the interwovenness of the city and the nation; cf. Jean Franco, "Invadir el espacio público; transformar el espacio privado", in: *debate feminista* 4,8, Fronteras, Limites, Negociaciones (1993), 267-287, esp. 273 ff., 287.

¹⁹ Cf. Franco 1993, 283 ff.

²⁰ The topic of a third or in-between space became widely known through Anglophone post-colonial theory. Cf. Bhabha 1994.

²¹ Cf. Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation*, Paris 1990, 46. On the important correlation of space and movement (vs. static place) see also Certeau 1980 and Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City", in: Simon During (ed), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, London/New York 1993, 151-160.

²² See Enakshi Dua/Angela Robertson (eds), *Scratching the Surface. Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought*, Toronto 1999, 19. Dua and Robertson point out that various Canadian anti-racist feminist writers have "[anticipated] Homi Bhabha's concept of a 'third space'" and brought into view "that women of colour occupy a structural position within the Canadian political economy which overlaps the margins of race, gender, and class", Dua/Robertson 1999, 19.

In the following, I will show how Marilú Mallet represents the interwovenness of different Montreal urban spaces in her film *Journal inachevé*, re-/inscribing the female, migrant, artist subject through "the omnipresence of the 'I'."²³

3. Urban Spaces and the Female Subject: Marilú Mallet's *Journal inachevé*

Docu-Fictionalizing the City and the Self

The representations of (Montreal) urban spaces in Mallet's *Journal inachevé* (1982) illustrate the possibilities of creating new spaces, spatial relations, and interstitial perspectives through cultural productions. The film is an autobiographic docu-fiction about a moment in the life of a Chilean filmmaker in exile in Montreal, showing her struggle to live her daily life in the city: to be a filmmaker, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a friend, an exile, a citizen of Montreal/Québec, etc. at the same time.²⁴ Her 'unfinished diary' is made as a docu-fiction, a cinematographic hybrid genre mixing documentary and fictional elements. It is on many levels the "evocation of a space only barely (re)presentable, a space given over to reflection, a 'féminine écriture,' a writing in the gaps and silences of patriarchal discourse".²⁵ The mixing of documentary and fiction as a technique to visualize and narrate the complex situation of a woman artist in exile, stresses the theme of breaking up seemingly opposed entities within binary logics, such as 'true' documentary vs. 'false' fiction. This move is supported by the topic of the (female genre)

²³ Brenda Longfellow, "Feminist Language in *Journal inachevé* and *Strass Café*", in: William C. Wees/ Michael Dorland (eds), *Words and Moving Images. Essays on Verbal and Visual Expression in Film and Television*, Coll. Canadian Film Studies/ Études canadiennes du cinéma I, Montréal 1984, 77. The essay was translated into French in 1993 by the Caribbean-Canadian writer Jean Jonassaint – an example for the multilingual lettered city and its 'trans-*letrados/as*' at work. Remarkable is also the cultural interest in Montreal to present in the 1990s the city's transcultural productions of the 1980s to a Francophone public.

²⁴ Within Québec culture and politics, the film comes shortly after the referendum of 1980 and is discussed in print press and television in a context of the special situation of Québec (and its Francophone artists and intellectuals) within Canada. Film critic Luc Perreault argued that, after the referendum, there seems to be an artistic/intellectual (self-)censorship in Québec, producing documentaries of an "uniformisation affolante", focusing on other spaces (and times), ignoring the 'here and now'. For Perreault it's, ironically, "une Chilienne en exil au Québec, Marilú Mallet, qui vient nous dire comment vit aujourd'hui une cinéaste dans le Québec post-référendaire". Cf. "Au fil des films. Le Québec est 'plate'", in: *La Presse*, October 8, 1983.

²⁵ Longfellow 1984, 80. See on the feminist "écriture d'un journal intime visuel" also Julie Roy, "Les femmes et le cinéma d'animation au Québec", in: *Nouvelles 'vue' sur le cinéma québécois* 7 (2007), 8-9.

diary as form of autobiographical narrating that also questions the claims of the documentary mode to depict (objective) 'truth' or 'reality'.²⁶ Instead, the mixing of documentary, fiction, diary, and autobiography stresses the woman filmmaker's vision of the "multiplicity of the real".²⁷ This aspect is central to all of Mallet's works, but is aesthetically especially accomplished in *Journal inachevé*.²⁸

The film features the protagonist/narrator/producer Marilú Mallet, her husband, the Australian filmmaker Michael Rubbo, her mother, the painter Maria Luisa Signoret, and the couple's little son Nicolas, all living together in a large house in Montreal. The film shows Mallet at work in the film studio with her colleagues, with her visiting friend Isabel Allende, a social get-together in Mallet's house with other Latin American exiles, and Mallet meeting her friend Salvador, a refugee, at his various precarious jobs (in a bakery and cleaning a shopping mall) discussing possibilities of stopping his announced deportation.

The ArtHouse: Inhabiting Spaces

The film begins with static photographs of a city street, of city buildings, of (typical Montreal) streets (*rue*) and back streets (*ruelle*): we see the façades of (Outremont) brownstone houses, streets with trees, urban architecture covered with snow, and we hear the clicking of the slide-projector. Then the camera starts moving, focuses on a house and moves into it: we see a woman artist work on a painting (Mallet's mother) and we hear Spanish guitar music. The space of the house is travelled by the camera: we see its rooms, furniture, and walls decorated

²⁶ See Gary D. Rhodes/John Parris Springer (eds), *Docufictions: Essays on the Intersection of Documentary and Fictional Filmmaking*, Jefferson, NC 2005. See on *cinéma vérité*, 'direct cinema' and 'performative documentary' Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, Bloomington 1991. See on 'auteur documentary' Marcel Jean, "Filmmaking in Québec: Auteur Documentary in Four Movements", in: *HorizonZero 9, Witness: Digital Documentary and the Passionate Voice (June/July 2003)*, <http://www.horizonzero.ca/textsite/witness.php?is=9&file=12&tlang=0>, November 13, 2008.

²⁷ Alain N. Moffat, "Manifestations autobiographiques dans le cinéma documentaire québécois récent", in: Claude Chabot et al. (eds), *Le cinéma québécois des années 80*, Montreal 1989, 40.

²⁸ See Sherry Simon, "Représentations de la diversité culturelle dans la vidéo et le cinéma québécois," in: Peter Klaus (ed), *Québec – Canada. Cultures et littératures immigrées*, Veröffentlichungsreihe "Neue Romania" Nr. 18, Berlin 1997, 43-44: "Les films de Marilú Mallet jouent tous sur la frontière mouvante entre fiction et documentaire. C'est dans *Journal inachevé*, que cette indécision prend sa forme la plus achevée sur le plan esthétique. Elle donne à l'incertitude générique de ce film un statut quasi-ontologique: on comprend que le va-et-vient entre fiction et documentaire est un reflet de l'état d'esprit de la réfugiée chilienne, qui habite un espace d'entre-deux, entre le Chili et le Québec, entre la politique et l'art, entre le collectif et l'individuel."

with a lot of photographs and paintings.²⁹ A woman's off-voice (Mallet) begins to speak in French, in a quiet recitative manner, "of exile, of the search for a home, a space for creation".³⁰ The narrator seems to feel the necessity to explain the extensive presence of the space of the house: "Si on n'a pas du pays on s'occupe de la maison, [on] vit à l'intérieur".³¹ But the inhabiting of the space of the house is problematized and made more complex already in the next sentence: "Une artiste [...] ne peut habiter que le lieu de son travail". The (traditionally) 'private' space of the house and the (eventually) 'public' space of art (production) are interwoven in a re-configuration of binary conceptualisations of (urban) spaces, such as 'private' vs. 'public' and its respective topographies, as in 'inside' vs. 'outside' space.³²

The art/house is at the same time a memorial space, transposing the past, and a space to re-start (a new) life, including the future. In the protagonist's vision, the 'inside' space of the house is not in opposition to the 'outside' space of the city; they are represented as related, both are equally contested and can be lost, gained and (re-)created. One of the film's central themes, the conflict of differing spatial visions (and practices) of the couple Mallet/Rubbo, is shown when Rubbo is preparing the house for the long winter. He covers all the windows from the inside with a milky insulating plastic foil in order to heat the house more economically. Mallet's narrating voice explains that for many months of the year life happens inside because of the harsh weather conditions. The laconic tone of her voice and her on-screen bodily presence express her feeling of being enclosed (in the house) and 'left out' (of street life) at the same time. The conflictive relationship of the spouses, their different perspectives and attitudes regarding social, family, and work life within Montreal urban spaces, become more and more visible and audible throughout the film.

²⁹ Through the narrator's comment "la maison de ma mère est partout et nulle part", we learn that her docu-fiction is not only about her individual life, but about other women artists as well. The music is "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" (1896, by Francisco Tárrega) and "Vals criollo" (1939, by Antonio Lauro); guitar played by Mallet's brother Octavio Lafourcade. Art production and presence in the house is multiplied in the very beginning of the film.

³⁰ Longfellow 1984, 79.

³¹ The "not having of a country" from the beginning of the film is reconfigured at the very end, when the protagonist's little son Nicolas is seen by his parents as being "in his country".

³² Considering spatial representations of women writers, Ileana Rodríguez analyses the 'house' as one of the terms "to signal the appropriation by women of ever-larger social spaces in the organization and reorganization of privatized spaces". Ileana Rodríguez, *House/Garden/Nation. Space, Gender, Ethnicity in Postcolonial Latin American Literature by Women*, Durham/London 1994, 19.

"Cheminant à la ville": Merging City Spaces

Shortly after the presentation of the house, the camera moves to the 'outside' space of the city, where protagonist Mallet walks the (neighbourhood) street with her visiting friend Isabel Allende, goes to work to her film studio (working on her film *Les Borges*), takes her little son Nicolas to the day care center, meets people, traverses shopping-malls, and drives her small car down-town – connecting urban spaces to an imaginary coherent city.³³ The visualized urbanity is complemented by the narrator's voice, by other voices and dialogues and by other (urban) sound elements, such as jingles and commercials in shopping centers. One important sound element, I would argue, is the film's music: The Québécois folk song "Cheminant à la ville" brings a dynamic and happy tune to the moving in the 'outside' city space, whereas the Spanish guitar music had added a more melancholic note to the 'inside' space of the house.³⁴

Through the film the spectators learn about the protagonist's multi-cultural and -lingual family: the Anglophone Michael Rubbo, the Hispanophone Maria Luisa Seignoret, who also speaks English, and the couple's Francophone little son Nicolas, the protagonist herself (mostly) speaking French and Spanish. We also learn about her work and social life in Montreal and her violent past during the military coup in Chile – inserted into the stream of the moving images through still photographs of the repression in the streets of Santiago de Chile (soldiers, tanks, machine guns, arrested people). Mallet's meetings and conversations with other political exiled and refugees in her daily life in Montreal relates the story of a repressive past and lost space to a present life in exile and the efforts of appropriating and creating new spaces. The impossibility of being in the streets of Santiago de Chile, of claiming the streets, of forming public space is contrasted

³³ Cf. Lajoie 2001, 36: "The cinematic representations of cities can [...] be used to mediate between the spatial imaginary of a city's residents and the built environment within which they live out their day to day lives".

³⁴ The folk song "Cheminant à la ville" is from the album *Entre Lajeunesse et la sagesse* (a.k.a. *French Record*) by Montreal singer/song-writers Kate and Anna McGarrigle, released in 1980. The title of the album is an urban pun, since Lajeunesse is a street in Montreal. To capture the intermediality of text, voice, and music, Ottmar Ette has proposed the terminology of "phonotextuality", referring to Roland Barthes' descriptions of "the pleasure of the text"; cf. Ottmar Ette, "Dimensiones de la obra: iconotextualidad, fonotextualidad, intermedialidad," in: Roland Spiller (ed), *Culturas del Río de la Plata (1973-1995). Transgresión e intercambio*, Frankfurt a.M. 1995, 13-35. Brenda Longfellow draws on Barthes' notion of the "grain of the voice", using it to stress the feminist inscription of the female body and voice; cf. Longfellow 1984, 85.

by Mallet's presences in various Montreal city spaces. Here, her bodily presence, her (French) narrating off-voice as well as her (Spanish and French) on-screen dialogues with others, and the capturing and (re-)presenting of city space via the moving camera form an appropriation of city spaces in order to make space and to create a subject position for the (migrant) woman artist.

Again, the (re-)presentations and appropriations of Montreal city spaces do not pose the duality of 'private'/'inside' vs. 'public'/'outside' space. The Montreal inside and outside spaces seem to merge into each other frequently, as e.g. the public street life goes indoor into large passages, arcades, and shopping malls, both on ground level and subterranean. The famous Montreal RÉSO (a.k.a. la ville souterraine/intérieure), by now the largest subterranean (shopping) area in the world, a city of its own, is represented in the film as an everyday urban space, which is 'in/outside' at the same time. As such it dissolutes the boundaries "between public and private space, between public domains of work and private spheres of leisure."³⁵ Traversing the underground city, Mallet as protagonist appropriates it as private *and* public space. The whole film is set in winter and the protagonist and her son are shown while walking the (white) city in winter clothes and entering public urban 'inside' spaces. Here, the topic of the Canadian long winters, of white snow, slippery ice, and chilling winds comes in again in order to implicitly describe the Montreal 'outside' urban spaces as different to Latin America, and the Canadian (east coast) winter as one of the first 'culture shocks' of Latino/a migrants.³⁶

The Spaces of Art and Subjectivity

As already transported via the (re-)presentations of the house and the city, the topic of space and non-space of the migratory female subject is intertwined with the

³⁵ RÉSO is a homonym for 'réseau' (network): in the early sixties the Metro was built and the first underground shopping mall opened; today, the 'underground city' has its own map, cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underground_City_Montreal, October 29, 2008. On the functioning of shopping malls as private *and* public spaces cf. Meaghan Morris: "[shopping centers] work to produce a sense of 'setting' that defines an imaginary coherence of public space [...], of a 'lifestyle' space declaring the dissolution of boundaries", Meaghan Morris, "What to Do With Shopping Centers?" in: *During* 1993, 295-319, esp. 316.

³⁶ Interestingly, the Canadian winter within Latina city narrations is presented as a 'culture shock' rather than as a 'nature shock'. See Mallet's short story "How are you?" published in 1981, where a 'Latina' and a 'Jewish/Polish' refugee meet in a Montréal English language course. Here, Montreal is also a winter city of ice and snow, where refugees experience the 'subterranean city'. Marilú Mallet, "How are You?" in: *Les Compagnons de L'Horloge-Pointeuse*, Montreal 1981, 69-81.

(non)space of the female artist. Brenda Longfellow has pointed out that "feminist counter-cinema begins to test a new vernacular", a new language in order to create and inscribe female presence and articulation.³⁷ One of the cinematic strategies in *Journal inachevé*, as analysed by Longfellow, is the doubling of subject and object. Through the doubling of Mallet's presence as a screen body and off-screen voice, the self can be represented as desired object, breaking up the dichotomy of subject vs. object and enabling desire for the female self as an act of appropriation and empowerment. The effect of subjective female (self-)desire within the film is related to the predominance given to the speaking voice, to the pleasure of the oral tradition, of a "writing with the body" in which language becomes "a tactile living presence".³⁸

Also on the thematic level, the film presents the importance of oral traditions, related to the Latin American migrant's experience. The collective dimension is focused when the film presents a circle of Latin American (exiled) friends coming together in Mallet's house one evening. Their conversation takes on the form of a *paya*, "a dialogue in verse accompanied by a guitar typical of Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina".³⁹ Relevant for the conflictive relationship of the couple is the fact that – while Marilú Mallet participates in the *paya*, even though timidly at the beginning since the present men are dominant, – husband Michael Rubbo obviously does not feel at ease, he cannot position himself within the Spanish speaking group and leaves the scene, taking son Nicolas (who does not want to go) to bed. Mallet's filmic composition is challenging the predominance of the written word within the lettered city, as a ('self-made') *letrada* she (re-)creates individual and collective oral urban spaces, which open up new spaces for other subjectivities, such as the (Latina) woman migrant artist.

Directly after the *paya*-scene, the couple's conflict culminates in the "much-discussed kitchen-scene", where Mallet is forced (by Rubbo) "to explain her idea of the film".⁴⁰ Before the couple is on-screen in the kitchen, the moving camera shows – as if from a car driving to town – the snow-covered city-landscape, its fringes and houses, accompanied by Spanish guitar music. Meanwhile, we hear Mallet's agitated angry off-voice in French and Rubbo's angry voice answering

³⁷ Longfellow 1984, 93.

³⁸ Longfellow 1984, 93-94.

³⁹ Zuzana Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project*, Austin 1993, 165.

⁴⁰ Pick 1993, 166.

in English, arguing about 'integration' and 'exile'.⁴¹ A cut follows, the music stops, and the camera films a seemingly spontaneous kitchen-scene, featuring the arguing couple: Mallet stands close to the stove, looking towards the open door, where Rubbo leans against the door frame, filling it with his bodily presence. The scene depicts distance between the couple and Mallet seems trapped in the kitchen. Rubbo is reproaching her, in English, about her film-project which he "doesn't understand". Mallet is answering in French, criticizing his dominant attitude: "Toujours, ta façon de faire le film, c'est la façon de faire le film; moi, je fais le film comme je veux". He insists on having "to catch the real things that happen", "the real facts" in a documentary. Mallet defends her film-project: "C'est ma vérité, c'est ma façon de faire le film, [...] je veux m'exprimer comme je veux, je veux pas être imposée un regard", thus discussing the partiality of 'real facts', being 'real' only from a certain perspective. She insists on the 'truthfulness' of her mixed docu-fictional mode: "C'est la moitié documentaire, la moitié de fiction, [...] pourquoi il faut définir la vérité comme ça? Pourquoi il faut définir un film, que c'est du documentaire ou c'est de la fiction?"

Rubbo then puts Mallet in the position of a (professionally) 'bad' filmmaker by suggesting that she has no "clear idea" of what she is doing, naming the 'true facts' Mallet should have in the film: "... you come here, ... you're lonely, ... you marry the wrong person, ... you make a mistake, *that's* exile, that's the truth ...". During this 'attack', the camera focuses on Mallet's tense face on the verge of tears, putting her in the center of the conflict, stressing her point of view. While Mallet is in tears, she literally loses her (French) language: she starts crying/speaking in English; her words are hardly understandable and her English language is thus fragmented. The kitchen-scene ends with her desolately crying, but still insisting, now in English, in doing the film in her way, and Rubbo walking over to her, consoling her in his arms. (The ongoing separation comes to an end when, towards the end of the film, Rubbo announces their divorce.)

⁴¹ Mallet shows the difficulty of creating and claiming an own space for a migrant woman filmmaker through the painful conflict of translating her condition into the hegemonic binary logic – here represented by Anglophone male Rubbo, who is an influential documentary filmmaker at the National Film Board – of 'integration' versus 'exile'. According to several interviews, Mallet's point of view is that of somebody who has chosen Québec society. Cf. Interview by Jean Royer, *Le Devoir* (February 12, 1983): "Pour moi, le problème, c'est celui d'être une artiste au Québec. C'est plus difficile que d'être 'exilée chilienne'". But within her film, I would argue, she strongly expresses a more complex perspective, where the aspects of female subjectivity, migrant vision and artistic expression cannot be separated, but overlap.

While Rubbo defines (her) exile as the deficient state of 'making mistakes and marrying the wrong person out of loneliness', Mallet uses the (edgy) potential of her double vision as an exiled/migrant woman filmmaker and channels it into the docu-fictional 'unfinished diary', in order to present the impossibility of objective truth and real facts. Interestingly, Rubbo, as an Anglophone Australian, himself an expat in Francophone Montreal, does not (want to) see the multiple perspectives: interviewed in the film, he says that he did not come to Canada, but to the National Film Board, giving his (art of) filmmaking a universal truth and validity. In the kitchen-scene, Mallet as a director seems to lose control over her film, but she explicitly makes her point at this very moment of break down: the opening up and appropriation of new – lingual, artistic and emotional – spaces is a painful process of gain and loss at the same time, where the production of meaning is attached to (the representation of) the risky moment of positioning oneself in a new space. Such an in-between or third space marks the breaking-up of binary oppositions, like documentary/objectivity vs. fiction/subjectivity, and the claiming of one's own voices, languages, perspectives, and modes of articulation, enlarging the 'migrant's double vision'. Mallet shows through her docu-fictional and multilingual film that the creation of a (migrant) women's artist subjectivity neither is a process with an end to it, but always 'unfinished,' nor allows singular definitions of 'one' language or of fixed (universal) categories of artistic expression.

4. Conclusion: The Urban Space of 'Being and Becoming'

The textualized and visualized (re-)presentations of the relations and intertwinings of urban spaces in Marilú Mallet's film go beyond binary oppositions that define cultural spaces as 'inside/house' vs. 'outside/city', 'integrated vs. exiled', 'public/political' vs. 'private/personal', 'collective vs. individual', 'documentary vs. fiction', as well as 'male/universal' vs. 'female/particular' and 'subject vs. object'. These transgressions cross the whole film: there is "the rupture between voice/image, documentary/fiction, memory reconstruction/historic reportage, poetry/the quotidian", the film "weaves its way between"⁴² and, I would argue, *partout*.

The visual and textual passages (in-)between urban spaces are, in many Latina texts and films, frequently opened up to an even greater passage, including more

⁴² Longfellow 1984, 79-80.

cities as important reference points within the urban migrational experience in the Americas and beyond.⁴³ In my opinion, the complex representations of urban spaces within cultural productions of Latinas in Canada, as here analysed in Mallet's *Journal inachevé*, reconfigure temporary and precarious "diasporic switching points"⁴⁴ and make them into "ideal points of migratory arrival",⁴⁵ thus opening up new spaces. While Mallet's Montreal urban spaces, I would argue, can actually be both – as in 'diasporic ideal' – it is important that the urban (transmigrational) spaces and movements are represented as sites "not just of departure and arrival but of being and becoming".⁴⁶ This new ontology of multiple female (artist) subjectivity is present in the 'unfinished diary' from the beginning, when "a division is introduced into the film between voice and image, interior poetic monologue and the idiosyncratic look of the camera: a division which opens the film to a desire for presence".⁴⁷

In *Journal inachevé*, the house, the city, art production, and the women artist's subject positionings are represented as urban spaces, their spatial negotiations forming part of the Montreal lettered city. Mallet's film produces and reconfigures *letrada* authority in order to inscribe new (visual, oral, and lettered) significations into Canadian urban spaces, creating new American spaces at the same time. Through these poetic representations of urban spaces, the film inscribes itself critically into the Canadian and Québécois debates on 'cultural difference(s),' relating these debates to a larger (Latin)American dimension.

⁴³ See also Mallet's collection of short stories *Miami Trip* (Montreal 1986) where she connects various cities from the Americas (and Europe), like Montreal and Miami. Her docu-fictional film *Chère Amérique* (Montreal 1990) focuses strongly on Montreal, but also introduces the migratory relations of American cities (Buenos Aires, Santiago, Quito, New York, Montreal). See also e.g. texts of Latino/a-Canadian writers Carmen Rodríguez, Gloria Escomel, Alberto Manguel.

