Small Dislocations: Narrative Acts Beyond the Home in North American Women's Fiction post 1945

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that the mid-century's enduring domestic symbol of the good life—the quest for wealth, social success and wellbeing represented by the free-standing suburban house—has been one of the most significant factors in determining North America's current unviable model of living. A fine-grained analysis of counternarratives to this model may offer alternative possibilities that are more gender equitable and socially and ecologically sustainable. This project contends that mid-century women authors, including Shirley Jackson, Ann Petry, and Alice Munro, used architectural concepts as literary devices, revealing the home as a site on which Late Capitalist ideologies of gender, consumption, and upward mobility were forged. Exploring how these authors' depictions of unsettled and unsettling domesticity challenges, and also participates in, the good life ideal, this project asks: what new stories—in both the narrative and architectural sense—become available to us if we recalibrate our relationship to the home?

Lacking access to the traditionally male-oriented literary genres of the large-scale journey—the voyage, the picaresque adventure—I argue that postwar women, and here I include both female characters and writers, found narrative possibility within small dislocations from the home: literary depictions of temporarily interrupted domesticity which expose the uncanny or alienating aspects of the domestic sphere. The small dislocation generates different narrative responses; it provides a critical distance from the home, from which the female narrator questions the good life and its scripts, and ultimately, through the telling of the story, creates a new script in which she drives the story. Yet the distance that these small dislocations open also allows for the melancholic pleasure of seeing what one is separated from, producing nostalgia for old scripts. The literary and cultural texts I draw from thus share a grammar of ambivalence—towards change, new forms of mobility and confining, although sometimes re-assuring, social

scripts; yet this uncertainty, I argue, is precisely what fuels these works' generative and imaginative capability, allowing us to recognize the home as a script-in-progress, the malleability of which destabilizes essential notions of domesticity. Bringing together the disciplines of cultural and affect studies, 20th century American domestic architectural history, ecocriticism, and narrative theory, this project offers an intersectional feminist study of the narrative forms emerging from the 20th century search for female mobility within architectural, environmental, and political structures.

Résumé

Ce projet soutient que le symbole domestique durable de la bonne vie, issu du milieu du siècle dernier – la quête de la richesse, de la réussite sociale et du bien-être représentée par la maison de banlieue isolée - a été l'un des facteurs les plus importants dans l'élaboration du modèle de vie actuel non viable de l'Amérique du Nord. Une analyse détaillée des contre-discours opposés à ce modèle peut offrir des possibilités alternatives plus équitables en matière de genre et plus durables sur le plan social et écologique. Ce projet affirme que des auteures du milieu du siècle dernier, notamment Shirley Jackson, Ann Petry et Alice Munro, utilisaient des concepts architecturaux en tant que procédés littéraires, révélant la maison comme un site où les idéologies du capitalisme avancée en matière de genre, de consommation et de mobilité ascendante ont été forgées. En explorant la façon dont les représentations de ces auteurs d'une domesticité troublée et troublante défient, et participent également, à l'idéal de la bonne vie, ce projet pose la question suivante : quels nouveaux espaces – littéraires et architecturaux – nous sont rendus disponibles si nous réajustons ajustons notre relation à la maison?

Puisque les femmes de l'après-guerre n'avait pas accès aux genres littéraires traditionnellement masculins des voyages à grande échelle – l'exploration, l'aventure picaresque – je soutiens que ces femmes, et j'inclus ici les personnages et les écrivains féminins, ont trouvé des possibilités narratives dans les petites dislocations de la maison : des représentations littéraires de la domesticité temporairement interrompue qui exposent les aspects étranges (*unheimlich*, *uncanny*) ou aliénants de la sphère domestique. La petite dislocation génère différentes réponses narratives; elle fournit une distance critique par rapport à la maison, à partir de laquelle la narratrice remet en question la bonne vie et ses modèles, et finalement, à travers le déroulement de l'histoire, crée un nouveau modèle dans lequel elle définit l'histoire. Pourtant, la

distance que ces petites dislocations ouvrent permet aussi le plaisir mélancolique de voir ce dont on est séparé, produisant la nostalgie des anciens scénarios. Les textes littéraires et culturels dont je me sers partagent donc une grammaire de l'ambivalence – à l'égard du changement, des nouvelles formes de mobilité et des scripts sociaux contraignants, bien que parfois rassurants. Pourtant, je soutiens que cette incertitude est précisément ce qui alimente la capacité de génération et d'imagination de ces œuvres, nous permettant de reconnaître la maison comme un scénario en cours, dont la malléabilité déstabilise les notions essentielles de la domesticité. En réunissant diverse disciplines – les études culturelles, les études de l'affect, l'histoire de l'architecture domestique américaine du XXe siècle, la critique écologique et la théorie narrative – ce projet se veut une étude féministe intersectionnelle des formes narratives émergeant de la poursuite de la mobilité féminine au XXe siècle au sein des structures architecturales, environnementales et politiques.

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Alongside my doctoral research, I wrote and published a story collection, *We Have Never Lived on Earth*, with the University of Alberta Press. This book traverses some of the same themes that that I explore in my dissertation, particularly those of female dislocation and transience. I want to thank the University of Alberta Press's acquisitions editor, Michelle Lobkowicz, for discussing with me these themes and their formal expressions and for supporting me with such warmth and enthusiasm on this parallel project.

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Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement.

—Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”

The symptom is there—women are writing, and the air is heavy with expectation: what will they write that is new?

—Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time”

INTRODUCTION

In heavy and mortal houses I feel a violent dismay. It gets harder and harder to feel female in one's life in such houses…Ideally the house lends some security to the body. One returns to the safety and stability of its site to test new affective situations and transformations. But maybe the house has too much symbolic and social value. Maybe it fixes, rather than shelters some of us.

—Lisa Robertson, *The Architectural Uncanny*

Is our housekeeping sacred and honorable? Does it raise and inspire us, or does it cripple us?

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Man the Reformer"

In 1869, the American activist Melusina Fay Peirce proposed an experiment in collective housekeeping in which housewives would unionize and demand of their husbands compensation for their work (Hayden 67). A century prior to Silvia Federici's 1975 treatise, *Wages Against Housework*, Peirce and her successors'—Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jane Addams, and Susan B Anthony—campaigns for socialized housework spearheaded a movement known as "municipal housekeeping," which sought to increase women's political presence by merging the domestic sphere with public life.[1] By ostensibly reconceptualizing the city as an enlarged household, the

[1] The parallels between these two feminist movements are remarkable. Federici's warning that "if our kitchens are outside of capital, our struggle to destroy them will never succeed in causing capital to fall," (*Revolution at Point Zero*) echoes Zona Gale's call for the socialization of housework: "The private kitchen must go the way of the spinning wheel, of which it is the contemporary" (33). For Gale's full article see "Shall the Kitchen in our home go?" *Ladies home journal* 36 (March 1919).

idea was that women could involve themselves in every facet of urban affairs without arousing opposition from those who believed woman's only place was in the home (Flanagan 1048).[2] In bringing the "home into the world" these early feminists believed they would, in one advocate Frances Willard's words, make "the whole world homelike" (Willard quoted in Rothman 67).[3] They understood that as long as the domestic world remained outside of public life and the political economy, politically active women could always be sent back to it, and men could justify their exclusion from public affairs (Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream* 228). They understood that in order for a political program to overcome what Lyn Lofland has called the "thereness" of women, the presence of women in public space had to be established not as a leniency but as a right.[4]

Yet, what would it mean to make the whole world homelike? In a culture in which all subjects are "housed" differently, to borrow Sarah Ahmed's term,[5] and wherein many find the

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[2] Chicago advocate for municipal housekeeping, Jane Addams argued that the household tasks keeping women out of the public realm, also provided knowledge that would make them excellent city leaders. For example, in 1894-1895 Addams organized women to go out and clean the streets themselves when the city was doing little about the problem (Flanagan 1048).

[3] The grand domestic revolution of the early 20th century was to bring autonomy to American women by socializing housework and redefining the domestic sphere.

[4] By the "thereness" of women, sociologist Lyn Lofland refers "to a phenomenon rather similar to that of the portrayal of the servant in the classic British mystery story…. They are continually perceived, but rarely perceivers. They are part of the furniture of the setting through which the plot moves. Essential to the set but largely irrelevant to the action. They are simply, there" ("The 'Thereness' of Women: A selective Review of Urban Sociology" 144-45). Lofland noted that her contemporary researchers tended to treat women as "part of the locale or neighbourhood or area—described like other important aspects of the setting such as income, ecology or demography—but largely irrelevant to the analytic *action*. They may reflect a groups organization and culture, but they never seem to be in the process of creating it. They may be talked about by actors in the scene, but they rarely speak for themselves" (145-146).

[5] In *The Promise of Happiness* Sara Ahmed writes: "What if the world 'houses' some bodies more than others, such that some bodies do not experience the world as resistant? We might rewrite happiness by considering how it feels to be stressed by the very forms of life that enable some bodies to flow into space. Perhaps the experience of not following, of being stressed, of not being extended by the spaces in we which reside, can teach us more about happiness" (12).

path to upward mobility blocked, what would such a project—one seeking to transform the public into a homelike space—entail? Within a patriarchal system, spaces considered homelike to the beneficiaries of patriarchy are often inhospitable to those oppressed by this social model. Or, as Ahmed puts it, killing the "joys" of patriarchy "involves coming up against the world" (*Living a Feminist Life* 19). Creating a space that is hospitable to women and socially marginalized subjects may require a new way to think about the concept of home. Rethinking this concept starts with the questions: Who does the home's hospitality serve and who are the servers? What happens when we unsettle its codes and rules?

It is particularly this last question—what occurs when we unsettle the home's codes and rules—that the postwar generation of women writers would grapple with during the debates about domesticity that pervaded the decades leading up to the second wave feminist movement. Known as the "golden age of capitalism" due to the rapid economic expansion,[6] this was an era wherein the American ideal of the good life and the social success it entailed—the nuclear family, the gendered division of labour, work and leisure practices, and personal aspirations[7]—became ingrained in domestic architecture. Peirce, Gilman, and their cohort of housing reformers could not have predicted that mid-century America would, more so than in previous eras,

[6] The golden age of capitalism spanned from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to the early 1970s, when the Bretton Woods monetary system collapsed. For more information on this subject see: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1996/07/the-forces-making-for-an-economic-collapse/376621/ and https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/tag/golden-age-of-capitalism/

[7] The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the "good life" as "a life marked by a high standard of living" and synonymous with "the American dream." The concept of the good life, defined by cultural theorist Lauren Berlant as the fantasy "of upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and durable intimacy" has expanded throughout the latter half of the 20th century, and with this expansion, so has its horizon of promises, despite evidence that liberal-capitalist societies can no longer be counted on to provide these opportunities (*Cruel Optimism*).

replicate the Victorian cult of domesticity that they so actively tried to dismantle.[8] They could not have foreseen that the model of domesticity that materialized within the expanding postwar suburbs would shape 20th-century North American cultures of car dependency and consumption with catastrophic social and environmental consequences for the 21st century.[9] Indeed, due to dispersed settlement patterns and poor energy planning, the result of ongoing household consumption has meant that more natural resources have been used by U.S. citizens since 1950 than have been consumed by people in all other places and times put together, emitting more air pollution than any other society in world history (Castillo xxiv; Black 127; Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream* 63).[10] This project argues that the mid-century's enduring domestic symbol

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[8] Elaine Tyler May argues that the suburban home of the 1950s reflected and refracted Cold War policies of "containment." In the domestic versions of containment, the "sphere of influence" was the home. Within its walls, potentially dangerous social forces of the new age might be tamed, where they could contribute to the secure and fulfilling life to which postwar women and men aspired. More than merely a metaphor for the Cold War on the home front, containment aptly describes the way in which public policy, personal behaviour, and even political values were focused in the home. (May 14; Wojcik 17).

[9] Before World War II, just 13% of Americans lived in suburbs. By 2010, however, suburbia was home to more than half of the U.S. population (Becky Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese "Suburbanization in the United States after 1945").

[10] In compiling these statistics, researchers have focused on car culture and suburban living and housing design trends. In his study, Brian C. Black focuses primarily on the emergence of automobile dependency in the 1950s. He writes: "between 1945 and 1954, 9 million people moved to suburbs between 1950 and 1976, central city population grew by 10 million, while suburban growth was 85 million. Housing developments and the shopping strip mall culture that accompanied decentralization of the population made the automobile a virtual necessity… as Americans became more and more reliance on moving about via automobiles, it follows that they produced more air pollution than any society and world history" ("Automobiles and environmental impacts" 126-127). Greg Castillo's research centers around housing size and consumption in the US verses other countries. Castillo notes that "recent studies reveal that far more greenhouse gases are generated by ongoing household consumption than by the impact of home construction on energy, water, and land use. As a result, more natural resources have been used by U.S. citizens since 1950 than by anyone else, everywhere else in the world, who ever lived before them. In short, the American formula for citizen enfranchisement and through ever-increasing low-cost mass consumption…is costing us the world" (xxiv). Drawing on David Wann, Thomas Naylor, and John de Graaf's research as well as Fredrich Bergström and Robert Gidehag's study*, EU versus USA*, Castillo writes that "democratic affluence, as symbolized by the mid-century American suburban home, has succumbed to an unsustainable inflation of consumer desire" (xxiv). The architectural historian Dolores Hayden also looks at the inefficiencies of suburban housing design. She writes: "environmentalists and energy planners pointed out that American dream houses and their dispersed settlement pattern used more non-renewable sources than any society had ever consumed before, because builders had assumed that energy would always be cheaper than materials or labour. In 1999, Americans, as about 7% of the world's population, accounted for about a fourth of the world's annual non-renewable resource consumption. A child

of the good life—the free-standing suburban house—has been one of the most significant factors in determining North America's current unsustainable model of living; yet it is not enough just to critique this 1950s symbol as a remnant of the past. [11] We must, in the architect and historian Dolores Hayden's words, "reconstruct the social, economic, and spatial bases of our beliefs about individual happiness, solid family life, and decent neighbourhoods" (77).[12] I suggest that this reconstruction starts with an unsettling of both the model of home and the model of individual happiness, and that narrative offers the tools for this dislocative task. As the fantasy of the good life has been constructed through the techniques of fiction, it can be dislodged through narrative means as well.

The Postwar Crisis of Domesticity

Tell them, in the house, tell them, in the house, tell them that there is danger. Tell them in the house that in the house it is safe….tell them in the house that there is danger…From the sky and

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born to a dream house family in the United States consumes many more resources over its lifetime than a child in a developing nation. Environmental activists showed that the imbalance was partly the result of deliberate but uninformed choices in housing design" (63).

[11]Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne Ehrlich's 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, (the book was authored by both Paul and Anne Ehrlich but was credited solely to Paul) acknowledges an early link between American lifestyles and climate change. Ehrlich wrote, "the greenhouse effect is being enhanced now by the greatly increased level of carbon dioxide ... [this] is being countered by low-level clouds generated by contrails, dust, and other contaminants…. At the moment we cannot predict what the overall climatic results will be of our using the atmosphere as a garbage dump." The book concludes: "In short, when we pollute, we tamper with the energy balance of the Earth. The results in terms of global climate and in terms of local weather could be catastrophic. Do we want to keep it up and find out what will happen? What do we gain by playing 'environmental roulette'?" (50-61). Another critic to make an early link between American housing and environmental crisis was James Marson Fitch. Originally published in 1947, Fitch's revised *American Building: The Environmental Forces That Shape It* broke new ground in the school of thought now known as "green architecture"—the philosophy of designing buildings that require a minimum amount of energy and resources to erect and operate.

[12] As Cynthia Enloe argues, "As feminist environmental researchers and activists already are revealing, the causes of climate change, for example, and not just its effects, can be realistically tracked only if one exposes the workings of ideas about manliness and femininity and the relations between women and men, each fostered by the deliberate uses of political power" (*Bananas, Beaches and Bases* 358).

from the ground and from the sea there is danger; tell them in the house…tell them in the house that they will be saved.

—Shirley Jackson, *The Sundial*

Because of the mid-century's mass subscription to the suburban domestic model, and its attendant symbols of the good life, and because of women's increasing presence in the public sphere during the postwar period, the first part of this dissertation is primarily focused on texts set in and/or published in the years immediately following World War II, known as the long 1950s (1945-1965). Although my analysis extends past the postwar and Cold War era in my last chapter, which engages contemporary literary and media narratives to think about the counternarratives to the ideas of home and the good life, I argue that our current formulation of the good life grew out of postwar discourses about gender and domesticity, what I am calling "the postwar crisis of domesticity," because of the anxieties that arose with the unprecedented social and architectural changes on the domestic front.[13] Defined by its technological advancement and deep social conservatism, this was an era wherein the concepts of private and public were, after a temporary suspension, being strictly reinscribed along gendered lines.[14] Home—pictured as a suburban freestanding house—became synonymous with privacy,

[13] Mary Louise Adams terms this period of American history a "domestic 'revival'" (Adams 18-38) because of its subscription to the Victorian delineations of public and private, but I choose the term domestic crisis to emphasize its material conditions: The postwar domestic crisis started with a housing crisis. As late as 1947, one-third of returning soldiers were still living doubled up with relatives, friends, and strangers. American family life was considered on hold.

[14] Though this project draws mainly on the ideas of pioneering scholars Jane Jacobs and Dolores Hayden, their work has enjoyed a rich legacy. Many feminists architectural scholars and historians have continued to interrogate the relationships between politics, taste, and housing design (Sparke 1995), proposing critical re-readings of late-19th- and early-20th-century concepts of domesticity, and have offered new explorations of the gendered contradictions caused by modern housing as the "proper" place for women (Friedman 1998; Martin and Sparke 2003; Heynen and Baydar 2005; Sugg Ryan 2018). For a more detailed overview of this history see Torsten Lange and Lucia C. Pérez-Moreno's recent special collection, "Architectural Historiography and Fourth Wave Feminism," *Architectural Histories*.

containment, individualism, security, socioeconomic success, in short, American national identity.[15] As Andrea Vesentini points out in *Indoor America*, postwar middleclass Americans did not just flee the city by getting out of it—they did so also by getting *inside*.[16] Yet, even with the postwar era's excessive concerns for containment on the domestic front, concerns intensified with the warming Cold War, we can find within the media and literature of the time a strong distrust of the home as being secure and contained, let alone safe.[17]

Consider the opening to American novelist, women's magazine columnist, and short story writer Shirley Jackson's 1949 collection, *The Lottery and Other Stories*, in which anxieties of containment are reimagined through its opposite extreme: radical exposure. Set in a dark kitchen amidst a party celebrating the end of World War II, the first story begins with a young girl describing to her parents' guest a disquieting vision of the future. "Everything that makes the

[15] This period in America when domesticity was a central preoccupation of the burgeoning middle class. As the media theorist Lynn Spigel writes, "During and after the war, the marriage rate rose to record heights … The baby boom, which began during the war and lasted through 1964, reversed declining birthrates of previous decades, creating a revitalization of the nuclear family as a basic social construct. The resurgence of the family unit was met with a new model for living—the prefabricated suburban tract home, so affordable that young middle class couples, and, at times lower middle class, blue collar workers, could purchase their piece of the American dream.… Popular media also participated in the cultural revitalization of domesticity, taking the white middle-class suburban home as their favored model of family bliss" (*Make Room for TV* 33).

[16] After the war, architect James Marston Fitch made note of the great move into the interior—the suburban house, mall, and car, writing, "to a greater extent than perhaps any other nation, we Americans have become an 'indoor' people" (*American Building: The Historical Forces That Shaped It*. 2nd ed. iii). Andrea Vesentini explores this phenomenon further in *Indoor America: The Interior Landscape of Postwar Suburbia*.

[17] The sense of the home's false security is a central theme in all Shirley Jackson's work. We can see this ambivalence to the home most explicitly her 1958 novel *The Sundial*. Predicting an apocalypse, Aunt Fanny heralds her family and guests with a message from her dead father to stay in the family manor house: "there is danger. Go back to the house. Tell them, in the house, tell them, in the house, tell them that there is danger. Tell them in the house that in the house it is safe….tell them in the house that there is danger…From the sky and from the ground and from the sea there is danger; tell them in the house…tell them in the house that they will be saved." Following an agoraphobic logic, Aunt Fanny's warning suggests that the only safe place to be in the world is in the house as the outside environment, the earth and sea and sky, poses an imminent, atmospheric threat. As it gains momentum, however, Aunt Fanny's incantation begins to blur the line between spaces of danger and spaces of safety: "Tell them in the house that in the house it is safe….tell them in the house that there is danger." In this formulation, the house becomes an unstable signifier, oscillating between a haven and a place of danger. This passage underlines a central anxiety of the atomic age—the failure of insular ideal: a home vulnerable to threat. It also dramatizes the era's crisis of domesticity, demonstrating how, especially for women, the home had become a site of ambivalence.

world like it is now will be gone," Eileen predicts; "We'll have new rules and new ways for living … maybe there'll be a law not to live in houses, so then no one can hide from anyone else" (12). What Eileen forecasts for the new era is a national, perhaps even global, mass unsettling of domestic space: a future in which people must find new ways to dwell and in which neighbours must reconsider their relationships to each other. Though Eileen's formulation may seem extreme, rethinking western conventional domestic structures is, in fact, instrumental to imagining a future where ideologies of gender, family, and success are revised. Eileen's vision raises the following questions: What new ways of living become available to us if we recalibrate our relationship to the home? What new modes of hospitality and more inclusive kinds of shelter might we discover? What new stories—in both the narrative and architectural sense?

These are the questions with which I launch my project. Taking into account the house, as a perceived space of everyday life, a theoretically conceived space of urban planners, [18] and a lived space of the imagination that stands for restrictive power structures (Lefebvre), enforced domesticity, ideologies of marriage and family, as well as notions of belonging and socioeconomic achievement, my project seeks the perspective generated by the most widely available forms of withdrawal from the home.[19] Exploring narratives generated by female experiences in temporary dwellings—borrowed rooms, sublets, overnight train carriages, hotels—I argue that rather than mere settings, these transitory living spaces function as

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[18] Henri Lefebvre argues that a "conceived space is a place for the practices of social and political power; in essence, it is these spaces that are designed to manipulate those who exist within them" (222).

[19] Be it a gothic fortress, a haunted manor, a Harlem tenement, or suburban dreamhouse, the house-as-metaphor remains central to twentieth-century American literature and film as a "tool for analysis of the human soul" (Bachelard xxxvii). Famous 20th century examples of treatments of the house in literature include *Beloved*; "A Rose for Emily;" *We have always lived in the castle; The Haunting of Hill House; The Turn of the Screw; Linden Hills; Housekeeping; House of Leaves; Repulsion; The Others; The Birds; Rosemary's Baby*.
Critics of the house in literature include Gaston Bachelard; Susan Stewart; Virginia Woolf; Andrew Ng; Katherine Shonfield; Barry Curtis; Lorna Sage; Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar; Edward S. Casey, Kate Marshall.

privileged sites for representing important alternatives to dominant discourses about North American domesticity in the mid-century. This project asks: What plots arise for women when domesticity is suspended? How do these plots counter the American postwar era's enduring ideals of domesticity? And what perspective can they offer us from our current vantage point, within the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic, which has reanimated conversations about gendered divisions of labour within the home?[20] This project aims to trace the new and efficacious perspectives on female mobility that an unsettling of the home can produce. I believe that these perspectives can teach us how to "do" domesticity differently, that is, more sustainably and more equitably.[21]

The Small Dislocation

My dissertation takes up the aforementioned queries by examining the ways in which depictions of the unsettled home provide fertile conditions for insurgent narrative production and create a testing ground for new cultural behaviours. Lacking access to the traditionally male-oriented

[20] These conversations and studies grow more conclusive as we accrue more data about the gendered impacts of the pandemic. In the early days of the pandemic, *The Atlantic* journalist Helen Lewis, predicted that "A pandemic magnifies all existing inequalities (even as politicians insist this is not the time to talk about anything other than the immediate crisis)." She suggested that the pandemic would send "many couples back to the 1950s … Across the world, women's independence will be a silent victim of the pandemic." ("The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism"). In their studies of how families are managing responsibilities during COVID, many social scientists have found that couples are falling back into traditional gender roles (Shockley et al). While some families came up with egalitarian childcare strategies, such as alternating days or shifts, in almost 37% of the families, women handled most or all of the childcare. Given the pay gap that leaves women often making less than their male counterparts, in a heterosexual couple it is often the woman who gives up paid employment to take on that caregiving. More information can be accessed here: https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/01/special-workforce-losses

[21] My deliberate use of the verb "do" here alludes to from Giard's "Doing-Cooking." Following Susan Fraiman, I suggest the notion of "doing domesticity" stresses that domesticity isn't a given and can't be taken for granted (24). As Fraiman writes "Someone (probably female) does it. Someone (feminized if not female) produces several meals a day, a place to sleep, a degree of cleanliness and order, and perhaps a touch of beauty… if domesticity is something we do, its variable political implications are a function of what it does—the subsequent effects it has, for better or worse, in a particular instance" (24).

literary genres of the large-scale journey—the odyssey, the quest, the crusade—as well as specific narratives of social mobility associated with American identity—the voyage, picaresque adventure, the western[22]—I argue that women, and here I include both female characters and writers, find narrative possibility within literary depictions of temporarily interrupted domesticity. I call these interruptions or acts of unsettling "small dislocations" in order to emphasize the temporality, spatiality, and scale of the narrative forms that I address.[23] Instead of epic adventures foretelling identity quests of national or even global dimensions, stories of these small dislocations depict brief suspensions of domestic codes. Thus, unlike stories of large dislocation, the stories of small dislocations depict minor ventures, such as visiting a nearby city or a neighbour's apartment, commuting, housesitting, apartment swapping, taking an overnight bus or cross-country train, or going on a family trip or vacation. These small dislocations, I claim, serve to disrupt the historically established gender binary in private verses public space. I read Hélène Cixous' assertion quite literally, that "Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own *movement*" (875 emphasis mine). It is precisely this movement that the small dislocation tracks.

As the works I discuss reveal, the experience of a small dislocation from the suburban model of home generates different narrative responses; it provides a critical distance from the home, from which the female narrator questions the good life and its scripts, and ultimately, through the telling of the story, creates a new script in which she drives the story. Yet the distance that these small dislocations open also allows for the melancholic pleasure of seeing what one is

[22] Definitive examples of the voyage, picaresque adventure and western include Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), and Edward Abbey's *The Brave Cowboy* (1956) respectively.

[23] I primarily examine short stories and narratives taking place over short periods of time, such as a summer, a vacation, or a trip.

separated from, producing nostalgia for old scripts. The dislocation—the jolting experience of being outside or separate—comes at a cost. As Elizabeth Grosz writes of the liminal position of outsiderness or dislocatedness, "Something is lost—the immediate intimacy of an inside position; and something is gained—the ability to critically evaluate that position and to possibly compare it with others" (*Architecture from the Outside* 1). The literary and cultural texts I draw from thus share a grammar of ambivalence—towards dislocation, change, new forms of mobility and confining, if sometimes reassuring, social scripts; yet this uncertainty, I argue, is precisely what fuels these works' generative and imaginative capability.

Small dislocations produce modest plot arcs: a suburban housewife struggles to navigate Manhattan; a woman traveling with her daughter on an overnight train temporarily exchanges her husband for a stranger; a host and guest switch places during a dinner party. Yet, the small-scale narrative situations that arise from these depictions of unsettled domesticity stage alternatives to dominant and traditional views of the home as stable, private, and family oriented. Blurring distinctions between public and private, between interiors and interiorities, and thereby separating the home from its codes and, in the process, defamiliaring these codes, these stories bring attention to the built environment as a "persuasive phenomenon" (Hattenhauer 71), one that communicates like a script, on both connotative and denotative levels. What emerges from this study of unsettled domesticity is a fine-grained attention to the changing nature of women's scripts, a term that refers to both social scripts—a series of thoughts or behaviours that are expected in a particular situation or environment—and to written works in which gender roles are emplotted. Through small dislocations spatial scripts are made *unheimlich*—unhomelike, strange, uncanny. They outline the artificiality of naturalized gendered scripts, announcing what is strange and also estranging about the ordinary.

In this regard small dislocations function as a subgenre of what Sigmund Freud has theorized as the uncanny, in so far as the dislocating effects they produce have the power to unnerve both characters and readers.[24] As Nicolas Royle writes of the uncanny, "Above all, the uncanny is intimately entwined in language, with how we conceive and represent what is happening within ourselves, to ourselves, to the world, when uncanny strangeness is at issue … its happening is always a kind of unhappening. Its 'un-' [as in *un*canny] unsettles time and space, order and sense" (2).[25] Following Royle's explanation of the uncanny, I argue that small dislocations disclose "the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of the home" (2), and allow for this revelation or critical perspective—even when this perspective feels uncomfortable.[26] Expanding on psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan's analysis of how the uncanny places us within a realm where we do not know how to distinguish bad and good, or pleasure from displeasure (*Anxiety*), I tease out the ways in which this space doesn't necessarily have to result in an irreducible anxiety, but can provide generative upheaval of spatial and social scripts.[27]

What is at stake in the unsetting of these scripts? Why challenge them at all? Like Shirley Jackson's Eileen, I believe that our living spaces are directly linked to our ideologies for living

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[24] As Freud has emphasized, the German dialectic term *heimlich,* means both "of the home, familiar" and "that which is concealed;" its opposite, *unheimlich*, can be defined as "unhomey, unfamiliar, untame, uncomfortable" and also "unconcealed, unsecret; what is made known." In psychoanalytic terms, it can provide a surprising and unexpected self-revelation (*The Uncanny* 217-223).

[25] For a thorough investigation into the history of the uncanny as feeling and concept see Nicholas Royle's *The Uncanny*.

[26] As Freud and others have pointed out, fiction is already an uncanny medium; by unsettling the ground of reality and imagination, it "entails the experience of a *suspended* relation" (Royle 15). Small dislocations emphasize this suspension.

[27] In this way I follow Anthony Vidler, whose *The Architectural Uncanny* interprets contemporary buildings and projects in light of the late 20th century's interest in the uncanny as a metaphor for a fundamentally "unhomely" modern condition.

and for attaining the good life, or as the case may be, envisioning a counter-narrative to restrictive or alienating fantasies of the good life. These stories of small dislocations suggest that instead of fleeing domesticity we might strive to remake it on our own terms.

Unsettling the Dream House

The term "good life" entered the American lexicon in 1937, the same year as the term "dirt poor."[28] Formalized in the heart of the Great Depression, these two opposing economic conditions would launch the quest for what has become the most widely accepted symbol of success, the dreamhouse, that is to say, the detached single-family home. Buttressed by postwar optimism, prosperity, and the GI Bill for returning veterans, which included the promise of affordable suburban housing (for some),[29] the American dream underwent a recalibration, changing from its original formulation—equality, justice, and democracy for the nation—to link up with the good life's promise of individual wealth expressed in material acquisitions, namely, the dreamhouse. As Sarah Churchwell explains, the phrase "the American Dream" was repurposed by each generation, until the Cold War, when it became an argument for a consumer capitalist version of democracy: "Our ideas about the 'American Dream' froze in the 1950s," Churchwell notes; "Today, it doesn't occur to anybody that it could mean anything else."[30] Thus,

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[28] Although the American dream has always been about the prospect of success, in the 19th century the phrase signaled the ideals of equality, justice, and democracy, rather than individual wealth. After the Great Depression and through the latter half of the 20th century, the American dream would be reformulated to serve as the 1950s understanding of the good life.

[29] The promise of home ownership was not accessible to all returning veterans. As I touch on my first two chapters, redlining practices formally segregated communities along racial lines, and suburban housing projects like Levittown often forbid Black families from joining the communities, reserving homeownership for White male-headed households.

[30] For more on the history of the concept of the American dream see Churchwell's interview.

in North America from 1945 to the present, the dreamhouse replaced the ideal city and other community structures, including kitchenless apartments and women's apartment hotels, as the spatial representation of American hopes for success (Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream* 55).[31]

Fig 1. General Electric advertisement depicting a U.S. soldier and his wife dreaming of a home. This image encapsulates how, within the postwar era, the promise of the good life was powered by the promise of home ownership and formalized by the textual rendering of the dream home. Image courtesy State Museum of Pennsylvania.

[31] As the architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright has pointed out, the dreamhouse acts as both a model of the status quo American dream, and also proof of its fabrication. My project wrestles with the house-as-symbol's capture and elision of such social issues by looking at what happens when we put pressure on the efficacy of this dream.

Fig 2. This chart expresses the meteoric rise in homeownership since the 1940s in the US. It also depicts how women's access to housing, for the majority, had to be through their husbands. Chart created by Dr. Bill Lindeke using date from IPUMS USA (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series).

As the housewife is part and parcel of the tableau offered by the dreamhouse, her separation from the house threatens to unravel the dream. Women's movement into the workforce en masse during World War II and the decades that followed further falsified the supposed inseparability of women from their home-making nature, [32] and made visible—or at least more visible—the significance of women's uncompensated labour and its necessary role in the sustainability of capitalism. [33] As kitchens, bedrooms, laundry rooms, and nurseries entered the political arena—both conceptually and also physically in the form of model homes at world fairs and exhibitions—the home emerged as a site of political possibility for social emancipation

[32] Nancy Fraser argues that "Marx's account of capitalist production only makes sense when we start to fill in its background conditions of possibility" ("Behind Marx's hidden abode' 60): the "hidden abodes of production" that make exploitation possible include care and affective labour.