⁴⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis 1996, 171.

⁴⁵ Jana Evans Braziel, "'C'est moi l'Amérique' Canada, Haiti and Dany Laferrière's Port-au-Prince/Montréal/Miami Textual Transmigrations of the Hemisphere", in: *Journal of Comparative American Studies* 3,1 (2005), 31.

⁴⁶ Braziel 2005, 35.

⁴⁷ Longfellow 1984, 79-80.

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'Espace/Space': Gender and Translation in Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve* and Gail Scott's *My Paris*

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From borderlands similar to those theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa, Québec's feminist translators have contributed an emerging awareness of the transformative power of translation.

(Anne-Marie Wheeler).¹

1. Introduction

The metropolitan city of Montreal is a space of cultural difference in which Anglophone and Francophone cultures meet and create a contact zone of diversity and linguistic intersections. My article will map this contact zone by analyzing the construction of identities in two Québécois novels that illustrate the displacement of their protagonists from Montreal but that simultaneously maintain a referential connection to the city.² Both Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve* (1987) and Gail Scott's *My Paris* (1999) introduce the notion of translation to describe the mechanisms of cultural difference in Montreal.³ But neither Brossard nor Scott make use of translation according to its traditional definition. The practice of translation is rather understood as divergent from the technique of transmitting language content between two languages. In their novels, Brossard and Scott create strategies that stress the process of translation, not its product. Brossard's "pseudotranslation" and Scott's "comma of translation" are means to articulate an in-between space that combines the English- and French-speaking cultures in Canada.⁴ Montreal

¹ Anne-Marie Wheeler, "Issues of Translation in the Works of Nicole Brossard", in: *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16,2 (2003), 450.

² For a definition of the concept "contact zone" see Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone", in: *Academic Discourse: Readings for Argument and Analysis*, Fort Worth 2000, 573-587.

³ Cf. Nicole Brossard, *Le désert mauve*, Montreal 1987; Gail Scott, *My Paris*, 1999, Chicago 2003.

⁴ Cf. Sherry Simon, *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, Montreal/Kingston

scholar Sherry Simon summarizes and terms these practices developed in recent Québécois feminist literature as "perverse translations". According to their potential ability to open a "third space", these "perverse translations" can be likened to Homi Bhabha's concept of "third space" and to Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "borderlands". In how far these three concepts are interrelated and in which ways Québécois writers elaborate on the idea of translation and cultural difference is the aim of this article. In particular, I will take a look at the hybrid discourse that the chosen texts expose on the levels of language, space, and gender. Brossard's *Le désert mauve* will be discussed specifically in terms of the construction of a "borderlands" space through the practice of "pseudotranslation" and through the use of the metaphor of the horizon. Likewise, Scott's novel *My Paris* will be analyzed in terms of the creation of the notion of a "third space" through the use of the so-called "comma of translation". Moreover, the "queering" of gender by way of placing initials instead of full names to represent characters throughout Scott's text will be considered. Lastly, a comparison of the two novels and their spatial relatedness to the city of Montreal will be given to emphasize the city's hybridity that roots in translation.

According to the Canadian Constitution Act, the two official languages of Canada are English and French. Therefore, official documents have to be published in both languages. As a result, Canadian reality is widely construed through obligatory translations. Similarly, Canadian literary texts have been translated from English to French and vice versa. For a long time, most of these translations have been claimed to be accurate reproductions of the original in the target language. The translator, who often remained "invisible", was thereby in the role of bridging the gap in-between the languages – in the Canadian case, English and French – more than in that of a mediator promoting cultural exchange. Attracted by the metaphor of invisibility, it were especially French-Canadian women writers during the Quiet Revolution who related to the role of the translator, only to subvert it in response. In their position of "double-invisibility" – being women in a patriarchal society and belonging to the colonized French minority of Anglophone Canada – Québec feminists engaged in analyzing the hitherto reticent role of the translator. By doing so, they challenged the translator's silent position to one of a visible negotiator between the cultures, in contrast to the former function of translation that had mainly focused on linguistic transfer.

Similar to women who stepped out of the private sphere into the public arena by joining the feminist movement, and similar to the Québécois who claimed their social status of post-colonial equality via the Quiet Revolution, the translator became more and more important in the social movements of Canada in the 1980s. Feminist Québécois literature of that period is marked by a "border consciousness" which exhibits the multiplicities of languages, cultures, and perspectives. The awareness of the multiplicity of languages in the contact zone manifests itself in "translation [which] involves straddling the borders between two languages, [and] two ways of organizing reality".⁵ Translation is thus a site of the shaping of the language systems that contain us. The translators, in this case primarily Québécois women writers, therefore elaborated their translation techniques and created a new conception for cultural encounters in Canada.

The notion of "perverse translation" describes a technique that "disturbs the boundaries of [...] cultural space" and does not "efficient[ly] transfer [...] a text from one language to another".⁶ According to Simon, "perversions are acts that do not respect the normative functions of objects or practices".⁷ Hence, "perverse translations" "turn translation[s] away from [their] normative function" and direct attention towards "the shady zone where the translator operates".⁸ The pejorative aspect of the adjective "perverse" qualifies the manipulative function of the translator who has the power to modify both: the translations s/he performs between languages and, consequently, the concept of translation itself. This practice of empowerment was embraced by women in Québec, who used "translation as a trope or topos"⁹ that emphasized its mere communicational function. As the female voice had long been excluded from dominant discourse, it is not surprising that especially women engaged in these subversive practices. Their translations raise the "question of angle of vision"¹⁰ – just like the concept of *écriture au féminin*

⁵ Wheeler 2003, 425.

⁶ Simon 2006, 15, 118.

⁷ Ibid, 118.

⁸ Ibid, 15, 119.

⁹ Miléna Santoro, "Feminist Translation: Writing and Transmission among Women in Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve* and Madeleine Gagnon's *Lueur*", in: Roseanne Lewis Dufault (ed), *Women by Women: The Treatment of Female Characters by Women Writers of Fiction in Québec since 1980*, Cranbury 1997, 147.

¹⁰ Ibid, 152.

– and generate "displacements in and of language".¹¹ Deviant translations, thus, have "the power to dislocate the self as [they] displace[...] language",¹² thereby blurring the borders of conventional translations.¹³ The city of Montreal, and in particular its contact zone, offers urban spaces for this "continuous transaction with difference"¹⁴ between the Anglophone West and the Francophone East.

2. Theorizing Spaces

Homi Bhabha defines the notion of "third space" as a site beyond the confines of specific nation-states. This transnational approach deconstructs the concept of borders and constructs a "paradigm of transnational territoriality which accepts hybrid cultural formations".¹⁵ Bhabha places his theory in a "position of liminality" that is a "productive space of the construction of culture as difference".¹⁶ As "culture is a signifying or symbolic activity" and "all cultures are symbol-forming and subject-constituting, interpellative practices", cultural meaning can only be externalized via "a process of alienation".¹⁷ By approving "the other" and through an understanding of cultural difference, meaning subsequently is constructed via translation.¹⁸ According to its non-essentialism regarding the idea of "original or originary culture",¹⁹ cultural translation is in constant flux. "Translation is the performative nature of cultural communication"²⁰ and creates a condition of hybridity that according to Bhabha manifests itself in "the 'third space', which enables other positions to emerge".²¹ Thus, in transnational/translational third spaces, new formations of cultural identity can take hold. In the works of Brossard

¹¹ Santoro 1997, 152. Also see Santoro for further details on feminist translation.

¹² Simon 2006, 129.

¹³ Cf. chapter 4, "Paths of Perversity: Creative Interference", in: Simon 2006, 119-161.

¹⁴ Ibid, 161.

¹⁵ Astrid M. Fellner, "'Other Places': The Concept of Borderlands as a Paradigm of Transnational Territoriality in Chicana Literature", in: Michele Bottalico/Salah el Moncef bin Khalifa (eds), *Borderline Identities in Chicano Culture*, Venezia 2006, 69.

¹⁶ Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha", in: Jonathan Rutherford (ed), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London 1990, 209.

¹⁷ Ibid, 210.

¹⁸ For further explanations of the concepts of "cultural difference" and "translation" cf. Rutherford 1990.

¹⁹ Ibid, 211.

²⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London 1994, 228.

²¹ Rutherford 1990, 211.

as well as Scott, it is the in-between of the historically divided city of Montreal into an Anglophone West and a Francophone East that gives rise to new identity formations. Crossing the linguistic and cultural borders on Montreal's "Main" is a translational performance based on encounters with the other that result in hybrid discourses in the borderlands of Boulevard St. Laurent.

The term "borderlands" initially appeared in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. There it is defined "as [a] site [...] of contest, of flux, and of change".²² The text contains theoretical chapters as well as fictional narratives and, thus, creates a hybrid genre itself. Anzaldúa critically discusses the construction of the U.S. border with Mexico and gives a historical account on its symbolism. Moreover, she integrates the politics of ethnicity, language, and gender into her discussion and claims that she is "cultureless because, as a feminist, [she] challenge[s] the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet [she is] cultured, because [she is] participating in the creation of yet another culture".²³ The notion of "borderlands" hence describes "shifting sites of transition [...], where space is contested"²⁴ and where a third space, an "in-between consciousness", is created. Consequently, borderlands are transnational spheres constituted by a hybrid discourse that subverts hegemonic structures and that re-invents the subject. As Fellner remarks in her article "Other Places: The Concept of Borderlands as a Paradigm of Transnational Territoriality in Chicana Literature", "border theory [...] emerges from everyday life, from the historical specificity of the boundary region [...], the border culture between".²⁵ In Anzaldúa's case it is *la frontera* between Mexico and the United States, and in the works of Brossard and Scott it is the in-betweenness of Anglophone North America and Francophone Québec. The concept of "border consciousness", as it was developed in U.S. Latina literature, can thus also be applied to the Canadian context which, similar to the U.S.-Mexican border, is also a border zone. According to Anzaldúa, "borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other".²⁶ In Canada, and particularly in Québec, it is Anglophone and Francophone cultures that share a border and thereby create a

²² Fellner 2006, 69.

²³ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco 1999, 102f.

²⁴ Fellner 2006, 70.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Anzaldúa 1999, "Preface".

"vague and undetermined place" that "is in a constant state of transition".²⁷ As a result, translations within this contact zone expose cross-cultural, transnational, and, ultimately, translational perspectives.²⁸ For Brossard, the space of the contact zone is metaphorically materialized in terms of the concept of the horizon. In *Le désert mauve*, *l'horizon* refers to the contact zone between the earth and the sky that allows for the protagonist's identity construction and projection while exploring the vastness of the desert in the twilight. The border consciousness that emerges thereby "embraces multiple voices and multiple positionings in relation to gender, class, sexuality and membership of competing cultures".²⁹ Scott takes up these multiplicities and construes her first-person narrator as an Anglo-Québécois *flâneuse* in Paris, who continuously comments on the issues of class and origin, as well as gender and sexuality, while walking through the streets of the city.

Sherry Simon's conceptions of "hybridity" and "translation" – including "perverse translation" – add to Bhabha's and Anzaldúa's definitions of an in-between space. According to Simon, "hybridity is the result of the multilingualism and [the] mixed identities of a cosmopolitan" society.³⁰ Analyzing the urban spaces of Montreal, Simon argues that the contact zones of the linguistically and spatially divided city give rise to a new *entre-deux* culture.³¹ This hybrid culture is "born in translation",³² whereby Simon understands the concept of translation as "a process rather than as a product" that is itself in constant flux and allows for various strategies of performance. Both Brossard and Scott work with the concepts of translation and hybridity, although by means of different techniques. While Brossard translates intralingually, and the text's hybridity emerges from its cosmopolitan setting and monosyllabic excursions from French into the English and Spanish language, Scott emphasizes her protagonist's culturally as well as sexually hybrid background, inserts French words and phrases into her English text, and overtly translates them into English, marking the translation process with a comma. According to Simon,

²⁷ Ibid, 25. For further details on the notion of transnational territoriality in Chicana literature cf. Fellner 2006, 75.

²⁸ Cf. Anne-Marie Wheeler, "Issues of Translation in the Works of Nicole Brossard," in: *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16,2 (2003), 425.

²⁹ Fellner 2006, 70.

³⁰ Simon 2006, 10.

³¹ Cf. "Introduction: Moments of Translation in a Divided City", in: Simon 2006, 3-27.

³² Ibid, 17, emphasis in the original.

it is this "comma of translation" that embodies the space between Anglophone and Francophone cultures.

It is thus feminist Anglo- and Franco-Québécois literature in particular that shows signs of a consciousness of this "third space", which exhibits the multiplicities of languages, cultures, and perspectives. Along with Simon, I want to argue in this paper that both Brossard's "pseudotranslation" and Scott's "comma of translation" are manifestations of "perverse translations". They are "position[s] and [...] practice[s] that allow [...] the writer to develop her own voice and style" and to "create new female subjects".³³ Moreover, I will expand this argument by examining practices of "perverse translation" regarding their potential of creating notions similar to those of the "third space" and "borderlands".

3. Pseudotranslations in Montreal

To begin with, the Québécois writer and feminist Nicole Brossard achieves hybridity in her texts not only by "perverse translations" but also via the practices of *fiction/théorie* and *écriture au féminin*. The former is a hybrid genre, a blurring of the borders between fiction and theory, the notions of form and content, and the boundaries between languages. Fiction/theory makes explicit the relations between author, translator, and reader³⁴ – and it engages the concept of a "third space" in Bhabha's sense in so far as it goes beyond the confines of fiction and theory in their conventional definitions and embraces hybridity by the amalgamation of the two. The latter, *écriture au féminin*, proceeds on the level of gender and uses translation "as an allegory for women's writing to change the notion of 'authorship' into one of 'authership'".³⁵ For Brossard, "the notion of an *écriture au féminin* [...] is] an imaginative site on which to construct new identities for women".³⁶ The creation of this imaginative third space allows for "contemporary women to transform themselves into autonomous agents in the process of signification".³⁷ If we read this transformation as one specific kind of translation, we could now move on

³³ Simon 2006, 129, 126.

³⁴ Cf. Wheeler 2003, 439.

³⁵ Ibid, 426, my emphasis.

³⁶ Karen Gould, *Writing in the Feminine: Feminism and Experimental Writing in Québec*, Carbondale 1990, 37, emphasis in the original.

³⁷ Ibid.

and have a closer look at the translational element in Brossard's novel *Le désert mauve*.

The Franco-Québécois novel *Le désert mauve* is a tripartite text entirely written in French: The first part, "Mauve Desert", is a narrative within the novel that is presented as being edited by a fictional Francophone Québécois author named Laure Angstelle.³⁸ The narrative is set in the desert in Arizona, close to the Mexican border. It recounts the story of Mélanie, an independent adolescent woman who is on the edge of exploring her sexuality when she meets the scientist Angela Parker. However, this love is not meant to evolve, as Angela is murdered in Mélanie's arms at the end of the novella. Part two of the novel, entitled "A Book to Translate", takes place in Montreal. There, a young woman called Maude Laure discovers Angstelle's book, reads it, and decides to translate it. As she gets obsessed by the multiple possibilities of reading and interpreting the novel, she closely examines each metaphor and character, and she even simulates an interview with the author of "Mauve Desert", Laure Angstelle. Maude Laure's translation has to be seen in a metaphorical way as there really is no transfer of the original text into another language. Both fictional narratives of Brossard's three-part novel – the "original" as well as its "translation" – are expressed in French; they frame the analytical middle part that illustrates the process of translation. The third part, consequently, offers a "pseudotranslation" of part one, now entitled "Mauve, the Horizon". The third part, ultimately, offers a "pseudotranslation" of part one, now entitled "Mauve, the Horizon". This narrative is a replication of Angstelle's "Mauve Desert" in so far as it is based on Maude Laure's reading of the novella. The translational aspect surfaces only in part two of Brossard's novel, which seeks to depict the work of a translator. The language transfer, though, is subtracted from the translation to emphasize its performative function.

In the middle section of *Le désert mauve*, Maude Laure closely examines, amongst other aspects, the notion of *l'horizon*. As argued above, Brossard's use of the concept of the horizon is highly metaphorical. A closer examination of this concept reveals that it represents a "third space" – a place of translation or a "perverse translation". On a mundane level, the horizon embodies the space in-between the earth and the sky. *L'horizon* is that ever-shifting contour of land toward which

³⁸ I will refer to the three parts of the novel using the subsections of the English translation of *Le désert mauve*, *Mauve Desert*. This makes it easier to differentiate between the single parts of the novel and the whole text, to which I refer using its original title in French, *Le désert mauve*.

Mélanie races in her car at dusk and dawn. As Holbrook claims, "suggestively in flux, shifting with vantage point and atmosphere, [...] the figure of the horizon takes on the rhetorical significance [...] of a permeable line between reality and fiction".³⁹ This indeed reminds us of Anzaldúa's definition of "borderlands". On the symbolic level, thus, Brossard construes a potential world where patriarchal fictions disperse, where a lesbian reality is no longer considered fictional, and where cultural as well as linguistic borders are crossed.⁴⁰ Through Maude Laure's reading of the horizon in "Mauve Desert", the concept undergoes a resignification and is incorporated into the title of its pseudotranslation "Mauve, the Horizon". On a metaphoric level, *l'horizon*, then, emerges as a highly invested term: From a simple, though prominent concept in Laure Angstelle's "Mauve Desert", we do not only find it again in Maude Laure's pseudotranslation of the novella, but this concept now becomes part of the title, "Mauve, the Horizon".⁴¹ According to Holbrook, this development of the term emphasizes the horizon's translational aspect in the novel. Furthermore, the second part of the novel entitled "A Book to Translate", "presents itself as a work enacting the process of translation".⁴² If we conceive of the notion of the "horizon" as a metaphor for the translations that take place in contact zones, we can infer that its integration in the title further emphasizes the otherwise lost aspect of translation. As Brossard's novel exemplifies a "pseudotranslation", only the procedural second part of the novel and the title of its third part indicate traces of a translation that otherwise just takes place beyond linguistic transfer. In addition, the metaphor of the mauve-coloured horizon – a space in-between comparable to that of Montreal's contact zone – creates a site for reinvention and imagination here: a third space from which Mélanie's identity emerges.

Nicole Brossard wrote this novel exclusively in French, which makes the text a "fictional translation – the fiction of a translation that is in fact a rewriting within the same language".⁴³ The three-part text *Le désert mauve* "reproduces the effects of translation", notably by way of the "subtle differences in rhythm and vocabulary" that can be found between part one and three. This "continual *dérive* of meaning

³⁹ Susan Holbrook, "Delirium and Desire in Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve/Mauve Desert*", in: *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 12,2 (2001), 81-82.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴² Simon 2006, 144.

⁴³ Simon 2006, 145.

which occurs with the passage across languages"⁴⁴ is nevertheless uncovered not only in terms of "perverse translation", but also by "Brossard's reluctance to actually include English" words in her text. Moreover, the novella "Mauve Desert" and its translation "Mauve, the Horizon" are set in the American Southwest. The translational part two of Brossard's novel, in contrast, takes place in Montreal. This choice of setting also supports the text's hybridity: The two protagonists of *Le désert mauve*, Mélanie and Maude, describe a transnational encounter between Anglophone North America and Francophone Québec. This contact is emphasized by Brossard's code-switching that points toward language practices in Montreal.⁴⁵

As stated before, the phenomenon of language mixing – although under different premises – also occurs in Gail Scott's texts. The Anglophone writer Gail Scott is affiliated to French-language culture as well as to the Québécois feminist movement. A former journalist for English-Canadian newspapers in Québec, Scott also published in feminist as well as French-language political and cultural magazines. This not only maintained her solidarity with Québec feminists, but also made her "a central figure in both Francophone and Anglophone feminist circles".⁴⁶ As a result, "her writing bears traces of French rhythms and syntax" and she "has become an important figure in the field of Anglophone writing in Québec because of her engagement with the question of what it means to live and write 'in translation'".⁴⁷ Whereas Brossard opens up a translational space by the use of *fiction/théorie*, Scott creates a "third space" by means of her writing of the "new narrative". The former "grew out of the feminist context" and *écriture au féminin* in Québec, the latter grew "out of a queer context"⁴⁸ in the United States. As Scott states in an interview with Moyes, it is "the looseness of the word 'queer'" that makes her "feel very free in this space".⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid, emphasis in the original.

⁴⁵ For a close examination of language practices in Montréal cf. Simon 2006.

⁴⁶ Lianne Moyes, "A Brief Biography of Gail Scott", in: Lianne Moyes, *Gail Scott: Essays on Her Works*, Toronto 2002, 232.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 233. For further details cf. Moyes 2002, 231-234.

⁴⁸ Lianne Moyes, "In Conversation: Gail Scott, Lianne Moyes and Corey Frost", in: Moyes 2002, 212.

⁴⁹ Moyes 2002, 221. For definitions and additional information cf. Moyes 2002, 208-230.

The space that the concept "queer" creates for Scott can be found in the definition of the word "queer" as being committed to denaturalization and having no "consistent set of characteristics".⁵⁰ According to Annamarie Jagose, "queer is widely perceived as calling into question conventional understandings of sexual identity by deconstructing the categories, oppositions and equations that sustain them".⁵¹ The indeterminacy of "queer", therefore, leaves space for self-identification. As "identification is a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, [...] the agency of identification – the subject – is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness". As a result, the concept of "queer", similar to that of cultural hybridity, "gives rise to something different, [...] a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation".⁵² Along with Bhabha's "third space" and Anzaldúa's "borderlands", "queer" is a site where categories are perpetually challenged, meanings are in permanent flux, and identities are subject to constant change. Jagose claims that "queer opts for denaturalisation as its primary strategy"⁵³ – a technique that can be found in Gail Scott's novel *My Paris* on several levels, be it the use of the gerund on the grammatical level or the avoidance of proper names on the gender level. Moreover, *My Paris* is written in a fragmentary style with short sentences that are a result of the abandonment of commas and, as mentioned above, the consistent use of the gerund instead of tense forms, which has the effect of introducing a sense of permanent unrest to the narrative. The reintroduction of the comma for the purpose of indicating the process of translation further fragments the text by dividing the already short clauses into even smaller units. The insertion of French words and phrases that are translated into English challenges the text's generally monotonous language and poses a perpetual encounter with "the other". On the content level, the protagonist encounters "the other" during her everlasting walks through the streets of Paris. The narrator denaturalizes the people she meets by referring to them with initials rather than by giving their full names, a technique that blurs gender categories as it is not clear whether the abbreviated names refer to a man or a woman.

Besides its queer element, Scott's text establishes the idea of an *entre-deux* by means of "translation which tests the conventional boundaries of interlingual

⁵⁰ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, New York 1996, 96.

⁵¹ Ibid, 97.

⁵² Rutherford 1990, 211.

⁵³ Jagose 1996, 98.

transfer". As Simon states, translation, "rather than serving as a passage across two discreet cultural zones, [...] opens up an intermediate space between them".⁵⁴ This space is indicated by Scott's "perverse translations" using a "comma of translation" to bridge the gap in-between English and French in her writing. This *entre-deux* is thus pointed out explicitly, which I will discuss in the following section.

4. Commas of Translation in Paris

The Anglo-Québécois novel *My Paris* presents a travelogue noted down by an Anglophone writer from Montreal during her six-month stay in Paris. While the first-person narrator locates herself at the intersection of Paris's plurality, the reader is confronted with a "montage of voices, languages, institutions, codes, cultural narratives, media practices, [...] [etc.] which constitute the city".⁵⁵ Moreover, the narrator is confronted with the linguistic asymmetries between French and Québécois. In addition to the subsidiary status of her language, her status as an Anglophone from Montreal marginalizes her once again. According to Moyes, Scott's writing subject "questions her own positions and preconceptions. [...] She places French words besides English words in ways which destabilize the notion of the linguistically 'foreign' and she calls attention to the continuities as well as the discontinuities between her 'home' culture (Québec) and that of the 'other' (France)".⁵⁶ As Scott claims in an interview, *My Paris* construes the subject on the grounds of a heteroglossia, "reveal[ing] the negative aspects of the cultural baggage [and] a huge gap in the writing subject".⁵⁷ The first-person narrator places herself right in this gap – "somewhere between the privileged and the dispossessed, somewhere between the French-speaking and the English-speaking".⁵⁸ Thus, she is "variously *montréalaise*, *québécoise*, *anglo-québécoise*, Canadian and (North) American"⁵⁹ and finds herself in a situation of continuous translation.

⁵⁴ Sherry Simon, "The Paris Arcades, the Ponte Vecchio and the Comma of Translation", in: Moyes, 2002, 150.

⁵⁵ Moyes 2003, 87.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Moyes 2002, 220f.

⁵⁸ Moyes 2003, 90.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 88, emphasis in the original.

It is this Anglo-Québécois position – the writing subject's and Gail Scott's – from which "writer/translators are increasingly involved in creating hybrid literary texts which are informed by a double culture".⁶⁰ To make the process of translation visible to the reader, Scott makes use of the "comma of translation" and at some point in the novel asks herself: "But if comma of translation disappearing. What of French-speaking America remaining" (*My Paris* 40).⁶¹ Simon, subsequently, makes the connection between France and Canada and points out that "Scott's comma of translation draws [...] a rich web of thinking about language and translation which leads [...] from Paris to Montréal [...] and] from the modernist experience of expatriation to the postmodern reality of cultural hybridity".⁶² Interestingly enough, Scott does not use any commas in the phrase itself, but separates the conditional sentence into two parts by placing a period in the middle. Just like Gertrude Stein, Gail Scott has banished commas in their conventional usage from *My Paris*,⁶³ just to introduce her own practice of the comma as a "comma of translation" when inserting French words and phrases into the otherwise English text. Scott's new use of the comma becomes visible in the following quotes: "*Comme si de rien n'était*, as if nothing happening" (*My Paris* 12, my emphasis). "So we nasalizing *pain*, bread" (*My Paris* 62, my emphasis). However, Scott deliberately replaces the comma with a full stop in the passage above not only to continue the fragmented style of the novel with its short phrases in general, but to support the idea brought forth in the argument she makes. The comma has disappeared from this passage as much as the French words have. Thus, she offers an answer to her own question: If the comma of translation – which Scott also refers to as "comma of difference" – disappears, nothing remains of French-speaking America. Without a comma of translation, the very process of translation is eliminated, and the space created by its transitional function does not come into existence. Consequently, the site of cultural difference, which the comma would embody, is substituted by a cultural norm set by dominant cultures. Following Bhabha's argument on multiculturalism in which he claims that "a transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society [...], which says that 'these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our grid'",⁶⁴ the omission of (the comma of) translation

⁶⁰ Simon 2002, 143.

⁶¹ Based on Simon 2002, 142.

⁶² Simon 2002, 142f.

⁶³ For detailed information on intertextuality with Gertrude Stein's opus cf. Simon 2002, 142f.

⁶⁴ Rutherford 1990, 208.

creates cultural diversity rather than cultural difference.⁶⁵ Accordingly, Scott's passage on the situation of the French-speaking population in a predominantly English-speaking North America reflects on the notions of translation and, as Simon concludes, cultural hybridity.⁶⁶

As mentioned earlier, Simon differentiates between translation as a process and hybridity as a product. This idea is based on Walter Benjamin's theory of "translation" as developed in his famous *Arcades Project*,⁶⁷ which is another intertextual component of the novel *My Paris*. "Benjamin suggests that translation is less about transmitting a message than it is about revealing differences".⁶⁸ Moreover, "the task of the translator [...] is [...] to display the complementarity of languages and texts. The space between one language and another opens up a 'third space' between original and translation, a utopian space that no longer means or expresses anything".⁶⁹ Thus, the process of translation with its signifying comma "can be seen as [...] drawing the languages together and separating them at the same time, gesturing toward [...] space between the 'original' and its 'afterlife' in a second language".⁷⁰ In short, Benjamin sees the challenge of translations and for translators in "imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced" and, at the same time, in keeping the notion that "the 'original' is never finished or complete itself".⁷¹ Scott emphasizes this point by her intentional use of the comma, which – in contrast to the short sentences limited by periods that dominate *My Paris* – leave space for something else.

Along with Simon, then, we can ask ourselves: "How does *My Paris* use the comma?"⁷² and we will find a solution in Scott's text itself, when "at one point [of

⁶⁵ For a detailed discussion of the terms "cultural diversity" and "cultural difference" see Rutherford 1990.

⁶⁶ Cf. Simon 2002, 142f.

⁶⁷ According to Dianne Chisholm, Benjamin's *Arcades Project* is a work of "theory-fiction" (Chisholm 154). Its incorporation into the novel *My Paris* once more includes Gail Scott's work in the Québécois tradition of *fiction/théorie* (cf. Nicole Brossard). See Dianne Chisholm, "Paris, *Mon Amour*, My Catastrophe, or *Flâneries* through Benjaminian Space", in: Moyes 2002, 153-207. Also see Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", in: Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, London 1982.

⁶⁸ Simon 2002, 145.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 145f.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 147.

⁷¹ Rutherford 1990, 210.

⁷² Simon 2002, 147.

the] novel, [the] narrator says, 'Wanting to stay afloat, To stay out of categories. Moving back and forth. Across comma of difference. A gerund. A gesture' (107)".⁷³ From this excerpt we can conclude that "the comma is [...] a space in-between, a space of blurred categories and undecidability. Here, alternatives are suspended, multiple realities come together, [and] differences coexist. This is the space of the *act* of translation."⁷⁴ Moreover, the conclusion can be drawn that the comma also construes a queer space in the sense in which I have defined the notion of "queer" before. This argument is supported by the fact that Scott circumvents gendering the personae in her novel and comments on this avoidance of gender categories in the text-passage cited above. To fulfill the narrator's wish "to stay out of categories" (*My Paris* 91), she refers to her French companions by their initials only.

5. Montreal-Paris

Both novels lead the reader from a place outside of Québec/Canada to Montreal and back. In Brossard's case, it is the fictional translator Maude Laure who lives and works in Montreal. Whereas the other two parts of the tripartite text are set in the U.S., the translational part of the novel takes place in Canada. This is symptomatic of the novel in so far as Québécois feminists generally want to emphasize their hybrid position between French and American feminisms, and Brossard, in particular, sees the translational process located in the city of Montreal as representative for its persistent translations. Brossard's "pseudotranslation," therefore, can be read against Québec national, social, and linguistic history and, according to Simon, it "is an intervention into the language politics of Montreal".⁷⁵ Scott's writing subject is an Anglophone Montreal native who has a writer's grant that allows her to work in Paris. The novel "make[s] the mixture of languages visible",⁷⁶ setting them side by side, but separating them by a "comma of difference". Scott, as well as her protagonist in the novel, belongs to the Anglophone minority of Montreal that is continuously immersed by its Francophone surroundings. The ambiguous urban space Scott inhabits is the reason for the writer's language consciousness and the weight she puts on the comma that "reveal[s] pressure

⁷³ Ibid. For the text passage see also Scott 2003, 91.

⁷⁴ Simon 2002, 147f., emphasis in the original.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 145.

⁷⁶ Simon 2006, 130.

points where languages and cultural differences, concepts of self and otherness, come to expression through [her] mode [...] of translation".⁷⁷ Ultimately, Scott "restores visibility to translation [and] imbues her Parisian novel with the spirit of her own city, Montréal",⁷⁸ just like Brossard translates North America into French from the angle of the borderlands of Montreal.

6. Conclusion

As I have shown, Québécois feminist writers have developed alternative schemes of translation for reinventing identities in the contact zone of Francophone and Anglophone cultural practices. The writings of Nicole Brossard and Gail Scott, as exemplified in this paper, accentuate a border consciousness which displays processes of "perverse translations" that construct a space for cultural difference. The concepts of intralingual "pseudotranslation", as well as the "comma of translation", are strategies to illustrate the moment of transition. Informed by bicultural experiences, both Montreal writers create texts that blur social categories and cultural boundaries and thereby constitute the notion of a space in-between. By way of the metaphors of the horizon and the comma, these Québécois feminist writers provide a third space for their literary subjects to emerge and find a voice. Crossing linguistic borders liberates their hybrid narrative voices and embodies the continuous translations of the borderlands of Boulevard St. Laurent. As the protagonists of both novels are displaced from Montreal, the idea of the divided city is expanded and analyzed from a cosmopolitan and postcolonial perspective.

⁷⁷ Simon 2002, 149.

⁷⁸ Simon 2006, 130.

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IV. Public Women: Space, Sex, and Corporeality

Le lieu de l'échange prostitutionnel dans trois romans québécois contemporains: *Putain* de Nelly Arcan, *Salon* de Marie Lafortune et *Pute de rue* de Roxane Nadeau¹

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- Qui c'est c'te belle fille-là? [demande Coco]
- S'appelle Edie. C't'une pute. [répond Léon]
- [...] pourquoi qu'elle est pas au bordel?
- Elle travaille dans la rue.
- Tu veux dire qu'on baise dans la rue?
- Non, espèce d'andouille! On les emmène à l'hôtel, ou dans une bagnole, ou à la maison.²

Ce dialogue entre Léon, un jeune écrivain nomade et rebelle, et Coco, un schizophrène dont il s'occupe et qui est plus âgé que lui, est tiré du dernier roman de Christian Mistral, *Léon, Coco et Mulligan* (2007). De cette situation, dont la perspective est doublement masculine (c'est un personnage masculin mis en scène par un auteur masculin qui exprime son point de vue),³ on peut tirer quelques observations; d'abord, le déictique "on", qui renvoie aux clients, signe l'anonymat de ceux-ci; puis, dans la relation dyadique client-prostituée, seuls ceux-ci apparaissent agentifs, "emmenant" la prostituée dans le lieu de l'échange

1 Cette étude des lieux d'échange prostitutionnel s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une recherche intitulée "Statut sociosémiotique du personnage féminin dans la fiction selon le sexe des auteurs (1960-2005)" (FQRSC 2005-2008). La recherche vise à déterminer le statut du personnage féminin en termes d'*objet hétéronome* ou de *sujet autonome* selon la place qu'il occupe aussi bien dans l'économie patriarcale mise en scène par le récit que dans l'économie textuelle même. Je remercie Catherine Desmarais et Carolyne Tellier, assistantes de recherche, pour leur collaboration au travail préparatoire à cet article.

2 Christian Mistral, *Léon, Coco et Mulligan*, Montréal 2007, 53.

3 Sur la sexualisation des rapports entre auteurs et personnages voir Denise Brahimy, "Une femme, un homme: deux représentations de la guerre d'Algérie", in: *Mots pluriels* 1,4 (1997).

prostitutionnel.⁴ La prostituée n'est qu'un instrument qui ne semble pas avoir de potentialité agentive: "On" l'amène ici ou là. Cela sous-entend que c'est le client qui choisit le lieu où se déroulera l'échange et en paie les frais le cas échéant, à l'hôtel par exemple. Le rapport entre ce dernier et le lieu de l'échange confère donc au client un statut de propriétaire, et à la prostituée, un statut de locataire passagère, locataire elle-même louée.

Cette question de l'appartenance du lieu de l'échange prostitutionnel est au cœur de l'analyse que je présente ici. À qui appartient le lieu où se déroule le rapport prostitutionnel ou, pour l'appeler autrement, "l'échange économique-sexuel?" À la prostituée, au client ou à un tiers? Et le rapport de la prostituée au lieu de l'échange prostitutionnel dans les textes écrits par des femmes est-il présenté de façon similaire à celui présenté ci-haut, où la femme n'a apparemment aucun mot à dire – encore moins un rapport d'appropriation – quant au lieu où se déroulera le rapport? Certes, le cadre prostitutionnel demeure le même qu'il soit rapporté par un homme ou une femme – en l'occurrence, "la domination sexuelle telle qu'elle s'illustre dans la prostitution est [...] l'envers de la sexualité affranchie de toute relation de pouvoir"⁵ – mais la perspective féminine peut-elle dessiner les choses autrement? Les dispositifs textuels mis en place par les auteures font-ils de la prostituée la propriétaire de son lieu, la figurant comme un *sujet autonome* et agentif? Ou la reconduisent-ils en locataire passagère du lieu de l'échange prostitutionnel, la figurant comme un *objet hétéronome*, dont la seule fonction est instrumentale? Si tel est le cas, cette position subordonnée est-elle soulignée? Dans le cas où la prostituée serait propriétaire du lieu de l'échange, cela lui confère-t-il un pouvoir de détermination à l'égard de ce lieu? Autrement dit: est-ce la prostituée qui détermine le lieu, ou le lieu qui recèle un pouvoir d'assignation identitaire sur elle?

⁴ Paola Tabet parle de "échange économique-sexuel", Gail Pheterson d'"échange prostitutionnel". Paola Tabet *La Grande Arnaque. Sexualité des femmes et échange économique-sexuel*, Paris 2004; Gail Pheterson, *Le prisme de la prostitution*, Paris 2001.

Quant à Lilian Mathieu, il accorde, dans son livre *La condition prostituée*, un chapitre à la question de l'espace. Toutefois, telle qu'il l'envisage, la notion d'espace prostitutionnel est assimilable à celle de champ élaborée par Pierre Bourdieu et nous est donc à ce titre peu utile. Il parle tout de même de "lieux d'exercice"; parmi ceux qu'il énumère, il cite notamment le trottoir, l'appartement, et les établissements clandestins. Fait intéressant, ce sont précisément les trois lieux où se déroulent les échanges prostitutionnels dans les romans à l'étude. Lilian Mathieu, *La condition prostituée*, Paris 2007, 49-50.

⁵ Clarisse Fabre/Éric Fassin, *Liberté, égalité, sexualités. Actualité politique des questions sexuelles. Entretiens*, Paris 2003, 178.

L'objectif que je poursuis est d'étudier le rapport que le personnage de la prostituée entretient avec l'espace, plus précisément avec le lieu où se déroule l'échange prostitutionnel, ce rapport me servant d'indice pour identifier le statut du personnage. Je me pencherai sur trois romans québécois récents centrés sur un personnage de prostituée:⁶ *Putain* de Nelly Arcan (2001), *Salon* de Marie Lafortune (2004) et *Pute de rue* de Roxane Nadeau (2004)⁷. J'examinerai, pour chacun d'eux, les informations textuelles sur le lieu de l'échange. J'identifierai à qui appartient le lieu, d'abord sur le plan diégétique, puis sur le plan discursif. Je soulèverai enfin le rapport que le personnage de la prostituée entretient envers ce lieu, en termes de propriété ou de non-propriété.

On l'aura compris, c'est dans un cadre hétéronormatif que j'étudie cette relation prostitutionnelle.⁸ Je précise également que je partage avec Gail Pheterson et Paola Tabet la préoccupation d'évacuer la mystique entourant la prostitution (notamment la "connotation morale négative"⁹). Aussi, dans le but de défamiliariser¹⁰ et "de rendre plus explicites les bases matérielles concrètes des conventions"¹¹ qui la sous-tendent, j'adopterai les termes "échange prostitutionnel" proposés par Gail Pheterson dans son étude *Le prisme de la prostitution* (2001). Cet échange est caractérisé par "le paradigme service féminin/compensation masculine"¹² et est

⁶ Dans les trois cas, ces personnages assument une narration à la première personne.

⁷ Paru trop tardivement pour qu'on le considère dans cette étude, le roman *Bordel*. Journal d'une amoureuse et d'une putain, de Camille Fortin (Éditions Voix parallèles, 2008) est également construit autour d'un personnage de prostituée; comme on le voit, le titre met à l'avant-plan le lieu de l'échange, confirmant son importance.

⁸ Il convient de le préciser ne serait-ce que pour rappeler que ce cadre, tout hégémonique qu'il soit, n'est pas le seul.

⁹ Tabet 2004, 7.

¹⁰ Comme le rappelle Éric Fassin: "L'actualité sexuelle [...] est la phase ultime d'une logique [...] de dénaturalisation des rapports sociaux: dans la société, rien ou presque ne nous apparaît plus 'naturel' – pas même le genre ou la sexualité. Nous en prenons de plus en plus conscience, tout est social, c'est-à-dire à la fois historique (ouvert au changement) et politique (sujet à débat)." Fabre/Fassin 2003, 38.

¹¹ Pheterson 2001 cité dans Virginie Despentès, *King Kong Théorie*, Paris 2006, 59. Je ne discuterai pas ici du bien-fondé ou non de considérer la sexualité comme "l'objet d'un commerce". Michela Marzano, *Je consens, donc je suis... Éthique de l'autonomie*, Paris 2006, 146. Étant donné que la prostitution que j'envisage n'est qu'un effet textuel, j'adopterai un point de vue pragmatique.

¹² Tabet définit cet échange en des termes similaires: "De la part des femmes, il y a fourniture d'un service ou d'une prestation, variable en nature et en durée, mais comprenant l'usage sexuel ou se référant à la sexualité; de la part des hommes, il a remise d'une compensation ou rétribution d'importance et de nature variables, mais de toute façon liée à la possibilité d'usage sexuel de la femme, à son accessibilité sexuelle". Tabet 2004, 8.

perçu par la théoricienne comme étant un "échange social inégal".¹³ Le syntagme "lieu de l'échange prostitutionnel" permet ainsi de mettre l'accent sur ce paradigme – où deux agents sont impliqués –, plutôt que de parler, par exemple, de "l'espace de la prostituée", qui ne concentre le faisceau de significations que sur la femme impliquée dans cet échange, la stigmatisant comme putain.¹⁴ C'est dans le même esprit que j'utiliserai désormais le terme "prostitueur" plutôt que "client", c'est-à-dire pour à la fois souligner la part productive de celui-ci dans la condition de prostituée,¹⁵ à la fois pour contrer l'invisibilité que lui confère l'appellation "client".

1. *Putain* de Nelly Arcan: la chambre de personne

Cynthia,¹⁶ la narratrice du roman de Nelly Arcan, travaille pour une agence d'escorte. Aussi le lieu dans lequel elle exerce appartient-il à l'"agence", instance anonyme s'il en est. Il s'agit d'"un meublé [situé] sur [la rue] Doctor Penfield" (22), soit dans le quartier Côte-des-Neiges de Montréal. Comme la narratrice le précise elle-même à un prostitueur, cet arrangement est commode pour eux puisque, lui dit-elle, "vous n'avez pas à louer une chambre car on la loue pour vous" (31). Le "on" accentue encore ici l'anonymat de l'agence, lui-même accentué par l'absence du souteneur, dont on entend peu parler, si ce n'est à l'occasion; ici seulement, pour souligner qu'il lui arrive de rappeler la prostituée à l'ordre lorsqu'elle dévisse les ampoules de la salle de bain pour mieux atténuer son reflet dans le miroir: "chaque fois le patron¹⁷ m'avertit, il me dit qu'il ne faut pas toucher aux ampoules, [...] je réponds que ce n'est pas moi, que c'est un client fou couvert de cicatrices qui ne veut pas se voir" (128). Sur le plan strictement matériel, cette

¹³ Pheterson 2001 citée dans Despentès 2006, 59.

¹⁴ "La catégorie 'prostituée' ou 'putain,' 'prostitution,' ne se peut distinguer ni définir par un contenu concret qui lui serait propre, ou par des traits spécifiques. *C'est une catégorie définie par une relation: cette catégorie est une fonction des règles de propriété sur la personne des femmes dans les différentes sociétés.*" (Mise en italiques par l'auteure de cet article) Tabet 2004, 32.

¹⁵ Ce que fait entendre en écho le personnage de Lafortune: "Si y avait pas de clients comme toi, y aurait pas de filles comme moi!" (76)

¹⁶ On ne saura pas son "nom de baptême"; elle dit le refuser parce qu "il a été choisi par [sa] mère" (122). Cynthia était le prénom de sa sœur, morte un an avant sa naissance.

¹⁷ À l'instar du terme "client", cette désignation occulte la spécificité du secteur d'activité tout en la banalisant.

chambre n'appartient donc pas à la prostituée, et elle n'a pas de droits sur la gestion¹⁸ de cet espace.

Cette non-appartenance est corroborée par et dans le discours de la putain. Les adjectifs qu'elle utilise pour désigner la chambre signalent tous la distance. Le plus souvent, elle utilise le démonstratif "cette"¹⁹ ou le pronom "la"²⁰. Il arrive même que le rapport de non-possession soit formulé de façon explicite: "Cette chambre n'est pas la mienne" (28), dit la putain, soulignant que les meubles, "le lit, la table [...] n'appart[ie]nt] à personne" (28), et ce, malgré qu'elle s'y trouve "presque tout le temps" (129). La chambre n'appartient pas davantage aux prostitués; Cynthia rappelle qu'ils s'exécutent "dans un lit qui n'est pas le leur" (130).

Paradoxalement, dans cette chambre qui ne lui appartient pas, la prostituée s'approprie le lit; à trois reprises, elle utilise le possessif "mon" pour le désigner.²¹ Il est vrai cependant que ce possessif est délaissé au profit d'un pronom indéterminé dans d'autres énoncés ("le lit", "du lit").²² Elle s'approprie également le bain, sinon en paroles, du moins en actes: "Je ne vous ai pas encore parlé du bain de la salle de bain que je remplis d'eau mousseuse avant de m'y glisser, j'y passe des heures en attendant les clients" (127).

Mais il arrive que la putain sorte de la chambre payée par l'agence d'escorte, le temps d'une passe, puisque certains prostitués préfèrent louer eux-mêmes une chambre, confortant leur position de propriétaire (155); ou alors le temps d'un séjour dans le sud, invitée par un prostitué. Dans ce dernier cas, le rapport entre l'espace et la prostituée est expressément mis en jeu: "Que je sois identifiée comme putain sur la plage ne m'ennuie pas le moins du monde" (57) et la réflexivité du lien est soulignée; la présence de la putain, son identité, est affectée par le lieu tout autant qu'elle l'affecte: elle est "putain sur la plage".