[33] This argument first surfaced in Frederic Engels's writings and was taken up more directly in the 1970s discussion of wages for housework. For more on this subject see: Frederic Engels, *The Origin of the Family Private Property and the State*; Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James's *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*; and Sylvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework*.

and control on the agendas of activists and politicians alike.[34] As a result, in the postwar years women's relationship to the home became the source of global contest as world powers fought over how the future should be housed, what that structure should look like—and who would clean it.[35]

Although government policies re-enforced the importance of the contained home, the postwar model of domesticity was antithetical to what the early material feminists meant by a homelike world when they agitated to extend the domestic sphere to include public policy. As noted in the examples of the competing housing structures of the communal Vanport City versus the suburban Levittown in Chapter 1, instead of community centres, socialized housework and state-funded childcare—the latter of which had become available to women briefly during the war years—the single-family suburban home was designed according to the "haven strategy": to provide a retreat for the male worker and a workplace for women's uncompensated labour.[36]

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[34] Kitchens both physically and metaphorically entered the political sphere in President Richard Nixon and Soviet First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev's 1959 kitchen debate, which I further explore in Chapter 1. Furthermore, the Cold War's spotlighting of domestic space as political stratagem introduced a new political interest in the relationship between production (manufacture of goods and services) and social reproduction, the often feminized, unpaid, socially necessary work that is central to the production of life itself (this includes biological reproduction, domestic and emotional work of maintaining households and intimate relationships, and the reproduction of community; Elias and Rai 203). Additionally, increased recognition of the porous nature of the boundaries between the private and public—due to technology, TV, media—and between different forms of labour and leisure afforded to these spheres, forecasted for some a convention-threatening disruption and for others a welcome shift.

[35] Although I mostly discuss domestic work as a limitation to women's writing practices, Ben Highmore has stressed in a piece appreciative of domestic routines from chopping vegetables to bathing children, work in the home is always profoundly ambiguous: involving frustration as well as reverie, oppression as well as artistry, resentment as well as love (quoted in Fraiman 346). In this sense, we might recuperate the term housework and think about the importance of this labour of care and attention as a form of poetics in itself—a poetics of tedium and tenderness, one that makes visible the energy required for this unobserved and unwaged labour powerful enough to change the genre and scope of a narrative form.

[36] In 1953, just 9% of suburban women worked outside the home, compared to 27% nationally. For data on the gendered labour trends within the suburbs verses the city see Otis Dudley Duncan and Albert J Reiss's "Suburbs and Urban Fringe," in *The Suburban Community*; Hugh A. Wilson's "The Family in Suburbia: From Tradition to Pluralism," in *Suburbia Re-examined*; Gwendolyn Wright's *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America;* Clayton Howard's "Building a 'Family Friendly' Metropolis: Sexuality, the State, and Postwar Housing Policy."

By disrupting, if only temporarily, the marriage between woman and the home, and specifically, the uncompensated labour involved in keeping up what the home symbolizes—family, reprieve from the public sphere, the good life—the narratives of small dislocation discussed in this thesis invite us to examine the tensions, adjustments, and maladjustments to women's shifting roles and opportunities. They urge us, moreover, to make critical space for small and non-prestigious forms (such as the short story and the gothic novel, respectively), for marginalized voices, and counternarratives to the good life within the formation of the ever-evolving archive of feminist poetics. Through their generative estrangement, these texts show us that in order to make space for new stories, we readers must allow ourselves to become unhomed—dislocated—by narrative itself.

Theoretical Overview

For me, feminist knowledge is fundamentally about imagining how things could be different, and, importantly for this project, how this imagination is developed affectively and spatially. I began this project by thinking about women's mobility and immobility through the lens of Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism. According to Berlant, optimism is the affective glue that binds together a chaotic world and turns it into a space made livable by hope, even if that hope never materializes. Optimism becomes cruel when the things we desire may be self-destructive or harmful to us; thus, cruel optimism blocks the very thriving that motivates our attachment in the first place. This concept rests on the thesis of the American dream: the hope that hard work—effort, striving, diligence, and doggedness—will be rewarded. The cruelty lies in the failure of this hope. An understanding of cruel optimism is important for analysing why people today continue to ignore the deeply injurious and destructive nature of their attachments

in favour of optimism. In Berlant's words, awareness of optimism's cruelty will help us "track the affective attachment to what we call the good life, which is for so many a bad life that wears out the subject who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it" (27).

While I explore Berlant's concept of cruel optimism at length in my final chapter on bad leisure as a limit case for the good life, this concept is also important for thinking about the ideologies of the dream house, which I analyze in my first three chapters.[37] Berlant argues that "one of optimism's ordinary pleasures is to induce conventionality, the place where appetites find a shape in the predictable comforts of good-life genres that a person or world has seen fit to formulate" (2); thus challenging these genres—which include the dream house, vacation, and nuclear family—may offer an alternative. If the quest for the good life is "cruelly optimistic," then failing to go along with its codes or fit in with its genres might be generative rather than diminishing—for the attempt to comply with the good life codes is, in fact, what gets us down and holds us back.

Refusing the affective work of maintaining accepted good-life genres, what cultural theorist Sara Ahmed calls refusing the happiness "duty" [38] or refusing to follow the "happiness

[37] Chapter 2, in particular, traces the ways in which the cruel promise of the suburban good life (cruel as this life remains materially unavailable to marginalized subjects) fuels the plots of much of the work of the mid-century Black canon. From Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* to Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* and Ann Petry's *The Street*, the quest for the kind of home offered by the American dream becomes a metaphor for the difficulty, and sometimes impossibility, in finding social accommodation as a racialized person in the U.S. Petry is especially interested in exploring the paradox of this dream. As Hillary Holladay writes, in all Petry's stories and novels "the American dream is a time bomb exploding invulnerable hands. Illusions of a better life torment those who realize, with appalling clarity, that their lives are only getting worse" (132). Through an analysis I show how these texts show a critical awareness of the cruelty involved in the fantasy of a life that is symbolically offered and materially withheld.

[38] Ahmed argues that "happiness is not so much what the housewife has but what the housewife does: *her duty is to generate happiness by the very act of embracing this image*" (*The Promise of Happiness* 53; emphasis in the original). Refusing this duty is therefore refusing a form of affective labour.

script" (7), can indeed be alienating.[39] Happiness scripts are Ahmed's idea that certain paths will guarantee us happiness. Some of these scripts include financial success, luxurious vacations, advantageous marriages, well-behaved and successful children, and, most ubiquitously, homeownership. While our society promotes the idea that aspiring for these goals will ensure happiness, even if/when achieved, they often fail to deliver what they promise. As Mari Ruti puts it in her recent analysis of the bad feelings that arise due to the failure of acquiring purchase on the elusive good life, "the proponents of dominant happiness scripts prefer to suppose that those who struggle are the *architects* of their own discontent" rather than recognizing the ways in which society marginalizes and oppresses certain groups and individuals (10, emphasis mine). Ruti's metaphor recalls Ahmed's formulation of how bodies are housed differently; these architectural images, my project argues, are important as they undergird the spatial affordances of these scripts as well as they ways in which our thinking is animated by domestic structures.

By questioning what is actually good about the good life, Ahmed, Berlant, and other feminist, antiracist, and queer critics have shown how happiness is used to justify social oppression, and how challenging oppression causes a disruptive unhappiness. In other words, unhappiness can be politically productive; unhappy subjects, such as the figures of feminist killjoy or the unhappy housewife, are in fact killing the joys of patriarchy.[40] What might seem like killing joy is then actually making room for those who are excluded from its promise.[41]

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[39] In Mari Ruti's words the happiness script "harms, even breaks, those who are most seduced by it while at the same time making them feel terrible about, and responsible for, their damaged lives" (*Penis Envy* xxxiv).

[40] In *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed includes the feminist killjoy, the unhappy queer, the angry Black woman, and the melancholic migrant in her list of political figures of unhappiness. The unhappy housewife is also a killjoy figure. Ahmed's 2014 book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, offers the most sustained analysis of the feminist killjoy figure.

[41] Like Berlant, Ahmed raises critical questions about the moral order imposed by the injunction to be happy or to be optimistic, but, also like Berlant, she does not necessary offer an alternative, other than to resist the happiness duty. Slowing down and questioning is a way of making room.

Failing to perform the happiness script can be frightening and disorienting, especially when there is an absence of alternative scripts. But this estrangement, a small dislocation in itself, allows for the critical distance to experience alternatives to the prescribed narratives of the good life. It is in these small moments of dislocation—made visible by the spatial elements of narrative—that we glimpse an active critique of women's social reproduction and entrapment in our contradiction-filled, alienating, gendered cultural scripts—scripts that get us to act and respond to each other in ways that are limiting and even oppressive. Legitimizing feeling differently opens up a space for thinking, acting, and knowing differently (Åhäll 38). Indeed, this is the task of feminist theory: to allow "women to make connections between their experiences and feelings in order to examine how such feelings were implicated in structural relations of power" (Ahmed 172).

One dysphoric affect that I am particularly interested in tracing in this project is that of envy—as it is part of the psychic fuel on which the fantasy of the good life runs. Here I draw on Sianne Ngai, who mobilizes the aesthetics of ugly feelings, such as envy, irritation, paranoia, to investigate not only ideological and representational dilemmas in literature—with a particular focus on those inflected by gender and race—but also blind spots in contemporary literary and cultural criticism, including academic feminist debates. In my project I look at how envy—and its close sister, dissatisfaction—actively works to keep the fantasy of the good life thrumming. For instance, I look at how envy unsettles domesticity in Shirley Jackson's stories of jealous neighbours and apartment swaps. I examine Ann Petry's portrayal of envy in her gothic depictions of White suburbia and its segregated versions of the good life. I also explore how depictions of bad leisure make visible the ways in which feelings like envy fuel the fantasy of the

good life and also make it unachievable.[42] Specifically, in Chapter 4, I look at how women's bad vacation stories (an example of a spatial dislocation) dislodge preconceived ideals of the good life and explore how these stories enact their grammar of disappointment on a textual—even grammatical—level, as we shall see with Lydia Davis's fiction.[43] I argue that leisure envy and leisure disappointment offer a particularly fruitful exploration of late-capitalist good-life genres and also the failure of their scripts.

Unlike anger, which, in Audre Lorde's words, is "loaded with information and energy" and has the capacity to be a powerful social weapon,[44] envy lacks cultural recognition as a valid mode of publicly recognizing or responding to social disparities, even though, as Ngai points out "it remains the only agonistic emotion defined as having a perceived inequality as its object" (*Ugly Feelings* 128). This invalidation, Ngai notes, likens envy to the 19th-century ideologeme of ressentiment: the "diseased passion," which, as Fredric Jameson has pointed out, enabled the discrediting of genuine political impulses by ascribing them to "private dissatisfactions" or psychological flaws (*The Political Unconscious* 115).[45] Hence, Ngai writes, "once it enters a

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[42] Following the MLA Handbook 9th Edition, I capitalize both the words "Black" and "White" when referring to ethnicity as opposed to colour. As scholars have argued in recent debates, to not name "White" as a race is, in fact, an anti-Black act which frames Whiteness as both neutral and the standard (Apiah; Nguyễn and Pendleton).

[43] As Moya Sarner notes in her *Guardian* article entitled "The age of envy: how to be happy when everyone else's life looks perfect": "We live in the age of envy. Career envy, kitchen envy, children envy, food envy, upper arm envy, holiday envy. You name it, there's an envy for it. Human beings have always felt what Aristotle defined in the fourth century BC as pain at the sight of another's good fortune, stirred by 'those who have what we ought to have' … But with the advent of social media…we [now] live in the age of envy. Career envy, kitchen envy, children envy, food envy, upper arm envy, holiday envy. You name it, there's an envy for it." Importantly for this project, leisure envy has become particularly ubiquitous with social media platforms such as Instagram flooding followers with images of vacations and other good life genres.

[44] In her 1981 keynote address, "The Uses of Anger," Audre Lorde spoke of the need to translate anger—a process by which sensations can become actions to stimulate a movement and strengthen a cause. For Lorde's full speech see: https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1981-audre-lorde-uses-anger-women-responding-racism/

[45] Elsewhere, Jameson has claimed that late capitalist culture's interest in space emerges from what he calls the "waning of affect … of the great high modernist thematics of time and temporality;" Jameson argues that "we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic … our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today

public domain of signification, a person's envy will always seem unjustified, frustrated, and effete—regardless of whether the relation it points to is imaginary or not" (128). What have been interpreted as a private and personal affect, has, in fact, a public mood.[46] By emphasising the spatial and performative qualities of my textual archive of unsettled feelings, my intention is to explore the ways in which these texts act as small dislocations, that is to say, the way in which these texts unsettle the reader, thereby prompting the reader to considering their own participation in cultural scripts and fantasies associated with attaining the good life.

While some affect theorists have argued that "affect is not form," but instead the "*transitions* between states" (Bertelsen and Murphie 138), I follow film theorist Eugenie Brinkema, feminist narratologist Susanne K. Langer, as well as Ahmed, Berlant, and Ngai by seeking to trace the aesthetic forms generated by emotions and vice versa, and suggesting that the affects have forms just as much as they inhere in forms. As Brinkema notes in *The Forms of the Affects* (2014), one symptom of the recent affective turn in Humanities scholarship is the "sin of generality" (xiii), a descriptive vagueness that has the tendency to foreclose some of the most interesting insights that formal attention to affect might reveal. My project works against this charge, and takes up Brinkema's invitation to a radical formalism by thinking specifically about how affects take on concrete narrative forms.[47] Yet, where theorists like Ngai, Ahmed and

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dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism" (*Postmodernism* 16). Following Jameson, I focus on these categories of space in order to think about how they produce political affects.

[46] Here I allude to Ann Cvechovich's work in *Depression: A Public Feeling* and to Lauren Berlant's work on women's public intimacies in *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, which chart the emergence of the U.S. political sphere as an affective space of attachment and identification.

[47] Brinkema proposes a "radical formalism" that allows for "*reading affects as having forms*" (37, emphasis in the original).

Berlant include affect-driven cultural analysis to trace how politically ambiguous feelings or states of impasse diagnose the character of late modernity, I focus on drawing out the spatial forms to better understand how such affects are inscribed into the built environment and narratives about the built environment. Instead of thinking of the public and domestic architecture of late modernity as representative of psychological and affective states, I take seriously the role of spatial metaphor—which I am defining broadly as narrative depictions of domestic and transitionary space—in reconfiguring ideas of literal space. In this way, my project calls for renewed attention to the ways in which affective valences mentioned above (unhappiness, envy, disappointment, false hope in the form of cruel optimism) mark the hard walls of our everyday dwelling places, as well as our everyday narrative structures. Since the postwar era's social and physical domestic structures are directly implicated in our current climate crisis, the concerns of this project are ecological as well as feminist. A response to these issues therefore demands a particular spatial attention to how the ideologies of the good life are implicated in the material practices of homemaking under late capitalism.[48]

To weave together the study of emotions with the study of material histories and narrative forms, I call on a number of social scientists and cultural critics who have sought to make connections between narrative structures and physical structures—and infrastructures—of everyday life and everyday spaces (Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre,

[48] Jameson dates the emergence of late capitalism to the postwar period: "the economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s, after the wartime shortages of consumer goods and spare parts had been made up, and new products and new technologies (not least those of the media) could be pioneered" (*Postmodernism* xx). Following Jameson, I understand "late capitalism" to mean the pervasive condition of our own age, a condition that speaks both to economic and cultural structures. As Jameson writes, "What 'late' generally conveys is ... the sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive" (*Postmodernism* xxi).

Roland Barthes, Georges Perec, and in more recent decades, Rita Felski, Caroline Levine, and Ellen Eve Frank).[49] For instance, Ellen Eve Frank, whose *Literary Architecture* explores in wide, cross-cultural terms the relations between the two disciplines of literary and architecture studies, observes that "a building is not an object (product) only; it is, importantly, an activity" (4). Architecture involves, as writing involves for writers, a variety of practical, economic, and aesthetic concerns along with a continuing scrutiny of the interrelations of those concerns (3). Marilyn R. Chandler takes these considerations further in *Dwelling in the Text*, which traverses the ways in which major American writers have appropriated houses as structural, psychological, metaphysical, and literary metaphors, constructing complex analogies between house and psyche, house and family structure, house and social environment, house and text. Houses, Chandler argues, are "animated agents of fate looming in the foreground, not the background, of human action" (4). The same, I argue, could be said for the spaces of temporary dwelling, which have hitherto enjoyed less analysis than the house. Thus, moving beyond the house, I extend the scope to include transitional spaces of domesticity.

In this way, my project is in direct conversation with film scholar Pamela Robertson Wojcik's work on how narrative depictions of urban living reflected and also challenged mid-century philosophies of urbanism. Wojcik examines the popularity of the "apartment plot," her term for stories in which the apartment functions as a central narrative device, arguing that it presents a philosophy of urbanism related to the theories of Jane Jacobs and Henri Lefebvre which centre on values of community, contact, density, and mobility, offsetting the popular

[49] My project is influenced by Benjamin and De Certeau's philosophy that the "arts of doing" such as walking, talking, reading, dwelling, and cooking afford an element of creative resistance against repressive structures and scripts.

haven model. As Wojcik has suggested, "rather than think of certain genres such as the western, the road film, and the apartment plot as spatially determined, thinking of space as the primary key to genre in general opens up possibilities to rethink genres in spatial terms, not only to define genre according to setting but perhaps to consider how … certain characters are situated within genres (in public or private space, indoors or out, etc.)" (8). Space and place are more than just one lexical choice among many, Wojcik writes, "they are imbricated in signifying structures that are historically determined and that carry tremendous connotative and ideological weight related to issues of sex, gender, class, race, the body, individuality, family, community, nation, work, pleasure, capital, and more" (8). My project builds on this line of thought by looking at plots generated not by location but by female experiences of dislocation.[50] I argue that such plots, which include the apartment swap (Chapter 1), the eviction (Chapter 2), the trip and the affair (Chapter 3), and the bad vacation (Chapter 4), open up a critical arena for negotiating gender, sexuality, race, and class in mid-20th-century America.[51]

In its concern with the small and the quotidian, my project is also closely allied to theories and studies of the everyday. In the tradition of Henri Lefebvre's *The Critique of Everyday Life* (1947) and Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1974), Small Dislocations investigates narrative depictions of the micropolitics of daily domestic life and spaces, and emphasizes the subtle modes of resistance that these stories direct at dominant prescriptions to the good life. I also build on the work of feminist/queer theorists of the everyday

[50] Here I refer to plot expansively, calling on genres chronicling the common quest for the good life—the female *bildungsroman*, for instance, and the marriage plot, wherein a female protagonist relocates from her father's house to her husband's keeping.

[51] In my argument about the organizing possibilities of temporary domestic spaces within narrative, I draw on Ned Schantz's thinking in *Gossip, Letters, Phones: The Scandal of Female Networks in Film and Literature*. In this book, Schantz demonstrates how the telephone works as a structuring device, not merely a prop, and explores the ways in which this communication tool shapes the plot and suggests provocative formal implications.

as Laurie Langbauer, Sara Ahmed, Susan Fraiman, and Rita Felski, who have pointed out the gender limitations of earlier studies of the everyday (especially Lefebvre's work). Specifically, my interest in everyday spaces and infrastructures of transport have led me to de Certeau's study of such systems in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau points out that the public transportation system in Athens is called the "metaphorai"—quite literally transport—to show that text moves from one place to another in an organizational system that also forms the condition of the railway car: "Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories…. Stories, whether everyday or literary, serve us as means of mass transportation, as metaphorai" (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 115).[52] De Certeau also offers a few suggestions for reconciling train movement and reading, noting of the train, "Every being is placed there like a printer's type on a page arranged in military order. This order, an organizational system, the quietude of a certain reason, is the condition of both a railway car's and a text's movement from one place to another" (111). I take up this mode of thinking within my analysis of how women travellers negotiate the regulated, both public and private space of the train and how they, for a time at least, transform it into their own space. As de Certeau notes, such a creation of space results in instability—a tear—in the order of things (117). The result is a production of a "practiced place,"[53] where subjects use opportunities that are presented to them in order to carve a space in which to assert their own power.

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[52] Mark Seltzer takes this connection between fiction and transport a step further, extending it to the marketplace: "News and novels supply a shorter or longer movement between the reader's private space and the world; the market productions of news and novels transport and 'beguile' the reader doubly shuttling between home and market-place. The novel is thus both for commuters and a commuter itself, representing and enacting an exchange between domesticity and the market-place of the world" ("Reading Foucault" 88)

[53] For instance, for de Certeau the city is a "practiced space" because the city is constituted through the practice of someone walking through it, just as a border is constituted by someone crossing it. The street is transformed into a space by walkers (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 117).

In recent years there has been a turn toward understanding the world in relation to both its discursive and material structures, thereby making connections between literature and non-linguistic, non-literary materials.[54] Literary scholars have theorized infrastructure[55] within literature and media, parsing the ways in which the foundations and networks of the built environment—for example air ducts, stairwells, waterways, bridges—expose uneven power structures (Tara McPherson, Kate Marshall, Tung-Hui Hu, Sarah Wasserman, Deb Verhoeven).[56] Significant examples include Caroline Levine's *Forms*, in which she has suggested that fiction can help uncover "the relations between structures such as racial hierarchies and infrastructures such as electrical grids," (15); Kate Marshall's *Corridor*, which looks at how neglected architectural spaces, such as passageways and corridors, act as self-reflexive media in modern American novels;[57] and Sarah Wasserman's *The Death of Things*, which develops portraits of the duality of persistence and disappearance of ephemera in 20th-century American literature, how postwar novelists "tackle the role of the subject against a landscape littered with the detritus of

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[54] Bruno Latour addresses this shift in his influential article, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?: From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern."

[55] I follow Kate Marshall's inclusive definition of infrastructure as "a description and concept has come to signify organization in its physical and abstract senses: it can refer to the bureaucratic structures composing the modern state; Public works such as mass transit systems, roadways, and power and sewage utilities, technical communication media and their networks, and the organization underlying social formations and modern businesses" (83-84).

[56] Critical infrastructure studies have emerged as a framework for linking thought on the complex relations between society and its material structures across fields such as science and technology studies, design, ethnography, media infrastructure studies, feminist theory, critical race and ethnicity studies, postcolonial studies, environmental studies, animal studies, literary studies, the creative arts, and others.

[57] In *Corridor: Media Architectures in American Fiction*, Marshall demonstrates how as "self-conscious forms that both communicate and reflexively produce interiority and sociality," the late naturalist American novels under discussion "indicate their own narrative structures when they query the relays of the hallway" (24). While Americanist literary scholarship and its historical narratives have accounted for modernity and also, to some extent, the emergence of modern communications systems, Marshall's account of the period places infrastructural forms at the intersection between the two.

American material culture" (28). Specifically, Wasserman's concept of "infrastructural racism," which illuminates how "racist social forms are embedded in the built environment … reminding us that historically contingent racism and resistance comingle in the same spaces" (116), has been generative to think through tenement life for women in mid-century Harlem, and the ways in which the good life relies on the labour of women of colour as its infrastructure.[58] Marshall's enormously inventive *Corridor* has also been a touchstone text, guiding me to reconsider the categories of "literature" and "architecture" and to think instead of literature *as* architecture, and even in some cases, architecture as a literary form. Reading literature as media revises what it means to do interdisciplinary work, exploring how the medium of the novel or the short story might self-reflexively interrogate its own status as a specific mode of communication or, in the case of my project, a script.

Bringing together these studies of infrastructure, narrative, and material histories,[59] my project expands upon the aforementioned scholars' work by tracking the structural transformations of post-World War II modernity through a gendered lens: specifically, exploring women writers' treatment of precarious female mobility through spatial and narrative scripts. The spaces I examine include trains (including the specific compartments of the carriage, including the berth, dining car, observation deck), cruise ships, cars, and hotels. These spaces function as "heterotopias," Michel Foucault's term meaning parallel sites that reflect or obscure our world (24); as third spaces, social surroundings separate from the two usual social

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[58] Other examples include Bruce Robbins's "The Smell of Infrastructure" (2007), Michael Rubenstein's *Public Works* (2010), Thomas Heise's *The Gentrification Plot: New York and the Post-industrial Crime Novel* (2021), and Adrienne Brown and Valerie Smith's 2016 volume, *Race and Real Estat*e, which reflects on literary representations of the vexed relationships between black subjects and the property they own, or are prohibited from owning. These scholars generally use the term "infrastructure" to denote "hard infrastructure," the physical networks necessary for the functioning of modern industry, such as roads, railways, and bridges.

[59] See Stacey Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman's "Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory."

environments of home ("first place") and the workplace ("second place") (Edward Soja, Ray Oldenburg, Robert Putnam); and occasionally as what Marc Augé refers to as "non-places," spaces of transience, including motorways, hotel rooms, airports and shopping malls, where human beings remain anonymous (122). My interest is in how these spaces house bodies differently, depending upon gender, race, and class. For instance, what may be experienced as anonymity for some, might mean hypervisibility or contact for others. I show how a gendered analysis of such spaces can reveal new insights into how these spaces reorganize the boundaries of private and public.

So far, like de Certeau, Marshall, and many of other theorists cited above, I have been aligning narrative with the architecture and infrastructure of the built environment. Some architectural scholars, however, take issue with the conflation of fiction and architecture. For instance, in *The Architecture of Thought*, Andrzej Piotrowski argues that architecture serves as a venue for a much broader spectrum of exchanges than verbal communication; material forms, he suggests, "have focused attention on and implied attitudes toward important issues of cultural identity and power relationships before verbal discourses could circumscribe them.… Spatial and visual constructs played a key role in these processes" (xii). Though I respect this distinction between verbal and spatial communication, my project demonstrates how the formal qualities of narrative—story structure, modes of focalization, syntax—share key qualities with the aforementioned modes of spatial communication. Like built structures, these formal qualities of narrative structure are also instrumental in revealing implied attitudes toward important issues of cultural identity and power relationships and testing out new patterns of thinking; they do not always articulate the writer/architect's intent, and often operate on culturally subconscious levels. As such, I call for an interdisciplinary approach that brings to narrative studies more

spatial attention to methods of analysis and interpretation. In other words, I argue for a reading of the spatial qualities of narrative that moves beyond metaphor to attend to the sensory and material affordances of the text.

Methodology

Following Mikhail Bahktin, Louis Marin, Marjorie Levinson, and others, I believe formal analysis is symbiotic with contextualist and materialist critique.[60] My approach recalls what Marin names the "inseparable duality of method and object" that makes language a formal and formalizable object, part of its historical production (*On Representation* 5). As such, I read holistically for form and historic impact. Furthermore, to explore how postwar ephemera have shaped our narrative and social scripts, alongside my primary literary sources, I analyse a wide range of cultural artifacts, including advertising brochures, rent party invitations, book cover art, magazines, architectural blueprints, found objects, newspaper clippings, and historical maps.[61] As Susan Stewart shows us in *On Longing*, certain objects can give meaning or shape to a subject and the narration of these objects—or the stories surrounding them—can give form or shape to literary expression. Thus, I integrate close readings of these artifacts alongside my primary literary texts. Since I use cultural and biographical analysis of the authors and their historical contexts, I consult author biographies and archives, including Ruth Franklin's phenomenal biography of Shirley Jackson, *A Rather Haunted Life*, Elizabeth Petry's *At Home*

[60] Bakhtin argues that everyday forms represent "a set of social beliefs, the image of a social ideologeme that has fused with its own discourse, with its own language…In the novel formal markers of language, manners and styles are symbols for sets of social behaviors" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 375). Levinson points to a desire across multiple formalist approaches to reclaim a lost attention "to the processes and structures of mediation" that constitute the relationship of literary discourses to that which they represent. ("What Is New Formalism?" 560.)

[61] The images included in this dissertation fall under the fair use/fair dealing doctrine for research.

Inside: A Daughter's Tribute to Ann Petry, and Sheila Munro's *Lives of Mothers & Daughters: Growing Up with Alice Munro*. I had the privilege to consult with Alice Munro's biographer, Robert Thacker, whose encyclopedia knowledge of Munro's life and work, along with his personal relationship with the author, was an incredibly valuable resource in the writing of my third chapter.

While the documents I use here—women's magazines, advertisements, diaries, television shows, literary texts, journalistic accounts—do not reproduce their society on a one-to-one ratio, they form an intertextual network, that is, a set of related texts, which reveal how people directly and indirectly encounter statements and images of their social world. These statements and images, in Spigel's words "form a horizon of expectations about that world" (15): a horizon of expectations I understand, in this project, as the promise of the good life. While much scholarship has focused on the homogeneity of the postwar cultural period, I am more interested in understanding counter-narratives, contradictions, and alterity within the depictions of the good life. However, my focus on these particularities does not mean a neglect of the general. On the contrary, my intertextual network of primary sources allows me to explore the particular and the general in ways that invite a revaluation of both.

Given this study's investment in accessibility (to spaces, publics, ideas), I have tried throughout this study to use clear language, to breakdown theoretical ideas into approachable terms, and to narrativize my research in a way that is hospitable to a curious reader. Occasionally, I include personal anecdotes and memoir passages within my critical analysis when I believe such an inclusion enlivens or offers productive counterpoints to my primary literary analysis.

The questions the project poses are directed at understanding unrecorded histories, histories of women, people of colour, non-nuclear or heterosexual families, whose stories and actions do not end up in conventional archival records. Following Hartman, Spigel, Fraiman, and others, I argue that instead of being merely a receptacle for cultural consumption, the domestic sphere has been an important site for cultural production (Spigel 8). My project thus demonstrates how scholars must engage fully with diverse sources, with established archives along with unofficial, under-recorded archives. Because of this, my project aims to be more generative than prescriptive. The writing and thinking processes of this project has been about the journey, not exclusively about the conclusion. It is about trains (of thought), not simply stations.

This sense of mobility has influenced how I have built my textual archive as well. Though overall I do structure my chapters in chronological order, my methodology is partly informed by Richard McGuire's narrative technique of temporal interplay, exemplified in his graphic novel *Here*. Instead of relying on plot, McGuire uses "rhyming events"—visual and textual echoes, juxtapositions, and synchronicities—to guide the mood and texture of his narrative.[62] On a smaller scale, I engage a structure of rhyming, and sometimes disharmonious, events for the purpose of thinking about the changing feminist landscape of the long 20th century. For this I build upon Prudence Chamberlain's notion of feminist timekeeping, which emphasizes how "the present of feminism is irrevocably tied to the past that constitutes it, the future that sustains it, and this sense of hopefulness for its own demise" (460)—that is, the hope that one

[62] Philip Smith and Stefanie Sobelle analyze how by positioning individual narratives in proximity to one another, McGuire dramatizes the tension between historical and culturally embedded narrative frames, and demonstrates the mutability of landscape over time. I borrow this methodology for my own work in order to make visible these historical and cultural tensions.

day gender equality will be attained, and the world will no longer need the agitations of feminism. Yet, Chamberlain continues, the ties that connect past and present cannot be grasped through causality, but rather through the "affective charge of investment," so that "feminism creates a haptic temporality, with past, present and future all touching upon one another" (460).[63] I see my adaptation of this feminist methodology as part of my research contribution as well.

Chapter Overview

Through close readings of Jackson's short stories of uneasy and unsettled hospitality, Chapter 1, "The Apartment Swap: Shirley Jackson's Unsettling Hospitality" explores shifting ideologies of domesticity and women's relationship to the home in the postwar period in Jackson's first story collection, *The Lottery and Other Stories*.[64] Identifying a pattern of unstable occupancy throughout the collection, I argue that Jackson's investment in what I am calling "apartment swaps"—stories wherein occupants exchange apartment units, sublets, and even imaginary shelters—can be understood as a study of how the postwar dislocations, upheavals, and ideological scissions challenged how we inhabit physical and psychic spaces. Jackson's permeable apartments, I argue, shed light on how the mid-century's anxieties of futurity

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[63] For example, engaging this sense of haptic temporality, I bring into conversation Amy Richter's research on 19th-century women's participation in domesticating the public sphere through train travel, social reformers Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Alice Constance Austin's early-20th-century blueprints for a feminist city with socialized housework, and bell hook's critique of travel as a symbol of White female mobility to look at how Alice Munro's stories critique the good life script through portrayals of the uncanny domesticity of the train.