Ainsi, dans *Putain*, c'est le sexe de la femme, "perdu dans un réseau d'échanges" (138), qui fait d'elle une prostituée, et c'est la prostituée qui détermine l'échange,

¹⁸ Ce que corrobore cet énoncé évoquant une règle abstraite, émanant d'on ne sait qui: "La règle veut qu'on se charge de vider le panier de la chambre et celui de la salle de bain dans les grands sacs verts lorsqu'ils sont pleins" (128).

¹⁹ Voir les pages 16, 26, 27, 50, 61, 62, 75, 87, 108, 111 et 149.

²⁰ Voir les pages 28, 152 et 155.

²¹ Voir les pages 19, 111, 156 et 157.

²² Voir les pages 23, 59, 64 et 88.

qu'elle soit "dans le lit avec les clients, geignant sur un divan ou encore [s]e dandinant sur les genoux des professeurs, [...] ou chez le médecin, nue sur le dos et regardant le plafond, les jambes ouvertes, les pieds dans leur support en fer blanc" (137).²³ Sujet agentif, dans une certaine mesure, mais toujours objet instrumentalisé.²⁴

2. *Salon de Marie Lafortune: le salon du souteneur*

Situé sur la rue Sherbrooke, le salon de massage où exerce Anna,²⁵ le personnage du roman de Marie Lafortune, et où elle devient²⁶ prostituée, appartient à un personnage laconiquement appelé "le Chinois". Ce nonobstant, il y a tout de même une appropriation énonciative de l'espace par la prostituée, qui désigne le lieu comme "*notre* salon de massage" (183).²⁷ Ce "nous" auquel renvoie le "notre" est constitué des masseuses, appelées "les filles"²⁸ (13) à qui le Chinois sert tout à la fois "de patron, d'intermédiaire, de souteneur..." (61). En contrepartie, celui-ci prélève presque la totalité du coût du massage, ne laissant qu'un maigre pourcentage aux filles, sous prétexte qu'elles reçoivent des pourboires des prostitués en échange d'"extras". En vertu de cette comptabilité particulière,²⁹

²³ Cette proposition étend la domination masculine condensée par la relation prostitutionnelle à ses formes socialisées que sont les corps professoraux et médicaux.

²⁴ J'ai analysé plus longuement ailleurs le statut paradoxal, entre sujet et objet, de ce personnage: Isabelle Boisclair, "Accession à la subjectivité et autoréification: statut paradoxal de la prostituée dans *Putain* de Nelly Arcan", in: Daniel Marcheix/Nathalie Warreyne (dir.), *L'écriture du corps dans la littérature québécoise depuis 1980*, Limoges 2007, 111-123.

²⁵ "Anna, c'est moi. Bien entendu, ce n'est pas mon vrai prénom, toutes les filles ici utilisent un nom d'emprunt" (13).

²⁶ Au départ, la narratrice rapporte: "Je ne couche jamais avec les clients; je ne suis pas une prostituée" (23) même s'"il [lui] arrive de faire des fellations [...], de [se] déshabiller et parfois de [se] laisser toucher" (23); puis, dans le chapitre "Vue de l'extérieur" (153-162), elle a une relation génitale "complète" avec monsieur Yoshimatshu.

²⁷ Mise en italiques par l'auteure de cet article.

²⁸ "Entre nous, nous disons *masseuses*, jamais *prostituées*, parce que nous ne nous considérons pas comme telles, parce qu'il est inconcevable de se considérer comme telles" (82; mise en italiques par l'auteure de cet article).

²⁹ "Le mois dernier, le Chinois a coupé de moitié la part qui nous revient sur les massages: des vingt dollars que l'on recevait pour chaque heure, il n'en reste plus que dix. Pour se justifier, il a évoqué les pourboires famoureux que soi-disant nous empochons et sur lesquels, nous a-t-il fait remarquer, il ne touche aucun pourcentage" (22); on apprend ailleurs que "les tarifs sont de 45 \$ pour une heure ou de 30 \$ la demi-heure" (13-14), et que le "pourboire" récolté pour une masturbation est de 40 \$. Cette inscription des tarifs, également présente dans les deux autres romans (*Putain* 31, *Putain de rue* 20), est notable, du moins en regard de la discussion sur

la majorité des jeunes filles en vient à pratiquer la prostitution – c'est donc le lieu, ici, qui fait la prostituée.

En effet, au début du roman, on apprend, d'abord à travers un échange qu'Anna a avec un prostitueur, ensuite à l'occasion d'un passage narratif, qu'elle ne pratique "que" la masturbation.³⁰ Mais elle finit elle aussi, à l'instar des autres masseuses, par s'engager dans cette voie,³¹ puisque les revenus ainsi récoltés sont préservés des ponctions du Chinois. Du moins en est-il ainsi jusqu'à ce qu'une descente de police survienne, obligeant le salon à fermer ses portes. Ayant perdu son emploi, se trouvant démunie, Anna contacte alors un ancien prostitueur, un mafioso nommé Vito, qui lui avait lancé: "Si tu as besoin de quoi que ce soit, tu peux m'appeler à ce numéro. Je pourrai peut-être t'aider" (120). Dès lors, Anna change de statut: elle n'est plus masseuse mais maîtresse attirée, entretenue par son *sugar daddy*. C'est lui qui paie le loyer de l'appartement qu'elle occupe, où il lui rend régulièrement visite. "*En échange* [de ses visites], il y a cet appartement, ces meubles, ces billets laissés sur la table du salon, et quelqu'un qui veille sur moi" (221).³² C'est peut-être parce qu'elle se sait dépossédée d'elle-même que la prostituée insiste sur le lien d'appropriation qui l'unit à ce lieu:

Dans quelques minutes, Vito sera là. [...] Après, je devrai me coucher sur ce grand lit que j'ai moi-même acheté, dans ces draps crème bordés de rose que j'ai choisis avec soin, et les yeux fixés sur le plafond au-dessus de moi, trouver une fissure assez grande et assez profonde où me cacher. (223)

Mais revenons au salon. Même si, du point de vue d'Anna, celui-ci présente l'avantage d'être sécuritaire,³³ quel rapport entretient-elle envers ces lieux qui ne

l'absence des préoccupations matérialistes dans certains romans de femmes narrés au "je", dits "intimistes", soulevée par Detrez et Simon (82-83).

³⁰ "Qu'est-ce que t'offres comme service alors? Je le lui dis – Ça, j'suis capable de me le faire tout seul!" (18). Cette "position" de Marie est réitérée dans le chapitre intitulé "André": à un client qui dit "vouloir tout," elle rétorque: "Je ne baise pas. Je n'embrasse pas non plus. Si vous voulez une masturbation, c'est quarante dollars. Pour une fellation avec condom, c'est soixante. Vingt de plus pour enlever mes vêtements, vingt aussi pour me toucher" (75-76).

³¹ "C'est arrivé comme ça, un mardi. Je ne l'avais jamais fait avant, je n'étais jamais allée jusque-là avec un client. Je n'avais rien contre celles qui le faisaient, simplement, moi ce n'était pas mon truc" (153).

³² Mise en italiques par l'auteure de cet article.

³³ "Les escortes, c'était une coche au-dessus. Les filles n'avaient pas la liberté de choisir les services qu'elles offriraient. [...] Et puis, cette idée d'aller chez les clients ne me plaisait pas. On ne savait jamais qui se trouvait derrière la porte" (176). Cela ne correspond toutefois pas à la réalité du personnage du roman d'Arcan.

lui appartiennent pas? Lorsque la place est débarrassée des prostitués et du Chinois, "[les filles] repren[nent] possession de l'aire commune qu'est la réception" (168); elles y boivent de l'alcool, écoutent de la musique (107), lisent des revues (25), etc. Le rapport d'appropriation est plus étroitement établi avec les salles de massage où chacune officie; ainsi Anna désigne parfois cette salle en utilisant le pronom "ma" (25, 123), bien que ces pièces possèdent un "nom", la "salle rose" (15, 157) et la "salle bleue" (30, 154).

Les filles jouissent d'une relative autonomie à l'intérieur de ces salles, ce qui n'exclut pas une appropriation des lieux par les prostitués. C'est par l'éthos qu'ils affichent que ces derniers manifestent leur statut de propriétaire des lieux. Ainsi en est-il de cet homme, s'adressant à Anna, après avoir "détaillé la marchandise": "Dérange-toi pas, ma belle, je connais le chemin" (15), et de cet autre, qui "ouvr[e] la porte, salu[e] à la ronde, parl[e] fort: il est ici *chez lui*" (122),³⁴ et de celui-ci encore, qui promène sur elle "un regard de propriétaire" (72). Ces extraits laissent déjà entrevoir que le rapport d'appropriation outrepassé les lieux et atteint jusqu'aux corps des filles.

Plusieurs passages corroborent cette dynamique. Lorsque la narratrice relate son premier massage, elle rappelle ce moment où le prostitué a pris sa main, "la dépos[ant] directement sur son sexe" (19). Il en est de même lorsque, plus tard, elle fait un pas de plus vers le rapport sexuel "complet", et qu'elle repousse les limites qu'elle avait jusque là maintenues, en laissant le prostitué lui faire un cunnilingus et en lui faisant une "branlette espagnole".³⁵ Anna se laisse manier par le prostitué: "C'est lui qui prend les choses en main. Il commence par me suggérer dans le creux de l'oreille de me détendre, puis, d'un bras ferme, il m'incite à m'allonger sur la table de massage. Ce que je fais" (114). Le lieu confère donc au prostitué un pouvoir de détermination sur la fille: c'est à la fois celui-ci et le lieu qui font d'elle une prostituée.³⁶

³⁴ Mise en italiques par l'auteure de cet article.

³⁵ "J'empoigne mes seins à pleine main, j'emprisonne son sexe au milieu. Monté sur moi, Vito s'engage dans un rodéo déchaîné. Il se branle furieusement entre mes seins lubrifiés à l'huile" (118).

³⁶ Cette hétéronomie du personnage féminin est réaffirmée à maints endroits dans le texte, notamment à travers le topos classique du pouvoir que les personnages féminins reconnaissent aux personnages masculins de leur confirmer leur propre beauté: "Ma beauté étant assurée par la proximité de cet homme vieux et flasque, je n'ai plus honte de mon corps" (113); "les regards [...] emplis de désir et d'admiration, qui vous contemplent et vous font sentir belle, mais belle..."

3. *Pute de rue de Roxane Nadeau: la rue des "clients"*

Vicky n'est ni escorte dans un appartement meublé, ni masseuse dans un salon de massage, elle est "pute de rue", à l'angle des rues Ontario et Dufresne.³⁷ La rue étant un espace public, elle appartient à tous, à l'inverse de la chambre privée de l'escorte, qui n'appartient à personne: "La rue pis le trottoir, c'est à tout le monde! Les ruelles aussi!" (16) Du point de vue de la prostituée, ce caractère public a du bon puisque cela signifie que ces lieux lui appartiennent *également*. Mais il a aussi ses revers; certains veulent préserver ce lieu public de la présence de la prostituée. À la vue d'une activiste, celle-ci s'exclame: "La tabarnak! Elle passe des tracts pour éliminer les prostituées" (16). La propriété du lieu est donc tiraillée de part et d'autre, toujours en négociation; et, dans le contexte social d'une telle négociation, le sujet prostitué n'a pas de légitimité.

Que la rue ne soit pas appropriée par un sujet singulier – par un quelconque souteneur – fait en sorte qu'elle n'a, à première vue, aucun pouvoir d'assignation identitaire sur la prostituée: "Y'a pas grand monde de la rue qui va me faire chier [...] Je dois rien à personne, pis j'ai pas de preuves à faire, à qui que ce soit. Incognito [...] je me sens plus vivante que jamais" (19), affirme Vicky. Celle-ci soutient même détenir un pouvoir: "Je fais ce que je veux au moins. J'ai beau être complètement accro à la dope et me faire crisser une volée quasiment à tous les trois mois, il en reste pas moins que, dans tout ça, j'ai du pouvoir. Sur les gars, ça c'est officiel. Sur ma vie, aussi" (48). Au point où elle dit préférer gagner moins mais rester maître de son argent plutôt que de se faire payer hôtel et drogue par des prostitueurs; car bien sûr, dès lors que ces derniers fournissent la drogue, ils "gardent le contrôle" (76). Certes, elle reconnaît que cette "liberté" a un prix:

J'aime mieux avoir mon cash à moi, pis ma dope à moi. Même si ça me prend plus de temps à le faire. Des fois je me trouve nouille, surtout en hiver, quand j'attends dehors pendant trois heures, la nuit, parce que j'ai refusé un gars qui voulait aller au motel [...] c'est ma façon de fonctionner. Je préfère être la boss de chaque vingt piasses que je gagne, pis de faire ce que je veux avec, quand je veux. (76)

(113).

³⁷ Voir la quatrième de couverture.

Cette apparente absence de pouvoir de détermination du lieu sur la prostituée ne signifie toutefois pas absence totale d'emprise. Alors que l'escorte et la masseuse étaient protégées du regard des autres, la pute de rue y est constamment soumise – le roman débute précisément sur un discours intérieur suscité par un observateur hors champ :

Heille! C'est quoi son esti de problème à ce gars-là! Y a jamais vu ça, une pute? À part dans les magazines pornos, pis dans les films de cul! Une actrice qui fait sa cochonne, ça, c'est de la belle salope, ça, ça te fait tripper! Mais, le vrai stock, les vraies putes, es-tu capable de dealer avec, hein? (9)

Sans parler du harcèlement policier qu'elle subit: "J'suis fatiguée du monde, j'suis fatiguée de la rue. J'suis tannée de pas pouvoir travailler tranquille. Les boeufs nous lâchent pas" (15), ni même de la violence: "Entre les clients violents, la police, pis les passants, c'est roffe en esti" (19-20).

Le caractère public déclasse le lieu, lequel déclasse la putain. Celle-ci en est consciente: "C'est vrai que sur la rue, on est une couple à être pas mal fuckées" (9). Les proximateurs lui font sentir cette dévaluation: "Y agissent comme si je devais leur dire merci de me donner la chance de les sucer [...] Heille criss! J'ai beau être une pute, pis être sur la rue, j'suis pas une conne!" (12) Tout de même, la narratrice reconnaît le caractère non sécuritaire du lieu: "Marie-Josée vient de se faire tuer. Elle a été retrouvée dans le parking, en arrière de l'église [...] on était plusieurs à aller dans ce parking-là. C'était un bon spot, en arrière de l'église" (35). Ce passage met en lumière le fait que l'appellation "pute de rue" dévoie en partie la réalité quant aux lieux où est pratiqué l'échange, puisque ce n'est pas "dans" la rue que celui-ci se déroule – ainsi que le faisait remarquer le personnage du roman de Mistral. En effet, sur la rue, les proximateurs circulent en voiture, et c'est souvent à l'intérieur des voitures qu'ont lieu les rapports sexuels; or, dans cet espace, la prostituée n'est pas en situation de pouvoir:

J'aime pas ça fourrer dans le char, mais là, j'suis crevée, j'ai pas vraiment envie de me faire chier; j'ai un client, je vais le faire. [...] C'est juste qu'il faut aller sur le siège en arrière, pis mettons que je me sens un peu pognée si y arrive quelque chose. Pis c'est un deux portes en plus. (59)

Cet espace – la voiture – appartient résolument au proximateur, il y est chez lui. Et dans cet habitacle fermé, la sécurité des femmes n'est pas garantie: "C'est rendu que tu sais jamais si tu vas sortir du char avec tous tes morceaux, pis avec ton cash" (15).

D'autres prostitueurs amènent la prostituée chez eux. Celle-ci goûte alors à un certain confort éphémère. La narratrice a même déjà cohabité avec l'un d'entre eux un certain temps – mais il semble bien que cette cohabitation reposait, elle aussi, sur un "échange économique-sexuel"³⁸: "Richard, y m'a amenée chez eux [...] J'suis restée chez eux trois mois. [...] *Y me donnait sa paye, un toit, de la bouffe. Ça m'a fait du bien. J'y apportais du réconfort, une oreille. Les deux, on se donnait de l'attention*" (42).³⁹ En échange de services sexuels, elle a droit à l'argent et à un espace qui lui appartient à *lui*. Ainsi, qu'elle pratique dans la rue, la voiture ou l'appartement du prostitueur, ou encore dans l'hôtel payé par celui-ci, la pute de rue reste déterminée, jusque dans sa désignation même, par le lieu de l'échange prostitutionnel.

4. Conclusion

L'examen du rapport entre le lieu de l'échange prostitutionnel et le personnage de la prostituée nous amène là où mènent toutes les questions de pouvoir, c'est-à-dire du côté de l'économie. En effet, la première observation qui s'impose d'emblée, avant même d'avancer une réponse à la question: "À qui appartient le lieu de l'échange prostitutionnel?" est la classe économique – ou classe sociale – qui distingue les trois personnages et, partant, les lieux dans lesquels ils exercent. La putain d'Arcan exerce dans un appartement meublé, chauffé, comprenant salle de bain attenante. À côté de ce lieu affichant tous les signes de confort, la chambre dans laquelle la masseuse exerce apparaît miteuse: le propriétaire est radin, le local petit, le chauffage compté, les murs en carton et la salle de bains commune. Mais tout est relatif: à côté de la rue, le petit salon de massage affiche à son tour les traits d'un certain confort. Il appert que du point de vue des prostituées, cette appartenance de classe s'exprime en termes de sécurité. Aussi bien dire que la sécurité du lieu où elle officie marque, de façon extrinsèque, la classe de la prostituée; voire, que la sécurité est le signe du luxe.

La situation géographique de chacun de ces espaces dans la topographie montréalaise participe également du classement économique: l'escorte attend les clients dans un quartier résidentiel, la masseuse exerce en plein centre-ville, la

³⁸ À l'instar d'Anna et son *sugar daddy*.

³⁹ Mise en italiques par l'auteure de cet article.

pute de rue travail à l'est, dans le quartier Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. La hiérarchie affecte même l'esthétique textuelle: *Putain* est un texte extrêmement travaillé, riche sur le plan littéraire, *Salon* un récit réaliste et *Pute de rue* est marqué par une esthétique de la pauvreté, où le discours intérieur est hachuré, construit à partir d'un vocabulaire pauvre – les quelques extraits cités suffisent à illustrer ceci. Enfin, les lieux d'édition surdéterminent ces positions en les reproduisant jusque dans le champ littéraire: le roman d'Arcan est publié au Seuil, celui de Lafortune chez Lanctôt éditeur, celui de Nadeau aux éditions les Intouchables.

Au-delà de ces considérations, il ressort que dans aucun de ces trois cas, le lieu de l'échange prostitutionnel n'appartient aux femmes – même lorsque celles-ci affichent une subjectivité féminine forte, comme c'est le cas chez Arcan. Pourtant, cette éventualité serait possible. D'ailleurs, dans *Salon*, Marie Lafortune pose cette utopie au cœur même de son récit. Alors qu'elles sont rassemblées avec d'autres filles autour d'un pot, Anna et son amie, Sarah, formulent un projet plutôt subversif de ce point de vue: "Au deuxième verre, on revient sur ce projet que nous avons d'ouvrir *notre propre* salon de massage, une place luxueuse et distinguée, située au centre-ville, et exclusivement réservée aux hommes d'affaires" (82).⁴⁰ Le principal obstacle est "bien sûr le problème de financement" (82), puisqu'elles sont "incapables l'une et l'autre d'économiser des sous" (82).⁴¹ En effet, l'autonomie n'est pas un réflexe dont on a encouragé l'incorporation chez les femmes.⁴² Aussi la solution que les masseuses envisagent pour remédier à ce problème est irrémédiablement hétéronome: "Reste toujours la possibilité de se rabattre sur un ou deux riches clients qui voudront peut-être investir ou avancer l'argent" (82). Mais une des filles, plus expérimentée, les met en garde contre une pléthore de problèmes et conclut: "Ce qui est vraiment payant et pas trop risqué, c'est les agences d'escortes" (176). Au final, du point de vue des prostituées elles-mêmes, la putain d'Arcan est celle dont la situation est la plus enviable – et ce, même si le lieu de l'échange prostitutionnel ne lui appartient pas.

⁴⁰ Mise en italiques par l'auteure de cet article.

⁴¹ Dans le chapitre intitulé "La grande arnaque: échange, spoliation, censure de la sexualité des femmes," Paola Tabet identifie "la *dépendance économique*" des femmes" comme une des quatre conditions de la prostitution. Tabet 2004, 143.

⁴² "La 'psyché' des femmes a été longtemps 'colonisée' par une culture [...] machiste qui les concevait comme des objets sexuels." Marzano 2006, 148.

En faisant entendre le point de vue de personnages de prostituées sur le rapport prostitutionnel, ces auteures semblent vouloir souligner les limites de leur agentivité au sein de ce cadre, tout en faisant entendre leur voix depuis leur position de subalterne. Et si ces écrits cantonnent le discours féminin autour "[du] corps, [du] ventre, [du] sexe"⁴³, c'est pour mieux en révéler le caractère politique; pour, peut-être, qu'un jour, "on" ne les emmène plus nulle part.

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⁴³ Christine Detrez/Anne Simon, *À leur corps défendant. Les femmes à l'épreuve du nouvel ordre moral*, Paris 2006, 91.

"A palimpsest of loss"/"The place of pain":
 Self and Place in Catherine Bush's Urban Novels
The Rules of Engagement and *Claire's Head*

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With her two latest novels, *The Rules of Engagement* (2000) and *Claire's Head* (2004),¹ Torontonian writer Catherine Bush delivers a fascinating exploration of the intricate dynamics between self and place. In particular, it is the experience of *changing places* that propels the plot and the female protagonists alike, pushing Arcadia Hearne from *The Rules of Engagement* (*RoE*) and Claire Barber from *Claire's Head* (*CH*) over the brink of their carefully circumscribed lives. In the course of the respective novels, both women feel profoundly unsettled by a series of events and encounters that increasingly come to undermine their personal boundaries and question their self-imposed limited range of action. Confronted, respectively, with an agonizing past and severe physical pain, Arcadia and Claire embark on journeys that will take them across continents and oceans – and onto unstable emotional territory. In particular, it is the city in a globalized world that provides the central coordinates of the characters' life stories and identity formation, sending them from Toronto to London, England, and back, as in the case of Arcadia, or from one urban locale to the next (Toronto, Montreal, Amsterdam, Las Vegas), as in the case of Claire. Both novels, hence, testify to a close linkage between the experience of place and the construction of self, tracing the dynamic relation between the protagonists' original sense of place and belonging, their exploration of other, unknown spaces, and their changing perceptions of themselves.

¹ Bush's acclaimed debut novel, *Minus Time* came out in 1993 and was shortlisted for the SmithBooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award and the City of Toronto Book Award in 1994. *The Rules of Engagement* was also shortlisted for the City of Toronto Book Award in 2001. Bush's latest novel to date, *Claire's Head*, has seen a somewhat unusual publication history: It was first published as a hardcover edition in 2004 (and shortlisted for the Trillium Award) and then substantially revised by the author for the paperback edition in 2005. See Catherine Bush, "Ever Revise", in: *Bookninja Magazine*, November 17, 2005, www.bookninja.com/?page_id=184, October 20, 2007. The following analysis of *Claire's Head* will be based on the paperback edition.

The Rules of Engagement introduces us to the protagonist and first-person narrator Arcadia Hearne, a thirty-one-year-old Torontonian, who, ten years before the novel sets in, had left her native country Canada for good to find a new home in London, England. As the plot unfolds, the reader gradually learns that her emigration was in fact an escape from a violent past. During her college years back in 1980s Toronto, Arcadia had been part of a tragic triangular love relationship, when – in an anachronistic emulation of romantic rivalry and male possessiveness – her boyfriend Evan and her lover Neil had fought a duel over Arcadia in a Toronto ravine, in the course of which Neil had been shot.² Never knowing whether he eventually survived, Arcadia, who had secretly witnessed the duel, flees the country, driven by feelings of guilt and despair. She arrives in London with a burning desire for "transformation" (*RoE* 39) on grounds that are yet uncharted by her personal history: Her dire need is for "a blank slate. No traces. *Terra nullius*" (*RoE* 38). She has since never returned to either Toronto or Canada.

Arcadia's desperate longing for a fresh, untainted start – wedded as it is to coming to a new city, a different continent even – is at the core of the novel's preoccupation with the relation between place and self. Bush's text is deeply engaged with the dynamics of *changing places*: both in terms of its alternating settings, London and Toronto (which make up part one and two of the novel, respectively), and as a coping strategy for the emotionally wounded. This conception of place, to a large

² The Toronto ravines as a site of stark violence and uncanny events have been a popular topos in Canadian writing. Robert Fulford calls them the "topographical signature of Toronto. There are those who find a furtive quality to Toronto, a certain habit of evasion, a weakness for codes; and if any of that is true, then surely our writers are wise to express it by turning to the half-hidden, little-known, green underside of the city" (Robert Fulford, "The Invention of Toronto: A City Defined by Its Artists", June 12, 1996, www.robertfulford.com/kilbourn.html, March 21, 2008). Prior to *The Rules of Engagement*, Bush already used the setting in *Minus Time*, in which a run-away teenager becomes known in the local newspapers as the "Ravine Boy" for living in the ravines for a while. On *The Rules of Engagement* Bush remarks in an interview: "I'm not the first to set a duel in a Toronto ravine: Timothy Findley did it too [in his short story 'The Duel in Cluny Park' (1989)]. There's a grand tradition of ravine writing: Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Anne Michaels. I just wanted to join it". Nancy Wigston, "Rules of Engagement in Love and War: An Interview with Catherine Bush", in: *Books in Canada*, 2001, www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=3080, March 21, 2008. Margaret Atwood indeed repeatedly takes her characters into the wild spaces of the Toronto ravines, such as in the novels *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Lady Oracle* (1976), or *Cat's Eye* (1988). The latter arguably stands as the most haunting evocation of the topos in CanLit, with the child-protagonist being tormented by other girls in the ravine. I am grateful to Marlene Goldman and Julia Sutter for drawing my attention to Atwood and Findley.

extent, hinges on the perspective of the female protagonist, as it is through Arcadia's eyes that the events, past and present, are revealed to the reader. Arcadia's take on place is, however, anything but dynamic – at least initially. On the contrary, her London life mainly unfolds in carefully circumscribed, well-trodden ways and routines. In the first part of the novel, Arcadia's idea of place and home can indeed be said to be an actualization of her unusual name ('Arcadia' being both a real region on the Peloponnesian peninsula and, of course, the famous mythical place of pastoral bliss, domain of Greek god Pan and paradise on earth for civilization-tired humans). With her London apartment, the character Arcadia has fashioned her private mythical retreat, sheltered from the space and pace of metropolitan life, where she can cultivate her seclusion as she does her little garden in the backyard. In fact, Arcadia has not only created this place but re-created herself as place, finding her private rooms to emanate a corporeal quality, which feels like a part of her own body: She enthuses over the "sensuality to returning to a place where you live by yourself. [...] Rooms themselves become a kind of body, an extension of your own body" (*RoE* 28-29). Arcadia experiences the apartment as a protective shell, especially her study, which she calls her "white cocoon" (*RoE* 13). Her description of the study moves from staples of coziness (a warm fireplace, a soft carpet) to a rather uncanny account of Arcadia's consolation in less peaceful scenarios:

I'd built a haven within these four walls. There was safety in the flicker of flame against the pale green ceramic tiles that line the fireplace; in the looped patterns of the worn Persian carpet [...]. In the outline of the desk, the slim gray case of the computer [...]. In the maps that cover the walls – maps dotted with pins and pencil lines to demarcate the world's restlessly new and shifting borders. Even in the titles lining the bookshelves, titles like *Slaughterhouse* and *How to Make War*. (*RoE* 13)

Of course, it is not war or conflict in itself that Arcadia finds reassuring. Rather, she thrives on her ability to intellectualize forms of aggression, and thus contain them – if only from the secure position of her desk. Arcadia works as a researcher at the Centre for Contemporary War Studies, a London-based think tank. Certainly, the experience of the duel – her passive subjection to a male code of honour and her disgraceful paralysis in the face of violence – has inspired a career which defies gender expectations and re-infuses the former victim of ill-fated love with a feeling of control. The causal link between past trauma and present profession shows through Arcadia's very rhetoric when it comes to explaining and legitimizing her job: "The work I do is perfectly valid. I'm a theorist. I hardly need to race

about the globe. Besides, I value safety. And here in London I've found a sort of safety" (*RoE* 27). A casualty of war of her own sort – deeply scarred by a love gone astray – Arcadia seeks to avoid risks, particularly on emotional territory. In fact, the novel abounds with a whole cluster of recurring terms and motifs – such as "safety", "risk", "intervention", or "engagement" – which, down to the book's very title, testify to the inextricable net of Arcadia's personal and professional motivations, underlining her concern for safety on both professional territory and on the battlefield of romantic engagement. While Arcadia eventually *does* revisit Toronto and the past in the second part of the book, her London life in the first part of the novel is still dominated by this all-encompassing obsession with safety through detachment, distance, and the drawing of borders. With the help of spatial politics, that is, Arcadia wants to keep the past at bay: "I had no wish to go back [to Toronto]. I did not want disruption. Better to keep the past in the past, to protect yourself through knowledge" (*RoE* 18). Arcadia's 'cocooning' instinct also strongly informs her description of the War Centre's office:

All this is deceptive, really – the broken window sashes, the heater – because the real office doesn't exist in any one place. I come in a couple of times a week [...] and work at home the rest of the time. These rooms are our shell, the carapace that hides the telecommunication lines and fiber-optic cable and complex binary codes that store our information and connect us to each other, to colleagues, and to conflicts around the globe. We cross borders with ease this way, even though the computers are chained to bolts in the floor and the red eye of an alarm system blinks high on one wall. (*RoE* 14–15)

The office, like Arcadia's apartment, is at the same time a concrete, material place as it is capable of engendering an extended, virtual room. While the apartment serves as a place of projection for Arcadia's eponymous idyllic retreat, the office provides a locale for global connectedness, the transgression of national borders via the Internet, which her job requires. In this double function as concrete place and enabler of virtual space, the office facilitates the reconciliation of localized security and global engagement; it thus neatly ties in with the precarious balancing act between detachment and (minimal) commitment that shapes Arcadia's life.

Of course, Arcadia's intention to radically transform herself through a change of place has been neither without risk nor has it been, or can ever be, perfected. The various borders she has drawn ultimately cannot prevent intruders from trespassing. On the most overt level, this invasion occurs in the disguise of other, equally strong-willed characters, whose own interests and trajectories collide with Arcadia's: most notably her younger sister Lux Hearne; her new lover, the

exiled Iranian Amir Barmour; and a mysterious Somali refugee, Basra Alale. Not coincidentally, this international cast of characters meets in London, the multicultural capital of the former British empire and "a transnational space of global relatedness", to quote from John Clement Ball's essay on "Transnational Urbanism" in Bush's novel.³ Ironically, it is London itself, which – while providing the coordinates of Arcadia's new life – also constantly undermines her refashioning, and which eventually even propels her back into the past. London features as an overdetermined place in the novel, appearing multi-layered and polysemous. First, it is of course a city of war, branded by past and present assaults; Arcadia imagines its architecture rising from layers of ruins of different epochs. London's dense history of war naturally attracts her, who appreciates that "there was history in London, but it was not my history" (*RoE* 38). She is also acutely aware of the city's ongoing assault from terrorist attacks, which, interestingly, stands in an odd contrast to her insistence on personal safety in her job as war analyst for the Centre of Contemporary War Studies. Clearly, the detached observer's stance is not available here. On the contrary, in the face of late-twentieth-century warfare and terrorism – as Arcadia should know best – the happy isolation of the centre/the Centre is but an anachronistic delusion.⁴

The continuous presence of its violent history is only one of the ways that London undercuts Arcadia's penchant for risk management. More effectively still, the city challenges Arcadia by bringing back her *personal* history, unleashing upon her sudden flashbacks of the duel and recurring nightmares of split bodies and spilled blood. Exhausted by haunting memories, Arcadia asks herself, "What does it mean to dream more of the city left behind than the one inhabited? To run toward the thing you think you've fled?" (*RoE* 79). The novel answers her question by having London figure as a "palimpsest of loss" (*RoE* 294), to use Arcadia's own coinage from a slightly different context. That is to say, beneath its streets, sites, and architecture, London is made to reveal its twin, Toronto. Arcadia confides that "[a]t times, without warning, I'll press my palm and hear the roar of a Toronto subway train [...]. I'll touch a point beneath my shoulder and

³ John Clement Ball, "Duelling and Dwelling in Toronto and London: Transnational Urbanism in Catherine Bush's *The Rules of Engagement*", in: Justin D. Edwards/Douglas Ivison (eds), *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities*, Toronto 2005, 183.

⁴ See Ball, who points out that Arcadia's "views are anachronistic, recalling an old idea of London as a place linked to and acting upon imperial territories while remaining safely untouched by their distant events" (Ball 2005, 187).

see myself in Toronto racing toward the streetcar stop at Queen and Bathurst, or College and Spadina" (*RoE* 84). The conflation of London and Toronto works the other way around, too: When she awakes in her sister Lux's apartment in Toronto at the beginning of the novel's second part, Arcadia hears "a Toronto streetcar – hurtling at night speeds along its tracks. Underneath that, like a ghost stratum, lay London, remembered, conjured London" (*RoE* 167-168). This palimpsestic structure of Arcadia's life – with Toronto shining through the fabric of London's urban spaces and vice versa – is something she only gradually learns to accept. Clearly, the simultaneous presence of both cities in a "palimpsest of loss" runs counter to Arcadia's accustomed strategy of erasing the past. Naturally, the return of the repressed extends from place to people, stirring up vivid recollections of family and friends in terms of sharp physical sensation:

Memory lurks throughout the body. There are days when I can press sharp nodes and feel the muscle twang – Evan, here. Neil there. Martin. Lux. My mother. My father. [...] Some days I feel they're with me always, carried within me as neurochemical presence, encoded in peptides and combinations of proteins, impossible to escape. An interior war. Some days loss, pure loss and the longing for what's lost, for what I failed to do, grows nearly toxic in my blood. (*RoE* 83-84)

The above comments on the novel's conception of London have focused on the city's *vertical* dimension, rising from layers of history on the one hand and revealing the underlying story of Arcadia's life at a different time and place on the other hand. But Bush also portrays London as a highly contemporary, topical place of global politics, where people with all kinds of backgrounds and interests meet in the here and now. In this function, London is a place of actuality and simultaneity, rather than history. Through its multinational and multicultural makeup the city enables myriad encounters and collisions on a daily basis, prompting Ball to call it an "international contact zone" and a catalyst of transnationalist agency.⁵ Arcadia comments on the buzz and human traffic of the city: "[I]n a city this size, there are always people about, bodies jostling endlessly against other bodies as they pursue their hidden missions, their double lives" (*RoE* 137).⁶ In this intense

⁵ Ball 2005, 196.

⁶ Arcadia's perception expresses the concerns of the author, who, in an interview, asserts her association of cities with personalized, rather than anonymous space. For Bush, the city constitutes a special place of intimacy: "For me, cities are both a place of obvious disconnection and a place of an intimacy, a charged intimacy just because you are living with so many people. The way people

microcosm of interpersonal and international relations, Arcadia's life clashes with that of two strangers, Amir and Basra. She is introduced to them via her sister Lux, who is the host of a TV show of world music called *Mundo* and, above all, a herald of change, her very name reverberating with the notion of transience and volatility. Lux's sudden appearance at the very beginning of the novel pushes Arcadia into a maelstrom of love and politics, when Lux asks her to deliver an envelope to Basra Alale, a Somali refugee and illegal alien bound for Toronto. The errand sparks off a romantic entanglement between Arcadia and Amir Barmour, an Iranian exile, who dreams of a truly cosmopolitan existence beyond national borders. Through Amir, Arcadia is forced to reconsider her private politics on love and war, that is, her privileging safety over commitment and intervention in both interpersonal and international relations. The love affair between Amir and Arcadia erupts into a dramatic confrontation at the end of the novel's first part, when Arcadia finds out that Amir is a forger of passports and has used her as a courier. The emotional turmoil of the confrontation leads directly to Arcadia's boarding a plane for Toronto, her abrupt departure an exact mirror image to her panicked reaction ten years earlier. Flying over the Atlantic ocean, airborne and thousands of miles from solid ground, Arcadia keeps coming back to the uncomfortable truth that had thrown her off balance: "Amir's words [were] like a trail streaming out behind me: *What risks* [are you willing to take], though what I heard was not only *risks*, but *What borders are you prepared to cross?*" (*RoE* 153). On discerning the coastline of Canada, Arcadia knows that she is headed for her final frontier, discovering in the faint traces of familiar geography "a map of the past" (*RoE* 154).

Arcadia's venture onto forsaken territory and into her violent past fills the second part of the book, which relates her quest for Evan and Neil and her tentative reconciliation with her parents. Interestingly, in her typical intellectualizing, reflective manner, Arcadia makes a point of dismissing "nostalgia" as a motivation for her return (*RoE* 182). Nostalgia (from Greek "nostos"/"to return home" and "algia"/"longing") is defined by Svetlana Boym in her study on *The Future of Nostalgia* as "a longing for home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with

who live really disparate lives brush against each other in the Underground in London or on a streetcar in Toronto – that kind of near intimacy where people are shoved together and you never know what is going to be sparked by those kinds of connections. [...] I am always surprised when people describe cities as being large, impersonal spaces". In: "A Conversation between Lynn Coady and Catherine Bush", *Literary Review of Canada* (November 2000), 13.

one's own fantasy."⁷ Boym describes "modern nostalgia [as] a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values [...], [for] the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history."⁸ While the latter fantasy of paradise regained calls to mind the confines of Arcadia's London life, the return trip to Toronto is indeed the opposite of nostalgic. Quite to the contrary, Arcadia's revisiting old times and places *in situ* ultimately does not lead her back but forth, enabling as it does a future free of past trauma. It is a therapeutic journey for sure, a passage of revision and healing. Many pages of the novel's second part are devoted to extensive reflections and anecdotes recalling Evan, Neil, and the Hearne family, in contrast to the preponderance of brief flashbacks in the novel's first part. With regard to the novel's continuous tracing of the relation between self and place, Arcadia's stay in Toronto, within a mere couple of weeks, provides her with a new sense of her own identity. This renewal is predicated on a thorough change in spatial politics. As we have seen, Arcadia's former strategy had been to cut all ties between Toronto and London, that is, between her present self and the past. Both London itself and the strangers she meets there have been shown to resist and undermine this wilful act. Now Arcadia learns to finally embrace her past as part of her sense of self, rather than anathema to it. Significantly, this process comes into bold relief with her awareness and acceptance of spatial conflation, which in turn, as will be elucidated below, generates a novel, transformative space of unlimited possibilities.

Two major instances of spatial conflation set the parameters of Arcadia's renewed identity. The first example draws on a play between place names and names derived from places, as Arcadia finds her "Third World alter ego"⁹ in the Somali refugee Basra. The latter name communicates an ambiguous oscillation between mythical beauty and earthly reality that is strikingly similar to the symbolic load of Arcadia's own name ("*Basra* as in the Iraqi city [...]. Bombed Basra, ancient Basra – once a cradle of civilization, once, so it was rumoured, home to the Garden of Eden", *RoE* 33). The two young women's relatedness via their 'place names' rests on the identification of one place with the other, that is, on a case of spatial conflation. Even if this merging of two places, cities, and lives occurs only in a rather metaphorical sense, it does spark a very palpable change in Arcadia's

⁷ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York 2001, xiii.

⁸ Boym 2001, 8.

⁹ Wendy Kussrow, "Review of Catherine Bush, *The Rules of Engagement*," in: *Pif Magazine*, www.pifmagazine.com/SID/698, October 23, 2007.

behaviour, as her identification with Basra translates into a new understanding of her political responsibility and global agency. When Arcadia returns to London at the end of the novel, she does so with the firm plan to travel to Kenya as a war observer and to deliver, on Basra's request, a forged passport to Basra's sister along the way. Arcadia's "private act of intervention", to quote from Amir's plea for an ethics of commitment (*RoE* 147), is one example of how she dramatically changes, literally, her ways in life.

Concerning the duel between Evan and Neil, Arcadia's re-engagement with the past is equally embedded in a new awareness of topography and spatial conflation, based on the special likeness between London's canals and Toronto's ravines. Both locales converge as sites of simultaneously conflicted love affairs and fateful decisions. On her long walks along the canal (where she meets and eventually parts with Amir) Arcadia is reminded of the ravines in her hometown, the site of both love and death. Significantly, it is on her return to this ambiguous place that Arcadia finally understands the palimpsestic structure of her life, that everything falls into (one) place for her: "I strode back to the place in the clearing where Neil had fallen, not far from where Evan had spread out our blanket in the heat of that other summer day. A palimpsest of loss" (*RoE* 294). But the London canals and Toronto ravines are not just places paramount for their shared association with love and tragedy in Arcadia's life. Even more importantly, they become absolutely essential to the novel's engagement with self and place by offering a quality of fundamental spatial difference. Arcadia notes that "[w]alking by the canal is like entering border country. The city as you know it disappears. Wildness asserts itself. People vanish – around corners, never to be seen again. Or they materialize as suddenly" (*RoE* 17). Here and elsewhere, both canal and ravine seem strangely out of place in an urban context. They are portrayed as mythical, unfathomable spaces of a different order, where the laws and ways of the city dissolve, where people lose their bearings and get lost to the world. In an interview, Bush likewise described such urban territory as "wild places inside cities, the places that break cities open. They look like one thing on the surface but there is a weirdness underneath."¹⁰ Ball is therefore right in applying Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" to these *non-urban urban* places, calling them "heterotopic sites" that "represent inbetweenness and transformation."¹¹ Indeed,

¹⁰ "A Conversation between Lynn Coody and Catherine Bush", *Literary Review of Canada* (November 2000), 13.

¹¹ Ball 2005, 188.

canal and ravine distinguish themselves via their marginal, liminal character, which provides the spatial equivalent to Arcadia's new, transformed sense of self. At the end of the novel, before flying back to London, Arcadia leaves behind the ravine and the duel/the past with this new awareness of open spaces, uncertain boundaries, und unlimited possibilities. Her renewed sense of identity integrates the very liminality and precariousness of the concept of heterotopia, striving no longer for an isolated, permanent refuge, but instead embracing the ever shifting parameters of love and life, place and self:

I used to long for love as a clear and steady state, though perhaps there is no love that does not hold the seed of something else – just as there is no steady state of the body, and no state at all without some inconsistency, some internal contradiction, some trace of weather patterns, the possibility of migration or other turbulence. Perhaps the question is simply whether love enfolds an ambivalence you can live with, or one you can't. (*RoE* 294)

The connection between space, place, and self in Bush's *The Rules of Engagement* underlines what leading theorists of space and cultural geographers maintain about the construction of space from social practices and symbolic orders. Doreen Massey, for example, has recently summarized this now well-established discourse as follows: "Space is a product of practices, relations, connections and disconnections. We *make* space in the conduct of our lives, and at all scales, from the intimate to the global."¹² Bush's novel is a case in point. What is Arcadia's retreat into the cocoon of her study but a fashioning of space under the condition of psychological distress? How can her obsession with national borders and their transgression in war be explained other than by resorting to her experience of painful trespassing on emotional territory? And last but not least, in which way do features of urban topography like the London canals and Toronto ravines constitute places of liberating liminality, if they are not equally constituents of Arcadia's book-length journey towards the acceptance of the contingencies, instabilities, and risks in love and life? Places and spaces in *The Rules of Engagement* are not just symbolic of Arcadia's development, but are themselves symbolic constructions, established through the perspective of the protagonist and first-person narrator. Further, the panoptic view on spatial practices that Massey assumes in the above quoted essay – spanning "intimate" and "global", individual and collective,

¹² Doreen Massey, "Space, Time and Political Responsibility in the Midst of Global Inequality", in: *Erdkunde: Archiv für wissenschaftliche Geographie* 60,2 (Juni 2006), 89-90.

localized and large-scale contexts – corresponds to the novel's negotiation of place and self within the framework of both interpersonal, romantic engagement and international, political responsibility.

While *The Rules of Engagement* is thus highly concerned with issues of "Space, Time and Political Responsibility in the Midst of Global Inequality" – to quote from the title of Massey's essay – Bush's latest novel, *Claire's Head* (2004), focuses almost exclusively on very intimate, personal experiences and constructions of space and place. *Claire's Head* shares many of its predecessor's interests, first and foremost its exploration of the seminal relation between place and self. Like *The Rules of Engagement* it is a real tour de force in spatial dynamics, with an increasingly restless protagonist traversing rapidly changing locales in search of her missing sister. But the later novel is, arguably, even more radical in its evolvment of space and place from the subjectivity of its protagonist and central focalizer in this third-person narrative. The very title of the book indicates a zooming in on the micro-level of spatial practices, locating as it does the centre of action in the protagonist's head, that is, within the bodily confines of Claire's mental world. The inseparable link between body and mind is crucial here, as it is through the filter of great physical pain that Claire, a sufferer from chronic migraines, comes to perceive and construct notions of place and self. *Claire's Head* can thus be said to spell out what its predecessor had only tentatively tackled, namely the relation between body and space, especially urban spaces and places. *Claire's Head* traces how a body in pain 'migrates' from place to place, how it interrelates with these places, and how this interrelation between tormented body and changing places is constructive of the protagonist's sense of self. Since *Claire's Head* is set in 2000 – that is, a couple of years after *The Rules of Engagement* – and features a protagonist in the second half of her thirties – slightly older than Arcadia – one might even argue that *Claire's Head* envisions Claire as a more recent version of the same character study. Certainly, Claire's central coordinates in life, her home and her job, invite comparison. Like Arcadia, she is a highly professional woman, in the sense that her job contributes significantly to her general take on the world. Here, it is her work for the Toronto City Map Department which lends a certain *déformation professionnelle* to the protagonist. Not only is Claire a gifted mapmaker, but she also openly admits to her "desire to measure things, trying to keep the world's wildness at bay" (CH 24). Claire's biography, too, has seen a causal link between intimate experiences and choice of profession, as the early onset of migraine attacks during her childhood and the violent death of her parents (they were crushed beneath a falling escalator at Frankfurt Airport) have instilled

in her a deep longing for control and containment, which she finds in her job. Especially the experience of death had unsettled her in such an existential way as to inspire an almost pathological need to completely realign the boundaries of her life through her private panacea: the world of maps and mapmaking (*CH* 134-136).