[64] As Jackson's biographer, Ruth Franklin writes, Jackson's brand of literary suspense is "part of a vibrant and distinguished tradition that can be traced back to the American gothic work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Henry James. Her unique contribution to the genre is her primary focus on women's lives two decades before the women's movement ignited, Jackson's early stories were already exploring the unmarried woman's desperate isolation in a society where a husband was essential for social acceptance. As her career progressed in her personal life became more troubled, her work began to investigate more deeply the kinds of psychic damage to which women are especially prone" (3). It can be no accident then that the house and the home—traditionally the women's domain—play critical roles in her work, sometimes functioning as a protagonist and sometimes as an antagonist in her narratives. As Franklin notes, in Jackson's epic horror novel, *The Haunting of Hill House,* the word poignantly repeated, "mantra-like, by whatever is haunting Hill House is 'home'" (5).

oscillated between a fear of perviousness and a fear of preservation. Both states pose threats to Jackson's (mostly female) characters, who navigate fears of exposure—social embarrassment, homelessness, being lost—and fear of suffocation within rigidly preserved social structures. Though her apartment swap stories generate strange and often fractious intimacies between neighbours, hosts and guests, these intimacies, in turn, create new plots that unsettle conventional social scripts. Jackson's stories offer a critique of how the quest for the good life, materialized in the search for shelter, extended an invitation to newcomers and marginalized subjects, such as women and people of colour, while simultaneously withholding welcome. The temporal dislocations that we see in Jackson's hospitality plots, I argue, reflect mid-century America's struggle over what the future of the home should look like.[65] Written between Vanport's collapse and Levittown's rise, Jackson's stories unsettle the conventional notions of home and offer a glimpse of living otherwise: in a female-headed house, in a racially integrated family, in a porous, communal environment.

Calling into question the emphasis on stories of upward mobility as representative of American identity, Chapter 2 focuses on what Tim Creswell has called the "often untold … tales of marginality and exclusion, which cast a different light on the grand narratives of nationhood, of progress, of democracy, and of modernity" (20).[66] Following a story of female itineracy, "Small Revolutions: The Search for a Homehouse in Ann Petry's Harlem" moves uptown to the redlined districts of 1940s Harlem. Through an analysis of the forced dislocation and temporary dwelling spaces in *The Street*, I consider how Ann Petry's treatment of spatial metaphors and

[65] By "hospitality plots," I refer to narratives about the (at times uneasy) reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.

[66] In *The Tramp in America*, Tim Cresswell argues that "the story of mobility in American needs to include less central stories, often untold: tales of marginality and exclusion, which cast a different light on the grand narratives of nationhood, of progress, of democracy, and of modernity" (20)

spatial plots reconfigure ideas of literal space. Here, suspended domesticity takes the form of precarious living situations, short-term leases, often culminating in permanent itinerancy. Examining Petry's use of dislocation within her narrative techniques—chiefly narrative time, unique methods of focalization and narrative structure, and infrastructural metaphors—I argue her work participates in a broader cultural history of imagining the urban in North America as it registers a particular moment when the debate about material, social, and political accommodation for Black citizens was undergoing a seminal change. I analyze how Petry's self-reflexive narrative techniques, which position the reader as both outside and inside the text, demand new and critical modes of attention to the ways in which the good life relies on women of colour for its infrastructural underpinnings. I also show how Petry's use of lateral situation-based plots allow for a more structural understanding of the intersectional experiences of female dislocation and women's revolutionary potential within and beyond the domestic sphere.

My third chapter, "The Living Road: Alice Munro's Women in Transit," examines the Canadian writer Alice Munro's 1960s stories of nascent or frustrated female artist figures to think about how the search for creative space and community shaped her narrative structures and storytelling techniques. Although Munro's fiction does acknowledge the restrictive social scripts women were, and are still, obliged to perform, her stories are more interested in how such scripts are formed and how they are altered, internally, intimately, and publicly. Munro's stories of domestic suspension and artistic pursuit, I argue, use the trope of the trip and the affair—the temporary escape from the conventions of the neighbourhood, office parties, and marriage—to speak directly to the conditions of narrative production, both the production of social scripts and of storytelling. In doing so they address the embarrassment and guilt the narrators feel around their sense of intellectual and creative ambition and the way in which they navigate the

ambivalent public intimacies facilitated by the temporary dislocation from the home and the marriage. This chapter thus examines how Munro's train travel journeys enter into a counter-site or parallel world and set up the female traveller with the possibility of a newfound personal privacy and sexual autonomy away from the domestic sphere. Casting the domestic in an uncanny light, these counter-sites initiate new social and narrative opportunities, and the fleeting encounters with strangers aboard the train—represented as artistic and erotic acts that challenge patriarchal scripts—prove critical in separating the writer/narrator from her role as caretaker and preserver of traditional social contracts. These transit stories also change the spatiality of the story structure. In this reshuffling of narrative space and story trajectory, the marriage plot and the domestic good life fantasy are temporarily suspended to make room for alternative stories and creative modes of being in the world.

Building on the themes invoked in Jackson, Petry, and Munro's narratives of unstable occupancy and female travel, the final chapter investigates another counternarrative to the good life. In this chapter I look at dislocations from the home in the form of depictions of bad leisure, what I term the "bad-vacation narrative"—stories about women's disappointing and disastrous vacations. These stories take place in hotels, vacation rentals, resorts, on family trips. I trace how in the 1970s and 1980s the good life fantasy becomes associated, not only with the acquisition of wealth, but the acquisition of experience, and particularly the experience of leisure and wellbeing.[67] The bad vacation story, I argue, is a small dislocation that reimagines the good life and its iconography as sites of ambivalence. Moving beyond the long 1950s to the present day, I gather cross media and genre representations of bad vacation stories, from short stories to television. This archive includes Lydia Davis's postcard fiction, contemporary American writers

[67] For instance, the 1970s sitcom *The Good Life* (1975-1978), follows Tom Good who leaves the so-called rat race to begin a life of simplicity and self-sufficiency, converting his family's suburban house into a farm.

Jhumpa Lahiri, Emma Cline, and Lorrie Moore's short stories based on bad vacations (Moore's "Paper Losses" follows a divorced couple on an all-inclusive island vacation, while Cline and Lahiri's stories are told from the perspective of hospitality workers, watching their guests' fantasies of the good life play out). I also include in this archive the HBO series, *The White Lotus* (Mike White), a six-episode story about a resort vacation gone wrong. Though an analysis of this good-life subgenre, I determine how the bad vacation story dislodges old scripts and provokes, in the narrators, a self-conscious choice to counter the good life fantasy by questioning its value and habitability.

In sum, each chapter explores the small dislocation in different but intersecting ways. In Chapter 1, Jackson's apartment swaps unsettle the ideal of the conventional symbol of the dream house and reveal alternatives to the good life script that has been so indelibly inscribed within the mid-century's domestic architecture. In Chapter 2, the most significant experience of dislocation takes place on a readerly level. Chapter 3 formalizes the small dislocation within the travel story, and Chapter 4 theorizes stories of bad leisure as small dislocations that alienate the late capitalist good life genre of the vacation and critique the fantasy it offers. Thus, I demonstrate how narrative expressions of small dislocations challenge the architecture of the good life by unsettling the characters and ultimately the reader, by opening up new perspectives, and by offering alternatives to its frequently elusive, and therefore deleterious, promise of happiness.

As a concluding note, I evaluate my dissertation's original contributions and describe how they have led to my future research, to be undertaken as a postdoctoral fellow at Concordia University's Milieux Institute for Arts and Technology. Part of this research includes a collaborative project entitled *Shelter in Text*, which probes the relationship between literature and shelter–interpreted as a noun or verb, as material or metaphor, from the micro (domestic) to

the macro (planetary).[68] Against the horizon of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also looking beyond it, I propose to examine the now familiar idea of "shelter in place" by investigating the relationship between shelter and narrative within our current moment. Building off the ideas presented in this dissertation, I propose that the practice of shelter-making through narrative can teach us to relate to our environment in ways that enable a more sustainable future.

As this introduction previews, the following project explores representations of idealistic and unsettling models of home and hospitality that arise in the postwar and Cold War years, and trace, from mid-century to our present the ways in which the fantasy of the good life fails as a sustainable script. My research into the relationship between narrative, shelter, and dysphoric feeling may at first appear to include a modest floorplan: my study is limited to the postwar and Cold War period, to a North American geographic, and a selection of (until recently) largely overlooked women authors. However, what 20th-century critics have called "domestic fiction" in the case of Alice Munro, dismissed as derivative of male writers, in the case of Ann Petry,[69] or classified as popular gothic horror and therefore outside the highbrow literary canon, for Shirley Jackson, can reveal fresh insights into the domestic scripts that have formed our perception of the good life and its architecture. As I hope to demonstrate, these writers' depictions of altered or suspended domesticity navigate the mid-century's concerns and ambitions about the habitability of the future—a central agitation due to the threat of nuclear annihilation, and the promise of swiftly changing private and public spheres, women's entry into the workplace, New Urbanism, and the social justice movements of the sixties and seventies. Now, on the threshold of the climate crisis, with rising inaccessibility to housing and hospitable environments, enduring the

[68] *Shelter in Text* will be a collection of essays that I am editing with my colleague, Dr. Myra Bloom, and is slated to come out with *The University of Alberta Press*.

[69] See Keith Clark's *The Radical Fiction of Ann Petry* on this topic.

rhythms and inequalities of the global health crisis, and saddled with the threat of future droughts, floods and pandemics, we face new considerations about our future habitation, asking what life—never mind the good life—will look like from here on out.

CHAPTER 1: The Apartment Swap: Shirley Jackson's Unsettling Hospitality

The dream house is a uniquely American form. For the first time in history, a civilization has created a utopian ideal based on the house rather than the city or the nation. For hundreds of years when individuals thought about putting an end to social problems, they design model towns to express these desires, not model homes. The ideal of a good town was once more important to American life than the ideal of a good house. To analyze how Americans gave up the model town in favor of the individual dream house is to understand the fears, hopes, and miscalculations that have generated the current housing crisis.

—Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream*

The history of American houses shows how Americans have tried to embody social issues in domestic architecture, and how they have tried, at the same time, to use this imagery to escape a social reality that is always more complex and diverse than the symbols constructed to capture it.

—Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*

You say it very well, better than I will say it: we are condemned to live together.

—Albert Camus, *Algerian Chronicles*

America's Travelling Kitchens

In the 1950s, the American home was on the move—quite literally. In 1959, the Typical American Model home, equipped with the General Electric kitchen and a live model housewife to animate its appliances, traveled to Moscow for the American National Exhibition to showcase

to the enemy the superiority of America's technology and social system.[70] "U.S. Typical Home Enters Cold War" announced the Washington Post, establishing the centrality of domestic space and its primary occupant, the housewife, as a sparring ground for the world's most powerful men, Nikita Khrushchev and then Vice President Richard Nixon, to vie for control over the world's future. Specifically, these men were in search of narrative control over what the future's living arrangements, and in extension, its political configurations, would look like. In what became known as the "Kitchen Debate," a discussion between the two leaders about dishwashers swiftly led to a debate about the status and roles of women within the two cultures. Gesturing to the dishwasher, Richard Nixon claimed that in America "What we want to do, is make life more easy for our housewives," to which Khrushchev responded: "Your capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under Communism," for under Soviet tradition, rather than working for the household, women worked alongside men. But Khrushchev's argument for labour egalitarian could not compete with the technological wonders that the American exhibition would simulate for their audience.[71]

The projection of the American good life on the American model kitchen relied on a temporal dislocation—a future already tightly preserved within the ideology of the past. This

[70] The American National Exhibition (July 25 to Sept. 4, 1959) was an exhibition of American art, fashion, cars, capitalism, model homes and futuristic kitchens that attracted 3 million visitors to its Sokolniki Park, Moscow venue during its six-week run.

[71] Many were mesmerized by the travelling American kitchens, but some were critical too. A number of Soviet citizens contended that America's Kitchen of the Future was not only irrational but also antisocial. In a letter to the newspaper *Izvestia,* the novelist Marie Shaginian criticized the RCA kitchen for being over-scaled and over-mechanized, and enslaving the housewife rather than liberating her. In the exhibition's visitor book, an engineer wrote: In the "miracle kitchen" a woman is just as free as a bird in a cage. The "miracle kitchen" shown at the exhibition demonstrates America's latest work in the field of perfecting obsolete forms of everyday living which stultify women. Another visitor added, "Is it possible to consider kitchens and cosmetics a cult . . . ?" (Quoted in Castillo 167).

domestic model revives the 19th century ideal of the private sphere, leading to what Lefebvre calls the emergent 1950s "reprivatisation" of everyday (*Critique of Everyday Life* 88ff). Removed from "real knowledge, real power and real participation" the private sphere therefore does not provide a shelter from the public sphere but its deprivation (Lefebvre 90). For Lefebvre, as for Betty Freidan, the housewife thus exists in a condition of privation, what Lefebvre names the "general alienation which determines and damages 'the feminine condition'" (211). Indeed, the juxtaposition of the model housewife, a neo-Victorian angel in the house, beside the kitchen's new technology creates an alienating vision of mid-century domesticity. At the same time, the unsettling image produced by its anachronisms actually points to the way in which the private sphere participates within "real knowledge, real power" even if that knowledge and power is not always available to its occupants.

While holding up the domestic ideal, America's traveling kitchens transformed the exhibition of domesticity into a performance, and exposed the ways in which nostalgia and futurism are sides of the same coin. This tension between nostalgia and futurism was especially alive in the Whirlpool Miracle Kitchen of Tomorrow, another wonder of the American Exhibition, which showcased a quality of domestic life beyond what the Soviets could imagine, partly because it was based on a fiction. In the Miracle Kitchen, meals could be prepared with an actual wave of the hand, tables could heat plates of food, and lighting could anticipate the family's moods.[72] A push-button control panel in the centre of the kitchen allowed the housewife, as a mechanized extension of the kitchen, to control appliances, prepare the meals, monitor her children and summon a robotic "mechanical maid" to mop and polish the floors of

[72] The lighting would change from cool tones on sunny days to warm tones on cloudy days for the housewife's supposed "psychological benefit."

the dream house (Castillo 109).[73] Some of the miraculous domestic tools were functioning prototypes, but many were mere dummies that were made to appear as if they functioned. For instance, the robot vacuum was radio controlled by a man hidden behind a two-way mirror while a team of model housewives demonstrated all of the appliances as if they actually worked, thus maintaining the fantasy of domestic ease and American technological advancement. The exhibition, featured at world fairs throughout the postwar era was supposed to be a showcase for how Americans were living and prospering, but, like the blueprints for Levittown's suburbs, it was fundamentally about selling an image of the American good life. The image the model home projected was largely a fantasy though, even in a material sense: its furnishings had not yet, and would never, actually materialize on the market.[74]

As the Kitchen Debate demonstrates, the power of spatial narratives had become increasingly instrumental in postwar America, wherein the home had come to signify successful consumption practices, the growing promise of the good life, and increasingly, a techno-utopic future. The housewife was the custodian of this future, and the spaces she occupied—homes, kitchens, suburban lawns, department stores—became especially influential for their narrative possibilities. Their script was intended to be one of insularity, privacy, and freedom brought about by technological advancement; like the miracle kitchen, their script was one of abundance,

[73] The Miracle Kitchen correlates with the 1960 twilight episode "The Lateness of the Hour" in which domestic robots become interchangeable with family members. This shows the fascination and also anxiety involved with these new intelligent household appliances.

[74] In the United States, the Miracle Kitchen was sold as just around the corner, but at the Moscow exhibition, it was presented as the American kitchen of today. The closest we may get to the futuristic homes of the 1950s is Bill Gate's Seattle "sentient" mansion, which, built in the 1990s mimics the exhibitions on display at mid-century world fairs by revealing a mix of baby boomer domesticity and unparallel futuristic technology, while the architecture and building materials express a nostalgia for the "natural" and the premodern home. For more on the behind-the-scenes history of the Miracle kitchen see Matt Novak's article, "The 1950s 'Miracle Kitchen' Of The Future Had Its Own Roomba." Also see Sarah Archer on the history of the 20th century American kitchen: https://www.sarah-archer.com/writing/2021/1/8/in-the-midcentury-american-home-radical-design-began-in-the-kitchen

perfectionism and conformity in the pursuit of utopic living. Yet, spaces, and their inhabitants, sometimes told a different story—one often clearest from a dislocated perspective.

Even the American typical home itself, intended to reflect life made "more easy" for women, exposed the ways in which their social reality, in Gwendolyn Wright's words, "is always more complex and diverse than the symbols constructed to capture it" (xix). Removed from the private sphere, occupied with actors and stage props (the dummy appliances and gadgets), and made uncanny by its blatant anachronisms, America's traveling kitchens make legible the ways in which domesticity had become a national performance. The temporal and spatial dislocation identified home for what it is: a narrative act, a script-in-progress, the malleability of which destabilizes essential notions of home and of woman as homemaker, even as it promotes this essentialized fantasy.

Fig.3 In the first image, model housewife Ann Anderson sits at the command centre of the RCA Whirlpool Miracle Kitchen during a demonstration at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow. In the second she demonstrates how to use the vacuuming robot, a dummy prototype, which was in fact radio controlled by a man hidden behind a two-way mirror. Photography by Robert S Lerner Photography LLC.

Fig.4. Khrushchev and Nixon discussing the common American household via translator (1959). Howard Sochurek/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images.

In order to take a closer look at the home as a script-in-progress I turn to Shirley Jackson's stories about the women for whom these futuristic kitchens and model homes were intended: mid-century housewives, war brides, mothers, and career women. A "faculty wife," mother, homemaker, and also her household's primary breadwinner, Shirley Jackson was particularly interested in writing plots that questioned domesticity, shelter, and hospitality. The stories in her first collection, *The Lottery*, center largely on apartment living, disturbed hospitality, and disputes between neighbours on the domestic home front. They engage postwar pathologies and growing pains largely through their domestic setting, which, as I will show, is also the key plot device. Jackson's narrative situations showcase neighbourly behavior or rather

misbehavior.[75] Written during the war and its immediate aftermath, these stories grapple with what Jackson calls the "unbearable intimacies" produced by urban living, diversifying neighbourhoods and workplaces, and women's newfound (although for some, short-lived) professional mobility ("Trial by Combat"). Beneath the surface of all Jackson's hospitality plots, however, lies a quiet yet insistent menace that gradually, and sometimes very suddenly, reveals itself to the reader. Neighbours openly steal from each other, visitors replace their hosts, a stranger corrupts children on trains, a village collectively shuns a newcomer, a woman fails to recognize her face in a crowded bathroom mirror, and, most famously, a community stones one of its members to death in compliance with tradition. They are unsettling stories—but they are also, in a literal sense, stories about being unsettled—at minimum, dislodged from one's comfort zone, but at maximum, from one's home or even from one's identity.

Set against the backdrop of the hugely dislocating force of the Second World War, these stories thus chart a sequence of gradual, seemingly minor dislocations between the suburban and the urban, between the exclusive and the excluded, the interior-self and the exterior world.[76] Shirley Jackson's stories of unsettled homes serve as a counternarratives to the exhibitions of American domesticity so central to the national narrative. The small dislocations within these stories, I argue, uniquely capture the everyday fears surrounding the ambivalent ongoing experiment of postwar family and professional life. Rather than from foreign sources, like

[75] The titular story "The Lottery"-- the most notorious story in *The New Yorker*'s publication history for its shocking depiction of small town ritual sacrifice -- is in fact an outlier among the collection. [75] This chapter focuses on the "other stories" in the collection for, though they did not, like *The Lottery*, provoke hate mail and death threats,[75] they do uncover several deep-seated and contradictory anxieties related to the mid-century's crisis of domesticity.

[76] In *Postwar* Tony Judt's argues that Europe in the immediate aftermath of World War II until 1953 was a battered, broken, helpless continent with forced migrations, and civil conflicts. This massive and traumatic dislocations would set a benchmark for how far the continent came in the following two decades.

Khrushchev, Jackson shows that the critique of the American good life was, to use a familiar horror film line, *coming from inside the house*.

In contrast to postwar America's traveling kitchens and model homes, these stories of disturbed hospitality and impermanent occupancies, point to the contradictory nature of the ideological war waged on the home front. The image of the disintegrating city and its inhabitants—in particular its lost and nervous woman—returns throughout Jackson's collection as her self-conscious protagonists attempt to navigate between public and private spaces. The permeable spaces, such as the apartment block, and the rented room index new mobility and social change, yet the uncomfortable intimacies and uncanny visions they facilitate can have untoward effects on their inhabitants as well. Jackson's vision of unsettled domesticity thus exemplifies the mid-century's concerns about the habitability of the future—a central anxiety due to the threat of nuclear annihilation, but also due to the swiftly changing social spheres.[77] They examine the danger of disappearing completely into an interior—a kitchen, a marriage, or an isolating inner life—while at the same time contending with the opportunities, fears, and new temporalities raised by participation, and particularly women's participation, in the design of the future.

The following analysis situates Jackson's stories within the postwar political context and offers a close reading of her treatment of unsettled domesticity. Focusing on their common theme of dislocation, I explore an emerging pattern of unstable occupancy which I identify as the apartment swap. I show how Jackson's apartment swap stories generate uncomfortable intimacies between neighbours, hosts and guests, unsettling her predominantly female protagonists and prompting them to question their participation in cultural scripts surrounding

[77] Jackson's work also forecasts the voyeurism of city living and the slow-burn hysteria of the suburbs, the exposure that comes with close proximity and the forced exhibition of dark interiors and darker inner worlds.

the good life. Extending this analysis to Jackson's suburban-themed stories, I explore the ways in her attention to domestic architecture *as* narrative troubled mass-accepted ideas of postwar living, including discriminatory suburban settlements, which privileged nuclear families and homogeneity, and opposed racial diversity and female-headed households. I argue that Jackson prompts us to question what was considered "unbearable" about the new intimacies arising between neighbours within the postwar era.

Anticipating the growing global dispute over the domestic design for the future, Shirley Jackson opens her 1949 story collection *The Lottery* with a rather more disquieting kitchen debate. As I touched on in the introduction to this project, the first story in the book, "The Intoxicated," begins in the midst of a raging cocktail party celebrating the end of the war. It is worth returning to this story of unsettling hospitality to explore, in a little more detail, Eileen's vision for the postwar world.

The story starts off with a pianist serenading the room with Doris Day's *Stardust*, while the hostess entertains a man with "thin clean glasses and a sullen mouth," and small bands of intellectuals discuss the future of the war-ravaged world. Seeking temporary refuge from the festivities to sober up, one intoxicated guest—our narrator—stumbles into the kitchen and falls into a conversation about the postwar world with the hosts' teenage daughter, Eileen. On one hand, Eileen is positioned as an extension of the party's hospitality; on the other hand, she's a kind of guest of the preceding generation who have, if not entirely made, at least become the custodians of the world that more or less welcomes her. This gives Eileen a unique perspective.

Unsettled by the child's odd seriousness, the guest reports that in his day, "girls thought of nothing but cocktails and necking" ("The Intoxicated" 11). Yet, Eileen, who, like the adults in the adjacent room, is also composing a treatise on "the future of the world," explains that it is

exactly such behavior—his generation's complacency and decadence—that has led to their current state of crisis: "if people had been really honestly scared when you were young" she admonishes her parents' guest, "we wouldn't be so badly off today" (11). Fear is portrayed here as a generative emotion; Eileen shows that some unsettlement can be productive.

Though her remark corresponds to the postwar anxieties about futurity, Eileen's admonishment feels uncannily timeless. She could be responding to the looming threat of climate change with its projected famines, plagues, economic disasters and social unrest. She could be predicting the Cold War's four-decade long threat of extinction, the ensuing ideological debates and atomic experiments, Castle Bravo's mushroom cloud blooming over the Pacific Ocean and spewing radioactive waste into the planet's atmosphere. The future, for Eileen as for many child prophets, is one of necessary loss: the slate of history wiped clean. Thus, Eileen's vision of the end of the world is a vision of mass-unsettling: a disintegrating city wherein industrial progress is derailed—here in the image of a smashed subway—and wherein the bastions of tradition are systematically dismantled and destroyed:

> "I keep figuring out how it will be." She spoke very softly, very clearly, to a point just past him on the wall. "Somehow I think of the churches as going first, before even the Empire State building. And then all the big apartment houses by the river, slipping down slowly into the water with the people inside…Everything that makes the world like it is now will be gone. We'll have new rules and new ways for living… Maybe there'll be a law not to live in houses, so then no one can hide from anyone else, you'll see" ("The Intoxicated" 12).[78]

[78] This urge to see inside houses has an echo in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) as well as in Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son*.

As in many apocalyptic images, the collapsed city clears room for a new social and political urban landscape. Most interesting in this image, though, is Eileen's insistence on domestic architecture as a locus of threat. Not only does Eileen's vision do away with religious and governing institutions but the tenants in the sinking apartments are unspared as well; there is the suggestion of a strange, rather militant, edict, that we will no longer live in houses, as houses are responsible for obscuring us from one another.[79] Houses take on a regulatory quality; their ability to conceal or to project a world comes under scrutiny in Eileen's new world order. The new law arises from a critique of consumption and ownership, proposing a world without objects;[80] but it also suggests a fear of the manipulative characteristics—what political scientist Joseph Nye calls "soft power" strategies of the home.[81]

Despite Eileen's prediction for "new rules and new ways of living," many of the progressive social changes that took place during the war effort on the home front would be reversed. Though up to six million women joined the civilian work force during World War II, many were demoted or laid off upon the troops' return. The Community Facilities or Lanham Act of 1941, which provided childcare for families working in war production areas would be promptly ended in 1946, discouraging mothers to continue working outside the home.[82] Rather

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[79] Enter the glasshouse, which would rise in popularity in the Cold War era.

[80] In 1971, the Austrian design trio Haus-Rucker-Co imagined a kind of architecture without walls and their project "Cover Installation Project" (1971), creating inflatable architecture—lightweight, portable and transparent—underscoring an ecological concern with living more lightly on the earth.

[81] Notably, the apocalypse that heralds Eileen's dream of an austere and houseless future is also an image of limitless consumption. Eileen predicts: "You'll be able to pick up all the candy bars you want, and magazines, and lipsticks and artificial flowers from the five-and-ten, and dresses laying in the street from all the big stores. And fur coats." Indeed, Jackson's 1949 portrayal of an abandoned and disintegrating consumer paradise foreshadows the urban apocalyptic fantasies of the following decades—most famously, the mall scene in the zombie horror film, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) wherein zombies take over a shopping centre, or the scene of tenant on tenant looting in J. G. Ballard's dystopian novel *High-Rise* (1970).

[82] The WWII program established an important relationship between working and the provision of childcare for all women. Later developments reinforced this relationship: The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Titles VII and IX of the

than crumble, New York would expand vertically. Weapon manufacturers would re-tool to mass produce cars and gleaming new domestic appliances—both of which Shirley Jackson would embrace (she spent the revenue from her fiction on a dishwashing machine and a Morris Minor convertible which she called "the pride and joy of my life") (Franklin 418).[83] Department stores would grow to the size of miniature cities, their wares multiplying to anticipate the consumer's every need, desire, and occasion. Due to growing suburbia, erected to house the population boom, the following decades would see an unprecedented increase in consumption of natural resources: since 1950, Americans alone have used more resources than everyone who ever lived before them.[84] And yet, contrary to the pervasive narrative of women's mass return to the home after the war, and despite demotions and unequal pay, women would continue to enter the workforce in the 1950s and 1960s. The labour need and the rapidly growing female workforce that the war had set in motion would, as Eileen speculated, demand new ways of living—though not in the way she envisioned.

The Apartment Swap

One of the ways in which Shirley Jackson's stories critique the regulatory aspects of postwar domestic space are through her theme of apartment swaps: situations of domestic dislocation in

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Civil Rights Act of 1964 made equal opportunity in education and employment for all women a national goal. Then in 1981, the Civil Rights Commission issued a report called "Child Care and Equal Opportunity for Women," which recognized the link between childcare and women's opportunities (Abby Cohen, "A Brief History of Federal Financing for Child Care in the United States"). For more on this subject see Geraldine Youcha's *Minding the Children: Child Care in America from Colonial Times to the Present.*

[83] In her biography of Shirley Jackson, *A Rather Haunted Life,* Ruth Franklin notes how Jackson's crippling agoraphobia made it difficult for Jackson to leave the house. The Moris Minor, however, did shield Jackson from some her agoraphobic anxiety though, as it acted as a contained private space within the public sphere.

[84] I have noted before, more natural resources have been used by U.S. citizens since 1950 than by everyone else, everywhere else in the world (Castillo xxiv).

which characters trade or usurp each other's living spaces. In a building where the apartment keys are interchangeable, a war bride and a war widow raid each other's rooms for keepsakes ("Trial by Combat"); a man's neighbor borrows his better-tended apartment to host a guest and ends up keeping it for herself ("Like Mother Used to Make"); a woman goes to buy furniture at an apartment and, finding no one there, pretends to be the owner ("The Villager"). Jackson's apartment swap stories generate uncomfortable intimacies between neighbours, hosts and guests, unsettling her predominantly female protagonists and prompting them to question their participation in conventional social scripts. The ambivalence and potential violence of domestic space emerges from the interchangeability of various living arrangements and therefore apart from the specifics of setting, character, and plot outcome. Freed from particularity, the accumulated forces offer a critique of women's larger social situation.

The strange pattern of unstable occupation, which I am calling the apartment swap, is a subgenre of what Pamela Robertson Wojcik identifies as the "apartment plot."[85] From the end of World War II and up until the New York's municipal and financial crisis in the 1970s, the apartment plot emerged as a narrative genre, largely due to increased urban living. As Wojcik argues in *The Apartment Complex* (2010), the 1940s and 1950s media saw a new investment in the apartment story as the status of the city was "up for grabs due to the rise of suburban

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[85] In *The Apartment Complex* (2010), Pamela Robertson Wojcik defines "apartment plots" as "narratives in which the apartment figures as a central device. This means that the apartment is more than setting, but motivates or shapes the narrative in some key way" (3). In television, the apartment plot has been a consistent mode, even a cliché, since *I Love Lucy* (1951), and including *Mr. and Mrs. North* (1952), *My Little Margie* (1952), *My Friend Irma* (1952), *Make Room for Daddy* (1953), The *Honeymooners* (1955), *Love on a Roo op* (1966), *Occasional Wife* (1966), *Family Affair* (1966), The *Odd Couple* (1970), The *Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970), *Diana* (1973), *The Jefferson's* (1975), *One Day at a Time* (1975), Th*ree's Company* (1977), *Seinfeld* (1988), *Melrose Place* (1992), *Friends* (1994), *How I Met Your Mother* (2005), *Rules of Engagement* (2007), *New Girl* (2011), and more. More a consistent subgenre than a single cycle, Wojcik argues, the apartment plot has been a crucial unacknowledged mainstay of television.

domestic ideology and white flight, on the one hand, and, on the other, a massive postwar urban building boom tied to New York's emergence as the cultural capital of the United States" (3). Furthermore, unlike other urban postwar genres, such as Film noir, where the action often takes place in public spaces, the apartment plot, in Wojcik's words, "situates the urban inside the home, mobilizing urban themes of sophistication, porousness, contact, and encounter within the apartment" (4).[86] In an age that vehemently prescribed the separation of the private and public spheres, the contingency between the city and the domicile, frequently imagined in Jackson's work as a porous house, was cause for anxiety about letting the outside in. The uncanny situations introduced by this porosity—situations that include frictions brought about by intruders, voyeurs, and unwanted guests—dislocate familiar domestic and gender scripts, emphasizing their artificiality.

We can trace these tensions in three stories about neighbours: "Like Mother Used to Make," "Trial by Combat" and "Flower Garden." True to the genre of the apartment plot, the first two apartment swap stories take place in New York during the war years. In contrast, "Flower Garden" outlines another form of dislocation, painfully familiar to the author herself—the crisis of the urbanite relocating to the countryside and experiencing the hostilities awaiting the nonconformist in rural America. I compare these stories in order to think about how they offer counternarratives to women's relationship to the home, the postwar ideal of the good life, and the anxieties over futurity.

[86] In her work on the 19th century city, Sharon Marcus also draws attention to the porosity of the apartment, arguing that "[a]ttempts to separate the city and the home had to contend with powerful celebrations of the apartment house's capacity to make urban and domestic spaces continuous and often foundered on the impossibility of fully separating the city and the home" (3). The apartment then provides potentially conflicting desires for transparency and privacy, city and home.

Case Studies: "Like Mother Used to Make," "Trial by Combat" and "Flower Garden"

In "Like Mother Used to Make" David Turner and his messy career-oriented neighbour Marcia, described as "a tall handsome girl with a loud voice," share a wall. Occasionally, they also share meals, which the more domestically inclined David prepares, because Marcia works late and is hardly ever home. Though the twin apartments have identical layouts, David's unit, with its silverware, table ornaments and translucent green bowls of marigolds is a comfortable haven, whereas Marcia's apartment is "bare and at random." When David goes to drop off her invitation to dinner (he has a key to her door so he can run errands for her), he finds her empty apartment in its usual disarray:

> An upright piano a friend had given her recently stood crookedly, half in the foyer, because the little room was too narrow and the big room too cluttered for it to sit comfortably anywhere; Marcia's bed was unmade and a pile of dirty laundry lay on the floor. The window had been open all day and papers had blown wildly around the floor.