Not surprisingly then, as Bush comments in an interview, Claire has become a person who is "particularly responsive to place",¹³ who takes her bearings in life in terms of her spatial relation to a given event or person. She is always acutely aware of the geographical coordinates and directions of her own position and that of loved ones, with her mind "spanning the distance" in-between and thereby reassuring her of a world where everything is in place (*CH* 1). Her lovely house on Toronto's lakeside, where she lives with her boyfriend Stefan, provides the fixed star of Claire's "[h]ome cosmography" (*CH* 52) – a coinage Claire's boss Charlie Gorjup had once applied to his cartographers' drawing of the city's new base map. Working on the base map, Claire and her colleagues had distributed the neighbourhoods according to their individual homes, allowing Claire to commit a "small act of cartographic defiance" (*CH* 53) and leave out an infamous eyesore, "what everyone on the block called the Ugly Garage" (*CH* 52). A case of cartographical cosmetics, Claire's slight manipulation of data in the service of "home cosmography" is a particularly telling example of her blending professional and private skills and concerns.

As has been sketched in the preceding paragraphs, it is the exceedingly symbolic occupation of the cartographer which characterizes if not determines Claire's life. Mapping has become Claire's prime strategy, her vehicle and metaphor of restoring order to a world of loss and pain. While "mapping as metaphor" – to quote from Aritha van Herk's 1982 essay – is not a new concept in Canadian women's literature,¹⁴ Bush's novel can be said to be an interesting contribution to the theme of "mapping" by reframing the discussion of space and mapping within a discourse of the body in pain. In her seminal study of the same name, Elaine Scarry has claimed that physical agony entails the "unmaking of the world",¹⁵ which,

¹³ "Q&A with Catherine Bush", www.catherinebush.com/bio/qna.htm, October 20, 2007.

¹⁴ Nor is it exactly a novel topic in Bush's oeuvre, as her first novel, *Minus Time* (1995), demonstrates. See, for instance: Mary Condé, "Mapping Postcolonial Spaces in Catherine Bush's *Minus Time*", in: *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 24,2 (Spring 2002), 69-78.

¹⁵ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, New York 1987.

in the case of Claire, could also be described as an "unmapping" of the world. With every outburst of migraine, Claire loses her grip on her surroundings. From Claire's perspective, this lack of control sees the dissolution of the boundaries between body and external world. She repeatedly diagnoses her chronic disease as "her body's porousness to the outer world" (CH 131) and finds the experience of pain to constitute a violent transgression of the confines of her body: "When a migraine came on, the pain swelled, like the sea over a small boat, overwhelming the horizon. It wasn't just in the head, but down one side of the body. All of you felt disturbed, helpless, assaulted" (CH 4). In fact, Claire's physical seizures sometimes become so comprehensive that they consume her entirely, taking possession of not only her head and body but of her very sense of self: "[T]he pain simply appeared. It was. She *became* it" (CH 22; emphasis added). Not surprisingly, her childhood memories in particular resonate with this horror tale of possession and disintegration:

At night sometimes [...] her body began shrinking [...] like falling down an elevator shaft, being both the one falling and the one who watched herself fall, whole but diminishing in scale. Other nights she grew. Her limbs swelled. If she concentrated all her attention on her right hand, it kept growing: its proportions remained the same, it simply expanded. [...] She had no warning which nights the distortions were going to happen. Whether she would be dropped into a deep well or lifted into the sky. Disappear or balloon to fill the world. (CH 23-24)

These and other instances in which the narrator relates Claire's suffering testify to pain's erosion of bodily integrity to the point of distortion – and to its takeover of one's sense of self. Another corrosive effect of pain comes with its muting of language and its exceeding the limits of communication. Her condition has thus drawn Claire particularly close to her older sister Rachel Barber, a New York freelance journalist and the family's "wild child", whom Claire calls her "twin" in pain (CH 121).¹⁶ Rachel's suffering from the same evasive disease has created a strong bond between the two siblings, which excludes, for that matter, their other sister Allison. With their "private code, the Barber Pain Scale" (CH 3), the sisters have found a way to put their pain on the map, that is, to represent and thus control it to some extent and to communicate its severity at least to each other. For Claire, the relief of sharing her condition with Rachel is vital: "[Rachel] was there

¹⁶ In this respect, it is hardly a coincidence that Bush has the two sisters living in Toronto and New York, respectively, that is, in cities often compared and contrasted to each other as "twin cities".

like a mirror, her evident pain proof of the substance of Claire's" (*CH* 281). Against this background, Rachel's mysterious disappearance at the beginning of the novel – just as the arrival of Lux Hearne had started off Bush's previous novel – cannot fail to stir Claire into immediate action. Initially, she understands her search to constitute but another kind of mapping, a restoration of order.¹⁷ Thus, at this point in the story, Claire still acts her professional self. In an accelerating pace, she embarks on a private investigation for Rachel's whereabouts, tracking her sister's faint traces from one locale to the next (partly accompanied by Rachel's former massage therapist and lover, Brad Arnarson). A journey through "three cities in three days, or six cities (well, four cities, a town, and a terme) in five days" (*CH* 210) has her spanning the continent and crossing the Atlantic. Her trajectory is not linear but propels her back and forth between Toronto, New York, Montreal, Amsterdam, a spa in Tuscany, Las Vegas, and, finally, a mountain resort in Mexico. But Claire is increasingly led astray, in the literal sense of the word, as her wild trip deprives her of the coordinates of her former life and triggers a process of transformation. Nothing expresses this experience of dis- and re-orientation better than Claire's fresh, unsettling perspective on her beloved Toronto, after coming back from Europe: "Claire was surrounded once again by Toronto, a city she knew in how many different ways, as map, as data, as home, a city that had always been central to the way she oriented herself in the world, so internalized as to be like the pathways of her brain, only now she felt cut off from it" (*CH* 205). Claire's exposure to changing places and various cities has obviously left her a distinctly different person. And again, her migraine affliction is shown to play the central role in this process, as the link between place and self is established through the novel's zooming in on the spatial micro-level of Claire's head and body in pain. In Amsterdam, where she finds temporary relief from the continuous outbursts of migraine that accompany her journey, Claire comments on this relation between pain, self, and the experience of a new place: "The transformation a new place afforded was not simply the release from pain. The place itself was transforming. [...] The city entered her and became part of her, she herself was changed" (*CH* 163). Described by Claire as a jump-start to her neurological system (*CH* 162), which has the potential to intercept the "pain grooves in her nerves" (*CH* 266), the effect of a new place on her physical condition proves highly beneficial in this case. Significantly, it is in Amsterdam that Claire is also for the first time

¹⁷ To her boss, Claire imagines, "[s]he might have explained that she had something else to map" (*CH* 61–62).

directly confronted with the nexus of place, self, and pain, when her session with a spiritual healer, Ariel, sets off an avalanche of questions on what the latter had mysteriously called Claire's own "place of pain" (*CH* 169):

What was the place of pain? [...] Did he [Ariel] mean 'place' literally, as if she had to figure out where in her body the pain came from (somewhere in her head) or was he referring to the role it played, its importance to her? Had she somehow put the pain in her head (as opposed to elsewhere)? Was putting it in her head, which was and was not part of the body, different than putting it in her brain? Or was he suggesting that there were places out in the world where her pain lived and which she had to find? (*CH* 199-200)

In contrast to the familiar urban locales of Toronto, New York, or Montreal, the widely different urban spaces of Amsterdam seem predestined to catalyze both Claire's self-healing and her self-awareness. With its incorporation of waterways, Amsterdam emanates a quality of spatial fluidity and flexibility (*CH* 164) that is as new to Claire as it becomes emblematic for her future journey. Ever since Amsterdam – and the unnervingly vague prospect of some mysterious "place of pain" – Claire submits herself more and more to the uncontrollable momentum of her quest, letting go of family ties and job obligations in Toronto and allowing herself to act instinctively and irrationally. Her commitment to the journey becomes total, including utmost physical distress. Deprived of sufficient medication, her soaring pain wears away the last vestiges of her detached mapmaker's perspective and instead draws her deep into the spatial dynamics of the places she traverses. This immersion becomes especially apparent in Las Vegas, the last city of Claire's grand tour through North America and Europe, before she eventually finds Rachel in a Mexican mountain retreat. In Las Vegas, Claire's "porousness to the world, or the world's own porousness, felt stronger than ever" (*CH* 262). Her experience of the city's dimensions and sites is one of grotesque distortion, as if the place itself were an expression of her physical condition. Significantly, Claire's depiction of the Las Vegas Strip evokes her childhood memories of eerie changes in bodily proportion during migraine attacks: "[E]very building grew huge. Out of scale. Or they, in their little white car, were shrinking" (*CH* 251). And when she takes a walk along the Strip, Claire feels a "great desire [...] to shut out the rest of the world, or at least the people in it, as she used to do as a child when her head ached and her surroundings grew too much for her, or [...] when the room used to grow and shrink around her" (*CH* 255). Claire clearly relates to Las Vegas via her body – to the extent that cityspace and bodyspace overlap. Marking the end and high point of Claire's city tour, Las Vegas stands out among the other urban

settings of the novel. A place of fantasy and simulacrum, it commonly figures as the world's most (in)famous symbol of artificiality and inauthenticity, and thus as an unreal place – or 'non-place' even. In the context of the novel, however, it can also be argued that its blatantly obvious construction from symbolic practices, from collective dreams and desires, makes this specific city a compelling case in point for the novel's stress on the mutually constitutive relation between place and self: On the one hand, the city of Las Vegas would not exist without the longing and the imagination of the people it attracts; on the other hand, it markets itself as a heterotopian place of self-obliviousness and unlimited possibilities, where, as Claire comments, "the past was blown up and cast away. On the Strip, you were shielded from loss and encouraged to surrender to desire" (*CH* 255).

The overtly symbolic character of Las Vegas as a city of dreams turns it into a most suitable vantage point for Claire's self-revelation during the last part of her journey, the drive from Las Vegas to Mexico. Sitting in the passenger seat while Brad does the driving, Claire grows delirious with pain. She enters a state of unprecedented physical agony, with the outside world violently impinging on her body's integrity: "Her hat clutched her head. The windshield enwrapped her. Such things weren't themselves any more as much as they were aspects of what she felt, the shape, the pattern of her pain" (*CH* 284). With her body's collapse comes the total surrender of her sense of self to the dynamics of place, both real and imaginary: "Claire vomited again. She was in a dark place. She was the dark place, the thin white line of the self dissolving" (*CH* 299). Confined to the real space of the car as to the "dark place" of pain that she imagines her head to be, Claire experiences an onslaught of flashbacks. In the temporary absence of consciousness, memories of her parents, Stefan, former lovers, and Rachel take over, opening old wounds and confronting Claire with a profundity of loss and pain that can never be fully fathomed or controlled. Nor can these experiences ever be sublimated through the imposition of order – or the craft of mapmaking, for that matter. When she emerges from her blackout and the "dark place" of pain, she does so with this new awareness: "The world flowed back towards her and she took it in, took herself in with a new kind of clarity, which wasn't precision but a different, more expansive awareness. [...] There was nothing to indicate where they were, geographically speaking" (*CH* 300-301).

A short while later, Claire discovers Rachel's whereabouts, watching from a distance as the older sister wanders along the grounds of a secluded mountain resort in the apparent bliss of a pain-free existence. Thus, *somewhere* in Mexico,

Claire has eventually found her peripatetic sister, or *believes* she has. Significantly, she chooses not to approach her but leave the situation to an *open* end. With this formerly uncharacteristic demeanour – a sweet surrender to the friendly embrace of chance and uncertainty – Claire finds her own peace at the end of her journey. Similar to Arcadia's epiphanic moment of recognition in the heterotopian space of the ravine, Claire's change in consciousness generates an alternative place of new possibilities to accommodate for her body's chronic condition. This will, indeed, be her own "place of pain" (CH 169):

She was giving up on the idea of a cure. She would find an accommodation with her pain, make a place for it. [...] If she concentrated only on pain's constraints, she would lose sight of what it had given her. She would lose sight of part of herself. Free of her headaches, there would perhaps be less of her" (CH 304); "she was no longer convinced that she would be able to slip back, like the missing piece of a puzzle, into her life as it had been. [...] She would go back, although she did not know what awaited her. Mystery. Disorder. Not necessarily bad things. (CH 309)

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Transgressing the 'poetics of the anglicized city': The Figure of the Flâneuse in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*

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1. Introduction

Dionne Brand's latest novel *What We All Long For*, published in 2005, like a lot of her earlier works is set in Toronto and continues salient themes in her work: the difficulty of black existence in the Diaspora, her characters' multiple displacements and complex histories, which make a return to a former place or state of existence impossible, the mistrust in concepts like home, family, culture, or nation, the impossibility to trace origins and the growth of new temporary affiliations in urban space, the experience of racism and the exploration of lesbian desire, but it also significantly departs from her earlier texts on Toronto.¹ Whereas the novel in no way pictures the city as a multicultural haven, but on the contrary shows how racial and spatial practices in the city often coincide and cause violence, unlike her previous books, *What We All Long For* also celebrates the multicultural city.

The novel focuses on the lives of four Torontonians in their early twenties. All of them are second-generation immigrants of diverse ethnic backgrounds – Caribbean-Canadian, Africadian,² Portuguese-Canadian, and Vietnamese – whose experience of growing up in Toronto has removed them by far from the

¹ In 2006 Brand received the City of Toronto Book Award, for which she had been nominated before, for *What We All Long For*. Brand previously published short stories on Toronto, collected in *Sans Souci and Other Stories* (Stratford: William-Wallace 1988), and in 1996 her novel *In Another Place, Not Here* appeared, set both in Toronto and in the Caribbean. In 2002 her collection of poems on Toronto, *Thirsty* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart), came out.

² Africadian is a term George Elliott Clarke coined for blacks who settled in the maritime provinces of Canada as early as the 18th century in the course of the American revolution. The term fuses the region of Acadia, as the maritime provinces used to be called, with the originally African origins of the first blacks in Canada. Clarke uses the term to distinguish this specific group of black Canadians with a distinct ethnicity from other black groups in Canada such as, for instance, immigrants from the Caribbean. See George Elliott Clarke, "Embarkation: Discovering African-Canadian Literature", in: *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*, Toronto 2002, 3-23.

spatial and cultural contexts their immigrant parents grew up in. By portraying two different generations and their divergent understandings of place and identity, *What We All Long For* renders an immigrant city in dialogue and complicates homogeneous notions of ethnicity, origin, or home.³ Furthermore, the generations' dissimilar models of identity formation are made palpable in spatial terms in the novel: The older generation tries to secure its ethnic background in specific places and clearly defined cultural practices whereas the younger generation is characterized by transcending spatial and ethnic boundaries and by forging new cultural practices that no longer follow the "roots/routes" of ethnic belonging.⁴ The young people are, in fact, frequently described as "borderless" in Brand's text.⁵ In the following, I want to trace the transgressive behaviour of the younger generation, which challenges spatial boundaries as well as social norms and symbolic practices for constituting racial or sexual identity, and show how Brand uses, recycles, and reinterprets the figure of the *flâneur* in her text.

I am going to focus on two of the young female protagonists in the novel, on Tuyen, a lesbian avant-garde artist, who defies the expectations of her Vietnamese-born parents to treasure family values and economic opportunities, and on Carla, a bisexual bicycle courier of Portuguese and Caribbean descent, who is trying to come to terms with her tragic family history while taking care of her delinquent younger brother Jamal. Tuyen and Carla ferociously embrace the city, grappling with its pace and rhythms and with the multiple lives that meet and clash in the intense contact zone of the multicultural city.⁶ Their generation revels in the city's "raw openness" (WALF 212) because they see "the streets outside, its chaos, as their only hope. They feel the city's violence and ardour in one emotion" (WALF

³ The generational gap is one factor which complicates racial identification in *What We All Long For* while sexual difference is another. By drawing on multiple differences that constitute a character's identity and position in society, Brand further destabilizes concepts of race, home, or belonging. Interesting for this context is the concept of transdifference, see Helmbrecht Breinig/Jürgen Gebhardt/Klaus Lösch (eds), *Multiculturalism in Contemporary Societies: Perspectives on Difference and Transdifference*, Erlangen 2002, 11-35.

⁴ See James Clifford, "Diasporas", in: *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge 1997, 244-277.

⁵ Dionne Brand, *What We All Long For*, Toronto 2005, 213. All further quotes refer to this edition. The novel's title will be abbreviated as WALF.

⁶ For the concept of the "contact zone" see Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone", *MLA* 13,9 (1991), 33-40; for its application to contemporary multicultural cities, see, e.g. Günther H. Lenz/Utz Riese (eds), *Postmodern New York City: Transfiguring Spaces – Raum-Transformationen*, Heidelberg 2003.

212). Tuyen and Carla choose urban space as their home, not because it is perfect, but because despite its violent aspects it leaves room for the reinvention of other subjectivities, for escape routes from their suffocating family histories and from notions of ethnic origins. In the novel, not only urban space, but the respective family histories of the four friends harbour dark secrets and the potential for violence. Tuyen's parents, for instance, have never recovered from losing their little son Quy on their flight from Vietnam in the 1970s. Quy is the novel's unofficial fifth protagonist. He is the one who did not make it to the "promised land", the one who got lost and subsequently spent his life in refugee camps, exposed to violence, abuse, crime, and corruption. His narrative runs counter to the rest of the text, a fact which Brand renders not only in the content but in the very print layout of the novel as well: While the other chapters are headed by numbers and appear in full justification, the chapters in which Quy's voice and perspective are given appear in left justification, that is with a ragged right margin, and are headed by his name. Quy sheds a different light on concepts such as nation, democracy, and justice, but also on the difficult but – compared to his own – protected lives of the four protagonists. And the novel shows how Quy's fate – which is generic for that of countless other immigrants who did not make it – overshadows the lives of those who did make it to Canada. Although the loss of Quy happened to her parents long before Tuyen was born, their guilt, shame, and hurt affect her life. Fleeing her parents' overprotection, Tuyen moves to a chaotic apartment in downtown Toronto, which she uses as a studio for her art work. Art is her way of coming to terms with her heritage but also with the space of the city. She collects traces of lives in Toronto and interviews people about what they long for, drawing a multitude of different stories and desires. Tuyen and her friends "exploit" the multicultural city as a rich source of materials from which to construct an identity. Tuyen is, for example, working on a Lubaio, some sort of Chinese sign post, on which she wants to pin people's longings as "messages to the city" (WALF 17). When her friends wonder why she uses Chinese heritage for her sign post, although she is ethnically Vietnamese, she angrily replies: "There is some ancient Chinese-Vietnamese shit that's my shit and I'm taking it. Okay?" (WALF 16). As the quote illustrates, Brand's novel is not anxious to trace authentic origins in the multicultural city, but quite on the contrary dwells on an understanding of cultures as migratory, transient, contradictory, and untraceable. Tuyen is a liminal figure when it comes to the construction of ethnic, racial, and sexual identity throughout the novel. She is described as "androgynous, a beautiful, perfect mix of the feminine and the masculine" (WALF 22).

Tuyen's desires are directed towards her friend Carla who lives next door. Carla, however, is too entangled in her family history to reciprocate Tuyen's feelings. In dealing with the loyalty that binds her to her mother, who committed suicide, the rage she feels for her father, who abandoned the family, and the responsibility she feels for her brother, whom she repeatedly gets out of jail, she fervently traverses the city on her bike, because its pulsating arteries infuse her with life. When her mother, Angela Chiarelli, started dating Carla's black Caribbean father, Derek, her Portuguese family disowned Angie because in their eyes she had crossed a racial boundary that was not to be crossed. Derek was married but promised Angie to leave his first family and live with Carla and her brother Jamal instead. It was a promise he did not keep, and Carla distinctly remembers how as a child her mother would take her to stand on the corner and watch the house of this other family for hours on end. Unable to bear the situation any longer, Angie committed suicide leaving her daughter Carla with the legacy of her racial and sexual entanglements as well as her younger brother Jamal. Carla is confounded by conflicting loyalties and by the responsibility she feels for her brother's life who after his mother's death frequently gets into trouble and drifts in and out of jail. Although Carla, who is not "phenotypically black" (*WALF* 106), could easily pass for a white person she pointedly identifies herself as black. Interestingly, while whites usually think she is Spanish, most black people recognize her as one of them because "[t]hey were more attuned to the gradations of race than whites." For Carla, it would have been easy "to disappear into this white world" (*WALF* 106), but out of loyalty to and respect for her mother, whose family abandoned her after she started dating a black man, she chooses to not disappear but be visibly different. This kind of "reverse passing" – choosing to pass for black – already marks Carla as a border-crosser, a characteristic which also becomes palpable in how she travels, reads, and interprets socially and racially marginal places in Toronto. Like Tuyen, Carla travels the spaces of the city in a desperate attempt to move beyond the impasses of the past. Both characters are driven by and use the city in ways that challenge normative sexual and racial behaviour while reinscribing and reorganizing public sphere in counter-strategic performances.

2. The Figure of the *Flâneur*

Before illustrating how the two female characters I am focusing on in Brand's novel can be read as what I would term past-postmodern *flâneuses*, I briefly want to look at the figure of the *flâneur* and at the interest it has recently spawned in social, cultural, literary, and feminist studies. As a historical figure, the *flâneur* is tied to 19th-century Paris and to the burgeoning of the modernist sentiment which is so closely related to the rise of urban metropolises. As the observer of the urban spectacle, who is at once part of the crowd and a detached chronicler, the literary figure of the *flâneur* appears in the writings of Charles Baudelaire and later turned into an important figure of cultural analysis through Walter Benjamin's texts on Baudelaire.⁷ In Baudelaire and Benjamin the *flâneur* appears as a liminal and elusive figure, as someone who is present/visible and at the same time hidden/invisible in the new semi-public and semi-private places of the city, such as cafés, parks, and arcades. The *flâneur* uses the new public places of the city to observe people and to take in the various stimuli of the urban environment, while at the same time remaining anonymous in the crowd. His *flânerie*, the process of walking and looking, is a search for meaning, a way of making sense of metropolitan space, of public life, and of the new modern sentiment. Much more than a voyeur, for Benjamin the *flâneur* is "a secular pilgrim, a seeker after the profane truths of a temporal spatial universe that has been trampled into the dust by a humanity made dull and inattentive to the hidden wonders of the metropolis."⁸ The *flâneur*, in other words, is a sensitive artistic figure that uncovers the "hidden wonders of the metropolis" instead of succumbing to what Georg Simmel termed the "blasé attitude" of the modern city dweller whose senses are dulled by the over-stimulation of urban life.⁹ The *flâneur* hence does not only observe but interpret. He gives his artistic vision of an urban way of life and thus becomes an authoritative figure. His aimless and leisurely walks through the city spawn aesthetic responses that he turns into a text. He, as Sigrid Weigel and others have pointed out, observes/

⁷ See, for instance, Walter Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire", in: *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. by Siegfried Unseld, Frankfurt a.M. 1969, 201-245; or passim in *Das Passagen Werk*, Vol. 1+2, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt a.M. 1982.

⁸ Quoted in Simon Parker, *Urban Theory and the Urban Experience: Encountering the City*, London/ New York 2004, 18.

⁹ Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life", in: Richard Sennet (ed), *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, Englewood Cliffs, NY 1969, 47-60.

reads the city in order to represent/write it and hence is, beyond being a figure, a literary or writing concept.¹⁰

Far beyond its modernist context, the *flâneur* has wandered off into other milieus and has become an important metaphor in contemporary literature and criticism concerning the city. The popularization of the concept towards the end of the 20th century – to the extent of almost becoming a commonplace – in my opinion is due to various factors. First of all, the *flâneur* has come to demarcate differences between modern and postmodern urban novels. In an attempt to define the period beyond postmodernism, many critics are re-examining both modernism and postmodernism as the gaps in-between those two cultural periods and aesthetic movements.¹¹ The public places of the city – the material realm for *flânerie* – have changed as much as the way the *flâneur* is represented in fictional texts from modernism to postmodernism. While the figure was a vital part of the grand narratives of modernism, postmodern literature has deconstructed city texts and has often turned *flânerie* into creating a semiotic labyrinth, which no longer resulted in a readable urban text. Furthermore, the new interest of urban critics in how urban space is used, not conceived, has also focused attention on the *flâneur*. Last but not least, the figure has become an important tool for analyzing the scopic regimes of the city, the relationship between observer and observed, the subject looking and the object being looked at. The public realm of cities is increasingly becoming connected to issues of representation and power: At stake is, who is made visible and who remains invisible in public by being relegated to the private realm, or who is excluded in other ways from public mythologies and public spaces. The public culture of the city has always been what Bender calls "a contested terrain", a battlefield for the right to participate and to be represented, and while women have traditionally been relegated to the margins, public spaces in contemporary cities, as Sharon Zukin e.g. has shown, exclude people on the grounds of race and class as well by being available to a white middle class

¹⁰ As Sigrid Weigel puts it: "[...] 'der Flaneur' ist immer schon ein literarisches bzw. ein Schrift-Konzept. Die Figur des Flaneurs ist weniger Repräsentant als Medium einer Schrift, insofern er sich der Lektüre der Stadt-Schrift hingibt, um diese als Subjekt *seiner* Schrift auf dem Papier nachzuahmen. Für diese zeichnet er zwar als Autor, er ist aber nicht ihr *auctor*/autonomer Schöpfer." In: "Traum-Stadt-Frau: Zur Weiblichkeit der Städte in der Schrift: Calvino, Bejamin, Paul Nizon, Ginka Steinwachs", in: Klaus Scherpe (ed), *Die Unwirklichkeit der Städte: Großstadtdarstellungen zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne*, Reinbek 1988, 179, her emphasis.

¹¹ See, for instance, Peter Brooker, *New York Fictions: Modernity, Postmodernism, the New Modern*, London/New York 1996; or Klaus Stierstorfer (ed), *Beyond Postmodernism: Reassessments in Literature, Theory, and Culture*, Berlin/New York 2003.

only.¹² As such, the concept of the *flâneur*, as someone who reads, interprets and represents public places from his – or in contemporary literature her – point of view, has found wide consideration in feminist and cultural studies. In the past, the *flâneur's* observing walks have often been equated with the male gaze which appropriates and objectifies women by making them part of the urban spectacle.¹³ Nowadays, some women writers of contemporary urban fiction, in my opinion, recycle the figure of the *flâneur* and the activity of streetwalking by turning the *flâneur* into a space and figure of the third who uses the urban realm to transcend categories of gender, sex, and sexuality.¹⁴ Increasingly, the *flâneur* or *flâneuse* becomes a means of empowerment for groups that are "othered" by the dominant discourses of and gazes on the city, and presents alternative readings of urban spaces that often involve blurring the line between the private and the public, between the sign/text and the body, between male and female.

3. *Flânerie* in *What We All Long For*

After this digression on the *flâneur*, I now want to look at how Brand's two female characters defy the "male gaze" and the spatial restrictions it encodes. The most vivid descriptions of urban life in Toronto are given when the narrative voice focalizes on Carla, who, like a typical *flâneuse*, observes the diversity of urban life in semi-private spaces. Through her eyes, the city is personified and becomes a round character with different traits, faces, and moods; a character that acts and is acted upon. Carla frequently watches the streets from the window in her apartment at the core of downtown, taking in the changing moods of the city:

The street below the window seemed distant, blurred, soft-lit last evening. She'd watched the street people haggling, the store owner trying to move them along, the man who went to Mars [a deli] ten times a day for ice cream,

¹² See Thomas Bender, "The Modern City as Text and Context: The Public Culture of New York", *Rivista di Studi Anglo-Americani* 6,8 (1990), 15-34, here 21. Also see, "Public Culture and Metropolitan Modernity", in: *The Unfinished City New York and the Metropolitan Idea*, New York 2002, 55-68. Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, Cambridge 1995.

¹³ See Janet Wolff, "'The Invisible Flâneuse': Women and the Literature of Modernity", in: *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 2,3 (1985), 37-46.; and Elizabeth Wilson's reply, "The Invisible Flâneur", in: Sophie Watson /Katharine Gibson (eds), *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, Oxford 1995, 59-79.

¹⁴ See Susanne Rohr, "On 'The Perils of Going Astray': Female Figures in the City", in: Lenz/Riese (eds) 2003, 9-97. Also see Andrea Strolz' essay on Margaret Atwood in this volume.

the lottery ticket man, the café sitters, the trail of plastic-bag-laden people coming from the market. She watched and watched until the light went and the street lights came on and the crowd changed, with the exception of the regular homeless – the man who always told her, 'Have a nice day, have a very nice day'; the chain-smoking woman who, on bad days, declaimed herself ugly to anyone within a few feet; the other woman who waited in the alley each day to tell the unsuspecting passerby that her dog had died; and the short, swollen, barefooted man with black hair. (WALF 39)

Carla observes different types of city dwellers, who in their diversity all make up the body of the city. People's individual boundaries of corporeality frequently dissolve in the novel as they merge into the anthropomorphic body of the city.¹⁵ While Carla at times simply watches the urban spectacle as a stage of life, at other times, however, she participates in using and changing this space.

Carla frequently "launch[es] into the city in a blizzard" (WALF 105) on her bike, ignoring all weather warnings and travels the "muscles of highway and streets" (WALF 31) when she needs to come to terms with her inner turmoil. While space is hence used to externalize a character's emotional geography in *What We All Long For*, Brand also employs Carla's bike rides, which lead her into abandoned and residual spaces, to highlight the resourceful and imaginative quality of liminal spaces in the city, spaces where the material and immaterial exchanges between old and new immigrants reanimate the city and where, as Bentley claims, a greater dynamism exists between and below the highrises than in the "white" parts of town.¹⁶ Carla presents us with a city on street level, below representative buildings, with a city that bustles with the desires of different people. It is a sensual city Brand portrays in her novel, not one that is defined by architecture or design but by the longings of the people inhabiting it.

Carla's bike rides inevitably bring to mind Michel de Certeau's concept of "walking in the city". According to de Certeau, everyday practices like walking the streets

¹⁵ On how the city is a simulation or simulacra of the body, see Donatella Mazzoleni, "The City and the Imaginary", in: Erica Carter/James Donald/Judith Squires (eds), *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, London 1993: 285-301; and Mike Crang, "Rhythms of the City: Temporalised Space and Motion", in: John May/Nigel Thrift (eds), *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, London 2001, 187-207. Crang looks at the city as a "polyrhythmic ensemble", (36) in which people interact with each other and urban space, and thus animate the city as body. Urban space, he maintains, is defined by the specific movements of bodies through the time-space of the city.

¹⁶ See D.M.R. Bentley, "'Me and the City That's Never Happened Before': Dionne Brand in Toronto", in: *Canadian Architexts: Essays on Literature and Architecture in Canada 1759-2005*. www.canadianpoetry.ca/architexts/essays/brand.htm, January 3, 2007.

change the urban text without making it readable, because as soon as we give up our panoptic view of the city by descending into the labyrinth of its streets, we become entangled in its text. While individual walks partly follow the 'official' syntax of the city – its streets and buildings – they also write a subtext of individual interests and desires. Brand is not concerned with a postmodern city of signs that defies readability. Rather than looking at the architectural syntax of the city and the symbolic order of language representing it, she is interested in the sublevel of language, in the excess of the symbolic order rendered in liminal and residual spaces as well as in individual counter-strategic spatial practices. In de Certeau's understanding "to walk is to lack a place" so that "the moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place".¹⁷ In *What We All Long For* this experience "of lacking a place" is related to the multiple displacements of subjects in the Diaspora and to how the younger generation embraces the "placeless place" of the city as the end of traceable origins.¹⁸

While Carla uses the material structures of the city to order her inner turmoil, Tuyen as an artist is increasingly fascinated by – as Brand put it in an interview – "the happening city"¹⁹ and by the intermingling of different lives:

Heading home, she looked at the city around her. Now in fact, she noticed lots of people like her staring idly into store windows, sitting in doughnut shops, touching fruit in outside fruit stands, washing clothes in the Laundromats, reading newspapers. Tuyen stopped into the Bubble Tea Café and ordered a coffee, took out her book, and waited for someone to sit near her to ask them what they longed for. It's like this with this city – you can stand on a simple corner and get taken away in all directions. Depending on the weather, it can be easy or hard. If it's pleasant, and pleasant is so relative, then the other languages making their way to our ears, plus the language of the air itself,

¹⁷ Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City", in: *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall, Berkeley 1984, 103.

¹⁸ For an in-depth analysis of *What We All Long For* see my chapter "'The End of Traceable Beginnings': Poetics of Urban Be/longing in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*", in: Caroline Rosenthal, *Symbolic Urban Spaces: Contemporary New York and Toronto Fiction*, Rochester, NY 2009 (forthcoming).

¹⁹ Brand said in the interview: "I sat down the other night for a coffee with a friend, and it occurred to me that this city we live in has never happened before. Toronto has not happened before, and that's something incredible. And it hasn't ever happened before because all of these different types of people, sharing different kinds of experiences, or what we call identities, have just not been in the same place together before. So now, who am I?" Maya Mavjee, "Opening the Door: An Interview with Dionne Brand by Maya Mavjee", *Read* 2,1 (2001), 28.

which can be cold and humid or wet and hot, this all sums up into a kind of new vocabulary. No matter who you are, no matter how certain you are of it, you can't help but feel the thrill of being someone else. (*WALF* 154)

In this quote, the city is again portrayed as one metaphorical body composed of different people. Their many languages no longer result in Babylonian chaos and disaster but instead in "a new kind of vocabulary" that mingles in and with the mood and the "language" of urban space itself, the air, the weather. Tuyen travels the city on the sights and sounds of different city dwellers, and these sensual stimuli take her "away in all directions", a dispersal of place that also involves the possibility for reimagining personal identity. Tuyen loves observing people and being in the midst of the polyphonic city, because it makes her "feel the thrill of being someone else". For her, the city becomes a space for shifting shape and for slipping into another body by imagining what people long for.

Like Carla, Tuyen's border-crossing behaviour also shows in how she transgresses space. She goes along with the graffiti crew at night, a group of four youths living next door, who are described in the novel as the "spiritual presences of Tuyen [...] and Carla's generation. Their legs straddling walls and bridge girders and subway caverns, spray-painting their emblems of duality, their dangerous dreams" (*WALF* 134-135). Not only is the physical challenge and danger of their activities congruent with Carla and Tuyen's need to transgress boundaries and experience the raw reality of the city, but the graffiti artists also share their need to re-inscribe the city and leave traces of their presence in the urban text. They see their tags and sprayings "as painting radical images against the dying poetics of the anglicized city" (*WALF* 134-135). Graffiti is an urban rite of passage which signifies membership to a certain group, and it is a decidedly male coded activity. There are few female graffiti artists because, as Nancy Macdonald has shown, graffiti making is mostly used to perform a masculine and male identity to which the female body would pose a serious threat.²⁰ Brand's novel subverts such gendered and sexed spatial codes as out of the four friends, it is Tuyen who sometimes accompanies the graffiti crew on their nightly strolls.

²⁰ Nancy Macdonald, *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York*, New York 2001.

Gender and sexual identity can be stabilized or destabilized by spatial practices. Places become gendered by the activities taking place in them, activities that are stereotypically associated with men or women. Such codings become most obvious in acts of gender-transgressive behaviour. As Liz Bondi puts it: "Precisely because these various places bear such powerful gender inscriptions, men and women put their masculine or feminine cultural credentials in question through their mere presence in those environments".²¹ Tuyen's tomboyish behaviour²² – her strolls through abandoned and liminal places and spaces – already shows in her teenage years, when she ignored her father's warnings and scoured "the beaches, the railroads, and the construction sites at night to look for discarded objects" (WALF 21). Her unruly spatial behaviour challenges norms and expectations of society as well as of her family. Her apartment on College Street, for instance, is located in a part of Toronto that her parents remember with shame because it was here that they first came as immigrants with no money. Like many other immigrants, they left their shabby and small room as soon as they had enough money and moved to Richmond Hill in an attempt to "eradicate" the "helpless, weak, unsuitable" self they were made to feel when first arriving in the city (WALF 54-55). In Richmond Hill, they lived with all the other immigrants running away from their past, and it is precisely this atmosphere Tuyen wants to escape. She moves back to the threshold zone of the city, the space where new immigrants arrive and make a place for themselves, where their longings and desires become inscribed into the places of the city. Tuyen is portrayed as being fearless of the city and as someone who in her spatial behaviour – her tomboyish strolls and her claiming of masculine spaces – breaks the heterosexual norm which stabilizes the division between male and female, masculine and feminine characteristics and features. While in modern cities, as S.R. Munt has shown, the mobility of homosexuals was greatly restricted, Brand turns her character into a lesbian *flâneuse*, who uses and represents the public spaces of the city in different ways.²³

²¹ Liz Bondi/Joyce Davidson, "Troubling the Place of Gender", in: Kay Anderson et al. (eds), *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi 2003, 328.

²² Judith Butler has pointed out that the word tomboy became linked to lesbian desire as early as the 19th century because it denoted a physical wildness that was deemed inappropriate for feminine behaviour. See *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, London/New York 1993, 155.

²³ See S.R. Munt, "The Lesbian Flâneur", in: Ian Borden et al. (eds), *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, Cambridge 2001, 246-260. On how the mobility of the black body has been restrained see Radhika Mohanram's illuminating study *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space*, Minneapolis 1999.

4. Conclusion

While male characters in *What We All Long For* get caught up in rituals, performances, and spatial practices constituting maleness and masculinity – such as spraying graffiti, gang violence, encounters with the police – the two female characters, whom I focused on, circumnavigate the obstacles of the city and the expectations of society more successfully. The *flânerie* of both Tuyen and Carla in *What We All Long For* frees them from normative spatial behaviours related to sex, gender, and sexuality. Their spatial activities are characterized by movement and mobility, something that had been denied to both the black and the lesbian body in the past. Tuyen's searching for discarded objects along train tracks and Carla's bike rides both evoke images of transience, mobility, and transformation that dissolve the stasis of stereotypes. Brand's reconfiguration of the *flâneur* blends sexual, spatial, and textual transgressions as it rewrites modernist perspectives on the urban public realm and on the female body alike. Brand's *flâneur* is a past-postmodern textual figure in that it reverses the male gaze of modernist city fiction by giving a decidedly feminine perspective on urban space and in that it also avoids the semiotic games and textual charades of postmodernism. Brand rather portrays a physical, a sensual city which breathes through the desires and longings that people invest in this place.

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Seamstresses, Prostitutes and Mothers: London's East End as a Jewish Chronotope in Lilian Nattel's *The Singing Fire*

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1. Introduction: Uncovering Jewish Women's Stories

When journalist Isabel Vincent set out to unearth the stories of the *polacas*, the Eastern European Jewish women who became prostitutes in South America, she was up against a code of silence, missing records, and even death threats. To prevent further provoking anti-Semitism, Jewish history has sometimes been recounted in a way that skirts around moments of Jewish complicity and wrongdoing. One such example is that of Jewish prostitution, something that was culturally never seen as a necessary evil. The expansive white slavery trade headed by Jewish mobsters virtually kidnapping young girls from their own homelands is a story that no one wanted to tell. Vincent explains in her book *Bodies and Souls* that she persevered in her research because while many feel the story of the Jewish prostitutes to be a source of shame, she sees it for what it really is – "a story of strength".¹

Montreal novelist Lilian Nattel, in her novel *The Singing Fire* from 2004, tells such a story of empowerment as it unfolds in nineteenth-century Jewish London.² The novel's protagonist, Nehama, escapes a Polish city to the freedom promised by England's capital. Upon landing, Nehama is duped by a *landsmann* and sold into prostitution. It is only after a daring escape that Nehama is able to begin a new life in Jewish London as a seamstress. Ten years later she saves Emilia from the clutches of a pimp when the genteel but unwed pregnant woman arrives – as Nehama once had – unescorted to the London docks. Their lives become inextricably linked when the childless Nehama is then left to raise Emilia's unwanted baby. *The Singing Fire* is a consciously female narrative that draws attention to

¹ Isabel Vincent, *Bodies and Souls: The Tragic Plight of Three Jewish Women Forced into Prostitution in the Americas*, New York etc. 2005, ix.

² Lilian Nattel, *The Singing Fire*, Toronto 2004. All subsequent citations are from this edition. *The Singing Fire* will be abbreviated as SF.

the absence of the female voice and the treatment of women's experience as marginal, unofficial and therefore unimportant. Through her complex narrative of women's experience, Nattel portrays heroines who find a measure of power in the East End. It is in women's spaces, such as the brothel, the back of the sweatshop, or the marketplace – spaces that are interstitial or inconsequential – that these women look out for one another, partake in communal celebrations, remember the dead, and choose or are chosen by loving families. All these actions require courage and strength and are for the protagonists the only means of asserting power. In women's writing, women take control of their spaces – the spaces they have been allotted – and use them to address complicated issues of identity. It is also a means to pass on memories and the stories of women's lives that are threatened to be silenced by more official accounts.

It is helpful here to enlist Bakhtinian theory in explaining an empowerment that almost ironically emerges out of women's oppression and humiliation.³ Many of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories have been attractive to feminism because of the challenge they present to patriarchal and imperial systems of control. Though imperfect, as will be demonstrated in the following, it is evident how an examination of *The Singing Fire* through the lens of Bakhtin's theories of literary chronotopes and the carnivalesque illustrate the subversion of power hierarchies in small, but meaningful ways.

2. The East End as a Jewish Chronotope

Although early Jewish-Canadian writers found themselves compelled to describe in fiction the experience of being a Jew in Canada, in more recent years, the spaces required for an investigation of identity seem to belong to other times and places; subject matter is being replaced with stories from a past even older than arrival. Jewish-Canadian women writers in particular have begun to sift through Jewish history in the hopes of "re-creating places of origin that have since been erased from the world".⁴ However, as Henri Lefebvre argues in *The Production of*

³ See: Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, transl. by Caryl Emerson/Michael Holquist, Austin 2004.

⁴ Janet Handler Burstein, "Recalling Home: American Jewish Women Writers of the New Wave", in: *Contemporary Literature* 42,2 (2001), 801.

Space, no place ever completely disappears.⁵ The result is what can be called, to play with a term from Bakhtin, "Jewish chronotopes". These can be defined as socio-historical space-and-times, such as the *shtetl*, the Shoah, pre-Inquisition Spain, a Canadian city, or the Russian Empire, where there is or once was a Jewish presence that in literature becomes the site for an examination of Jewish life as valuable and intrinsic to that time and space. In every chronotope, the reader is entertained by a multiplicity of voices. Bakhtinian dialogue is derived from the idea that meaning is relational. A dialogized rhetoric is one where human activity is a unity of differences, made up of an array of voices (which include world-views as well as language), in what he has called *heteroglossia*. It is in a dialogized rhetoric that the heteroglossia – made up gradated and socially diverse speech types within a single national language – negotiate, express, and confront their differences. Situating their works in Jewish chronotopes, Jewish-Canadian women writers preserve the collective past and create an identity for the present by participating in the continual revision of Jewish historiography. In so doing, they reveal layered histories and allow multiple voices to be heard.

Fin-de-siècle East End London is a Jewish chronotope explored in Lilian Nattel's *The Singing Fire*. By the beginning of the twentieth century there were 60,000 Jews in the East End (half of all of those in London), and 50% of these were foreign-born. "Jew town" was the not very affectionate term for a small area of Jewish concentration encompassing Whitechapel and a small piece of Mile End and a part of St. George's-in-the-East. In 1888, there were 600 people per acre,⁶ and the "yellow fog snuck through the cracks and the sound of coughing was all the song you could hear" (*SF* 109). In *The Singing Fire*, Jewish London is brought to life as "the irritating pimple on the backside of London, the subject of parliamentary debate, the hundred thousand newcomers among the millions, ready to take fog as their mother's milk here in the East End, where all the noisy, dirty, and stinking industries were exiled from the city" (*SF* 2). With the surge into the East End of Russian immigrants who were escaping an existence made even more precarious and turbulent since the 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II, rents became exorbitant and exploitative. In Whitechapel, the average rent rose

⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford/Cambridge, Mass. 1994.

⁶ Selma Berrol, *East Side/East End: Eastern European Jews in London and New York, 1870-1920*, Westport, CT/London 1994, 26.

by 25.3% between 1880 and 1895, and then by another 25% before the end of the century.⁷

In Nattel's novel the cramped and dilapidated tenement buildings, doss houses, sweatshops, Yiddish theatres, and ragtrade market of Petticoat Lane symbolize the struggles of nineteenth-century Jewish women. Like the city, which is a text, amenable to revision, their lives only appear to be fixed. As a "fallen woman", for instance, Nehama is too embarrassed to enter the Jewish neighbourhood. Once she escapes prostitution, however, she is free to make her life there. After being so badly beaten that she miscarries the baby she was willing to run away for, Nehama wanders unaware into Whitechapel where a woman named Minnie finds the heavily bleeding woman. After taking care of the reluctant Nehama, Minnie suggests placing an unnamed prostitute's death announcement in the newspaper. Minnie's small act of generosity towards a stranger allows for momentous change. Her "death" in the newspaper promises Nehama a rebirth in the Whitechapel Jewish community, into which she will now be able to disappear indefinitely. Minnie, however, has set off a chain reaction of women looking out for one another. Ten years later, Nehama in turn will risk being spotted by the ponces at St. Katharine's dock and save Emilia from abduction. In the meantime, as the daughter of a custom tailor, Nehama has no trouble finding work in one of hundreds of workshops in the East End. Unfortunately, she ends up replacing one form of exploitation for another.