These two domestic descriptions presented side by side in the story outline a reverse of the conventional bachelor pad and lady's apartment.[87] Indeed, in its clutter and disorder, Marcia's apartment is a blueprint for Holly Golightly's flat in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), a space devised more for passing through than for living. The wide-open windows bespeak a porousness with the city and the elements that can disrupt the order of the home. The story continues to play

[87] Wojcik describes the bachelor pad as signalling a "particular philosophy of urbanism that links the urban with sophistication and seduction pitted against the suburban, which is associated with marriage and emasculation" (91), and the single girl's (temporary) apartment connotative of glamour and sophistication (143). Jackson's story also proposes a suggested reading of David as a queer character as he doesn't conform to the traditional playboy of the postwar media apartment plots.

on their unorthodox behavior—culminating in David presenting Marcia with a pie that he baked —like his mother used to make. Just then they hear Marcia's doorbell ring and Marcia invites her apparently unexpected guest—a colleague from her work named James Harris—into David's apartment, pretending that it belongs to her. This new level of theatricality has an uncanny effect, disrupting Marcia and David's familiar script. As the charade unfolds David becomes increasingly anxious, and, after serving Marcia's visitor, isolates himself in the kitchen with the dishes while the other two drink and smoke in his living room. The story closes with David, in his attempt to get his guests to leave, realizing that the roles of host and guest have been reversed. Marcia tells him to "Sit down Davie, won't you?" in a tone that David recognizes as "the one hostesses used when they didn't know what else to say to you, or when you had come too early or stayed too late. It was the tone he had expected to use on Mr. Harris" (33). Unable to help himself, he follows cue and excuses himself from his own home: "Guess I better be going along, Marcia … lots of work to do" (34). In the final scene we see David, sitting on Marcia's laundry-scattered, unmade bed, yearning for his own apartment:

> It was cold, it was dirty, and as he thought miserably of his own warm home, he heard faintly down the hall the sound of laughter and the scrape of a chair being moved. Then still faintly, the sound of his radio. Wearily, David leaned over and picked up a paper from the floor, and then he began to gather them up, one by one.

A form of (limited) sovereignty is at stake in the hospitality plot, which the bad guest always threatens to—and in this case, does—appropriate. Ousted from his domestic haven, usurped by his guests, he has no recourse but to clean up after his neighbour as she entertains in his own space. A man tidying up after a woman—if the gender roles were inverted, this would be an unremarkable event (though switching apartments would still be unusual), but, as it stands, this is

the nightmare with which Jackson ends the story. This reversal of gender roles, and the subtle dislocations leading up to David's full exile from his home reveal fears of emasculation (he feels undermined by Mr. Harris) and replacement (Marica eclipses his role as host). Yet the story is not exclusively about a crisis of postwar masculinity—David is, in fact, quite content with his domestic role; for instance, he shops for butter and rolls while Marcia stays late at the office. It is, perhaps more urgently, a temporal crisis.

Wojcik argues that it is not only the space but also the temporality of the apartment that structures the events: "in terms of plot, the temporality of the narrative is usually shaped by the temporality of the apartment: beginnings or endings marked by characters moving in or out" (4). Though generated by the conditions of apartment dwelling, the narrative form itself signals a sense of transience. In this way there is in Wojcik's words, "a contradiction between the sense of dwelling—that characters are identified by and with a place of residence—and the sense that one's place is constantly changing, which relates to the sense of transience in the apartment plot" (4). This sense of dislocation is keenly felt in "Like Mother Used to Make" on a number of levels. As the title of the story "Like Mother Used to Make" suggests, David longs for, and indeed tries to imitate through his nostalgic cooking, a vanished past—a similar gesture made by the guest in "The Intoxicated," who recalls for Eileen a time when all girls thought about was fashion and necking. But it is because of his attachment to this past of silverware and apple pies that he is undermined and dismissed by his more urbanely modern guests. When trying to face up to Marcia, who has taken credit for the meal and replaced him as host in his own apartment, he has the feeling that he has "come too early or stayed too late" (33). A disruptive guest in his own home, he has been rendered untimely and unwelcome; he shows himself the door.

Yet, as Elizabeth Grosz notes in her interpretation of the untimely subject, the more clearly we understand our temporal location as being straddled by the past and the future without the security of a stable and abiding present, the more transformation becomes conceivable.[88] Perhaps this instability is part of what it means to make space for a changing social framework. In this view, the fear of replacement, of being unwelcome, or ill-timed, the overall loss of control that David experiences is not dissimilar to the fear the intoxicated guest feels for Eileen's projections of a postwar future. However, in David's case, "everything that makes the world like it is" is not decimated but out-of-sync. The sense of unease that pervades "Like Mother Used to Make" culminates in an uncanny finale, in which David submits to cleaning a dark replica of his own apartment. Will he be allowed back to his own home eventually? Or is his re-location permanent? If tidiness and hominess are what define his apartment, Marcia won't be able to take over his unit long term without also taking over his cleanly habits. If she doesn't conform to his level of domesticity, she will have to continue following him back and forth between the apartments, appropriating the freshly cleaned one. In this situation, David would be doomed to remain a perpetual guest, scuttling between apartments, tidying up after a working woman who is seldom home—the opposite of a postwar model of domesticity. In this way, the situation presented by the apartment swap offers a counternarrative to this ideal.

Following "Like Mother Used to Make," "Trial by combat" (*The New Yorker* 1944), with its titular war metaphor, speaks directly to the battles waged on the home front. Emily, a war bride, and Mrs. Allen, a war widow, reside in a city rooming house made up of identical units,[89]

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[88] See Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* (Duke 2004).

[89] One important consideration about hospitality plots that take place in identical units is whether the uniformity of modern space will sometimes make dislocations fail—you try to go somewhere else and yet you're still in the same place. Yet, arguable, the uncanny nature of this experience, and the realization that one's home is not unique, creates a small dislocation, an internal unsettling, for the occupant.

which, we find out, all share the same key. Emily, who is employed in the city while her husband is away in the army, begins to notice that small, though not particularly valuable, articles from her room have started to go missing—handkerchiefs, a pin, and a bottle of perfume. What's more, she has glimpsed the thief—who is none other than her elderly neighbour Mrs. Allen—exiting her room. Yet, even after Emily indirectly confronts Mrs. Allen by disclosing that she knows the identity of the thief and suggesting that the thief cease and desist, she returns from work to discover that a pair of earrings and a pack of cigarettes are missing. One day, Emily waits until Mrs. Allen is out, and lets herself into Mrs. Allen's room, which is so eerily similar to her own that "for a minute, when she opened the door, it seemed as though she *were* in her own room" (45). She finds the pilfered handkerchiefs, earrings and perfume neatly arranged in the top drawer of her neighbour's dresser. Disturbed by how uncannily similar Mrs. Allen's apartment is to her own, and now, how similar her situation is to her neighbour's—both army wives, and, now, both home intruders—Emily has "a sudden sense of unbearable intimacy with Mrs. Allen and thought, This is how she must feel in my room" (38). When Emily turns around, Mrs. Allen is standing in the doorway, watching her.

Out of pity or embarrassment or fear, Emily decides not to confront Mrs. Allen about the stolen items, even though the evidence lies before them. She claims, instead, to be looking for aspirin for a headache and, accepting the lie, Mrs. Allan responds with a line, that given the situation has potentially sinister undertones: "I'm glad you felt you knew me well enough" (47). However, this acknowledgement of intimacy can also be seen as a way to ensure the continuation of an emotional exchange—even as a gesture of care. "I'll run up later today," she assures Emily; "Just to see how you feel" (47). Through their acts of home invasion, or potentially their acts of care, the two have become too familiar; they have fused together through a system of exchange.

But it is not only their apartments and actions that seem to mirror each other, there is a claustrophobia to their emotional bond—for Emily, an accelerating unwanted intimacy. There is an emphasis on the word "feel"—"this is how she must feel" "I'm glad you felt you knew me well enough," "to see how you feel"—that speaks to the porosity of the apartment, the corridors, walls, hallways and elevators as a conduit for shared emotions (for more on this topic see Kate Marshall's *Corridor*). Like David listening with longing to his radio through the wall in "Like Mother Used to Make," Mrs. Allen seeks to become closer to Emily by stealing and preserving her everyday accessories, in the hopes that proximity to these objects will lead to proximity with a life she hungers after. But perhaps this emotional hunger belongs to Emily as well, the war bride, observing her future as a potential war widow, living in urban poverty. After all, both Emily and Mrs. Allen's burglaries are ill-timed. Do they seek to be caught?

If they do mean to be caught—and it appears that they do as the story is definitely not about getting away with the theft—we can read "Trial by Combat" as a story about an intimacy that has moved from the unbearable to the dependent. The uncanny here opens up a possibility for familiarity or self-recognition that doesn't produce fear. Like the architecture of the building, wherein unit relies on unit to keep the apartment building standing, the two women seem to rely on one another for detection. Theirs then is an ambivalent game of recognition, in which they seem to oscillate between identification and evasion of confrontation or direct demands, strained hosts and untimely guests. Picking up on the two women's similarities, critics interpret their relationship to be a supernatural one: Mrs. Allan is the ghost of Emily's future, coming back to pilfer from the past. However, as an older woman is always a potential image of a younger woman's future and vice-versa, this reading does not in fact offer a heightened allegorical perspective or add to what is already a story about the permeability of private lives and

apartment walls.[90] A more interesting reading might question rather, what kind of host the future might make. For, as in "Like Mother Used to Make," we see a temporal dislocation wherein the future and past converge—either as a future-haunted past or a past-haunted future. Indeed, as Wojcik notes, "in the haunted house variant of the apartment plot, ghosts become thinly veiled versions of the noisy unseen inhabitants of subdivided apartments, and the porousness and permeability of apartments are emphasized by the intrusion of unwanted guests" (*Philosophy of Urbanism* 14). In other words, in the apartment plot, neighbours play the role of ghosts; no supernatural element is necessary. Whether the old woman is Emily's future self, or a spectre of one of Emily's possible futures, or an economically and emotionally destitute war widow, finding her comforts in petty theft, her presence reminds of the many lives of apartments, and the many bifurcating histories that play out in close proximity with the rise of new urbanism during the war years. It speaks also to the mid-century's ambivalent relationship to the future, a future which enters uninvited, which re-arranges the familiar and the private.

We find another instance of unbearable intimacy between neighbours caused by the speculation of a shared home in "Flower Garden," a story that examines 1940s small town racial tensions. This hospitality plot specifically traces the anxieties of interracial friendship, family, and cohabitation. The proposed exchange of homes works on a more symbolic level.

"Flower Garden" is told from the perspective of young Mrs. Winning, a 1940′s housewife, who befriends Mrs. MacLane, a widow who has moved from the city to a small Vermont town, and whose son, Davy, is the same age as Mrs. Winning's boy. However, when the newcomer forms a friendship with one of the town's few African American families, Mr. Jones and his bi-racial son, Billy, the community begins to draw away, and eventually openly

[90] We see this relationship again between two characters in Jackson's later novel *The Sundial*, but in this case, the older woman fails to engage the girl in her game.

ostracizes the widow and her son. The fact that Billy's mother, Mr. Jones' previous partner, was a White woman leads the town to speculate as to whether Mr. Jones and the widow, Mrs. MacLane, will form a family and cohabitate in the White community. Indeed, such is the bigoted community's deepest and most tantalizing fear: an inter-racial intimacy that erodes the boundaries of the insulated White community and threatens the White nuclear family structure.

The utopian ideals associated with postwar suburban living emphasized homogeneity within the architecture as well as the residents. White suburban society enforced common experience by eliding, and in the case of "Flower Garden" punishing, every indication of variance among its residents including differences in garden planning, family structure and choices of guests. As in the previous stories I have discussed, the "Flower Garden" traces family configurations outside the nuclear model.[91] In "Like Mother Used to Make" we have a (supposedly) non-romantic male/female friendship with reversed domestic roles, and in "Trial by Combat" the widow and the war bride form a mother daughter relationship, intruding upon each other's space and trading aspirin. "Flower Garden" explores several constellations of family that challenged the nuclear ideal and give way to postwar anxieties surrounding diversity within the homogenous suburban model—namely, fears of racial miscegenation. The suburban house and garden symbolized the sanctity of the nuclear model, and so Mrs. MacLane's hospitality to Mr. Jones and his son threatens this sanctity and uniformity.

Anxiety over the families' interracial companionship spikes when, passing her neighbour Mrs. MacLane's home, Mrs. Winning overhears a conversation between the young Davy MacLane and Billy Jones:

> "Billy, you want to build a house with me today?"

[91] Merriam-Webster dates the term "nuclear family" back to 1947, while the Oxford English Dictionary has a reference to the term from 1925.

"Ok," Billy said. Mrs. Winning slowed her steps a little to hear.

"We'll build a big house out of branches," Davey said excitedly, "and when it's finished we'll ask my mommy if we can have lunch out there."

"You can't build a house just out of branches," Billy said. "You ought to have wood, and boards."

"And chairs and tables and dishes," Davey agreed. "And walls."

"Ask your mommy can we have two chairs out here," Billy said. "Then we can pretend the whole garden is our house."

"And I'll get us some cookies, too," Davey said. "And we'll ask my mommy and your daddy to come in our house."

As we have seen in Jackson's hospitality plots, the house becomes a narrative. As Billy and Davey discuss their building materials, future furniture, and their future guests, their imaginary house lingers between a game and an actual possibility. Their plan to invite their parents into the home, and even to swap their old homes out for this inclusive, self-built one, is also a way to unify them as a family. Furthermore, Billy's suggestion to "pretend the whole garden is our house," expands the concept of the home to include a wider physical and symbolic terrain; it conjures up an image of an Edenic utopia, one that offers an alternative to the available White suburban model. It underscores the power of narrative, in this case a collaborative narrative to build hospitable spaces. It forecasts the possibility of a much more fundamental apartment swap, one that would shift the paradigm and the concept of American shelter itself.

Towards the close of the story, the town's hostility towards Mrs. MacLane and her guests has grown conspicuous: the very soil appears to be poisoned by their scorn, as the garden begins to wilt. In a fateful thunderstorm, a branch from the neighbour's tree falls and flattens Mrs.

MacLane's flower garden. Surveying the wreckage, Mrs. MacLane wonders aloud to Mr. Jones if she should give up on the cottage and return to the city. The smug neighbours watch without offering to help as Mr. Jones attempts to remove the branch, unsuccessfully. Mrs. MacLane tells him that it will be the next occupier's problem; still he continues to struggle with the branch. Davey and Billy's dream house remains imaginary, their planned invitation for their parents to join them there no longer possible.

Visitor Vs. City: Suburban Dislocation

In January of 1958, the year Sputnik crashed to the earth and the US planned to launch its own satellite, Shirley Jackson and her husband Stanley Hyman took a trip to New York. As their train pulled into the stop at 125 Street, Jackson was arrested by a grotesque sight: in her words, "a building so disagreeable I could not stop looking at it" ("Experience and Fiction" 201). It was an ordinary tenement building, much like the one that Eileen envisions collapsing into the Hudson, but something about it felt "unspeakable" and "horrifying" to Jackson (201). As she recalled later:

> It was tall and black and as I looked at it when the train began to move again it faded away and disappeared. That night in our hotel room I woke up with nightmares, the kind where you have to get up and turn on the light and walk around for a few minutes just to make sure that there is a real world and this one is it, not the one you have been dreaming about; my nightmares had somehow settled around the building I had seen from the train. From that time on I completely ruined my whole vacation in New York City by dreading the moment when we would have to take the train back and pass that building again…my nervousness was so extreme, finally, that we changed our plans and took a night train home, so that I would not be able to see the building when we went past, but even after we were

> home it bothered me still, colouring all my recollections of a pleasant visit to the city ("Experience and Fiction" 201).

Jackson would write to a friend at Columbia University to see if he knew of the building and its history. He searched for it; however, the building had disappeared. Later, he discovered that it only existed from one particular point of the 125th Street Station; from any other angle it was not recognizable as a building at all. Some months before, Jackson would learn, the building had been consumed by a disastrous fire which had killed several people: "What was left of the building, from the other three sides was a shell. The children in the neighbourhood knew that it was haunted" (202).[92]

Jackson's recollection of the experience that inspired her to write *The Haunting of Hill House* underscores how, with a shift of perspective, cities can become uncanny. It speaks to how the city can be a defamiliarizing space and presence. Though this experience took place in the late 1950s, this theme—the uncanniness of the city, and the anxiety it bestows on visitors—comes up in Jackson's earlier stories. As we see in "Pillar of Salt" and "The Tooth," the city is often an uncanny, disorienting, and potentially terrifying place for the visiting housewife. Jackson's recollection of needing to "turn on the light and walk around for a few minutes just to make sure that there is a real world and this one is it, not the one you have been dreaming about" feels particularity salient in her portraits of the unsettling, or even outright hostile, city.

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[92] Of this story, Jackson's biographer, Ruth Franklin writes: "Like so many writers' best stories, this one seems only to be partially true. There was a fatal fire in Harlem in April 1957, in which three people (not nine) were killed and five injured; but the apartment building where it took place was at 229 West 140th Street, too far to be seen from the 125th Street train station. If Jackson received a letter from a professor at Columbia, no record of it exists in her files. But she may well have glimpsed an uncanny-looking apartment house from the train that got her thinking about how houses become haunted" (*A Rather Haunted Life* 401).

Case Studies: "Pillar of Salt" and "The Tooth"

In "Pillar of Salt" a suburban couple, Margaret and Brad, take the train in to the city for a vacation. At first, they feel at ease within the new terrain; their sublet appears to replicate their own home; the city appears to welcome them. However, after an incident at an apartment party, wherein Margaret mistakenly believes the building is burning and attempts to raise an alarm, (which is ignored by the party guests), the city starts to conspire against her. "I feel trapped," Margaret tells her husband, "High up in that old building with a fire; it's like a nightmare. And in a strange city" (176). Following this experience, a nightmare logic organizes her attempts to navigate the "strange city" which appears to be crumbling in slow motion around her:

> The buses were cracking open in unimportant seams…the buildings were going too—in one of the nicest stores there had been a great gaping hole in the tiled foyer, and you walked around it. Corners of buildings seemed to be crumbling away into fine dust that drifted downward, the granite was eroding unnoticed. Every window she saw on her way uptown seemed to be broken (178).

Here, the crumbling towers and the uninhibited consumer paradise in Eileen's vision of the apocalypse, resurface as symbols of a rampant postwar capitalism. When shopping for Christmas presents for her children, Margaret finds the city to be replicated in the toys: "hideous little parodies of adult life, cash registers, tiny pushcarts with imitation fruit, telephones that really worked (as if there weren't enough phones in New York that really worked), miniature milk bottles in a carrying case" (177). Growing increasingly anxious, she is arrested by a vision of postwar consumerism: "a picture of small children in the city dressed like their parents, following along with a miniature mechanical civilization, toy cash registers in larger and large sizes that eased them into the real thing, millions of clattering jerking small imitations that prepared them nicely for

taking over the large useless toys their parents lived by" (177). All the toys seem to be uncanny prototypes of objects in the adult's world, just as the tools of commerce appear to approximate toys.

These images of a sped-up childhood influence her own experience of time in the city. After leaving the department store, Margaret experiences a sudden increase in the speed of life around her. She notes how "people were moving faster than before…hurled on in a frantic action that made every house forty-five minutes long, every day nine hours, every year fourteen days" (178). Indeed, nothing is impervious to this breakneck pace:

> Food was so elusively fast, eaten in such a hurry, that you were always hungry, always speeding to a new meal with new people. Everything was imperceptibly quicker every minute. She stepped into a taxi on one side and stepped out the other side at her home; she pressed the fifth-floor elevator and was coming down again, bathed and dressed and ready for dinner with Brad. They went out for dinner and were coming in again hungry and hurrying to bed in order to get to breakfast with lunch beyond…She thought, it's as if everything were traveling so fast…she was afraid to say it, truly afraid to face the knowledge that it was a voluntary neck-breaking speed, a deliberate whirling faster and faster to end in destruction (178).

Just as life speeds up, so does the appetite—for fast-food, resources, appliances, toys, things—accelerate. In fact, the toys seem to enjoy more agency than Margaret herself, whose physical mobility seems to decrease as the world around her speeds up. According to Fredric Jameson, the flood of goods onto the market within the postwar era and the liquid fungibility of the market itself made all things appear interchangeable—and this includes the consumer.[93] Like the "hideous little

[93] For more on the lives of objects see Sarah Wasserman *The Death of Things* (67), and Gillian Brown *Domestic Individualism*

parodies of adult life," in the store windows, Margaret is locked within a mechanical circuit (*The Lottery* 177); yet, unlike the toys, who are designed to keep pace with world they reflect, Margaret cannot sync up.

By the end of the story Margaret can't keep up. Growing increasingly agoraphobic, she avoids going outside; she tells her husband that "I just want to stay in and rest" (181). However, outside her window the city appears to be soundlessly crumbling around her; she feels the building shake as the windowsills dissolve into a fine sand. The disintegrating city prompts Margaret to retreat into her role of housewife. In an attempt to calm herself she strips and remakes the bed, "taking a long time with the corners and smoothing out every wrinkle" (182). Yet her attempt at preservation does not succeed. Unable to keep up with the rhythm of the city, Margaret finds herself immobilized by the speed and transforms into the story's titular pillar of salt. The story ends with her fixed to a street corner, unable to cross the street. Looking longingly at her apartment on the other side she wonders how anyone manages to cross; yet she knows "by wondering, by admitting doubt, she was lost" (184).

In this instance Margaret has lost the battle with her anxiety, but her acknowledgement of being lost also alludes to her sense of dislocation on a grander scale. For Margaret, as for many of Jackson's female characters, the city is over-mapped by a long tradition of patriarchal enterprise and architecture. The space thus evokes a disorienting effect for those who do not readily recognize or respond to the city's affordances. In "Meditations on being lost," film critic Vivian Sobchack suggests that perhaps the most fearsome of all forms of being lost is "not knowing where you are."

> Not knowing where you are is not about the loss of a future destination or the return to a previous one; rather, spatially it is about a loss of present grounding and temporally about being lost in the present…. [Its shape is] elastic, shifting, telescopic, spatially and

> temporally elongated….This form of disorientation and its resultant existential anxiety also may occur when worldly space and time are "overmarked"—that is, when one's present spatial and temporal orientation are overlaid and conflated with other (and equally compelling and vivid) space-times" (25).

Sobchack uses the example of the museum whose multiple indexes of temporalities can cause a form of anxiety—known as Stendhal's Syndrome—for tourists. As Sobchack suggests, this sense of loss, confusion, or emotional vertigo that Margaret feels is brought about by several disjunctive temporalities within an overmarked space. Although she knows where she is on the map—she can see her vacation sublet across the street—she is lost on a deeper level. She is a tourist in the city, but, as a woman, she is also a tourist in the public sphere. Her struggle to navigate the city's speeds, rhythms and commercial scripts reveals several larger structural anxieties at the heart of the story: the fear of not being heard—Jackson's narrator repeatedly laments, "No one *listens* to me…I might as well not be here" (176-177)—the fear of not being welcome, and the threat of losing, gradually or quite suddenly the capacity to act.[94]

In another female tourist's trip to the city detailed in "The Tooth," the narrator Clara Spencer suffers a similar disorienting experience. After traveling alone on an all-night bus ride to New York to consult a dentist about her tooth, Clara visits a public Ladies Room, in which several women are attending to their appearance in front of the mirror. However, when she steps aside to

[94] In contrast to Jackson's portrait of the lost and paralyzed housewife, Betty Friedan suggests that an urban lifestyle offers women more choices to counter "the mystique." The housewife's move back to the city is, for Friedan, a first step toward liberation—and Friedan herself moved back to the city, renting a seven-room apartment in the Dakota, when *The Feminine Mystique* became a bestseller: "My roots are in what's happening. And now I don't have to worry about a septic tank" (quoted in Marcus, "Placing Rosemary's Baby," 4). Jackson, however, reveals the complexity of this undertaking by underscoring the ambivalence haunting many mid-century women's sense of social mobility.

let someone pass and glances back into the mirror, she realizes "with a slight stinging shock" that she has no idea which face is hers.

> She looked into the mirror as though into a group of strangers, all staring at her or around her; no one was familiar in the group, no one smiled at her or looked at her with recognition; you'd think my own face would know me, she thought, with a queer numbness in her thought. There was a creamy chinless face with bright blond hair, and a shaper looking face under a red veiled hat, and a colourless anxious face with brown hair pulled straight back, and a square rosy face under a square haircut, and two or three more faces pushing close to the mirror, moving, regarding themselves. Perhaps it's not a mirror she thought, maybe it's a window and I'm looking straight through at women washing on the other side.

In this uncanny scene, Clara searches the heterotopia or parallel world of the mirror but cannot locate herself there. She has become one of the group of strangers, essentially, a stranger to herself. Like Margaret, she too is lost within the overmarked space of the city.

The reversals in the conventional relationship between the visitor and the city—wherein walls move and women stand still, wherein the street light has more agency than the pedestrian—speaks to women's uncanny position within a broader social structure, one that requires women to be both social subjects and domestic ornaments.[95] The characters' continuous attempts to narrativize these relentless and deceivingly small experiences of dislocation reveal, on a micro

[95] In *Domestic Individualism*, Gillian Brown traces how the values of interiority, order, privacy, and enclosure associated with the American home come to define selfhood in general. Drawing on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper as a case study, Brown considers how immobilization was used to treat nervous diseases, such as agoraphobia (fear of open spaces), which mainly affected women. By sending patients to bed, Brown argues, the rest cure demobilizes the domestic in order to recharge it for reproductive service to the market. When the rest cure fails, as it does In Gilman's text, the result is that "domestic boundaries vary and waver, that walls and women move" (176). As Brown suggests, the "story of threatened domesticity sells a reinforced domesticity" (182), and thus Jackson's immobilized female visitor satirizes the ideal of the stationary housewife by rendering her unable to step out of the domestic sphere. Instead she becomes a symbol of pathological domesticity.

level, the anxieties of becoming a subject, and, in a broader scene, having a subject to write about. By transforming banal or supposed "nonevents"—such as crossing the street, making the bed, going to the dentist or even looking in a public mirror—into plot, the story maps out a defamiliarizing narrative path through the city, demanding a new metric of attention, one akin to the form poetry demands. As Lucy Alford reflects in her treatise *Forms of Poetic Attention*, "Attention takes place always and only in the 'now' of the breathing body in which the mind moves…In orienting the mind in its spatiotemporal present, drawing out certain things and leaving others either in the background or off frame, attention is always at once a historical and a political act" (270-272). Embedded in a historical moment and in a sociopolitical weave, this new metric of attention conjured in Jackson's work defamiliarizes everyday actions and spaces, questioning their socio-historical designs. Its defamiliarizing effects on the city disclose, to once again borrow Royle's terminology for the uncanny, "the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of the home" (2).

Jackson would also go on to explore the defamiliarized city in a children's book, *Famous Sally*, about a little girl who wants everyone in the world to know her name.[96] In it, the heroine uses different methods to communicate with people in different cities: for "Tall City," where the buildings are "so high they wore clouds on their heads like hats," she writes her name on a thirty-one-mile-high kite; for "Soft City," where "people wore shoes made of cat fur so their feet would not make a sound on the street," she commissions the wind to whisper it; for "Slow City" where "people moved like water dripping from a faucet," Sally paints her name on the back of a turtle (Franklin 474-475). New York, in contrast, could be renamed "Fast City" wherein "every hour was forty-five minutes long, every day nine hours" ("Pillar of Salt" 178). Moreover, it appears

[96] *Famous Sally* would be published posthumously in 1966.

that Sally's desire is not so different from the wish shared by Margaret in "Pillar of Salt" and Clara in "The Tooth"—to be recognized and to be able to communicate with her new environments. In this way, these stories of cities and visitors are all about adjustments and maladjustments to the rhythms of the city and public life.

In all her hospitality plots, Jackson is interested in the uncanny—particularly as it manifests as a small psychic dislocation in the city and the home—for its potential to interrupt what has been naturalized as accepted norms. In all the stories we have looked at so far, the uncanny unsettles the conventional. This unsettling can even offer creative possibilities and a larger sense of perspective. Of her use of the uncanny, Shirley Jackson once wrote, "I have always loved (and there is the opposition: love) to use fear, to take it and comprehend it and make it work and consolidate a situation where I was afraid and take it whole and work from there.… I delight in what I fear" (Franklin, *A Rather Haunted Life* 441-442). In Jackson's formulation fear seems to have a pliability; it is a material or even a tool connected to process and creative labour. In "Pillar of Salt" and "The Tooth" the dislocating effects of the uncanny city indicate a deeper fracture: it exposes a world which does not recognize or accommodate women—quite literally, a world in which the female subject has difficulty finding her image reflected within the cultural mirror; a world in which she struggles to take a public step.

The unbearable intimacies, porous homes, and disintegrating cities portrayed in Jackson's hospitality plots, particularly her stories centering around apartment swaps, reflect much broader postwar social anxieties—those of social dislocation, miscegenation, and female mobility due to the social shifts experienced in the war years. By ending the Great Depression and giving US citizens a common cause, the war brought a powerful but artificial unity to Americans, which,

after the war ended had started to be questioned.[97] The war also instigated a massive new mobility for women, immigrants, African Americans and ethnic minorities. As the literary historian Morris Dickstein notes, the war caused large scale relocations across the US:

> The war … shook Americans loose from their local moorings, from religious roots and isolated lives in small towns, from urban ghettos and other homogenous communities. Young men who never strayed fifty miles from home were shipped off to distant training bases and overseas missions; others migrated to take up jobs in defence industries. City boys and country boys, the children of immigrants and the children of sharecroppers were thrown together for the first time, like an accelerated version of the melting pot or a poster for the Popular front … There was no return to isolationism after the war, as there had been after the first World War.[98]

Here, Dickstein outlines how the war's dislocations offered a hopeful vision of cosmopolitan living; yet as Jackson's stories reveal, with the end of the war, these newfound proximities, and for some, newfound freedoms, began to cause social frictions—and fictions as well. It is the sense of unease caused by said tensions that runs through the plots and at times very syntax of Jackson's hospitality plots. It is this tension that offers a critique. As we shall see in the next

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[97] Broadcasts from besieged London created new communication networks and made the world, or at least the allied world, seem a smaller and more interconnected place. Fueling patriotic feeling, the war's common cause also deflected internal conflict among social groups for the early war years, but these tensions rose again during the last years of the war and during the postwar period. For instance, a race riot took place in Harlem, New York City, on August 1 and 2 of 1943, after a White police officer, James Collins, shot and wounded Robert Bandy, an African American soldier; and rumors circulated that the soldier had been killed. The riot was chiefly directed by black residents against White-owned property in Harlem. It was one of six riots in the nation that year related to Black and White tensions during World War II. The others took place in Detroit; Beaumont, Texas; Mobile, Alabama; and Los Angeles (Zoot Suit Riots). In Beaumont and Mobile, the riots were White defense industry workers attacking Black people.

[98] Instead of returning to isolation, the physical destruction of much of Europe, the unconditional surrender and occupation of Japan, and the breakup of the odd colonial system left the United States in a powerful economic and political potion, which would soon be cemented by strategic alliances such as NATO.

chapter, Ann Petry's novels and stories, written in the aftermath of the 1943 race riots, were also largely to do with social and physical accommodation.

During the same time Jackson was writing her apartment swaps and suburban dislocation stories, politicians and developers were competing over the future of American housing, and extension, overseeing the future of integration and community. As Dolores Hayden points out in *Redesigning the American Dream*, two possible community structures arose during the 1940s. The first was Vanport City, built to honour Rosie the Riveter and women like her, working in the shipyards as welders and riveters for the war effort. A racially integrated city of wartime public housing in Multnomah County, Oregon,[99] Vanport was equipped with six childcare centres open 24 hours a day and cooked food facilities so that working mothers could pick up casseroles with their children (Hayden 20-21). The second, built six years later, as Vanport was being dismantled,[100] was the more-well known Levittown, erected near Hempstead, Long Island and consisting of identical single-family homes headed by male breadwinners and cared for by housewives: the blue print for the American suburbia and the single most powerful symbol of upward mobility for American families, in which the home is a retreat for the male worker, and a workplace for wife (23). As Hayden writes, in Levittown, "energy conservation is not a design issues, nor is low maintenance, nor is public transportation, nor is child care" (22-23). As, the federal Housing Administration did not, at the time, approve mortgage funds for integrated

[99] The establishment of Vanport coincided with an unprecedented influx of African-Americans into Oregon, attracted to work in newly federally-desegregated wartime defence industries. Though there were no official segregation laws in Vanport, the vision of integration included tension between inhabitants.

[100] Vanport was dramatically destroyed on May 30, 1948, when a 200-foot section of a railroad berm holding back the Columbia River collapsed during a flood, killing 15 people. The 1948 Vanport Flood parallels the more recent Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans. In both cases, public officials led the population to believe that the damage would be slight, and in both cases the government response to the disaster was harshly criticized. Critics attributed the poor response, in both cases, to racist attitudes on the part of officials, who pointedly neglected to respond appropriately to the destruction of a community that had a relatively large number of Black residents.

communities, or mortgages for female-headed families, Levittown and its copies were largely homogenous. These houses and neighbourhoods, which still dominate US ideals of home, encode Victorian stereotypes of the "women's place," thereby, in Hayden's words, forming "an architecture of gender unsuited to twenty-first-century life" (29).

Yet this was not how it had to be, Jackson's stories remind us. The temporal dislocations and sense of disorientation that we see in her hospitality plots reflect the mid-century America's struggle over what the future of the home and the good life should look like, which ideals it should preserve and which it should evacuate in the calibration of the American dream. Written between Vanport's collapse and Levittown's rise, Jackson's stories unsettle the conventional notions of home and offer a glimpse of living otherwise: in a female-headed house, in an integrated family, in a porous environment. In these ways, Jackson's apartment swaps and suburban dislocation stories draw attention to the ways in which naturalized ideas about women's relationship to the home were in fact artificial and part of a national performance.