3. The Tailoring Trade

In the London of 1883 (where Nehama has already been living for eight years), 25% of all Jewish males were tailoring, 20% were selling miscellaneous items, 10% were boot-making, 10% were selling tobacco or furs and the rest were involved in carpentry, cabinet-making, or baking.⁸ As the most prevalent Jewish trade, it is unsurprising that Beatrice Potter, in her in-depth study of London's Jews for Charles Booth's series *Life and Labour of the People in London*, led a detailed examination of tailoring. This was the trade of choice in nineteenth-century East London because it survived industrialization as a result of its new ready-to-wear

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Berrol 1994, 117. See also Alan Palmer, *East End: Four Centuries of London Life*, London 2000, 101.

line and its ability to eradicate the need for import (especially its reliance on German fashion products). In 1888, there were 901 tailor shops. 685 of these had less than ten workers, thereby signifying the trend that Jewish tailors tended to prefer to be their own bosses. Unfortunately, it was in these small workshops that the worst conditions were found, in those inhumane working environments known as sweatshops.⁹ Potter describes the path to becoming a sweater:

His living room becomes his workshop, his landlord his security; round the corner he finds a brother Israelite whose trade is to supply pattern garments to take as samples of work to the wholesale house; with a small deposit he secures on the hire system both sewing machine and presser's table. Altogether it is estimated that with £1 in his pocket any man may rise to the dignity of a sweater.¹⁰

Running such a workshop, often enslaving one's own wife and children, was indeed dignified. To toil relentlessly for oneself or one's family was deemed far superior to slaving away for another's profit.

Nehama in *The Singing Fire* provides an example of why tailors and tailoresses working in sweatshops were willing to put up with the brutal conditions; it was often seen as a steppingstone to something better. Although she is an excellent seamstress who learned from her custom tailor father, she earns very little as a plain hand: "The only reason she wasn't a 'best' by now is that women never were" (*SF* 69). Moreover, the oppression played out on her body as a prostitute continues as a seamstress through overwork, exhaustion, and hunger. However, in the tailoring trade, she falls victim to abuses that are shared by the community and are thus rendered easier to bear. The sense of community that is fostered in the East End greatly outweighs the isolation she had once felt working the streets. Although Nehama is powerless to change the system, she feels as though she belongs to a community of Jewish women who will look out for one another. She is also free to love, to celebrate life, to raise a family, and to protect others from making dangerous mistakes. Her small act of heroism in saving Emilia at the

⁹ According to W.J. Fishman, the word "sweat" for "sweatshop" comes not as a reference to the heat of the workshops or the intensity of the work, but to the Anglo-Saxon word "swot" which means "the separation or extraction of labour or toil from others for one's own benefit". W.J. Fishman, *East End 1888: Life in a London Borough among the Laboring Poor*, Philadelphia 1988, 76.

¹⁰ Beatrice Potter, "The Tailoring Trade", in: Charles Booth (ed), *Life and Labour of the People in London*, vol. IV, London/New York 1893, 61.

docks is a sign of her strength. Charity, self-love, and imagination in times of slavery *are* forms of resistance. It is a refusal to be a victim.

4. Holidays, the Marketplace, and Carnival in Jewish London

Jewish London in the nineteenth century was an era where destitution was so extensive that baby selling, child prostitution, child labour, and infanticide were not unknown. In *The Singing Fire*, Lilian Nattel uses Nehama's conversion from a prostitute to a seamstress and the power it gives her to question the role of lower class Jewish women in the East End. It is in these women's spaces that female challenges to patriarchal forces, along with lower class confrontations with those in power, are staged. Bakhtin describes the carnivalesque as the use of motifs, themes, and genres drawn from a tradition of the medieval popular culture of carnival that in literature, art, and everyday life subvert, mutate, and deform standard social mores and hierarchies. In carnival times, mocking those in authority and parodying official ideas was an important outlet for the masses. It was a means of undermining, through parody, the official or monologic. With its masks and monsters, feasts and games, plays and parades, replete with extremes such as bingeing on food and alcohol, carnival was also the grotesque mixing and confrontation of opposites such as high and low, upper and lower class, secular and religious, young and old, male and female. Carnival represents a theory of resistance; it is a symbol for deliverance from domination. It is a chance, as Nattel's description of Guy Fawkes Night intimates, to turn "anger into revelry and sorrows into warmth and light" (*SF* 275). Always posited against the official, carnival is about telling stories from the bottom up, or telling stories that are otherwise ignored.

Holidays are important to the narrative structure of *The Singing Fire*, and they are always celebrated out in the streets in a carnivalesque manner. The story climaxes and ends on an exclusively British holiday, Guy Fawkes Night. The characters also observe a Jewish holiday that insists on turning the world upside-down. Purim is the festival that commemorates Queen Esther's triumph in saving the Jewish people from extermination at the hands of Hamaan, the minister of her husband, the Persian King Ahasuerus. Nattel conveys in *The Singing Fire* how the holiday is celebrated in the East End:

Buyers and sellers pressed close together, with wares spread on the ground in front and stalls behind, one leaning up against the next. The market stretched along Petticoat Lane to the surrounding streets, Goulston and Wentworth, and the smallest passageways like Frying Pan Alley. People thronged among bright awnings and painted tables admiring the jugglers and fingering nearly new coats, looking at masks and pastries, for it was the eve of Purim. (SF 50)

On this day only, Jews are encouraged to drink more than they can handle, to dress up in wild costumes, and to pretend to be everything they are not. An old (discontinued) Purim tradition is burning an effigy of the hanged Hamaan, not unlike the guys that are burned on Guy Fawkes Night. Noisemakers are even used as a means to block out the wicked man's name when the Purim story is read aloud each year. This may be seen as an affirmation of power over one's enemies. Nevertheless, while it is a self-conscious attempt to assert power by burying the enemy's name – suppressing his story – it is, at the same time, an admission of his power and thus a problematization of the function of carnival.

Guy Fawkes Night is a holiday where masks destabilize identity, and where there are surrogates for those in power. However, it is also a festival where the effigy of a condemned man who dared to protest against the government is burned. Consequently, one of the resounding messages is that dissent will not be tolerated. Guy Fawkes – a Catholic rebellion against the Protestant rule of 1605 – was also a man who felt marginalized and demanded his rights. It has to be remembered, however, that Guy Fawkes Night is celebrated for different reasons: Some rejoice in his failed mission and subsequent execution, while others honour his attempted assignation of James I and his ambitious plan to destroy parliament. This holiday is dialogized and allows different statements to be made through the various reactions to it as a national narrative.

With this example of a carnivalesque holiday in mind, it is important to note that there has been some criticism of feminists' use of Bakhtinian theory. The most significant is Karen Hohne's charge that the carnival is only a "quick fix": "Carnival is a controlled period of subversion [...] that happens on limited occasions during the year with the approval of the society that it ostensibly subverts".¹¹ Linda Hutcheon

¹¹ Karen Hohne/Helen Wussow (eds), *A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin*, Minneapolis/London 1994, xii.

points out that parody, intrinsic to carnival, "is as compromised as it is potentially revolutionary; it always acknowledges the power of that which it parodies, even as it challenges it".¹² Because Bakhtin claims that all parts of society are interrelated, those attempting to subvert are never really "outside" the system. Some critics in defence of Bakhtin suggest that the tradition stems from a time when "the people" were clearly separate from official culture.¹³ A dilemma, nonetheless, is created: If "the people" are seen as outside and unrelated to the other social classes, then a binary of high/low class, or peasant/nobleman is achieved. However, Nancy Glazener asks, how can such a bifurcation fit in with a theory of dialogism that is meant to represent society as a reference point for individual identity? If all parts of society are connected, is subversion possible? Moreover, is the lower class being considered a monolithically subversive force lacking its own inherent levels of diversity?

Writers engaging in chronotopic fiction such as Nattel face this problem directly by using imagery to reinforce social connections. In the East End marketplace, many voices representing the many social layers collide. Those who are buying, selling, begging, visiting, passing through, or giving charity would all have a different story to tell of the same spaces. It therefore becomes evident that in fiction they are not understood to be outside of the system, yet that does not mean their protestations are quietly contained. Bakhtin's theory is about renewal and is placed in direct opposition to an "immoveable", "absolute", and "unchangeable" understanding of social relations.¹⁴ Clair Wills elucidates how this works for women's writing. She argues that

designated marginal to the dominant forms of culture, the attempt of many contemporary women writers to introduce the concerns of the private domestic sphere into the public discourse of literature entails a theoretical as well as a representational intervention, as it fuses the private (unofficial) side of women's narrative with the public (official literary) norm.¹⁵

¹² Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, Oxford 1998, 110.

¹³ Nancy Glazener, "Dialogic Subversion: Bakhtin, the Novel and Gertrude Stein", in: Ken Hirschkop/ David Shepherd (eds), *Bakhtin and Culture Theory*, Manchester 1989, 114.

¹⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, transl. by Helene Iswolsky, Cambridge, Mass./London 1968, 83.

¹⁵ Clair Wills, "Upsetting the Public: Carnival, Hysteria, and Women's Texts", in: Hirschkop/Shepherd (eds) 1989, 141.

Change is possible because the contrast between official and unofficial creates a continued dialogue between the self and the other.¹⁶ It must be remembered, however, that any account, even an "unofficial" one, can end up silencing another,¹⁷ thereby creating a reversed absolutism and retaining the system it wishes to undermine. The emphasis, therefore, must be on dialogue that prevents any sort of monologism.

It can thus be concluded that celebrating Purim, Guy Fawkes Night, and other incarnations of carnival is not in vain even if remonstrance comes from within the system; protest still serves its purpose of building a sense of belonging and community by addressing shared woes. Carnival's encouragement of communal dissent is also crucial to overcoming personal difficulties. For instance, the bonfires lit on Guy Fawkes Night, which represent rebirth and purification, parallel Nehama's feeling of inclusion and resurrection into the community that she will achieve following her "death" in the newspaper. To be aware of one's lack of power does not mean one cannot attempt to assert it on a day declared as different. The proffered dialogism thus tenders a realm of contest, accommodation, and negotiation.

5. Ghostly Visitations as Sources of Power

In addition to subversive holiday celebrations and taking care of one another, heroines in Nattel's novel take control of women's spaces through their communion with ghosts. Ghost stories were very fashionable in 1899, as Emilia's husband Jacob, the writer, informs his wife (*SF* 211). Emilia, in her loneliness, however, has communicated with ghosts all her life and knows that they are never as they appear in stories. Emilia is well acquainted with what it is like "lying awake at night with no one but ghosts to advise her" (*SF* 152). Since her childhood, she allows herself to be followed by the ghost of the first Mrs. Rosenberg, her father's first wife, who died of his abuse and neglect. The function of ghosts in *The Singing Fire* is varied, but they are always there to assist the living. All that these ghosts wish for is recognition that their absences are felt and that they may keep on

¹⁶ Lisa Gasbarrone, "'The Locus for the Other': Cixous, Bakhtin, and Women's Writing", in: Karen Hohne/Helen Wussow (eds), *A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin*, Minneapolis/London 1994, 16.

¹⁷ Ibid.

looking after the living. The ghosts, however, are painfully aware that "a cow isn't the same as meat on the table, nor a ghost a human being" (*SF* 298). The most devastating possibility for a ghost is to be forgotten. Consequently, storytelling becomes very important to the characters in *The Singing Fire*, because sharing stories is a means of affirming oneself in the face of the power structures that consider these unofficial women's stories unimportant. Storytelling prompted by ghosts ensures that accounts of women's experience such as a chronicle of the first Mrs. Rosenberg's abuse will no longer be ignored.

Emilia would not have been thought of as odd if others knew of her discourse with ghosts. The Victorian age was a time rife with séances and communion with the dead. Interestingly, it has been argued that in this age also haunted by the "Women Question", Spiritualism was a form of empowerment for women who otherwise had very few options. Women as mediums were given attention or status they were denied elsewhere. With these new roles, they could somewhat transcend the rigid nineteenth-century class and gender norms.¹⁸ Alex Owen goes on to explain in *The Darkened Room* that the power women acquired through their spiritual abilities was actually subversive in an oddly paradoxical manner: Since passivity was necessary to being a powerful medium – one can become host exclusively as an empty vessel –, women had power only through performing female passivity. Women of this era did not have any way to be authoritative other than to perfect the essentialist roles handed out to them. This essentialist view of femininity that both gave influence to women and further entrapped them is, similar to carnival, an example of an alternative system that contained a protesting group in its subversiveness. Nevertheless, it is also demonstrative of how it is possible to make social changes without straying too far from one's role – by taking control of women's spaces. Emilia's affinity for ghosts is a sign of her strength. She will not let herself become like the first or second Mrs. Rosenberg (for her mother is also wasting away), but neither will she quietly let her father get away with murder. Nattel thus demonstrates in *The Singing Fire* that listening to ghosts is another way to disrupt monologism.

¹⁸ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*, London 1989, 4.

6. Adoptions, Family, and Collective Memory

A final example of the means Nattel employs to illustrate the subversion of power structures in her novel is by prioritizing surrogacy over bloodlines. When Lazar, Minnie's husband who fancies himself a talented playwright, begins musing over ideas for the next dreadful play he wishes to write, Nehama demands: "Why should the stepmother be wicked?" (*SF* 111). Her own dear grandmother, after whom she is named, was also a stepmother who was anything but wicked. In fact, she was a stepmother so loving that, as family legend goes, her breasts were able to run milk just at the sight of the starving baby she suddenly inherited. "Why should the stepmother be wicked?" is a telling question, and articulates a powerful leitmotif within the novel: adoption as an end in itself. Identities in *The Singing Fire* become flexible and fluid and are based not on what is physically inherited, but on the narratives that are passed on to those who are adopted. The surrogacy exemplified in *The Singing Fire* through various relationships resists the will to impose a single "universal" reading of history, and insists that there are countless unofficial buried stories that make up the past.

As easily as she sheds her position as daughter when she runs off alone and pregnant to London, Emilia plans to remove herself from the responsibility of motherhood. She refuses to succumb to the pain of giving up a child. Her resolve to survive and to live a good life free of suffering and poverty is much stronger than any potential feelings of loss. As the pregnant Emilia reads English books aloud to Nehama when she works in her husband's sweatshop, Emilia is aligned with Jane Austen's heroines who are clever at making good marriages. After the baby is born and she has fled to another part of town, Emilia momentarily gives in to despair until she realizes: "She was not dying but merely suffering the ordinary fortune of every woman from the day that Eve was pushed out of her garden and realized that she must find a good address" (*SF* 144). Such is the identity Emilia wills for herself. Getting a job in an elegant shop, Emilia gives herself a new name and a new history. When the opportunity presents itself, Emilia decides to marry well, and she sets her sights on Jacob Zalkind. By marrying the man she has hunted, Emilia is choosing a new family for herself, the Zalkinds, in addition to new roles within that family, that of daughter-in-law and wife.

One way in which Emilia's father had always tyrannized her was to continually accuse her of being an illegitimate child. It is only much later that Emilia finds out that, even if she had been the product of an illicit affair (which she was not), Jewish law states "the husband is the father if he lives with the mother in the

same house. And even if he was not living with her, if at any time he has called the child my daughter, or indicated his paternity in any way, such as paying for her education, he has no right to say she isn't his [... and] it's a great sin on the part of the father to lead her to think so" (SF 158-159). Jewish tradition never considers a child "illegitimate" – every Jew is within the Law and must adhere to it – but the *mamzer*, as the product of an adulterous union, may only marry another *unclaimed child*. Learning that she is not a *mamzer* and thus free to marry, Emilia seeks out Mr. Levy, the father of her child, who has mysteriously disappeared. When her former tutor asks how she knows the child is his, Emilia resolves to leave the country to put some distance between her and the man who will not accept responsibility for his actions. She will not have a husband throw similar accusations at the child that were hurled at her by her own father. Having been reassured that through words and deeds she is legitimate, Emilia is not afraid to give up her baby to someone who wants it. She has concluded that there is nothing worse than an unwanted child.

When the baby she leaves behind grows up into the shy daughter of the loving parents Nathan and Nehama, Nehama ponders the platitude: "Like mother, like daughter" (SF 281). The question is, however, whom will Gittel take after? If Gittel is bound to repeat her mother's mistakes, whose will she make: the adoptive or the biological mother's? When Gittel runs off to Dorset Street to earn money as a singer – not realizing its pubs are full of prostitutes – Nehama fears that the innocent child will take after her and make Nehama's mistake all over again. Not wanting Gittel to be as easily deceived as she was, Nehama hopes that Gittel has Emilia's gentility in her blood. By thinking she has doomed Gittel to repeat her own miserable past as a prostitute, Nehama fears she is unworthy to be Gittel's mother. Nehama has always felt this way because she was unable to breastfeed the baby, leading her to believe that if she were a good surrogate mother, she would have been just as able as Grandma Nehama was to be a wet-nurse for an adoptive child.

In an interesting parallel, towards the end of the novel, Emilia's strange behaviour and ready abandonment of her child is explained. Terrified of living a life imprisoned by an abusive husband, she makes the choice her mother never dreamed of making and leaves a child behind for the life she really wants. Emilia feels guilty that because her mother could not bear to abandon her, she did not run off to Paris with the man she truly loved. Emilia learns this truth when she becomes pregnant at sixteen: "She told me about it when I got into trouble because she

wanted me to know that we were alike. They say that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, but a person isn't a piece of fruit. Right?" (SF 304), Emilia asks the ghost of the old woman who has begun to follow her around. Emilia is declaring that just because she is her mother's daughter, she is not condemned to repeat her mother's mistakes. What these analogous stories of mothers and daughters indicate is that each person is responsible for her own fate. The lesson taught to children by those who have raised them does, however, impact their choices. What every mother passes on is a set of narratives. Hopefully, these stories, with their implicit values and mores, will help positively guide the decision-making process. It is when Nehama confesses her own tale of arrival in London, the handing down of her most influential story, that she fulfills the contract of motherhood. Nehama thinks as she stares at her beloved (adopted) child: "A daughter doesn't know that she is always part of her mother" (SF 181). It is her claim "my daughter" that proves their attachment. Words, narratives, and the expression of love are all the attachment one needs as proof of motherhood.

Because this novel asks what makes a woman a real mother, one of the most telling scenes is a reworking of the biblical story of King Solomon and the Two Mothers. With all the wisdom of age and experience, Grandma Nehama announces that she knows the true version of this tale. The traditional story goes that two women gave birth at the same time, but one baby dies. Solomon has to choose between two women both claiming the living child as hers. He threatens to split the child in half to be shared between the mothers, knowing that the "true" mother would rather see the baby live. The grandmother challenges: "*What makes you so sure that it was the woman who bore the living baby that spoke? The other one, she knew what it was to suffer. She held the stillborn child and cried till her eyes were raw. Wouldn't she be the first to say, 'No. Better the baby should live?'*" (SF 227). The most important way that motherhood is redefined in *The Singing Fire* is through the characters' reworking of cultural narratives to fit women's *real* experiences. The most love-filled relationships in the book are between the family members who are chosen, not biologically determined. Nehama is Gittel's only mother, because she is the one who loves her and wants to take care of her. It is Nehama's stories and understanding of the world that are passed down as narratives that are adopted by her daughter and will define who she is.

7. Conclusion

Before the arguments are summarized, it is first important to mention that Lilian Nattel's first novel, *The River Midnight* (1999), is also situated in a Jewish chronotope: the shtetl. It features four female characters each waging her own private battle within her narrow role as a woman in the community. In her brief analysis of *The River Midnight*, Janet Handler Burstein holds that Nattel's characters "neither abandon nor rebel against tradition. Rather, they adapt it to their own needs".¹⁹ In *The Singing Fire*, Nattel's female characters likewise summon their strength in order to exemplify the Talmudic tenet: "Be pliable like a reed, not rigid like a cedar".²⁰ Nattel's resilient female characters of *The Singing Fire* also refrain from rebelling. Rather, they assert themselves in order to make the best out of their lives given circumstances they cannot control. Since they feel they could never compete with official history as it unfolds, they know that at least they can choose whom to love, which stories to tell, and which memories they will cherish. As is expressed in the novel: "Sometimes a person has to make the best of an unpleasant decision" (*SF* 39).

Women's writing is a means for injustices against women to be channelled through literature in order to "upset" social norms".²¹ In *The Singing Fire*, Lilian Nattel, is chronicling *another* nineteenth-century London by relating the struggles of powerless prostitutes, seamstresses, and mothers to eke out a bit of happiness. Their stories, to cite Patrick D. Murphy, illustrate "a concept of [...] *anotherness* rather than *Otherness*".²² By rooting *The Singing Fire* in the dialogism and relativism inherent to the Jewish chronotope, also symbolized by the thriving, vibrant, and ramshackle spaces of the city, Nattel is intimating that meaning and identity are not intrinsic, absolute properties and that power can be challenged. They realize that some things in their environment need to change, but they do not

¹⁹ Burstein 2001, 821.

²⁰ Quoted in Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews: 1933-1945*, New York 1975. In another context: "The commandment to preserve life had generated a strategy of accommodation, a tactic of adaptability, which centuries of powerlessness under oppressors had fashioned into a serviceable tradition. 'Be pliable like reed, not rigid like a cedar,' the Talmud says" (219). Although Dawidowicz refers here to how the Jews as a people could endure so much and survive for so long, the Talmudic adage could also be used to describe how these unhappy Jewish women were able to put up with marginalized roles in their community.

²¹ Wills 1989, 148.

²² Patrick D. Murphy, "Voicing Another Nature", in: Hohne/Wussow (eds) 1994, 63.

plan any revolutionary upheavals. As in carnival, they are aware that any attempt at authority would be "compromised" as a mere concession to that same power being challenged. Consequently, they begin their subversion of oppressive power structures by making small changes that do not force them to deviate from their social roles as lower and middle class Jewish women. Nehama may never become the best-paid seamstress in the sweatshop, but she takes action to prepare for a better future for her daughter, Gittel. Emilia is happy aspiring to be a good wife, yet as someone who communicates with the dead, she thus acts as the bearer of their unofficial stories. Furthermore, both Nehama and Emilia, by immigrating to London, endeavour to write their own futures. They learn in their London lives that their stories are important, and that they must continue to tell them. Remembering and narrating their experiences of women's spaces is how these women attain a measure of power. In these spaces, victims become heroes.

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This collection of essays explores representations and constructions of space and gender in Canadian women's fiction and brings together a variety of theoretical approaches, drawing on works by Nelly Arcan, Margaret Atwood, Dionne Brand, Nicole Brossard, Catherine Bush, Hiromi Goto, Anne Hébert, Marie Lafortune, Marlilú Mallet, Suzette Mayr, Tessa McWatt, Roxane Nadeau, Lilian Nattel, Gail Scott, Elise Turcotte, and Jane Urquhart.

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