The Country of a Story

> Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.
>
> —Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken"

Houses conspire; they tell stories; they even forecast futures. This chapter has revealed how on a narrative level, just as the floor design of a dwelling or workplace controls the movement, sounds, and activities of its occupants, so too domestic architecture can shape cultural behaviors

and movements. I have tracked how Jackson's stories of unstable occupancy invite the possibility of larger cultural domestic dislocation that demands a reconceptualization of the home, and the elusive good life that it symbolizes. Jackson's descriptions of suspended and uncanny domesticity reveal a deep suspicion of the conventions of the good life, even if her characters, like Jackson herself, retain an ambivalent attachment to it.

This analysis opened with a young girl's vivid projection of the end of the world; less vivid, however, is the vision of the future that precedes that end. Poised on the cusp of the feminist movement, susceptible to the shocks and rhythms of the nuclear age, Jackson's hospitality plots track the struggle over occupancy, habitability, and narrative control. As I have explored in this chapter, Jackson's stories about domestic dislocations, such as apartment swaps, are about defamiliarizing hospitality; they are about *unsettling* present structures, making kitchens and apartment units and neighbours uncanny in ways that reveal possibilities for new kinds of hospitality and habitability. To be frightened by the familiar, and traditional structures of occupancy, Jackson's apartment swaps suggest, may be a good thing.

In the weeks before her early death at 48, Jackson returned to the question of the habitability of the future. Like many of her female narrators, and many women of her generation, she was questioning the inequalities of her marriage and homelife and thinking about her writing as an "act of survival" (Rich "When We Dead Awaken"). Like Eileen, she was determined to build a more accommodating world for herself; this world would be one in which, unlike Margaret from "Pillar of Salt," she would be able to "stand and walk alone":

> i think about the glorious world of the future. think about me think about me …alone. safe…to be separate, to be alone, to *stand* and *walk* alone, not to be different and weak and helpless and degraded…and shut out. not shut out, shutting out…on the other side

> somewhere there is a country, perhaps the glorious country of well-dom, perhaps a country of a story. perhaps both, for a happy book…laughter is possible laughter is possible laughter is possible.

Her last diary entry underlines the importance of narrative in plotting a way out of a hostile space or a confining mode of living. Her intention to write "a happy book" speaks to her wish to change her own world with her tools as a writer. Part dream, part spell, the glorious world in which Jackson locates her own future is also the domain of the imagination, in her words the "country of a story." For her, storytelling is what makes such a future possible. As Jackson noted to a friend in the last months of her life, "the sound of the typewriter in an empty house is comforting;" its yellow pages provided a "refuge, a pleasant hiding place."[101] Here, among her familiar pages and her tools for writing, she was most "at home."

[101] Conversation between Howard Nemerov and Shirley Jackson, between 1963-1964 (Franklin 476).

CHAPTER 2: Small Revolutions: The Search for a Homehouse in Ann Petry's Harlem

The sentence is a terrain along which experience and thinking occur… Ellipses are windows. Each word is an architecture.

—Renee Gladman, "Artist Statement," Foundation for Contemporary Arts [102]

"To dwell" is a transitive verb—as in the notion of 'indwelt spaces'….It has to do with fashioning a shell for ourselves. [103]

—Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* "The Interior, The Trace" [14,5]

She had built up a fantastic structure made from the soft, nebulous, cloudy stuff of dreams. There hadn't been a solid, practical brick in it, not even a foundation. She had built it up of air and vapor and moved right in. So of course it had collapsed. It had never existed anywhere but her own mind.

—Ann Petry, *The Street*

[102] This is an excerpt from Gladman's artist statement for Foundation for Contemporary Arts, 2015. https://www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org/recipients/renee-gladman/

[103] Indwell (transitive) means to exist within as an activating spirit, force, or principle. Indwell (intransitive) means to dwell; exist.

"No Hospitable Corner on Earth": Harlem's Pathological Architecture

Arriving in New York in 1938, the young journalist Ann Petry was immediately struck by the glaring inequalities between Harlem and the rest of Manhattan's infrastructure, noting how Harlem's dilapidated tenement buildings seemed to belong "back in the Middle Ages" and stood in stark contrast to New York's global identity (*Ann Petry* 766). "Harlem," Petry wrote was "an anachronism—shameful and unjustifiable, set down in the heart of the biggest, richest city in the world" (766–75).[104] As we saw in the previous chapter, Shirley Jackson's fiction depicts Manhattan as a space wherein urban acceleration is so swift it threatens the visitor who can't keep up. In contrast, Petry describes mid-century Harlem as a place where time is blocked, alienated from technological progress. Moreover, Harlem's anachronistic effect in New York explicitly fused the past to the present, animating the ways in which the legacy of slavery still haunted the ghetto: instead of homes, Harlem's tenements were closer to towering, vertical slave ships (Lucy 13); they were the antithesis of the domestic (Spillers 72), and barely hospitable to human life.[105]

Others have echoed this critique of New York's vast economic disparity in the mid-century by focusing, like Petry, on the infrastructural problems that haunted Harlem. Instead of a space of possibility, verticality, and expansion—all the attributes associated with Manhattan in

[104] Originally published in the April 1949 issue of *Holiday*. Sourced from *Ann Petry: The Street, The Narrows* (Library of America, 2019), pages 766–75.

[105] Robin Lucy points out that Petry reproduces the slave ship in her description of the tenements in *The Street*. The names on the tenement mailboxes are "scratched out and other names substituted;" Lutie imagines the building's landlord filling the hallways with "row after row" of cots for innumerable interactable tenants (*Street* 7). Lucy argues that by drawing parallels between the experience of slavery and the existence for many black women in Harlem, Petry's work draws attention to the gaps in the records of black motherhood that a materialist feminist investigation seeks to fill (13).

the 1940s[106]—life in Harlem was, in James Baldwin's words, like "the insistent, maddening, claustrophobic pounding in the skull that comes from trying to breathe in a very small room with all the windows shut" (57). Picking up on this sense of physical and psychological claustrophobia, partly due to faulty infrastructure that does not let the air or light in, Saidiya Hartman describes the inner-city similarly as a place where "There was never enough air to breathe, no room to grow, no corner of the earth hospitable enough to allow you to put down roots" (143). Channelling a voice from the archives, Sam Shepard, [107] Hartman defines the generation of African American families who moved northward during the Great Migration as "drifters, nomads, [and] fugitives" who "had not been allowed 'me' and 'mine'" (143). [108] Even when African American families acquired "a homehouse with enough space for your children and your brother's children" their purchase was not safe for "one day a white man could ride up to your front porch with a piece of paper in his hand that said none of this belonged to you; it was not yours and never had been" (143).[109]

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[106] Upon escaping Nazi-occupied France and arriving in the United States, the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss praised New York as a "city where anything seemed possible" ("New York in 1941" 258-267). To this newcomer's eye, New York was "an immense horizontal and vertical disorder attributable to some spontaneous upheaval of the urban crust rather than to the deliberate plans of builders" (Levi-Strauss 258-267). Yet he too picked up on its anachronistic effects, describing New York as a space of competing histories and timelines, an "agglomeration of villages," wherein the "still visible remnants … vacant lots … hovels, red-brick buildings," were like "witnesses to different eras" (Levi-Strauss 258-267).

[107] In this quote, Hartman channels James Shepard, a marginal voice from the archives to tell a "story told from inside the circle" (xv) that describes the continuous experiences of dislocation in the search for a home.

[108] Hartman's research covers the years 1980-1935, giving historical background to the inner-city precarity and strife that Baldwin describes and the disparities that Levi-Strauss noticed. Her description of the forced dislocation—the denial of a "homehouse" or a hospitable corner of earth for African Americans—contextualizes African Americans' continued experience of displacement, ubiquitous in the 1940s and 1950s, wherein redlining practices, as extensions of the fraudulent deeds mentioned in this passage, further marginalized Black citizens.

[109] For inner-city inhabitants, homehouse/dream house was, in Petry's words, "made from the soft, nebulous, cloudy stuff of dreams…[without] a solid, practical brick in it, not even a foundation" (The Street 308). In other words, residents of Harlem were not immune to the promise of the good life that motivated Manhattan's acceleration. Rather, the juxtaposition of postwar wealth beside Harlem's depressed conditions and its pathological architecture increased the subscription to the ideal of the good life. Those who believed that they might acquire this domestic dream were seduced, or rather blighted, by a cruel sense of optimism.

In a similar vein to Petry, Hartman's Sam Shepard, and Baldwin, Richard Wright also used spatial metaphors to critique the anachronistic living situations in Harlem. However, he argued that not only were the domestic spaces symbolic of the legacy of slavery, but the women who occupied them were representative of this legacy as well. Mothers and domestic workers were, in Wright's view, "surviving remnants" of a traumatic history of oppression, confined to the margins of historical chance and democratic experience (*12 Million Black Voices* 127). Because "their orbit of life is narrow—from their kitchenette to the white folk's kitchen and back home again" (131), the consciousness of Black women workers, Wright suggested, "lies beyond the boundaries of the modern world, though they live in that world daily" (135). Yet, as Petry reveals in her 1940s fiction, specifically her novella *In Darkness and Confusion*,[110] and her novel *The Street*, Harlem's domestic space *was* political space; the Black domestic workers who moved between kitchenette and kitchen, the women who commuted from Harlem to Manhattan or to the White suburbs and back, were active and not passive participants in America's changing political landscape and cultural script. As we shall see in the following chapter, Petry's female focalizers work to critique Wright's depiction of Black women as passive, "surviving remnants" of America's history of slavery. For Petry, not only is the domestic place is a revolutionary and consciousness-creating location within the Black community, but the fight for this space is central to the struggle for civil rights.[111]

Yet, despite her progressive rendering of domestic space as political space, and despite her pathbreaking literary achievements and social activism[112]—Petry's bestselling debut novel

[110] Petry's "In Darkness and Confusion" is collected in *Black Voices: An Anthology of African-American*

[111] Petry's novel anticipates the Fair housing protests of the 1960s that we see in figure 5.

[112] While living in Harlem, Petry was active in efforts to mitigate the continuing economic effects of the Depression, as well as problems arising from the war effort, including high rents and rising food prices. In 1942, while working

The Street was also the first novel to depict the struggles of a mother to raise her family in a northern city (Christian 65; Lucy 3) and her novella, *In Darkness and Confusion*, the only account of the Harlem riots of 1943 that represented Black women as active participants in it (Lucy 3)[113]—Petry was, for many decades, considered one of the most problematic writers in the postwar African American literary canon. This was due, in part, to her supposed bleak portrayal of the lives of Black women, particularly in *The Street*, which, according to several critics, "evicts hope entirely" (Wurst 2), expresses "unqualified despair" (Yarborough 46), and depicts a lack of connection between the female residents of Harlem. For instance, Barbara Christian writes that "*The Street* is different from most novels by Afro-American women in that its female characters are so cut off by everyone and everything" (64), and Marjorie Pryse critiques Petry's depiction of the economic and political forces which operate to "systematically alienat[e] children from their 'mothers'—that is, from their roots" (129).[114] This sense of disconnection, dislocation, and alienation that these critics pick up on is, in fact, central to Petry's narrative scheme.

Part social history, part gothic horror, *The Street* invites the reader into the inhospitable tenements of Harlem, as well as the inhospitable minds of the villainous or abject characters, for

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as an editor at *The People's Voice*, Petry helped to launch a women's civilian defense group, "Negro Women Inc." whose aims were both practical--to "help women get their money's worth for everything from hats to groceries to furniture" (Petry, "Ann Petry" 268)—political: to protest discrimination against African Americans and to fight for the rights of women in Harlem (Lucy 188).

[113] Due to being overshadowed by the emergence of a coterie of celebrated Black male writers (James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison and social realist Richard Wright) Petry has remained, in the critic Keith Clark's words, "a reluctant and understudied literary icon" (7).

[114]These reading, in fact, distort the central issue of Petry's work. As Robin Lucy writes, "Petry delineates the material operations of an urban economics which function to isolate and alienate African American women from each other, their matrilineal ancestors and their children, and to displace them from a domestic site constituted by their productive and reproductive labour" (182).

instance, the cellar-dweller, Super Jones, his meek, long-suffering consort, Min, the violent, would-be pimp, Boots Smith, and the calculating bordello madam, Mrs. Hedges. In short, *The Street* is not a comforting or comfortable read. But comforting her reader with portrayals of the successful acquisition of the American dream was not Petry's prerogative. Noting that her aim in *The Street* was "to show how simply and easily the environment can change the course of a person's life" (Ivy 49), Petry wrote that she hoped that her sensory description of place in the novel would cause "an explosion" in her readers' heads, alerting them to the injustices of the ghetto (Sarkissian 265). Yet, perhaps more than an "explosion," the novel creates a pervasive sense of dislocation for readers and characters alike. Petry's self-reflexive formal techniques, her experiments with narrative time, dislocating flashbacks, multiple perspectives, and lateral plots oriented around female experiences of itineracy, all work to unsettle the reader.

Examining cultural and narrative representations of mid-century housing discrimination, this chapter traces how Black counternarratives to the mid-century's philosophy of urbanism and domesticity, counternarratives that include stories of eviction, redlining, and precarious living, replot the good life script. The first section of this chapter frames the historical context of African American experiences of domestic dislocation and offers a brief overview of how infrastructural tropes operate as primary structural devices in the literature of the mid-century Black canon. I argue that the employment of infrastructural metaphors emphasizes the connection between physical housing and the accommodation of civil rights.[115] Further, I show how the infrastructural metaphors and spatial plots produced in the search for physical, social,

[115] The term accommodation is deliberate as it brings together architecture and dialogue, foregrounding the importance of domestic space in the negotiating a material political change (accommodation is defined as temporary lodging, and as a convenient arrangement, a settlement or compromise). Much like the definition of narrative: "a spoken or written account of connected events; a story," the 17th century Latin roots of accommodation(n-), from accommodare, means to 'fit one thing to another.' This notion of linking suggests that the story is both a space of temporary shelter and a space of compromise between reader and text. It allows us to think spatially about the relationship between interiority and domestic interiors.

and narrative accommodations reconfigure ideas of literal space, inscribing the abstractions of power and racial and gender inequality onto the hard structures of the city. Turning to *The Street* as a case study, the second half of the chapter analyses Petry's self-reflexive narrative techniques, which at times emulate the floorplans of the tenement in which her characters dwell. I argue that Petry offers a unique critique of the good life and its domestic symbols in the following ways: first, by demonstrating how the White suburban America's vision of the good life relies so heavily on the labour of women of colour that these women are treated as a form of infrastructure; and secondly, by unsettling the reader through narrative techniques, ranging from innovative uses of narrative time, story structure, and shifting focalization. For the latter, I focus specifically on Petry's use of an unsettling form of free indirect discourse that I elaborate on and name "free indirect dislocation" due to its dislocating effects on the reader. By thinking infrastructurally, I argue, Petry demonstrates how the larger social system built on the racial inequality that is still operative today, fails its occupants on both structural and infrastructural levels.

Fig. 5. This image depicts a fair housing protest in Lake City, Seattle, April 1964 wherein protestors confronted racial discrimination in housing sales. This was part of a CORE-sponsored demonstration at realtor office of Picture Floor Plans, Inc. Signs declaring "Don't Patronize, Picture Floor Plans" call out the realtor office's discriminatory practices while demanding material, rather than simply symbolic, change. Source: Seattle Municipal Archives Digital Collections.

The Search for Accommodation in the Mid-Century African American Canon

Stories set in the mid-century hovels and rundown tenements of Harlem tell of precarious living situations; they tell of short-term leases, often culminating in forced removal and permanent itinerancy. Such narratives speak from a particular moment when the debate about material, social, and political accommodation for Black citizens was undergoing a foundational shift. From the Great Migration forward, when African Americans moved north in increasing numbers (Drake and Cayton 31-98), to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1968 Fair Housing Act, and even the space race,[116] the demand for social and physical accommodation was only to grow more

[116] For a fascinating study on how people of colour were represented in the space race in the 1960s see Lynn Spigel's "Outer Space and Inner Cities" in *Welcome to the Dream House* in which she shows how African American

urgent. These narratives of domestic dislocation also politicize the philosophy of urbanism by suggesting that its positive values, such as the ones I discussed at length in Chapter 1—porousness, proximity, contact, comparative privacy and economic opportunity—were not extended to the majority of urban dwellers, and not fundamental to city living.[117] Practices such as redlining (in which mortgage companies put a red line through African American's housing applications, thus denying them mortgages) meant that African Americans were unable to purchase property outside the ghettos, or in most suburbs, and thus were relegated to specific areas of the city, and at the mercy of ruthless landlords and the rhythms of urban renewal, now familiar as gentrification, the legacies of which still shape urban life today (Drake and Cayton 174-80). Furthermore, postwar urban renewal was often falsely portrayed as a means for social uplift, and the laws and policies that did address housing discrimination were not enforced or misinterpreted to further exacerbate segregation.[118] As Lance Freeman notes in his recent study of the postwar housing crisis, *A Haven and a Hell,* those dislocated from their living situations in the slums were not guaranteed admission to the new housing thus creating a terrible paradox: a family's home would be "demolished because of the putative horrors of their

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responses to the space race—whether positive or negative—were often explicitly tied to a critique of suburban segregation and the plight of Black communities in the inner cities (143).

[117] As I explored in the first chapter, there exists a deep tension between mobility and containment in the mid-twentieth century, between the porous home and the fortress. The opposition between these two states gets played out acutely in representations of Black urban domesticity as a model of class rise and assimilation, on the one hand, and oppression and segregation, on the other (Wojcik 226). Most explicitly this tension is materialized within the images and narratives surrounding the apartment verses the tenement, and the ways in which these two models are depicted within the media and literature of the time. Rather than stories of apartment life, mid-century representation of Black life depicts stories of forfeited domesticity.

[118] For example, in the 1948 court case *Shelly Vs. Kramer,* the Supreme Court overturned "restrictive covenants" that were a common, legal method of prohibiting Black occupancy in traditionally White neighbourhoods. After resisting the Supreme Court's ruling for two years, the FHA finally announced that it would end restrictive covenants; however, this announcement "served the purpose of alerting developers," encouraging many White prospectors "to hasten their applications for covenant-bound property before the announced deadline" (Arnold R. Hirsch, "With or without Jim Crow: Black residential Segregation in the United States," 90).

living in inadequate housing, yet the family might be ineligible for the new and improved housing and condemned to move into a slum elsewhere or be homeless" (110-111). As such, though they may have escaped the constricting south, African Americans were met with new restrictions on their citizenship in the north.[119] As Baldwin put it: "They do not escape Jim Crow: they merely encounter another not-less-deadly variety. They do not move to Chicago, they move to the South Side; they do not move to New York, they move to Harlem" (76).

Considering this historical context, it is not surprising that a fundamental theme in the mid-twentieth century Black literary canon was the quest for accommodation on a material, social and narrative level. Many of the most innovative writers of the mid-century—Richard Wright (*Native Son*, 1940), Langston Hughes (*The Big Sea*, 1940), Ann Petry (*The Street,*1946; *The Narrows*), Ralph Ellison (*Invisible Man*, 1952), James Baldwin (*Giovanni's Room*, 1956), Lorraine Hansberry (*A Raisin in the Sun*, 1959), and Chester Himes (*Harlem Cycle* 1957-69)—explored how social scripts were encrypted in urban and domestic infrastructure.[120] Their work demonstrates how, when relationships between race and space are situated in the language of architecture, the built environment emerges as a site wherein larger cultural narratives are at stake, such as the struggle for civil rights. Their work also presents a counternarrative to the vitality and promise of urban life for White populations, showing how racial segregation

[119] In the postwar years, more than 60 percent of those displaced by urban renewal were African Americans (Spigel 144).

[120] Many writers of the Black canon explore the Harlem ghetto as "pathological" in both objective and subjective dimensions (Wojcik 228; Massood 84; K. Clark, 11). Their texts include St. Clair Drake's and Horace P. Cayton's important Black Metropolis, Clark's Dark Ghetto, James Baldwin's "Fifth Avenue, Uptown," Oscar Lewis's "The Culture of Poverty," Daniel P. Moynihan's *The Negro Family*, and Lee Rainwater's *Behind Ghetto Walls*. Presenting an alternative view or urban renewal, these texts focus on transient domesticity and other conditions of life in the ghetto, such as poverty and drugs.

produces a uniquely limited experience of city living, one that is overlooked or even whitewashed by the positive values of the philosophy of urbanism (Wojcik 228-229).

Furthermore, for writers of the postwar Black canon, space and language hold a particular charge due to the legacy of the middle passage which erased, in the poet Renee Gladman's words, "that unmappable first land and unutterable first language" ("The Sentence" 94). The colossal dislocation of the middle passage and its legacy of material absence, loss, and being lost finds new narrative forms within in the search for the unmappable and the unutterable. This relationship between the absent language and absent maps of a community makes visible—and potentially audible—the connection between the voice and the map, or the voice *as* map.[121] The structural implications of the initial dislocation—abduction, captivity and forced migration—and the search for new maps persist within the ways in which African American writers articulate the relationship between language and architecture, and specifically, how space and language make, or fail to make, a home.

Although the above-mentioned literature is concerned with finding a homehouse, very few scenes of domesticity exist in these works. Furthermore, the mid-century media that did depict Black domesticity, represented domesticity under the threat of forfeiture. For instance, echoing a lawsuit (Hansberry v. Lee, 311 U.S. 32 1940) in which the playwright's family was a party, Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)[122] follows an African American family's move from a dilapidated two-bedroom apartment in Chicago's south side to a White suburb, and the ensuing tensions over the interracial cohabitation. This play portrays a

[121] As Luce Irigaray suggests, these two concepts are invariably linked, for to find a voice (voix) is to find a way (voie) (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 209).

[122] The title comes from the poem "Harlem" (also known as "A Dream Deferred") by Langston Hughes.

domesticity under threat while the protagonists fight for the right to social accommodation. Wright's *Native Son* similarly begins in a rat-infested one-room apartment in Chicago's south side, a space reflecting his protagonist Bigger's limited opportunities in life. The domestic space is described as barely inhabitable.[123] Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* also draws heavily on infrastructural symbols but foregoes conventional domesticity.[124]

Likewise, few scenes of domesticity exist in the media of the time. Mid-century film genres of the Black-cast musical and blaxploitation tended to represent public spaces such as nightclubs, bars, streets, and corners, rather than private spaces (Massood 84; Wojcik 226). As such, African American characters were rather associated with the urban city scape—as opposed to the domestic interior. Even *Ebony* (1945-present), the most popular postwar lifestyle magazine among African Americans, paid little attention to domestic topics, such as cooking, pregnancy, or childcare, usually relegating coverage to the small women's section at the back of the magazine, next to fashion spreads (Wojcik 231).[125] This may be because, for marginalized communities, representations of American domestic spaces have historically come with

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[123] James Baldwin also offers an example of domesticity under threat. Significantly, the titular room in Baldwin's most famous novel, *Giovanni's Room* (1956), is a domestic space wherein queer intimacy can momentarily find expression, despite the mural of compulsive heterosexuality on its walls. Yet, in the end, it is the room's promise of queer domesticity that most threatens Baldwin's White narrator, David, who believes Giovanni brought him to his room to "destroy it and give to Giovanni a new and better life" (88). Feeling emasculated by his domestic role in the relationship and unable to imagine a domesticity that includes two men, David abandons the room, and his life with Giovanni, leading to the novel's central crisis.

[124] Drawing on the metaphor of the cellar, the novel opens under a building "rented strictly to whites, in a section of the basement that was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century" wired with hundreds of electric lights, operated by power stolen from the city's electric grid, Monopolated Light & Power (*Invisible Man*, 6). The power sapped from the urban electrical grid connects electrical and social power through an infrastructural metaphor. Here, the racial marginalization is synonymous with invisibility within the social and built environment. As the scholar Adriene Brown notes "while history and sociology can tell us about the practices and discourses of suburbanization, a closer look at Ellison's novel shows that narrative was as crucial a terrain for thinking through the spatial upheavals of the 1950s as FHA handbooks or racial covenants […] As Ellison's nameless protagonist illustrates, attraction to the insularity of "warm holes" of aggressive sameness was not limited to White Americans during the mid-century, appealing to the visible and invisible alike" (178).

[125] *Ebony* was the "most read" magazine by African Americans, and although its readership was primarily of lower social and economic status, *Ebony* reflected Black middle-class tastes and ambitions (Berkman, 54).

ambivalent associations. As Elizabeth Machlan puts it, “From the ‘big house’ of the plantation to the ‘big house’ of the prison, African Americans have colloquially associated the domestic architecture of the United States with oppression and abjection” (149). So, although the hunt for a homehouse is so central to the literature of mid-century Black canon, domesticity tended to be associated with abjection. Shelter needed to be sought elsewhere, in community, in music, in story.

Revolution in a Minor Key

As mid-century media and literary representations of African American domesticity are sparse, it is often only through the act of eviction that we get a glimpse of early to mid-20th century Black domestic life. Following Hartman, we must read in-between the margins of the traditional archives, sourcing artifacts such as rent party ephemera, redlining documents, and landlord and rent collectors’ ledgers and diaries. For instance, Helen Parrish, a White rent collector who devoted her life to housing reform in Philadelphia in the early 20th century, kept a journal of her Monday collection rounds, which tell of the destitution of the ghetto and the squalid domestic conditions of those who are drained for rent by White landlords, pawning their shoes in order to pay the minimum amount to stave off eviction. Though Parrish shares a degree of compassion for the tenants, buying back their shoes from the pawn shop, or providing food money for residents’ children, her diaries also depict the moralizing, disciplinary or paternalistic attitudes rent collectors and landlords had over their tenants’ social lives and personal choices—such as

threatening to evict mixed race couples, unmarried men, "fast girls," or women who drink (503).[126]

Though they depict the oppressive circumstances of the early 20th century housing crisis, Parrish's meticulous descriptions of tenement life also provide evidence of flickers of resistance from the tenants—resistance that will later fuel calls for housing reform. For example, in one passage while reflecting on a "prolonged and stormy interview" with one of the tenants over unpaid rent, Parrish observes, "It is mindful to be as wise as a serpent surely in dealing with them and I must remember never to speak a word of one to any other… they are too much together, *too much at home*. They talk and gossip too much. I find knots in the yard and whatever I do is sure to bring about some discussion—alone they are amenable, but *en masse* far from it" (501, my emphasis). This strange formulation—that people living on the brink of eviction, within brutal oppression and systemic precarity are "too much at home" —signals the rent collector's uneasy awareness of the strength of numbers, and foreshadows future efforts of marginalized communities claiming space such as housing riots wherein the ghetto occupants will gather to demand more hospitable cities.

On another Monday rent collection, tells of a tenant, Katy Clayton, who "comb[s] her hair in the street" while another tenant, Rebecca Clark, sits with a woman in the yard "deliberately drinking beer" (503). Parrish recalls how when the women saw her, "Rebecca deliberately took the cup from her [friend] and finished it before me" (503). Parrish acknowledges that this act of defiance occasions an eviction notice, but reconsiders her options

[126] In one passage, Parrish confronts the tenant Joe Robinson, "who is on the defensive at the slightest interference about his white fiancée," warning him that she has "decided that if he marries the white girl he cannot stay.… If they do not [marry], he may stay until Sept., but she cannot go there to live" (503). We do not find out what happens to the couple, but mention of Joe's White fiancée keeps cropping up over the year, as Parrish warns him that mixed race cohabitation qualifies for eviction.

because of her attachment to Rebecca—a reoccurring motif in Parrish's notebooks. The repetition of the word "deliberately" captures a moment wherein power is briefly transferred from rent collector to tenant, a moment of self-assertion within an otherwise tightly controlled and morally policed environment. To borrow a line from Hartman, these rare glimpses into tenement life reveal "a revolution in a minor key … wherein the vision and dreams of the wayward seemed possible" (*Wayward Lives* xv).[127] The marginalized subject's deliberate reclaiming of space, of being "too much at home"—paradoxically like an unwanted guest within their own dwelling—prompts anxiety for figures like the rent collector or the landlord because it conflicts with spaces that are considered "homelike" to the beneficiaries of patriarchy and White supremacy. Being "too much at home" within such spaces unsettles what the concept of homeliness or feeling "at home" might actually mean. It overtly questions who the city's hospitality serves and what might happen when these conventions change.

More evidence of the revolution in a minor key can be found in the rise of the weekly rent party, known as the "social whist party," thrown to help tenants faced with discriminatory rental rates to make rent (West 279). Since Monday evictions were common, these parties were hosted on Thursdays and Saturdays in order to avoid the scene of a family seeing their belongings tossed onto the street come rent collection. Holding a rent party would include turning the private home into a public semi-commercial space: the living room, dining room and possibly bedrooms transformed into a miniature dance hall (West 279*).* Referred to as "Social

[127] Yet, even with these fleeting visions of Black resistance within the domestic space, the African American quest for the "homehouse" secure from rent collectors and the punitive White gaze was still, like the quest for the dream house, largely aspirational. As Hartman narrates from the voice of one of her archival subjects, "The first generation after slavery had been so in love with being free that few noticed or minded that they had been released to nothing … People were too busy dreaming of who they wanted to be and how they wanted to live … folks were still looking, picking up and moving on, again and again" (145). In the first half of the 20th century, the main experience was still of dislocation. Folks were still trying to imagine what a life could be.

Party" or a "Social Dance" to avoid suspicion from police, rent parties were predominantly advertised through "rent party tickets" printed as business cards or small leaflets in order to be easily distributed. The hosts would hire a band and a hat was passed around to collect contributions that would go towards rent.[128]

Like the scenarios described in Parish's diaries, the rhymes on the rent party cards signal the ways the community sought to protect their right to a home, and also the ways in which the Harlem neighbourhoods were changing. "Don't move to the outskirts of town, stick around and meet a new Brown" one party card reads; "Not to slow, not too fast, but a real good time while it last" states another party invite (Hughes collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library).[129] Though rent parties seemed to disappear temporarily after the Depression, they made a comeback in the postwar era when redlining policies were enforced. As the rent party card collector Langston Hughes noted in the 1957, "Maybe it is inflation today and the high cost of living that is causing the return of the pay-at-the-door and buy-your-refreshments parties."

[128] Hosts would usually distribute these tickets to friends, neighbors, and acquaintances, while others would surreptitiously pass out tickets to strangers, or hide them amid various public spaces to avoid attracting the attention of police. Tickets never explicitly referred to events as "rent parties," instead referring to them as a "Social Party" or a "Social Dance." Some parties charged at the door. The cost of admission ranged from around 25 cents to 50 cents.

[129] Langston Hughes wrote about his collection of rent party cards in the *Chicago Defender*, explaining, "When I first came to Harlem, as a poet I was intrigued by the little rhymes at the top of most House Rent Party cards, so I saved them. Now I have quite a collection." For more on Hughes' collection see: https://slate.com/human-interest/2013/03/rent-parties-langston-hughes-collection-of-rent-party-cards-photo.html

Fig. 6. These cards, collected by Langston Hughes and held with his papers in Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, advertised "rent parties" to be held in Harlem in the 1940s and 1950s. Courtesy of Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Though playful, the rent party rhymes perform an aesthetics of precarity. The couplets offer a combination of witty lyricism and a recognition of the common situation befalling Harlem's residents: dislocated domesticity. They are an invitation, but also a contract with the community, encouraging community members to buy refreshments and help make rent now and the favour will be returned in due course. They give lyric shape to the experience of shared, imminent dislocation, but also of the changing social landscape. Implicitly in Ada and Rachel's

rent party rhyme "Not too slow and not too fast / But a real good time while it last—" is the recognition of ephemerality, that, like the living situations in the neighbourhood, these moments of celebration and community are fleeting. The same sentiment is implied in Gus and Jenkin's party invitation: "Don't move to the outskirts of town, / Drop around and Meet a new Brown." There is an anxiety about the move to the suburbs and the further class segregation that such changes might bring, and thus the social whist party seeks to re-center the ghetto as a space of culture and community; it seeks, even if temporarily, to make a collective homehouse.

The social whist parties were successful in creating a partial counternarrative to the dream of suburban flight, which, as we can see, was a fantasy entertained by Black as well as White urban communities. Indeed, some of the most innovative jazz music was to be born on the rent party dancefloor.[130] Despite the hellish housing conditions and the redlining policies, Harlem was a haven for cultural gestation: "the ghetto provided a space for blacks to thrive culturally economically and politically and simple to feel at home" (Freeman 10). Thus, these fleeting glimpses of the revolution in a minor key offer an alternative domestic symbol to white-washed depictions of the dream house, one that would fuel a second wave of Black nationalism in the 1960s.

Suspension of the Good Life: Lutie in Transit

Set in 1944, just after the 1943 Harlem riots, *The Street* follows Lutie Johnson, and her young son Bub, as they search for a new apartment and eventually find a one-bedroom in an undesirable tenement on 116th street. Despite the squalid conditions of the apartment, and the

[130] Notable jazz musicians are associated with rent parties include the pianists Speckled Red, Georgia Tom, Little Brother Montgomery, James P. Johnson, Willie "the Lion" Smith, and Fats Waller (Oakley 148-9).

strange, predatory behavior of the building's superintendent, Jones, the uneasy presence of his timid domestic partner, Min, and the all-watching and scheming bordello-owner and neighbour, Mrs. Hedges, Lutie takes the apartment because she knows she has few other options within her price range. She tells herself it will only be temporary and that soon, when she has saved enough money, she and Bub will be able to move to a safer neighborhood and a better life. But Lutie's life begins to unravel as she becomes ensnared in the machinations of other characters from 116th Street, who seek to exploit her out of greed or lust. After her son Bub is tricked into committing a petty crime, and after Lutie kills Boots Smith, her would-be pimp, in self-defence while trying to find the money for a lawyer, Lutie flees New York on a train headed for Chicago, convincing herself that Bub will be better off without her. As the train departs, she blames the street itself for limiting her options and eventually destroying her chances at making a life for herself and her son.

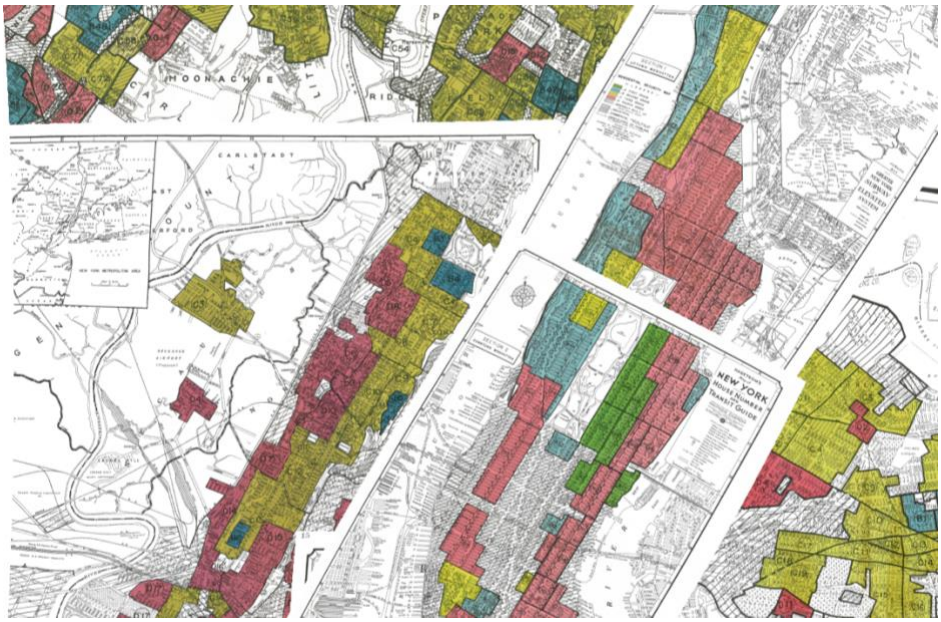

Fig. 7. This map of Manhattan and Harlem depicts New York's redlined neighbourhoods in 1940. Redlining is a discriminatory practice that puts services (financial and otherwise) out of reach for residents of certain areas based on race or ethnicity. This map was created through Mapping Inequality Redlining in New Deal America and shared in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution.

Fig. 8. The highlighted section depicts the district of Harlem where *The Street* is set. This map was created through Mapping Inequality Redlining in New Deal America and shared in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution.

The novel begins with Lutie in a state of suspension between her memory of the suburban dream house in which she used to work and the nightmare of the tenement in which she now lives. In the first scene, we meet her between homes, visiting the apartment on 116th street as she searches for accommodations for herself and her son, and in the following scene, the novel's second chapter, we encounter her in a scene of literal suspension, on a train traveling from Manhattan, where she works as a transcriptionist, back to the tenement on 116th street in Harlem. Along with the other passengers, Lutie stares at an advertisement directly in front of her and

enters "a small private world which shut out the people tightly packed around her" (28).[131] In fact, it is the advertisement on the train, which pictures a couple in their dream kitchen, that initiates the 25-page long flashback into Lutie's life as a domestic worker and nanny for the wealthy Connecticut family, the Chandlers. Gazing at the gleaming kitchen, Lutie recalls the events that led her to losing her house and husband, and renting the fateful apartment on 116th street with its predatory Super.

> For the advertisement she was looking at pictured a girl with incredible blond hair. The girl leaned close to a dark-haired, smiling man in a navy uniform. They were standing in front of a kitchen sink—a sink whose white porcelain surface gleamed under the train lights. The faucets looked like silver. The linoleum floor of the kitchen was a crisp black-and-white pattern that pointed up the sparkle of the room. Casement windows. Red geraniums in yellow pots.
>
> It was, she thought, a miracle of a kitchen … almost exactly like the one she had worked in in Connecticut (28).

Interestingly, the image of this "miracle of a kitchen" mingles with the lights of the commuter train, juxtaposing the kitchen within the public space, thus positioning the commuters as audience members to this intimate scene of the good life. The scene, so similar to the suburban kitchen Lutie worked in as a domestic worker, seduces its onlookers with the impossible promise of upward mobility while moving horizontally along the train's predestined track. Furthermore, by juxtaposing the private world of the kitchen into the public space of the train, Petry reveals how, contrary to Wright's claim that domesticity and domestic workers did not have political

[131] Interestingly, Lutie's city job is almost entirely unnarrated, as opposed to her commute. Petry's narratorial focus is on Lutie's moments of dislocation, rather than moments of location or security.

purchase, the kitchen was a site of politics—in this case, a soft power strategy selling the good life. As the train scene reveals, Black women moving between this markedly White space of the suburban dream house and the Harlem tenements were in fact active and mobile subjects, who could scrutinize the good life script from both sides of the redline.

Even as she is seduced by the miracle of the kitchen conative of the white-washed good life, Lutie also acknowledges the paradox of her double bind: "she never felt really human until she reached Harlem and thus got away from the white women who stared at her on the downtown streets and in the subway" (57). She thus lives in a state of dislocation, an experience of being out of place, and not at home in the dream house or the blighted tenement.[132] This uncanny experience is one shared by many African American women living in Harlem and working in Manhattan and in white-washed suburbs and neighbourhoods. Thus, contrary to Wright's concern that the hustle between "kitchenette to the white folk's kitchen and back home again" depoliticizes Black women, relegating them to the margins the modern world (*12 Million* 131), the small dislocation Lutie experiences on her commute affords her a unique critical perspective of the structural injustices of the mid-century African American experience. It is in her unsettled state that Lutie registers the condition of other women on the street and increasingly develops what bell hooks defines as "the critical gaze, one that 'looks' to document, one that is oppositional" (116). This sense of dislocation prompts Lutie to articulate both the dream house and the tenement as sites of ambivalence and even horror.

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[132] Freeman picks up on this shared experience of dislocation within ghettos faced with urban renewal projects. As he notes, "many 'slums' or 'blighted' areas were only such in the eye of the developer or planner, who ignored the social relationships in these neighborhoods and who judged the housing there from the vantage point of someone with a full range of housing options in the larger city. Old neighborhoods with flocks of people hanging outside, in particular the "wrong" kind of people, were often seen as little more than slums" (111). Questions remained unanswered: What provisions would be made to relocate the thousands of Black families 'cleared' from their home? What consideration would be given to uprooted communities—churches, business-owners—within a relocation scheme? What would a new home look like?

As Lutie reflects on her commute, her experience with the Chandlers and their suburban home, sparkling kitchen and tree-lined street, does not match up to the ad on the train. Despite its appearance, with its "four big bedrooms, each one with its own bath … like something in the movies" (37-38), we discover that the Chandlers' dream house failed to produce the good life it promises, and instead revealed a family riddled with alcoholism, loneliness, insecurity and despair. Concealed behind the sashes of the dream house is a house of horrors—Lutie recalls how her employer's brother, Johnathan Chandler, shot himself in the living room beside the Christmas tree in front of the whole family. Thus, just as it is impossible to escape the corruption and despair of the Black inner city, it is equally impossible, as the Chandlers reveal, to escape the despair of the small White towns whose inhabitants have benefited from the housing restrictions imposed on people of colour and who rely on the labour of Black women (Bell 190). Lutie recognizes that this is because these supposedly antithetical structures, the dream house and the tenement, are two sides of the same coin.

Yet even this failed symbol of the good life doesn't deter Lutie from continuing to adhere to its script. As we learn, even after "Mr. Chandler's brother killed himself in the living room, she didn't lose her belief in the desirability of having money, though she saw that mere possession of it wouldn't necessarily guarantee happiness" (49). Lutie's belief in what the miracle kitchen can provide demonstrates how the good life is an aspirational fiction. Lutie's relatable investment in its script is one of the things that forecasts her downfall for it welcomes Lutie while, at the same time, eliding her completely. We never find out what the advertisement is for specifically, only that it pictures a White middle-class heterosexual couple beside a gleaming sink. Like the Miracle Kitchen of the world fairs, this image is, for Lutie and for her

fellow passengers—other workers traveling from downtown Manhattan to Harlem—a poster for the good life, one barred from them yet contingent upon their labour.

Lutie is not the only one to experience this sense of suspension in the train scene. Petry masterfully slows down time in this scene, suspending the action, and inviting a readerly displacement as well. Every time we readers begin to forget our moorings as we move through Lutie's flashbacks, Petry brings us back to the train, reminding the reader of the itinerant body, still holding on to the rail, staring at the gleaming kitchen. Yet the commute into Lutie's past lives takes longer than Lutie's own commute on the express from 59th and 8th to 125th street and then back on the local to 116th. According to my calculations, making this journey now would take about 10 minutes by subway. In 1944, when the novel is set, the journey would have taken slightly longer due to older infrastructure, but still far less time than the 30 minutes it takes to read the scene on the train. Thus, by slowing down narrative time by about 50 percent of the real time, Petry creates a temporal dislocation; we are both invited to join Lutie on her commute uptown, but also into her past, which, because of its weight, slows her, and us readers, down. By slowing us down, Petry requests a more embodied form of attention from the reader. Like we saw in Chapter 1, this new metric of attention defamiliarizes ordinary actions, in this case, the act of riding the train, and invites us to inhabit the sense of dilated time that comes with being in a space of suspension. For this passage we are outside of the city's scheduled time. Like Lutie, we enter into the analytical time that the small dislocation affords.

Infrastructural Racism and Women as Infrastructure

As Kate Marshall argues in *Corridor*, many well-worn cultural narratives of 20th century urban development in the United States focus on "a double movement: the colonization of vertical

space via the skyscraper and the horizontal space via the suburb" (106). But, she suggests, as these forms develop, "the novel often focuses on another dimension, laying out an urban topography that is subterranean and infrastructural" (106), a topography that includes transit networks and power grids. These infrastructural movements emerge in a self-reflexive manner "as places where the novel names itself as a transit network as well" (106). We can find evidence of such self-reflexive maneuvers in *The Street*, particularly in Petry's exploration of the relationship between female bodies and infrastructure and what Sarah Wasserman has termed "infrastructural racism," a concept that illuminates how "racist social forms are embedded in the built environment," while reminding us that "historically contingent racism and resistance comingle in the same spaces" (*The Death of Things* 116). Indeed, by foregrounding the contingencies of infrastructural racism on a thematic and formal level, Petry points to the ways in which racialized female bodies are paradoxically both excluded from political discussions about mid-century urbanism,[133] and positioned as infrastructurally integral to maintaining the American vision of the good life.

Along with the metaphor of the train—suspension, dislocation, fated trajectory—and the titular metaphor of the street—as a mode of conveyance and connection, but also a dead-end[134]—an important infrastructural metaphor that resurfaces in *The Street* is the wall: specifically, the wall

[133] For instance, for Lutie Johnston all of the seemingly positive values of apartment living outlined by the apartment plot (community, visibility, contact, density, and porousness) are in fact what conspire against her. The porous nature of the tenement becomes the metaphor for how the men view her body, as something to be entered and riffled through and discarded at will, as the building Supervisor does in her rooms and her closet. If anything, *The Street* resembles the urban gothic horror film, *Rosemary's Baby*, wherein the neighbours and tenement corridors serve to terrorize and confine the protagonist, rather than offer mobility and community. Thus, Petry's novel serves as dark double of the postwar apartment plot that we looked at in the first chapter.

[134] The street is also likened to a parental figure. Lutie is aware that her motherhood and home have been displaced by a street which has become "mother and father and trained your kid for you, and it was an evil father and a vicious mother" (407).

that encloses the consciousness in the way that brick and plaster encloses the power wires or insulation in an apartment. Like Bigger's wall metaphor in *Native Son*, Lutie's wall both keeps one out and hems one in. It is a psychic and legislative, as well as physical barrier—though, importantly, not always an acoustic one.[135] Throughout the novel, Lutie employs the metaphor of the wall and walled-in interior to think about the paradox of being both imprisoned and excluded by White culture. But what is particularly interesting about these descriptions of being both walled in and walled out by White culture, is that Lutie is positioned *inside* the wall, like the insulation within the walls of a house, looking out through its cracks.

For instance, drawing on the image of the wall, Lutie acknowledges that "from the time she was born, she had been hemmed into an ever-narrowing space, until now she was very nearly walled in and the wall had been built up brick by brick by eager white hands" (201)—a gothic image right out of Poe's "Cask of Amontillado." As we find out, these hands belong to Junto, the powerful White landlord and nightclub owner, who refuses to pay Lutie for her singing and attempts to make Lutie his mistress. In the novel's climatic scene, wherein Lutie is attacked by Junto's emissary Boots, narrative time slows down as she considers the prospect of a (symbolic) living burial:

> And all the time she was thinking, Junto has a brick in his hand. Just one brick. The final one needed to complete the wall that had been building up around her for years, and when that one last brick was shoved in place, she would be completely walled in. (262)

In this passage, the "eager white hands" and the extension of these hands, Boots, threaten to turn Lutie's body into a form of infrastructure: an object and a space to be filled through an act of sexual violence. As she beats her aggressor Boots—eventually to death—the infrastructural

[135] The porosity of walls is key to Wojcik's formation of the apartment plot.

conceit moves from the street to the interior, to the women dwelling within those interiors, and finally, to the larger structural problem of inequality brought about by the White world:

> First she was venting her rage against the dirty, crowded street. She saw the rows of dilapidated old houses; the small dark rooms; the long steep flights of stairs; the narrow dingy hallways; the little lost girls in Mrs. Hedges's apartment; the smashed homes where the women did drudgery because their men had deserted them. She saw all of these things and struck at them…Finally, and the blows were heavier, faster, now, she was striking at the white world which thrust black people into a walled enclosure from which there was no escape . . . (266)[136]

Foregrounding the roles of African American women as domestic labourers (women doing drudgery) and sexual labourer (little lost girls in Mrs. Hedges's apartment), this passage points to the ways in which women of colour face a double bind, being hemmed in by both cultures of racism and misogyny. The walled encloser from which there is no escape again depicts the gothic image of being buried inside a wall.

The images of being walled in and thereby disappeared from sight also recalls Lutie's depiction of the kitchen in the train ad that we looked at earlier. Unseen in this kitchen with "all its tricks of white enamel" is the labour Black women have spent fortifying this image (*The Street* 56). As Robin Lucy points out, these women are "the itinerant, invisible work force of the urban North whose labor undergirds this domestic miracle but who participate in none of its

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[136] Instead of spaces of shelter, the "smashed homes" have become spaces of incarceration, foreshadowing Lutie's son Bub's eventual capture and juvenile detention. These lines anticipate the lament of Ellison's invisible man: "You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your firsts, you curse and swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful" (*The Invisible Man* 4). More recently, we can hear the same resonances in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*, which underscores the persistent experience of marginalized communities of being both visible and invisible: "you grow into an understanding you / are not anyone" Rankine writes, "Even as your own weight insists / you are here, fighting off / the weight of nonexistence (139).

benefits" (11). The invisibility of this labour recalls the invisibility of infrastructure, buried within the walls or discreetly hidden from view, which only gains visibility when it breaks down. This breaking down of the network quickly transforms the background into the foreground, shedding light on discounted or unseen stories and experiences, which is precisely what Petry's use of self-reflexive spatial metaphors does in *The Street*. As Marshall writes, it is important to consider the ways in which "communication is figured in the making visible of infrastructure" for when "infrastructure becomes visible it indicates that something in the relations between things and persons is at stake" (113). In this case, what is at stake is Lutie's sense of personhood, her fight to be a participant in the American dream, instead of the infrastructure that supports it for others.

In another infrastructural passage, Lutie, while in Connecticut housekeeping for the Chandlers, imagines the good life as situated inside a walled garden to which she cannot gain access:

> She was looking through a hole in a wall at some enchanted garden. She could see, she could hear, she spoke the language of the people in the garden, but she couldn't get past the wall. The figures on the other side of it loomed up life-size and they could see her, but there was this wall in between which prevented them from mingling on equal footing. The people on the other side of the wall knew less about her than she did about them. (31)

This notion that "the people on the other side of the wall knew less about her than she did about them" describes Lutie's understanding of "double consciousness," defined by W. E. B. Du Bois as a source of inward "twoness" putatively experienced by African-Americans because of their racialized oppression and devaluation in a White-dominated society (*The Souls of Black*

Folk 1903).[137] Du Bois uses the metaphor of the veil when describing the sense of looking into the "American world" that the Black American cannot participate in, while Lutie returns again and again to the wall. What is interesting about Lutie's choice of infrastructural conceit—one that is much harder, thicker and more difficult to see through than the veil—is that it deliberately draws attention to how the built environment perpetuates the conditions that enforce such a double consciousness. It also emphasises the uncanniness inherent in what Du Bois calls "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," this experience of "twoness" (Souls 38).

The sense of double consciousness goes beyond the diegesis of the novel. Along with her critical awareness of this sense of twoness, Lutie's description of looking at the figures on the other side of the wall suggests the image of a reader considering the characters in a book, or a viewer watching characters on a stage or screen in which the figures "loomed up life-size" (31). Through this emphasis on watching, Petry reminds us of the participation of the reader, and anticipates the need to create what Toni Morrison has referred to as a doublevoiced text, a novel that performs an act of double-consciousness in relation to its readers. In other words, the emphasis on perspective signals the author's awareness of how the novel communicates with its readers, based on their experiences of marginality. This brings about another level of narrative accommodation and also reveals how Petry's infrastructural metaphors work self-reflexively.

[137] The African American, Du Bois writes, "is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness." (*Souls* 38).

Drawing on her own writing experience, Morrison describes being "forced to resort" to certain "strategies" in order to "accommodate the mere fact of writing about, for and out of black culture while accommodating and responding to mainstream 'white' culture" so that potentially hostile readers have no time "to wonder 'What do I have to do, to give up, in order to read this? What defense do I need, what distance maintain?'" ("Unspeakable Things" 26-33). Yet, on the other hand, Morrison notes, she must sustain "a deliberate posture of vulnerability to those aspects of Afro-American culture that can inform and position [her] work," a vulnerability that relies "for full comprehension on codes embedded in black culture" and thus "effect[s] immediate co-conspiracy" with black readers ("Unspeakable Things" 26-33). Put simply, Morrison is describing the construction of a text that African American readers can decode while White readers think they have (though have failed to have) done the same (Lanser 120). Morrison's use of the word "accommodation" is important here, especially in regard to Petry's use of infrastructural metaphors, for it further links the notion of compromise with narrative and with shelter. For Lutie, the wall is a symbol of imprisonment and means of being kept out, but it also serves as a critical part of any structure of accommodation. In this way, by returning to the physicality of the wall metaphor, Petry reminds us that language, like the built environment, has the power to develop multiple meanings using common structures. It has the power to shelter some, while evicting others.

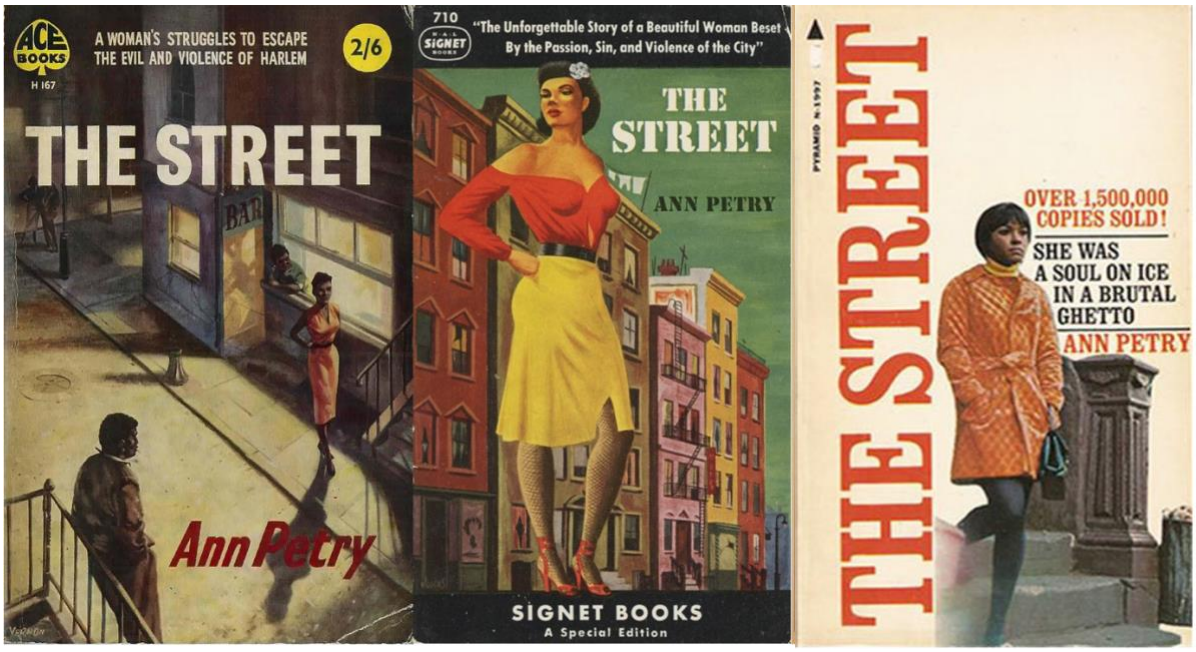

Fig. 9. In the quotations on the majority of *The Street*'s covers, the city is treated as the central antagonist: it is Lutie Johnson verses "the evil and violence of Harlem," the "Passion, Sin, and Violence of the city" and the "brutal ghetto." This emphasis on the ominous power of the built environment reflects Wasserman's concept of "infrastructural racism": wherein racist social forms are embedded in the environment, as well as evidence of resistance to those forms. In the central image Lutie is pictured towering above the street, the same height as the tenements, her clothing matching the building's red and yellow paint. This visual similarity between the female body and the building emphasizes the ways in which social structures relied on the labour of women of colour.

Petry's Panoramic Vision in the Tenement Plot

Just as *The Street*'s narrative structure is shaped like a tenement building in which the reader catches glimpses of the lives going on behind the half-closed curtains and blinds, the novel's plotlines rely on parallelism, in addition to causality, and on shared or misunderstood situations rather than strictly individual dilemmas.[138] Petry uses the shared situation of unsettled occupancy—the experience of not feeling at home and not being able to find home—to move

[138] Ned Schantz writes in reference to Jordan Peel's film *Get Out*, "What situation can throw into relief, then, is a fuller sense of the stakes of a given narrative, which need no longer be framed individualistically or with reference to narrow plot resolutions" (4). I believe that this is very much the case with the dislocation situation in *The Street*.

beyond the individual and draw attention to the collective experience. Thus, the narrative architecture mirrors the story's overarching theme, the shared situation facing everyone on 116th Street: racial segregation, discrimination, and poverty.[139] In short, the urban space itself is cast as a character, which amplifies the critique of the larger powers in play: White supremacy.

The novel accomplishes this formally in two ways: First, by the employment of a focalizing technique that I am calling "free indirect dislocation"—a play on free indirect discourse, which describes the moments in a third-person narrative when the narrative voice becomes absorbed by the perspective of one of its characters.[140] Free indirect dislocation is an extreme form of free indirect discourse that moves between oppositional point of views within a scene creating a destabilizing or unsettling effect for the reader. And second, by the incorporation of lateral storylines that bear no causal relationship (though often a thematic relationship) to the central plot and the protagonist and are based on situations that evoke shared experience. In the following, I will briefly outline two examples of these self-reflexive narrative techniques and demonstrate of these techniques map out the complex experiences of infrastructural racism within the novel.

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[139] Even the novel summaries that appear on the covers of the 20th century editions of *The Street* outline the story as a woman's plight against her situation: "The Unforgettable Story of a Woman Beset by the Sin and Violence of the City" (Signet Giant, 1949), the slightly elaborated version "The Unforgettable Story of a Beautiful Woman Beset by the Passion, Sin, and Violence of the City" (Signet Books, 1949); "A Woman's struggle to escape the Evil and Violence of Harlem" (Ace Books, 1958); "She was a soul on ice in a brutal ghetto" which is a nod to Eldridge Cleaver's memoir of racial rage and misogynistic violence (Pyramid, 1961). The situation described by these summaries outline the conditions of life of many in the ghetto in which the city takes on the role of the amorphous antagonist.

[140] Free indirect speech is a form of narration written in the third person while maintaining some essential elements of a first-person narrator. The author can thus describe the inner workings of their characters; their private emotions and thoughts, while still remaining at an observational distance. This allows for the narrator to 'delve in and out' of the thoughts of any character they choose. The Free Indirect style allows the author to combine the detached objectivity of a third person narration with the personal, biased, and often prejudiced voice of a first-person narrator. Definition obtained from: https://janeausten.co.uk/blogs/jane-austens-work/what-is-free-indirect-discourse

Petry's use of free indirect *dislocation* pushes the subtly shifting perspective associated with free indirect discourse further to create an effect of narrative itinerancy, one which, in this case, reflects the novel's theme of displacement. Further, Petry's sudden shifts from innocent or sympathetic perspectives like Bub or Lutie, to antagonistic, racist, and predatory focalizers, challenges her readers' sense of accommodation as we are forced to inhabit the novel's uncomfortable sections wherein the narrative moves into the consciousness of Lutie's would-be rapists Boots Smith and Super Jones, Lutie's neighbour, the bordello's exploitative madame Mrs. Hedges, Bub's bigoted White third-grade teacher, Miss Rinner, who is both dismissive and terrified of her Black students, and the White detectives who have come to break the news to Lutie that her son has been imprisoned. These last two examples reveal particularly dislocative transitions between focalizes.

In the first instance, we move from Miss Rinner's perception of her classroom as "a jungle…filled with the smell of the jungle…tainted food, rank unwashed bodies, the small tight braids on the little girls' heads [that] were probably African custom" (333) and her portrait of Bub and his fellow classmates as "worms, moving their arms and legs in endless intricate patterns…[that] frightened her" (330), to Bub's consciousness, as he searches for "something pretty to buy his mother—something shiny and pretty" (335). Within the course of the scene we move from Miss Rinner's grotesque, racist view of her Black students as worms to Bub's vision of his love for his mother and his wish to buy her shining things.

In the second instance of free indirect dislocation, we move from the detectives describing her apartment as "not fit for pigs to live in, let along people" (386) and imagining Lutie as "probably some drunken bitch….They usually are" (387) to Lutie's focalization in which, grief-

stricken at the news of her son's arrest, she considers the larger social structures which imprison Black women and their families:

> Her legs felt brittle … her thoughts were like a chorus chanting inside her head. The men stood around and the women worked. The men left the women and the women went on working and the kids were left alone.…The women work because the white folks give them jobs—washing dishes and clothes and floors and windows. The women work because for years now the white folks haven't liked to give black men jobs that paid enough for them to support their families… Even wars don't change it. The men get out of the habit of working and the houses are old and gloomy and the walls press in.… She pressed closer to the wall ignoring the grey dust, the fringes of cobwebs heavy with grime and soot. Add it up. Bub, your kid—flashing smile, strong, straight back, sturdy legs, even white teeth, young, round face, smooth skin—he ends up in reform school because the women work.…the little Henry Chandlers go to YalePrincetonHarvard and the Bub Johnsons graduate from reform school into DannemoraSingSing.[141] (387-389).

This eloquent, analytical passage veers close to Petry's journalistic voice, as Lutie guides the reader through an intersectional account of the socio-economic situation in mid-century Harlem. But in terms of narrative strategy, what is striking about the transitions between focalizers in both this scene and the scene between Miss Rinner and Bub is the movement between exteriority to interiority, the shocking transition between the dehumanizing White gaze of Miss Rinner and the White detectives to the intimate and analytical consciousness of Bub and Lutie. They draw a stark and unsettling contrast between outside perceptions of the inner city and perspectives from within the Harlem community.

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[141] High security prisons in New York state.

Petry extends her panoramic vision by providing variations on a singular scene from multiple perspectives within the tenement building, thereby moving between the character's interiorities and domestic interiors.[142] As a result of the novel's multiple perspectives, we readers are invited into different interiorities of characters rooted in the same place (the tenement; 116th street, 1940s Harlem) and facing the same situation (precarity, discrimination, segregation). For instance, after hovering close to Lutie's perspective for the first 83 pages of the novel, the third person narration abruptly transports readers into the interiority of the villain, Super Jones, hungerly following Lutie's progress up the street and wishing that "she hadn't worn such a full coat so he could have a better view of her well-shaped hips" (85). Lutie's youthfulness and beauty make "him deadly aware of his own loneliness that ate into him day and night … a loneliness born of living in basements and sleeping on mattresses in boiler rooms" (85). As we see from this description of pathological architecture, when in Jones's mind, we readers are relocated to the cellar. Indeed, picking up on the spatial determinism of the tenement, Mrs. Hedges describes Jones as "cellar crazy" from living "in cellars so long" (240).

Lutie refuses this sense of spatial determination, pointing out that many people live in a similar situation and do not develop cellar craziness—that is, they do not succumb to criminality and threatening behavior. Yet she too imagines Jones as linked to the infrastructure he maintains; she sees him as less-than-human "chained to buildings until he was like an animal" (191). She dreams that Super Jones's throat

[142] Examples of lateral or parallel storylines based on a common situation would be secondary characters Min and Mrs. Hedges's storylines and variations of a common scene include the scenes with Bub and Super Jones in the cellar or Lutie's apartment while she's out, or the tense interactions between Min and Jones or Jones and Lutie, culminating in a climactic scene wherein Jones attacks Lutie in the corridor at night, and she is rescued by Mrs. Hedges.

> worked like the dog's throat. He made a whining noise deep inside it. He painted and strained to get free and run through the block but the building was chained to his shoulders like an enormous doll's house made of brick. She could see people moving around inside the building, drearily climbing the tiny stairs, sliding through the narrow halls (191).

Lutie's vision of the dollhouse echoes the novel's structure and third person narrative mode in which we see "people moving around inside" the narrative, dipping occasionally into their thoughts through Petry's roving focalization. Like in the passage in which Lutie observes the world within the walled garden, Lutie is positioned as the reader observing the cast of characters stuck inside the architecture of the plot. To recall Elizabeth Grosz's assessment of the liminal position of outsiderness: "Something is lost—the immediate intimacy of an inside position; and something is gained—the ability to critically evaluate that position and to possibly compare it with others" (*Architecture from the Outside* 1). Thus, in this self-reflexive passage, the reader is prompted to critically evaluate her position as observer, consumer, and occupant of the text.

For instance, when trapped within the interiority of the more villainous characters, such as Jones, we readers are forced into a kind of complicity with the "cellar crazy" mind and are compelled to take on a different perspective—a view from the cellar—that, though unsettling, reflects an experience of the common situation.[143] By incorporating multiple perspectives, Petry adopts what Clare Virginia Eby calls a "politics of sympathy that encourages identification (of our common humanity) while insisting upon individual variability" and "rejects the notion that oppressed people have uniform experiences" (36). In other words, she creates a portrait of the

[143] This reflects a version of Ellison's view from the basement—or, for that matter, Dostoevsky's.

tenement through its individual rooms. Thus, in its attention to minor characters and their situations, *The Street* demonstrates the value of considering perceptions and experiences from different positions within a marginalized community and insists upon a reading that takes the importance of social and narrative infrastructure into account.

This leads me to my second point about Petry's incorporation of lateral storylines based on situations that evoke shared experience. By exploring diverse and frequently oppositional perspectives on a common situation, Petry evokes what Karla Holloway calls "shared ways of saying": a "perspective that does not isolate it from its community source" which Holloway locates within the tradition of Black female writing (Holloway 7).[144] Indeed, the world of *The Street* is made up of parallel situations and intersecting stories rather than strictly causal events, offering a fuller sense of the stakes for the characters, who each experience and challenge the limits of their situations in different ways. In Petry's case this narratological choice reveals how the situations in which the characters find themselves in—situations that reflect tenement life in the 1940s—are not easily resolved.

An example of a lateral, situation-based plot can be found in the chapter focused on Min, a secondary character, who faces imminent eviction from the tenement where she co-habits with

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[144] Other critics, such as Susan Lanser and Rachel Blau Du Plessis, have picked up on the 20th century turn to what Lanser calls a "new communality of representation with conventions that also allow communality of narrative voice" (*Fictions of Authority* 225). According to Rachel Blau Du Plessis, "individual heroes" and "sealed couples" are often replaced by "collective" protagonists and "groups which have a sense of purpose and identity, and whose growth occurs in mutual collaboration" (Du Plessis, *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, 179). Lanser points out that experimentation with a more collective narration has increased traction in the latter half of the 20th century. For instance, Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) and Pat Barker's *Union Street* (1983) "use place rather than plot as a unifying principle" for exploring the lives of poor urban women as female communities (225). Transgressing conventional expectations of plot, these books, "retain authorial voice and rely on free indirect discourse to represent each character's consciousness, constructing formal coherence by narrating diverse stories and characters in a single authorial voice" (255). Writers Toni Morrison (*The Bluest Eye*, 1970; *Sula,* 1973; *Beloved*, 1987) and Louise Erdrich (*Love Medicine*, 1984; *The Beet Queen*, 1986); and *Tracks*, 1988), use a spectrum of voices and interior monologues, both authorial and personal, that together suggest the voice(s) of particular African American and Native American communities (Lanser 225).

Jones, because of his obsession with Lutie (123). Min is described as an abused and submissive middle-aged woman, who is almost mistaken by Lutie for a piece of furniture. While signing the lease in the Super's apartment, Lutie describes her first encounter with Min:

> Next to the sofa was an overstuffed chair and she drew her breath in sharply as she looked at it, for there was a woman sitting in it, and she had thought that she and the dog and the Super were the only occupants of the room. How could anyone sit in a chair and melt into it like that? As she looked, the shapeless small dark woman in the chair got up and bowed to her without speaking … the dark brown dress she wore was almost the exact shade of the dark brown of the upholstery and because the overstuffed chair swallowed her up she was barely distinguishable from the chair itself. Because, too, of a shrinking withdrawal in her way of sitting as though she were trying to take up the least possible amount of space. So after bowing to her Lutie completely forgot the woman was in the room, while she went on studying its furnishings" (23-24).

Here Min is depicted as part of the domestic and narrative background: inseparable from the space, a furnishing, and not even a protagonist in her own life's story.[145] What is more, it seems at first that Lutie's ungenerous assessment of Min is accurate. Switching to Min's perspective we see that despite years of exploitation at work and at home, Min had "always accepted whatever happened to her without making an effort to avoid a situation or change one" (126). We are told:

> Never once had she protested. Never once, she thought with pride, had she left a job, no matter how much work there was or how badly the people treated her … It was the same thing with various husbands she had had. They had taken her money and abused her and given her nothing in return, but she was never the one who left" (127).

[145] This depiction of woman as furniture recalls my earlier analysis of women of colour depicted as infrastructure.

Yet, as we see in Chapter 5 of *The Street*, Min is now confronted with "a situation where prayer couldn't possibly help" (123), a situation that threatens to change her arrangement with Jones and her domestic conditions: because Lutie has caught Jones's eye, Min realizes she is facing an imminent and potentially violent eviction from Jones's tenement apartment.

This fearful prospect leads Min to seek out the consultation of a Root doctor named The Prophet, and thus commit "an open act of defiance for the first time in her life" (127). Thinking about this newfound spurt of courage and initiative, Min is surprised and frightened by her own audacity:

> For in coming here like this, in trying to prevent Jones from putting her out, she was actually making an effort to change a situation. No. It was better to think of it as being an effort to keep a situation the way it had been before. That is, she was trying to stay in his house because there she was free from the yoke of that one word: rent (127).

Min is uneasy with the idea that her actions are a challenge to the situation—this would betray too much uncharacteristic agency on her part—so she prefers to consider her actions as a kind of passive mediation, preserving, rather than disrupting, the situation. But whether she regards her actions as an "open act of defiance" or an effort to conserve the status quo, she is still intervening in a situation; and it is intervention that generates her lateral plot.[146]

Theorizing the idea of situation as a narrative concept, Ned Schantz suggests that "situation is much more than the space and time in which a character finds herself, or in which a plot unfolds. It is nothing less than the total array of forces—social and otherwise, kinetic and

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[146] Min's storyline is an example of a lateral plot because it bears no causal relationship to the central plot and the protagonist, Lutie. We follow Min's efforts to protect herself physically and economically. Min suffers Jones's foul moods, understands that she might be evicted from his apartment, scares Jones with the Root Doctor's preventative powders and instructions, and then decides to leave to find another room, perhaps with her luggage carrier, who she decides may make a sensible companion. Thus, though her situation arises because of the Lutie's presence in the tenement, Min's actions have no effect on the protagonist Lutie's storyline.

potential—that seize or spur character or plot" (5). Activating the ecology of a narrative to reveal its most significant features, situation "can include institutions and infrastructures, things like the affordances of objects and the adaptability of plants and animals" (Schantz 5). In this way, by employing a situation-based narrative to describe Min's experience of dislocation, Petry captures the sense of the larger infrastructural forces at play while also following an individual story.[147]

The emphasis on Min's situation-based plot comments on the situation that both Lutie and Min share: the precarity that comes with being economically disadvantaged woman of colour in a culture hostile to their survival. Min spells out the situation quite clearly: "a woman by herself didn't stand much chance…with a man attached to her she could have an apartment—a real home" (133). Indeed, like the two women in Jackson's apartment plot, "Trial by Combat" (*The Lottery* 35), Min and Lutie, who have both worked as domestic workers (though Lutie takes up a typist job when leaving the Chandlers' home), who have both been mistreated by male partners, are reflections of each other. Min is a mirror of Lutie's possible future, should she stay in Harlem, just as Lutie may be an echo of a more youthful Min. In this way the lateral plot allows Petry to offer different angles on a common situation, and to demonstrate how the failed system, like the crumbling tenement building, affects all its inhabitants in different painful ways.

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[147] As Ned Schantz notes, Gilles Deleuze uses the term "situation" to describe the problems that arise from an active setting. In this case, the active setting is the tenement from which Min knows she will be informally evicted. We can apply Deleuze's formulation of situation to Min's storyline: "The milieu and its forces ... throw [Min] a challenge, and constitute a situation in which [she] is caught. The character reacts in [her] turn (action properly speaking), so as to respond to the situation, modify the milieu, or [her] relation with the milieu, the situation, with other characters. [She] must acquire a new mode of being (habitus) or raise [her] mode of being to the demands of the milieu and of the situation. Out of this emerges a restored or modified situation, a new situation" (141-2) iii. It is in her fight for accommodation—or rather to amend the circumstances that threaten to change her access to accommodation—that Min learns to be less accommodating herself. We see a change in her character, but she does not succeed in identically preserving her original situation. Instead, we could read the chapter's ending—where Min leaves with a luggage carrier and imagines becoming his domestic companion—as Min subscribing to or being propelled into a situation that resembles her former one, though presumably there will be differences as she will be living with a different man and in a different tenement building. We have been told that she has a history of dislocation, incrementally changing her living situation when it becomes unbearable, and thus continuously modifying her situation, a strategy that keeps her off the street. The lateral replotting of her trajectory is her method of survival.

Thus, Petry's narrative strategy to employ lateral situation-based plots allows for a more structural understanding of the intersecting experiences of female dislocation.

Small Revolutions and the Act of Pre-writing

As *The Street* is a novel about how a single mother's search for accommodation reveals the failure of America to accommodate Black lives and Black futures, it follows that spaces of accommodation and the perpetual threat of eviction are given such emphasis in the novel. Yet, in Lutie Johnson's Harlem, there are no spaces of refuge, only transitory spaces and only failed models of home. Her dislocative experience more broadly represents the ways in which spaces can act as scripts that both confine and evict marginalized subjects. Lutie's attempt to change the script is thwarted, yet the novel's exploration of female Black identity does ultimately offer a literary model of home to be inhabited by generations of 20th century and 21st century African American writers that came after her.

The novel ends with Lutie fleeing the scene of the crime, Boots's apartment, which contains Boots's lifeless body, and buying a ticket for a Chicago-bound train.[148] She imagines that her son Bub will be sent to reform school where she believes that, without her, he might have "some kind of chance" (435). As the trains starts to move she begins to trace a design on the window:

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[148] Notably, before Boots Smith was a jazz musician whose band played at the Casino, he was a Pullman porter — one of the few jobs African American men could secure in Jim Crow America. Rather than an escape, for Boots the train was a vehicle of self-erasure, another form of dislocation. Earlier in the novel, he recalls how the experience of waiting on White passengers rendered him emasculated, powerless and essentially erased: "Porter!...Boy. George. Nameless. He got a handful of silver at the end of each run, and a mountain of silver couldn't pay a man to stay nameless like that. No Name, black my shoes. No Name, hold my coat. No Name, brush me off. No Name, take my bags. No Name. No Name" (*The Street* 264).

> It was a series of circles that flowed into each other. She remembered that when she was in grammar school the children were taught to get the proper slant of their writing, to get the feel of the pen in their hands, by making these same circles.

Some have argued that these circles depict Lutie's entrapment in the circular hell of ghetto life,[149] but I read this last scene differently. I suggest that what Petry leaves us with is the act of writing, or the act of pre-writing: learning the slant and the feel of writing, before putting words on the page. Furthermore, the novel's documentation of Lutie's critical gaze offers a record of female consciousness which, though not yet acted upon, provides the necessary precondition for change (Lucy 22). This act of pre-writing foreshadows that this change is possible through language. Rather than dead ends, we can read these circles as small revolutions.

The circular gesture of prewriting is reminiscent of Frederick Douglass's description of learning to write on the city walls, tricking the White neighbourhood boys to correct his grammar and spelling mistakes so he could progress (*Narrative of the Life* 1845). It recalls Richard Wright's focus on literacy as a weapon in *Black Boy* (1945), which he claims he wrote in an effort to "try to build a bridge of words between me and the world outside, that world which was so distant and elusive that it seemed unreal" (*American Hunger* 453). Yet once again Petry reminds us of the obstacles that surround writing as an act of power. Lutie recalls the "flat exasperated voice" of her Miss Rinner-like teacher as she looked at the circles Lutie produced as a schoolgirl, chastising her, "really … I don't know why they have us bother to teach your people how to write" (435). Yet even with this traumatic memory surrounding her first lesson in

[149] Robin Lucy sees the circles symbolizing Lutie's entrapment on the street (22), but I read this scene in a metafictional light.

writing, this form of observation and self-expression, Lutie continues to draw her rings on the window:

> Her finger moved over the glass, around and around. The circles showed up plainly on the dusty surface. The woman's statement was correct, she thought. What possible good has it done to teach people like me to write? (436).

Given Petry's documentation of Lutie's double-consciousness, we can hear in these lines that first read like self-condemnation, a clear double meaning. *What possible good has it done to teach people like me to write?* It is not hard to detect the authorial irony behind this question. Lutie's metafictional note comes at the end of an aesthetically innovative, emotionally moving, 400-page novel written by one such person. Thus, what at first sounds like a rhetorical question, can be read instead as a challenge to future writers to reap the benefits of those pioneers that came before, to show what possibilities these narrative acts have opened for the reader.

Toni Morrison has noted how literary critics often neglect to discuss conceptual or formal innovation in the African American literary canon. "Critics generally don't associate black people with ideas," Morrison observed in an interview; "They see marginal people; they just see another story about black folks. They regard the whole thing as sociologically interesting perhaps but very parochial" (*Black Women Writers at Work*). *The Street* has been dismissed as such a novel by some critics, believing it to be a work purely invested in socioeconomic problems, and less interested in aesthetic forms. In this chapter, though, I have examined the ways in which Petry demonstrates how the two—narrative experimentation and political engagement—are intertwined. In fact, Petry's distillation of politics into the narrative architecture of the novel urges readers to understand what is at stake in the search for housing—the quest for social and narrative accommodation on a large scale. We can read Lutie's act of prewriting on the window

of the train—leaving her mark on the infrastructure of the city—as inviting others to use storytelling to make visible the effects of structural and infrastructural inequality.

Petry's attention to how thinking—and storytelling—takes the shape of buildings, kitchens, streets, corridors and cellars spotlights how our internal experience is shaped by the everyday spaces we move through, dwell in and dwell upon, but also how these structures are linked.[150] Petry's use of situation-based narrative further explicates how the parts—tenants in their dark and crowded rooms—are connected to a much larger structure, not just of the tenement building but of the ghetto, and the significant influence of the ghetto on forming American culture and its conceptualization of the good life. A living archive of the past's present-day legacies, Petry's self-reflexive documentation of the quest for narrative and social accommodation emphasizes the need for a renewed examination of our society's present intellectual and material infrastructures and calls for more hospitable spaces for Black experience.

Coda

Some years ago, while on a trip to New York, I spent five days with a friend's great aunt and her husband on the sixth floor of a tenement on 145th Street in Harlem. When I arrived at the tenement, which had been renovated since Lutie Johnson's time, I learned the elevator was broken, and that I would need to climb the six flights of stairs to their light-filled apartment in the sky. Due to their disabilities, Roy and Bonnie, now both in their late seventies, had not managed to leave the

[150] In the *Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre glosses the apartment as "stack after stack of boxes for living in" but also recognizes the relationship between these crowded boxes, as parts that make up a whole: "the spectators-*cum*-tenants grasp the relationship between part and whole directly," Lefebvre writes, "furthermore, they recognize themselves in that relationship (*The Production of Space* 98).

apartment in several days. Their neighbours had been supplying them groceries and medications, they explained, and had offered to do so until the elevator was fixed. I did the same while staying with them, carrying sagging bags of onions, rice, and fresh callaloo from the African and Caribbean market beside their place, up the many stairs. These journeys to and from the street made me consider how our reliance on infrastructure is most keenly felt when the infrastructure breaks down.

When infrastructure breaks down, a story opens up.

Roy and Bonnie had lived in this apartment since 1982. They were the first inter-racial couple in the building, they told me. Maybe the neighbourhood.

Not anymore, though, they assured me. Things have changed. As Sojourner Truth once said, things are stirring. *Now that the ice has cracked.*

Their living room, where I slept on the pullout couch, was shaped like a ship's cabin, with the sky—which was totally absent in Petry's Harlem—filling all the windows. Enormous spider plants hung from the ceiling; the Hudson River glinted below. The walls had been converted into bookshelves and filled with my hosts' shared collection. I spotted Baldwin, Richard Wright, Frederick Douglass, Nella Larson, Malcom X, Ellison, Octavia Butler, and Audre Lorde stacked beside each other on the shelves. Ann Petry might have been in the collection too, though I had not yet read her at the time, so I would have not recognized her name. Running a hand over their spines, Roy explained that these were the books that had formed him as a young Black man. They were his education, he told me. His foundation. Not what he learned in college but his real education. Beside his collection, on another shelf were Bonnie's art books. Her bright abstract canvases now hung on the spaces of wall not covered in books.

They were both social workers and married to other people when they first met. *So we had that in common*, Bonnie laughed. Now, they were both retired.

Shortly after I left, I heard that the elevator was fixed, and so the couple could access the outside again. But holed up their space for those weeks, with their neighbours helping them with the essentials, had not been an inconvenience for them. This had been their home for decades now, and they were happy here, up in the sky, in their haven of books, in the heart of Harlem. They could not imagine living anywhere else and did not seem to have much need for the outside world.

For years now I have considered their rare book-lined apartment to be my dream home—an ideal domestic space—because of what it signaled: intellectual activity, creativity, refuge, light. How different Lutie's trajectory would have been, had she and Bub had been able to make a home in an apartment like this one instead of their two rooms on 116th Street, cut off from light and air, or if Ralph Ellison's invisible man could have traded the cellar for this library. At the same time, Roy and Bonnie's homehouse may have not existed without these writers and the worlds they made possible. Their books, now lining the apartment walls, are records of the living struggle against physical and cultural eviction; they offer rare shelter.

CHAPTER 3: The Living Road: Alice Munro's Women in Transit

She resembled our mother, and besides that, she seldom removed her coat, and every story she told had to with a train or a bus station.

—Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*

Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice.

—Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Housewife Finds Time to Write Stories

"It takes a lot of time to be a genius," wrote the self-proclaimed genius Gertrude Stein; "You have to sit around so much, doing nothing, really doing nothing" (289). These seem to be the essential ingredients for producing any writing, never mind the work of genius. You have to sit around in a private room and, for a long expanse of undisturbed time, allow yourself to enter into the nowhere space of the imagination; to be "really doing nothing" you have to have something that few women writers—those who are also caretakers and unwaged workers—possess: an urgent sense of entitlement to your privacy, idleness, and time.

Yet, what if these resources—privacy, idleness, and time—are not available? How then do these spatial and temporal constraints change the development of genius? How do they alter

the form of its output? Investigating the relationship between space and conditions for female genius led me to Alice Munro, a writer whose journey from the laundry room (where Munro did much of her early writing) to the centre of the global literary canon has been well documented. For a housewife and mother with literary aspirations, as Alice Munro was during the 1950s and 1960s, marriage and a move to the suburbs presented a unique double bind: it afforded the upward mobility that secured the financial support to write, but it also meant the loss of a private life—that is, privacy from the private sphere. For Munro, as many writer/mothers of her generation, the problem of interrupted time, affective labour, and maternal guilt remained a critical factor in her development as a writer, especially since, as Munro has acknowledged, the essential ingredients for her writing practice were "a long period of aimless time…with nobody to notice" (quoted in Knelman 22). Yet, the constraints on her time and privacy, and the search for a space free of these constraints, are also what have shaped Munro's genius. This chapter examines Munro's stories of nascent or frustrated female artist figures to think about how the search for creative space and community shapes storytelling. Although many of the stories I examine do reflect aspects of Munro's own journey to writing, I do not read them as being strictly autobiographical. Indeed, Munro has often complained of readers' persistent hunt for the "real" in her fictional worlds—one that threatens to dismiss or misrecognize the art of her fiction ("What is Real?"). Moreover, as we saw with Ann Petry, female writers and writers of colour have historically been beleaguered by the limiting expectation—from readers and critics—that their work is based purely on the facts of their own lives (Clark). As such, I read the following stories as being, in Munro's words, "autobiographical in feeling" in order to think about how a

work might trace the emotional, formal, and spatial contours of a life, rather than its facts and, in doing so, might offer a narrative that is both shared and unique.[151]

Indeed, although Munro's fiction does acknowledge the restrictive social structures women faced and continue to face, her stories are more interested in how such scripts are formed and how they are altered, internally, intimately, and publicly. Munro's stories of domestic suspension and artistic pursuit, I argue, use the trope of the trip and the affair—the temporary escape from the conventions of the neighbourhood, office parties, and marriage—to speak directly to the conditions of narrative production, both the production of social scripts and of storytelling. In doing so they address the embarrassment and guilt the narrators feel around their sense of intellectual and creative ambition (read as "egotism") and the way in which they navigate the ambivalent public intimacies facilitated by the temporary dislocation from the home. The following stories of cross-country train journeys or road trips outline an important difference between the notion of "privacy" and the private sphere, tracing how semi-public spaces, such as the train carriage or the car, might actually afford more artistic privacy than the home or even, as the case may be, the rented office.[152] Entering into a counter-site or parallel world, Munro's train journeys set up the female traveller with the possibility of a newfound personal privacy and sexual autonomy away from the domestic sphere; casting the domestic in

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[151] Following Catherine Gallagher, Ned Schantz argues that the novel "emerges precisely as a shelter from the actionable exposure" of community gossip, and, in Munro's case, prying readers (*Gossip, Letters, Phones* 12). "Fiction," Schantz writes, "lets you talk about people without talking about people" (12). In this way fiction—or fictionalized autobiographical account—acts as an alibi; it can afford the female writer privacy.

[152] For a comprehensive look at female mobility and the space of the car see Deborah Clarke's *Driving women: fiction and automobile culture in twentieth-century America*. Clarke argues that when women take the wheel, family structure and public space are reconfigured and re-gendered, creating a context for a literary tradition in which the car has served as a substitute for, an escape from, and an extension of the home, as well as a surrogate mother, a financial safeguard, and a means of self-expression. By investigating how cars can function as female space, reflect female identity, and reshape female agency, Clarke's study opens up new angles from which to approach fiction by and about women and traces new directions in the intersection of literature, technology, and gender.

an uncanny light, counter-sites initiate new social and narrative opportunities; and the fleeting encounters with strangers aboard the train—represented as artistic and erotic acts that challenge patriarchal scripts—prove critical in separating the writer/narrator from her role as caretaker and preserver of traditional social contracts. These transit stories also change the spatiality of the story structure. As the cultural theorist Michel de Certeau points out, on some level all stories "organize spaces": in selecting and linking spaces together, stories "make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories" (115). In this reshuffling of narrative space and story trajectory, the marriage plot and the domestic good life fantasy are temporarily suspended to make room for alternative stories and creative modes of relating and being in the world.

Cruising for Experience: Domestic Dislocations and Relocations

> After all everybody, that is everybody who writes is interested in living inside themselves in order to tell what is inside themselves. That is why writers have to have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really.
>
> —Gertrude Stein, *Paris France*

In American fiction of the 1950s and early 1960s the road represented "the expansive footloose spirit of America after the war yet also the need to escape from the new domesticity and work ethic" (Dickstein 96). Yet road trip stories were a particularly male genre. Indeed, in novels like Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* the task of jealously upholding domesticity and social morals fell to the wives and girlfriends of those "footloose" male ramblers. Munro shows us how difficult it is to envision a female version of this story, wherein the mother claims the role of the "footless spirit" (Dickstein 96). Can the world beyond the home—and its promise to temporarily suspend

domestic expectations—offer Munro's narrators the chance to become observers and poets? Can this inverted story of domestic flight—wherein the gender roles are reversed—provide the housewives, girlfriends, and mothers with the luxury of a private life?

Set in 1961, Alice Munro's widely anthologized short story, "Miles City, Montana," follows a suburban family's cross-country road trip and contains all the expected trials of a road trip—the hot car, irritable children, a strained marital debate about the importance of lettuce on sandwiches, as well as some unexpected ones, namely, the near drowning of the narrator's youngest daughter in Miles City. The narrator, a restless, unfulfilled housewife, has been closely aligned with Munro herself—so much so that her biographer, Robert Thacker, entitled a photograph of the author and her two young daughters on the west coast: "Jenny, Alice, and Sheila Munro, Vancouver, July 1961, the summer of the 'Miles City, Montana' trip" (*Alice Munro: Writing her Lives*).[153] Indeed, it is easy to read Munro's tight smile and faraway, vaguely agitated gaze in this photograph as belonging to the narrator. She could be the dark-haired housewife whose husband frequently commands her and the children to pose for the camera—exclaiming, "Great. You look like Jackie Kennedy!"—thus ensuring that their family "record go forth" (83). Judging from autobiographical accounts and interviews, Munro did harbour the same desires as the housewife in "Miles City, Montana"—that is, the desire for privacy, uninterrupted time, and movement beyond the domestic sphere. If, as the narrator observes, her husband's notion of record making is to take "a lot of pictures of me, of the children, our house, our garden,

[153]In her memoir, *Lives of Mothers and Daughters*, Munro's eldest daughter Sheila Munro describes "Miles City, Montana" as "one of the most autobiographical of my mother's stories" (69). She describes the trip as "the time Jenny nearly drowned when we were driving back east to see our grandparents in 1961" (69). Sheila Munro also recalls marveling at Alice Munro's ability to capture her daughters' characters: "I thought, *how could she know I was like that* … it is hard to accept that she could recreate me in fiction exactly the way I really was … without knowing how I felt. She must have known" (70).

our excursions and possessions" (83), thereby fixing their image in linear time, the narrator's mode of record making is, in contrast, to "shed" her geographical confines, "the house, the neighbourhood, the city…our country" (83), in an effort to compose the associative and artfully fragmented narrative that we now read.

"Miles City, Montana" takes place the same year that the Vancouver Sun ran an article about Munro entitled "Housewife Finds Time to Write Short Stories," which quoted the Toronto newspaper critic Robert Fulford's description of the then thirty-year-old Munro as the "least praised good writer in Canada." "The attractive young housewife and mother also finds time to write short stories which have been widely published and broadcast," reads the Vancouver Sun article; "until recently, however, her output has been very small because of the demands of home and family" (quoted in *Lives of Mothers and Daughters* 84–85). Recalling this time of constraint, "Miles City, Montana," like much of Munro's work, describes the challenges of leading a double life as a mother and writer and the way in which these two forms of labour continuously interrupt, obscure, and, at times, define, each other.[154]

[154] Of her female narrators, Munro once acknowledged, "I often write about the same heroine and give her a different name and a different occupation and a slightly different background because of something I want to do in the story. But her psychological make-up is not different … the psychological truth [is] all there" (quoted in MacKendrick 30). The shared psychological truth between artist/writer narrators and, to some extent, author seems to circumvent what Leigh Gilmore considers the paradox of autobiographical writing, that the writer/autobiographer "be both unique and representative" (8).[154] Thus claiming, as Munro has done in regard to her more autobiographically inflected fiction, that her work is "autobiographical in form but not in fact," Munro moves away from the recognizably autobiographical form while engaging autobiography's central concerns.[154] Her narrators' shared "psychological truth" form a collective biography: the biography of a creative life, defended.

AUTHORESS Mrs. Alice Munro is pictured in the garden of her home at 2749 Lawson, West Vancouver, with her daughters Sheila (left), aged seven, an four-year-old Jennie. Photo by Morr Farrow.

"Least Praised Good Writer"

Housewife Finds Time To Write Short Stories

By MOIRA FARROW

Looking after a husband, two small children and a house

Mrs. Munro sold her first story to Robert Weaver of CBC and it was broadcast on the radio series "Canadian

few years time—or if we mov elsewhere—I shall start wri ing about B.C."

Although Mrs. Munro has

Fig 10. A 1961 article from the *Vancouver Sun* featuring a photograph of "authoress" Alice Munro and her daughters, Sheila and Jennie. Used with permission.

In a 2001 interview with *The Atlantic*, Munro described the importance of her yearly cross-Canada drive—a journey that she, for most of her life, has refused to forfeit, despite heart surgery or snowstorms or advancing age: "I just can't give up this drive," she explained; "We've

been driving through the same towns for years, and noticing what happens. It's like a time when you drop out of your life and into just being an observer." For Munro the role of observer or the "watcher" holds a unique importance— both in her life and in her narrative process. We see the deep desire to be an observer in the road trip outlined in "Miles City, Montana" and in the cross-country train trips in a series of other stories set in the 1960s, including the Juliet story sequence in *Runaway* and "To Reach Japan" from *Dear Life*. Despite the tension-filled car, we learn that the narrator in "Miles City, Montana" relishes a chance to escape her suburban life:

> As for me, I was happy because of the shedding. I loved taking off. In my own house, I seemed to be often looking for a place to hide—sometimes from the children but more often from the jobs to be done and the phone ringing and the sociability of the neighborhood. I wanted to hide so that I could get busy at my real work, which was a sort of wooing of distant parts of myself. I lived in a state of siege, always losing just what I wanted to hold on to. But on trips there was no difficulty. I could be talking to Andrew, talking to the children, and looking at whatever they wanted me to look at…and pouring lemonade into plastic cups, and all the time those bits and pieces would be flying together inside me. The essential composition would be achieved. This made me hopeful and lighthearted. It was being a watcher that did it. A watcher, not a keeper. (84)

The narrator describes her suburban homelife using military terminology, likening her children and neighbours' demands—or attacks—on her attention to a "state of siege," paralleling Munro's own accounts of such attacks on her attention, in which she has recalled extensively in interviews how the pressure to play housewife around her neighbours and in-laws had devastating psychological effects: "I had to be a housewife when they were there. I couldn't hang on to the idea of myself writing" (quoted in Ross 60). Indeed, the postwar suburb was often described as a

land of ‘‘fishbowl’’ houses, where windows looked out onto other people’s homes, and private interiors were surveiled by busybody neighbors next door (Spigel 2). The lack of privacy within these fishbowl suburbs caused Munro a lot of distress. Of the “sociability of the neighbourhood,” Munro confessed, “My jailers were other women, showing up to have coffee. You didn’t have any privacy unless you were extremely eccentric and prepared to be disliked. And I was not … I had a long training in duplicity and confidence, and I led a double life” (quoted in Watts 55). The social scripts the neighbourhood women expected her to rehearse threatened to destroy the conditions for writing.[155]

We see traces of this double life play out in the narrator’s longing to be a watcher as opposed to a keeper and in what Munro has considered women’s difficulties in “backing off and doing something lonely and egotistical” (quoted in Ross 61). There is, of course, the issue of space and permission, which for the mother/writer is linked to the notion of sacrifice. In an interview entitled “Writing’s Something I did like the Ironing,” Munro somewhat playfully outlines the worries that come with claiming a room—and even a desk—of her own: “I can’t tell you how horrified I feel when I go into a male writer’s house and see the study, you know, the entire house set up for him to work … I just can’t help thinking poor bugger. What a load to carry, it’s really got to work, that novel, if everyone else is sacrificing for it” (quoted in McGaig 92). With this observation, she reveals her ambivalence toward claiming ownership over the role of writer, her knowledge of the familial sacrifice, as well as her anxiety over failure. The anxiety

[155] Munro has defined the 1960s as “a watershed decade for women of my age” because of the change she witnessed on the horizon. “We weren't young enough to really be with that decade,” Munro writes of her generation, “but we were young enough to see that all possibilities were not closed to us” (*Atlantic*). *The possibilities that were not closed to us*. You’ve slightly altered the quotation. Even the syntax of this passage, the meaning inferred in the negative, embodies an anxiety for the ephemerality of such a possibility, a momentary opportunity kept ajar by that small word, “not.” Indeed, Munro’s fiction takes up this ambivalent stance towards women’s possibilities beyond the domestic interior—a door that is not closed, but not fully open either—by exploring, or more accurately, developing genres that allow for this sense of dislocation.

over claiming time and space for creative work resurfaces again and again in Munro's autobiographically inflected fiction—to the extent that the desire for a space outside the home and the shame for having such a desire creates the central tension in her stories about nascent female artists. In the late 1950s, due to her extended family's demands on her time, interruptions to her work, and a number of discouraging setbacks—she was denied a Canada Council Grant in which she asked for money to hire babysitters, and she faced a string of magazine rejections—Munro experienced an internal failure of confidence which lead to a severe writing block; she began suffering from an anxiety disorder where she was afraid she would stop breathing (*Lives of Mothers and Daughters* 87). As Munro's daughter Sheila Munro recalls, her mother "literally couldn't trust that one breath would lead to another, and she was prescribed tranquillizers" (*Lives of Mothers and Daughters* 87). In order to combat this impasse, Munro began searching for a space beyond the domestic realm in which she could focus on her writing. Yet, as Munro would find, procuring a creative counter-site to the home presented unforeseen challenges.[156]

In 1961, in order to get away from the "fishbowl" sociability, avoid domestic interruptions, and ensure personal privacy, Munro rented an office in Vancouver. It was to serve as a bare room where she could work, a space removed from her domestic duties, where she could separate her identity from her position as housewife. "The solution to my life occurred to me one evening while I was ironing a shirt," reads the first sentence of the semi-autobiographical short story "The Office," that she subsequently wrote about her attempt to adhere to Virginia

[156] Simply acquiring a sense of artistic permission was the first challenge. Ann Petry noted the same harmful effects of casual interruptions on her time: "I keep seeking uninterrupted time … I am usually defeated by my archenemy the telephone or by people who do not regard writing as work and drop in to visit" CAAS, 253). Shirley Jackson expressed a similar sentiment in an interview in which the interviewer asked, "You were encouraged to write by your family?" and Jackson wryly replied, "They couldn't stop m." (*New York Post*, Sept 30, 1962). Munro, Jackson, and Petry's accounts signal the ways in which a woman writing was not recognized as a woman working.

Woolf's advice and find a room of her own.[157] "It was really the sound of the word 'office' that I liked, its sound of dignity and peace," the housewife/narrator of "The Office" confesses; "And purposefulness and importance" (23). In order to convince her husband of her need for a counter-site from the home, she outlines women's uncanny relationship to the domestic sphere:[158]

> A house is alright for a man to work in. He brings his work into the house, a place is cleared for it; the house rearranges itself the best it can around him. Everybody recognizes that his work exists. He is not expected to answer the telephone, to find things that are lost, to see why the children are crying, or feed the cat. He can shut his door. Imagine (I said) a mother shutting her door and the children knowing she is behind it; why, the very thought of it is outrageous to them. A woman who sits staring into space, into a country that is not her husband's or her children's is likewise known to be an offence against nature. So a house is not the same for a woman. She is not someone who walks into the house, to make use of it, and will walk out again. She is the house; there is no separation possible. ("The Office" 60)

Munro's suburban gothic depiction of the inseparability between house and woman—the notion that the idle or creative woman is "an offence against nature"—recalls the assertion that unwaged domestic work should be recognized for producing not just goods and services that make the household run smoothly; it produces gender as well (Weeks 9). As Silvia Federici reminds us, housework is naturalized as being part of the female character, ignoring the fact that it takes twenty years of socializing to prepare a woman for the role of housekeeper (*Wages Against*

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[157] The humorous first line of "The Office"—"The solution to my life occurred to me one evening while I was ironing a shirt"—recalls Tillie Olson's unromantic portrayal of working-class motherhood in her famous short story "As I Stand Here Ironing." Like the narrator in Olson's story, the narrator in "The Office" articulates a familiar gendered double standard that points to the ways in which women's affective labour fragment time and attention.

[158] Unlike the husband in the short story "The Office," Jim Munro was supportive of his wife's writing and was the one who scouted out an office space for her (*Lives of Mothers and Daughters* 89).

Housework 2). Indeed, the link between biological determinism and domesticity was forged directly and repeatedly in the media of the time. Postwar volumes of Good Housekeeping included blueprints to introduce young couples to the variety of housing designs available for suburban development, explaining the benefits of each home based on the type of mother the housewife wanted to be (Barnes 23). Thus, architectural decisions defined the home as the housewife's external representation, one that women were encouraged to internalize to define and understand their own identity. For Munro, renting the office was a means of separating the writer from her identity as unwaged labourer; it was a way of defending the distinction between two different forms of work, to become a watcher. Yet, even in the office, Munro's narrator finds she is denied the role of "watcher" and forced to perform the role of "keeper."

The narrator's complaint in "Miles City, Montana" and in "The Office" directly evokes Betty Freidan's description of the "problem with no name" that was just being given voice in the early 1960s. As Freidan writes in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963):

> It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched the slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Club Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to even ask herself the silent question—"is this all?" (15)

Yet, as the narrator of "The Office" illustrates, even when a woman manages to shed the home, the slipcover material, and peanut butter sandwiches, and rent an office space, she is not able to access that "country that is not her husband's or her children's" ("The Office" 60), as she is constantly interrupted, here by her attention-seeking office landlord. The story describes how the

landlord keeps bringing the narrator gifts (such as a plant that requires daily care) to domesticate her bare office space, whilst simultaneously shaming her for acquiring a space in which to indulge her "hobbies" and neglect her familial duties; soon the office no longer serves as a liminal creative space or counter-site from the home but becomes another place in which she must play housewife. Finally, the narrator relinquishes the keys and, defeated, returns home. "The Office" incidentally, was the only story Munro produced during her months at the rented office (Ross 61). Again, the space becomes the story. As we see in "Miles City, Montana," when unleashed from her suburban life, the narrator is able to access that solitary country or in this case "distant part" of herself, to become "a watcher" divorced from the responsibilities of "a keeper." The trip, it appears, allows for her role as observer to eclipse her role as domesticator, carer, and custodian of the family and the home. With her domestic and emotional duties on autopilot, she is able to facilitate the transformation of "those bits and pieces … flying together inside me" into cohesive form, which she ambiguously names "the essential composition." Although the narrator does not explicitly refer to the act of writing in this story, this "essential composition" belies a sense of narrative-arrangement, a preliminary step to writing. Indeed Munro has described how characters might remove themselves from restrictive situations by "looking at the way things happen—by changing from a participant into an observer," which, she has acknowledged, is something she was able to do with her writing: "I made the glorious leap from being a victim of my own ineptness and self-conscious miseries to being a godlike arranger of patterns and destinies, even if they were all in my head; I have never leapt back" (quoted in Ross 45). Thus, the formation of the "essential composition" alludes to the narrator's exploration of a self erased by the demands of motherhood and gendered double standards—a search for the self-actualizing narrative, that gives the narrator a sense of hope

within her state of siege—but it also determines a record of her engagement with storytelling itself. It reveals a spatial trajectory that, in turn, demands a new narrative map (de Certeau 115).

The yearning to be "a watcher, not a keeper" that we see in Munro's "Miles City, Montana" is prevalent throughout many of her other travel stories, as is the separation between domestic labour and what the narrator calls "real work," defined auto-erotically, as the "wooing of distant parts of myself" (84). The narrator's husband, however, sees this "real work" as a threat, bluntly stating: "I know there is something basically selfish and basically untrustworthy about you" (87). The narrator does not deny the accusation; instead, the story seems to suggest that, for women, these characteristics are necessary in becoming an artist: the self-preservation and hoarding of one's energy and time and the repurposing of intimate lived experience into art, which could be read as a particular form of betrayal or infidelity. A woman writing, Munro once noted, makes men realize "that this still centre that they thought was there, this kind of unquestioning cushion, is not there at all" (quoted in Rasporich 22). We can view this "still centre" in opposition to the restlessness that pervades Munro's stories of aspiring women writers and thinkers. In order to retain one's identity as a writer, Munro warns, "you have to think that your work is more important than almost anything else, and you have to start thinking this when you're very young" (quoted in Ross 56).

Yet, the female narrator's ambition to become a temporary citizen of this parallel world, the country "that is not her husband's or her children's"—often in the form of an affair—is invariably interrupted by fatal and near-fatal accidents, thus revealing the consequences that arise when women relinquish the role of carer. In "Miles City, Montana," the mother's retreat from her role as "keeper" coincides with her youngest child's fall and near-drowning in the deep end of an unattended public swimming pool, which evokes memories of an actual drowning that the

narrator witnessed as a child; in a thematically similar story "Gravel" (*Dear Life*), now told from the perspective of a young child, the older sister does in fact drown in a flooded gravel pit while, we find out later, her bohemian mother and her mother's boyfriend are engaged in sexual activities; in "Deep-Holes" (*Too Much Happiness*) the child falls into a hole in the earth while his mother is distracted. In the Juliet stories (collected in *Runaway*), we see an intergenerational drama and the slow burn tragedy of a lost daughter, one who chooses to not be found, and for whose self-imposed disappearance the mother feels responsible. Eaten up by guilt, the mother blames herself for not being a conventional enough mother for her daughter.

There is also an archive of stories about children interrupting possible romantic or erotic liaisons in more direct ways. In "Accidents," news of a child's death arrives at the same moment that his father enters into an affair. In "Walker Brothers Cowboy," from Munro's first collection, the watchful female child chaperones her father's visit to an old flame and even becomes his proxy, waltzing with his former lover around the kitchen when her father nervously refuses to dance. In another autobiographically inflected story, "Providence" (*Who Do You Think You Are?*), set in interior British Columbia, where Munro taught creative writing briefly after her separation from her husband, the daughter disrupts her newly divorced mother's affair several times throughout the course of the story. Indeed, the narrator's series of failed attempts to get out of the mountain town and find adequate childcare so she can meet her lover on the other side of the Rocky Mountains make up the plot of the story. A snowstorm, a broken bus, a canceled train, a sick child all stand in the way of the affair's consummation. Thus, the story is made up of a series of failed dislocations in which the mother is returned to her daughter and the home.

Because of the way in which female ambition is cast as infidelity, for many of Munro's female narrators, the story of self-discovery or the claim to artistic practice comes later in life—

often after marriage, after child- rearing, after divorce—and the artistic practice is not always explicitly realized. For instance, in "Silence" Juliet returns to her youthful intellectual aspirations at the end of her life, parsing through classical myths (*Runaway*). In the "The Children Stay" (*For the Love of a Good Woman*), a mother yearns to become a theatre actress and eventually leaves her family to join the theatre and also have an affair with the play's director. In "To Reach Japan" (*Dear Life*), the aspiring poet Greta views her roles of motherhood/wife and artist as mutually exclusive; she considers compromising on the former to change her life's conventional trajectory.[159] "What interests me is how [life] stories are made" Munro has explained, "what is put in at different times in your life, what is left out at different times, and how you use the stories to see yourself, or sometimes just to make life bearable for yourself. Very few people seem to want to see their lives in terms of one pointless thing after another" (quoted in Feinberg). In this sense, for Munro introspection *is* activity. It is not only the activity of literary creation but the continuous confrontation with and revision of social scripts. This means the stories of self-discovery are also stories of making life bearable—they are ambivalent in tone, morally indeterminate, oscillating between following and evading social scripts.

As Jonathan Franzen has observed of the contradictions so often faced by Munro's female characters and concretized in the figure of Juliet, "simply by trying to survive as a whole and independent person, she has incurred painful losses and dislocations; she has caused harm." As others have pointed out, there is an uncomfortable sense, often barely glimpsed beneath the surface of Munro's stories, "that the destruction has already occurred before the stories begin,

[159] Other stories in which later-life artists and writers are found include "Material" (1974), "The Moons of Jupiter" (1978; published in the collection in 1982), "Labor Day Dinner" (1982), "Dulse" (1982), "Cortes Island" (1998), "Family Furnishings" (2001), and "Nettles" (2001). Like the narrator in "Miles City, Montana" the artist narrators in "Providence" (1978), "Powers" (2004), and "Save the Reaper" (1998) yearn for a fulfilment that does not arrive. Thank you to Robert Thacker and Tracy Ware for helping me compile this list.

that an impending explosion is waiting just for a spark" (Birkenstein 213). This sense of impending fate invokes the predetermined scripts bestowed on so many women of Munro's generation. It points to the absence of alternative narratives—or the danger of investigating alternative narratives. Yet, for Munro the "painful losses and dislocations" also signals a departure from a world that that views female ambition as egotism and a betrayal of the underlying order of things and that punishes women for attempting to survive as a whole and independent subject. The dislocations allow for new narrative paths.

What interests me about the association of the pursuits of intellectual and creative engagement with the pursuit of erotic experience is what this suggests about the shifting nature of the female artist's relationship to privacy within public space and how a new relationship to space might shape these new narrative paths. The following section considers how cruising for experience and creative autonomy is re-conceptualized in the socially disorienting space of the train.

Strangers on a Train

Friendliness sets the mood in the Spacious Main Observation Lounge. Make friends here, chat with interesting people as you speed under smooth diesel power across Canada.

Canada Pacific, 1950s Ad Campaign

Fig 11. Image from *The Canadian* ad campaign, 1950s.

In *Home on the Rails: Women, The Railroad, and The Rise of Public Domesticity*, Amy G. Richter argues that the woman railway traveller was a critical agent in the changing terrain of nineteenth-century public culture. Recasting the railroad as a "woman's space," Richter's study places the female and male spheres side by side (7). Women were both the markers of unsettling cultural change and, seen as a domesticating influence in the public space of the train, the means of stabilizing such transformation. The domestication of public spaces, like the train carriage, was largely due to the issue of maintaining women's privacy, the basis of her respectability. The woman traveller's presence forced a continuous re-defining of public and private space (6). Yet,

Richter points out, these small spaces of travel remind us that "we can never be 'at home' in public—that despite the blurring of the lines between private and public life, no amenities, no set of rules can prevent us from bumbling up against one another" (163). As I have argued in my first two chapters, perhaps it is precisely not being "at home" that provides the possibility for a new social script.

Fast forward a hundred years to the 1960s, the situation aboard the train is not so dissimilar—it still operates as a space of fluctuating social contracts. No longer a symbol for modernity and technological progress, the train has become a way of slowing down—perhaps even a way to suspend time in order to observe the present more carefully. Unlike the car, the train was a safe and respectable means of travel for a single woman across the country. Surrounded by strangers, the 1960s female traveller is afforded a degree of anonymity, and thus privacy, she does not have in her neighbourhood or in her small town. The train, in this sense, offers more privacy than the fishbowl suburb or small town; it offers, in the words of the Canada Pacific, 1950s advertising campaign, "an uncrowded land of fun."

Though the train offered suburban housewives more privacy, this was not the case for women of colour and other racially marginalized travellers.[160] In many postwar African American writers' work the train can be a site of horror and humiliation; for instance, the playwright Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* (1964), or Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). However, as we see in *The Street*, the moving space of the train can sometimes temporarily suspend certain social conventions established in the "stationary" world. For example, while in their carriage, Lutie and her employer Mrs. Chandler appear to enjoy a companionable train ride wherein "the wall

[160] Famously, on December 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks rejected a bus driver's order to vacate a row of four seats in the "colored" section in favor of a White passenger, once the "White" section was filled. Parks' act helped inspire the Black community to boycott the Montgomery buses for over a year, resulted in a November 1956 decision deeming bus segregation unconstitutional.

between them wasn't quite so high. Though it was still there, of course' (50-51). Their relationship in the privacy of the train is so pleasant that Lutie is particularly hurt by the way Mrs. Chandler condescends to her in public when they dismount the train and part ways. Lutie recalls "there was a firm note of dismissal in [Mrs. Chandler's] voice so that the other passengers pouring out of the train turned to watch the rich young woman and her colored maid: a tone of voice that made people stop to hear just when it was the maid was to report back for work" (51) This was "because the voice unmistakably established the relation between the blonde young woman and the brown young woman. And it never failed to stir resentment in Lutie" (51). The allusion that the social hierarchy between the women could be temporarily suspended creates an even greater sense of dislocation for Lutie when she emerges onto the train platform and into society. Analyzing the moment when the two of them dismounted the train, Lutie asks: "would it hurt Mrs. Chandler just once to talk at that moment of parting as though, however incredible it might seem to anyone who was listening, they were friends? Just two people who knew each other and to whom it was only incidental that one of them was white and the other black?" (51). These questions signal the ways in which the train opens up an alternative space in which Lutie is able to imagine, however briefly, an alternative mode of relating.

Whereas for Petry, the train symbolizes a suspension of social order and potential escape/exile (at the end of the novel), for Munro, the train trip appears to have a specific relationship to the themes of adultery and artistic ambition—both of which present challenges to the traditional institution of marriage and the postwar ideal of the nuclear household. In Munro's world, the train, like the book, is represented as a technology of access, linking the passenger, and the reader, to the possible worlds beyond a life circumscribed by gender or class or geography. A mobile hotel, the train allows for unexpected social as well as narrative openings

in a life hemmed in by social expectations and familial duty. Munro is not alone in this portrayal of the train carriage. In his book *Adultery in the Novel*, which positions adultery as a revolt against the contract of marriage and, more broadly, restrictive social values, Tony Tanner describes the carriage as a space wherein unpredicted debates between the sexes concerning gendered social contracts can take place.[161] With "people coming and going in and out of compartments as they get on and off," the setting of the train is understood to correspond to a compressed version of life itself.

> The train offers a model of certain forms of contemporary life, old ties and bonds easily loosened, the fragmentation of community and the diffusion of destination. In addition, natural routines and rhythms are disturbed; places flow together, artificial light replaces the stable alternations of night and day, and the changing group of people in the railway carriage are not related in any way except through random contiguity—a fortuitous aggregate, not a unit. (Tanner 72–73)

This passage proposes that the environment of the train not only suggests or reflects certain forms of life but in fact compresses and even alters them, creating a parallel world with disturbed routines and irregular or "unnatural" rhythms determined by the train's schedule and artificial light. It presents opportunities for alternative narratives—diverging lives—in its uncanny world of artificial days and nights.

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[161] Tanner draws on Tolstai's novella The Kreutzer Sonata, which takes place on a train, to illustrate this notion of compression.

Fig 12. This scene from Hitchcock's adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's novel, *Strangers on a Train*, highlights the train carriage as a space of potential ambiguous or even illicit erotic encounters. As Tanner points out, the train is a place wherein unpredicted debates between the sexes concerning gendered social contracts can take place; it is a place wherein these contracts dissolve or transform, opening up the possibilities of alternative scripts, as exemplified by the nascent homoerotic encounters in the scene above, wherein two men can brush toes.

Within the world opened up by the train, the codes and structures by which society operates may temporarily be dissolved. Indeed, Michel Foucault too has picked up on the "nowhere" space of the train and its importance to gendered contracts and sexual rituals. "For girls," he writes, "there was, until the middle of the twentieth century, a tradition called the 'honeymoon trip' which was an ancestral theme" ("Of Other Spaces" 24). 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" (24–25).[162] Foucault defined heterotopia as sites "that have the curious property of being in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (24). Heterotopias, then, are spaces of alternate ordering (Hetherington viii); they are counter-sites "in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 24). These ambivalent counter-sites evoke spaces of difference and conflict that contribute to the shaping of social and narrative landscapes; they invite attention to the idea of process rather than structure (Hetherington 21). Time also operates differently in these "unreal" or "nowhere" spaces. For Munro, however, the "honeymoon" that takes place is most often between the female traveller and her own sense of autonomy. Here on the train she can temporarily—and only temporarily—divest herself from outside responsibilities and become a watcher.

As a heterotopia, the train is a model of life but not life. It represents society but in a distorted way, presenting an uncanny replica of the private sphere within a public space. What's more, the train trip—the "incarceration vacation" as de Certeau calls it—offers a unique mixture of introspection and participation within the world (114). As de Certeau asserts, "Between the immobility of the inside and that of the outside a certain *quid pro quo* is introduced, a slender blade that inverts their stability" (112). Within this slender-bladed contract between inner and outer world, past and future are also momentarily subordinated to altered "nowhere" time of the train. Perhaps this is why it is easier for Munro's narrators to reinvent themselves or rethink their life trajectories while in this placeless and time-suspended space, to be able to inspect their lives

[162] As Walter Russell Mead has written, "Utopia is a place where everything is good; dystopia is a place where everything is bad; heterotopia is where thingsare different—that is, a collection whose members have few or no intelligible connections with one another" (13).

from the parallel world that the train creates. Indeed, the glass and iron of the train window creates a cut-off from regular routine and domestic structures that, in de Certeau's words, "is necessary for the birth, outside of these things but not without them, of unknown landscapes and the strange fables of our private stories" (112). This suspension of routine allows for erotic encounters, casual adultery, expressions of ambivalent motherhood, life-shaping secrets, accidents, and near disasters—indeed, new fables in a female life, one that has long been defined as "a life without external events—a life whose story cannot be told as there is no story" (Goethe 620).

We see the collision between these two worlds most conspicuously in Munro's train story, "To Reach Japan," wherein the narrator Greta's act of infidelity—her momentary distraction—results in her child's near-accident on the train. Earlier on in the story, Greta depicts the decade leading up to the second wave feminist movement as a time

> when having any serious idea, let alone ambition, or maybe even reading a real book, could be seen as suspect, having something to do with your child's getting pneumonia, and a political remark at an office party might have cost your husband his promotion. It would not have mattered which political party either. It was a woman's shooting off her mouth that did it. (6)

Greta's description closely aligns with Betty Freidan's argument surrounding mother-blaming in the 1950s and 1960s. "It was suddenly discovered that the mother could be blamed for almost everything," Freidan writes:

> In every case history of a troubled child, alcoholic, suicidal, schizophrenic, psychopathic, neurotic adult; impotent, homo-sexual male; frigid, promiscuous female; ulcerous, asthmatic and otherwise disturbed American, could be found a mother. A frustrated,

> repressed, disturbed, martyred, never satisfied, unhappy woman. A demanding, nagging, shrewish wife. A rejecting, overprotecting, dominating mother. (189)

Yet while Freidan uses this argument to illustrate why middle-class women should have a vocation other than full-time motherhood, lest they poison their child's future with their repression and unhappiness, Munro allows for a more complex depiction of the social climate. Although Greta may be frustrated and ambivalent about her maternal role, she is not sexually repressed or overprotective of her child—in fact, she admonishes herself for being distracted by her literary aspirations. The train journey brings the question of duty versus vocation into crisis. In the climactic scene, Greta, accompanied by her young daughter, Katy, is traveling to Toronto to consummate an affair with a journalist she met once at a literary gathering where she had failed to make any other literary connections. On the train Greta meets Greg, a traveling actor, and is seduced by his attentiveness to her and his ability to entertain Katy. His secret power, she recognizes, is that he is "just there … he doesn't save himself up," a protective measure that she herself employs against her daughter and husband (20): "Greta thought. That's what I do. I save myself up, most of the time. Careful with Katy. Careful with Peter" (20). She continues to meditate on the ideological shifts and changing character of the private and public, and what she calls "the barriers between the inside and outside of your head":

> In the decade that they had already entered but that she at least had not taken much notice of, there was going to be a lot of attention paid to this sort of thing. Being there was to mean something it didn't use to mean. Going with the flow. Giving. Some people were giving, other people were not very giving. Barriers between the inside and outside of your head were to be trampled down. Authenticity required it. Things like Greta's poems,

> things that did not flow right out, were suspect, even scorned. Of course she went right on doing as she did, fussing and probing, secretly tough as nails on the counterculture. (20)

Interestingly, Greta is as wary of the emerging 1960s counterculture's scripts as she is of the more conventional ones mentioned earlier, where "having a serious idea, let alone ambition, or maybe even reading a real book, could be seen as suspect" ("To Reach Japan" 6). She points to the way in which both scripts tend to demand a large degree of affective labour ("some people were giving") as well as censor forms of self-expression and ambition (and demand others). In both cases, her writing is held in suspicion, and her privacy compromised—its barriers "trampled down" (20).

Yet the "nowhere" place of the train allows for her to welcome some of this counterculture into her world, as she invites Greg into her and Katy's berth, where they engage "in some kissing and fondling," all of which, she admits, "had to go on beside the body of the sleeping child" (22). When she suggests that they stop as it might become "deplorable," Greg responds by inviting Greta to imagine an alternative life:

> "It isn't us," Greg said. "It's some other people."
>
> "Tell them to stop, then. Do you know their names?" "Wait a minute, Reg. Reg and Dorothy." (22)

Here Greta and Greg preproduce a family portrait: Reg and Dorothy and their sleeping child. At a glance they might appear perfectly conventional, except that this family is made up of strangers on a train, thus yielding an uncanny domestic tableau, one that reflects a distorted version of Greta's life outside the train.

This uncanny domestic tableau recasts the family structure as a performance and this dislocating vision opens up a chasm that can never quite be closed up again. As Kevin

Hetherington has argued in *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*, rather than spaces of transition, heterotopias "are spaces of deferral, spaces where ideas and practices that represent the good life can come into being, from nowhere, even if they never actually achieve what they set out to achieve—social order, or control and freedom" (ix). As the good life practices are made uncanny by Greta and Greg's performance, ideologies of the good life become sites of ambivalence. Thus, Munro's transit stories are not necessarily stories of transition from one life circumstance to another—from the suburbs to a creative life—as much as they are stories of suspension, deferral, and ambivalence.

We see this ambivalence play out following Greta and Greg's—or Dorothy and Reg's—domestic performance. Initially, intrigued by this parallel world and the privacy anonymity gives her—Greta carefully notes that "the people who were not in the dome car taking pictures of the everlasting mountains were in the bar car, or dozing" (23)—she leaves her sleeping child and follows Greg to his berth; however, when she returns from her erotic experience with him, Katy is missing. Believing her daughter kidnapped, and frantically searching the train, Greta realizes that her daughter might have entered the walkway between the cars. With a "heavy door behind you and another in front," this space signifies the connective function of the train itself, bringing together worlds, protracting distances, but also opening up a potentially terrifying space of possibility (25). Of this in-between space Greta observes, "You always hurried through these passages, where the banging and swaying reminded you of how things were put together in a way that seemed not so inevitable after all" (25). De Certeau describes this space linking the train cars—a space of crisis and recognition in "To Reach Japan"—as a contact zone: "a sort of rubbing together of spaces at the vanishing points of their frontiers" (113). In this moment of crisis, the machinery of the train takes on symbolic value for Greta. Like De Certeau's

observation that the transportation system in Athens is called *metaphorai*—transporting bodies, the way metaphors transport ideas—the passageway between the railway cars becomes the point of connection between Greta's duties as a mother and her erotic and artistic pursuits.

It is in the interstitial space that Greta finally discovers the child: "between the cars, on one of those continually noisy sheets of metal…Eyes wide open and mouth slightly open, amazed and alone" (25). What follows is a deep sense of guilt, in which Greta ruminates on her ambivalent relationship to motherhood, acknowledging that her attention to her daughter had been "spasmodic, her tenderness often tactical…Other thoughts had crowded the child out" (28). It is the near accident that prompts Greta to conflate her marital infidelities with the act of writing, as she recognizes that "Even before the useless, exhausting, idiotic preoccupation with the man in Toronto, there was the other work, the work of poetry that it seemed she had been doing in her head for most of her life. That struck her now as another traitorous business—to Katy, to [her husband] Peter, to life" (28). Because of the near accident she considers how writing is potentially something else that she may have to give up: "She had given her attention elsewhere. Determined, foraging attention to something other than the child. A sin" (28).

Here we see competing genres at play—the female *Künstlerroman* is obstructed by the family melodrama, female ambition subordinated to maternal sacrifice. And yet Munro shows us how invisible domestic and affective labour offers up an aesthetic pattern, one that is given acuity at the moment of interruption. That is to say, for Munro's women, the moment of interruption—the sudden chasm—forces them to claim a stake in their own lives. Greta acknowledges that for women tactical tenderness, maternal distraction, the "traitorous business" of artistic ambition, is considered a sin. Yet, even if this self-chastisement gives Greta pause, it does not stop her from continuing on with her pursuits. Although the climactic experience

between the train cars composes the domestic crisis of the story, it also prompts Greta's revelation that the duties and patterns that make up her life, like the materials of the train, are "put together in a way that seemed not so inevitable after all" (25). Thus, this moment of collision between these double worlds and the inward-confession that it yields are in fact what allow Greta to make her choice—the so-called "traitorous" choice—consciously and publicly. In the end of "To Reach Japan," it is her daughter Katy who submits to her mother's choice. This time, as we are told in the story's last line, while watching her mother embrace her new lover in Toronto's Union Station, Katy "didn't try to escape. She just stood waiting for whatever had to happen next" (30). Here we can recall Munro's own sentiment about the changing nature of women's public roles in the 1960s, the notion that her generation wasn't "young enough to really be with that decade, but we were young enough to see that all possibilities were not closed to us" (quoted in Feinberg). It will be up to Katy's generation to actively participate in "whatever had to happen next," that is, to amend the idea of female ambition or even female privacy as something traitorous. I read the last paragraph of this story as the moment when Greta realizes that there is another interpretation of her so-called traitorous choice, that it may be more traitorous to her daughter's generation to accept her guilt at wanting a more intellectually engaged life.

The importance of the train scene lies in the creation of space between the private and public sphere where social practices can be questioned and such revelations can take place. As Richter discusses in her study of the railway's role in the rise of public domesticity in the nineteenth century, the train was a space where narratives surrounding public and private were actively formed and questioned. As we have seen, this aspect of the counter site of the train persists: by opening up a sphere wherein the public and private constantly devolve and overlap,

the train becomes a particularly fertile narrative space, one in which identities, histories, and stories can be invented or discarded. The uncanny replica of the domestic interior, with the bed and dining car, allows for the emergence of a parallel-yet-different world wherein the narrator has the opportunity to try out new scripts.

Home Suite Home on the Rails

The parallel-yet-different world depicted in Alice Munro's train stories was also explored by the cultural texts of the time, such as the 1950s railway ad campaigns, which portrayed overlapping practices of domestic ritual and public life as part of their publicity schemes. For instance, one popular Pullman train ad campaign features a family on the move, depicting scenes of semi-private domesticity and family life, such as sleeping, breakfast, playtime, and shaving. Children are tended to by both parents, and the family is tended to by the domestic staff on the train, thus creating a vision of domesticity within a public space. Furthermore, the parents can enjoy spending time with their children or relaxing together without adhering to domestic tasks of cooking, and cleaning, which is clearly emphasized in the ad copy: "While the children sleep and play in one room, you relax in another" reads a caption beside the photograph of the parents playing cards; the caption below a photograph of the family's mealtime reads: "Breakfast in the dining car is really a treat—especially for Mother," presumably because the Pullman's service means she doesn't have to wake up early to prepare the food herself.

Fig. 13. American midcentury ad campaigns emphasized different aspects of the train journey. Catering to the family, the Pullman 1958 ad campaign "Home Suite Home" depicts scenes of family life while on the move. Source: "Cruising the Past" Michael Grace, Grace Collection.

Pullman's completion, New Super Chief, emphasized a more adult-themed version of the overnight train journey. An ad campaign released around the same time as the Pullman ad depicts an observation car in which strangers can mingle and watch the stars at night, while the

lit-up train snakes along the tracks behind them. The copy reads: “In the dome lounge on the all-new Super Chief, your individual sofa seat turns so you can look ahead, look back, or all around to view thrilling scenery by day. At night you can almost “reach up and pick a star.” Evidently, no one in this image is using their swivel sofa chair to look at the stars, but rather to look at each other, as depicted by the flirtatious glances between the two foremost figures, the woman in yellow and the mustached man with the cigarette.

Fig. 14. Pullman's competition, New Super Chief depicts a more adult-themed experience in the observation car, "Top of the Super—next to the stars." Source: "Cruising the Past" Michael Grace, Grace Collection.

In contrast to the American ads, the Canadian Pacific ad showcases the train as both a space where family values are celebrated, but also where chance encounters between strangers can occur, as explored in Munro's "To Reach Japan." At the center of the image in the Canadian Pacific ad we see a woman in yellow that bares a strong similarity to the figure in the *New Super Chief* ad—is she indeed the same woman, riding a different train? The woman mounts the stairs to the observation room and, like in the *New Super Chief* ad, shares an inviting smile with a seated male passenger. However, unlike *New Super Chief*, the foreground of *Canadian Pacific* ad is cast as a scene of family life: a mother and daughter taking in the view, a little boy playing with a miniature Canadian Mounty, interacting with an older couple. In fact, the two blond children are almost identical the pullman ad for "Home Suite Home." By appealing to the broadest range of travellers, the ad promises seemingly inconsistent experiences: within this public transient domestic space, a female traveller is both mother and alluring stranger; a child becomes an observer—of adults, of the landscape outside the observation car. Like in Munro's story, the child on the train watches how her mother's identity changes when brushing against strangers.

Fig. 15. The Canadian Pacific ad depicts the train as both a space where family values are celebrated, but also where strangers can meet, as is suggested by the background tableau of the woman in yellow, exchanging glances with the seated male passenger (detail from the *Canadian Pacific* ad campaign.) All three ad campaigns depict a white-washed vision of the North American good life, emphasizing different aspects of the ideal: class mobility (on the train passengers are waited upon and are free from domestic duties, such as cooking and cleaning), family, leisure, travel, and romantic opportunities. Source: *Canadian Pacific* ad, March 1956 issue of National Geographic.

As these cultural texts and as Munro's travel stories make clear, it is within this ambiguous gap between scripts, or rather, this vector of overlapping and contradictory scripts, that the female traveller is alerted to possibilities of a new mode of living. More than simply suspending domesticity, these portrayals of lives in transit dramatize how the train is a space wherein modes of public and private life can occur simultaneously.

Domesticity Suspended: Houses without Housework and Other Feminist Utopias

The vision of railway domesticity in the ad campaigns, and in Munro's travel stories, bear surprising similarities to the proposed feminist housing projects and other models of community living that gained brief popularity at the turn of the century, but were eventually replaced by the detached single-family home model. The antithesis of life aboard the train, the single-family

home, was considered a retreat from public life, rather than a workplace, thereby rendering women's work invisible. Indeed, the train's space public/private space, wherein domestic work is socialized, constitutes a model for what late 19th century and early 20th century architects, social reformers, and urban planners considered to be a possible antidote to the problem of domestic drudgery.[163] Under the influence of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, reformers such as Ebenezer Howard, Alice Constance Austin, Charles Harris Witaker, and Edgar Chambless, designed kitchenless apartments, and even planned for towns without housework in response to the needs of the twentieth century women and their families. Fantasizing about kitchenless dwellings in *A Modern Utopia*, novelist H G Wells argued that "the ordinary Utopian would no more think of a special private kitchen for his dinners that he would think of a private flour mill or dairy farm" (217), and even went so far as to predict cooperative housing was the only valid option for the future for shelter: "In a few short years," he envisaged, "all ordinary houses will be out of date and note salable at any price" (Wells quoted in Howard, "A new way of housekeeping" 4). Others shared the sentiment. Enumerating the advantages of socializing housework, reformers argued that that socializing housework with benefit both sexes, that "freeing men and women for social contact is vitally more important than cloistering them in a home" (Witaker).[164]

What is striking about Howard, Austin, and Chambless' blueprints of kitchenless utopias is how much these concepts resemble the train, both in structure and function. For instance, Austin's housing designs emphasized economy of labour, materials and space (Hayden 243). In

[163] Charlotte Perkins Gilman and others advocated for the ideal of efficient, collective kitchens, laundries and childcare centers, which would socialize domestic labour, removing it from the home and freeing women for paid work.

[164] Witaker concluded his 1919 article for Journal of the American Institute of architects with a similarity optimistic question: "shall we dare to predict that the ideal house of the future will be kitcheless…?"

order to spare women from the "hateful monotony of preparing 1095 meals in the year and cleaning up after each one" ("The Socialist City" 14), Austin proposed built-in furniture and rollaway beds to eliminate dusting. In her plans for a circular city of ten thousand people inscribed within one square mile of land, each kitchenless house was to be connected to a central kitchen, staffed by professionals, through a complex underground network of tunnels and railway cars. These underground railways would bring cooked food and fresh laundry to shared hubs, from which small electric cars would dispatch the deliveries to the basement of each house. Once consumed, the food containers and laundry would be returned to the central facilities for washing in an industrial machine helmed by paid workers, both women and men (243). [165] Moreover, Austin believed that "The Socialist City should be beautiful … illustrating in a concrete way the solidarity of the community; it should emphasize the fundamental principle of equal opportunity for all; and it should be the last word in the application of scientific discovery to everyday life, putting every labor saving device at the service of every citizen" ("Building a Socialist City," 17). This leap to urban scale was Austin's major achievement.[166]

The architectural plans that offer the most physical resemblance to the train can be found in the inventor Edgar Chambless' renderings of Roadtown, first published in 1910. Rather than

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[165] As Dolores Hayden notes, by relying on underground railway delivery, Austin placed herself in a technological tradition which had begun with Henry Hudson Holly and the "steam-tight cars" of his family hotel project for Hartford in 1874, with Mary Coleman Stucket who had introduced underground trains in her Denver rowhouse project in 1893, and the architect Charles Lamb, who produced plans for the same scheme for New York City apartments in 1906 (243).

[166] A self-taught designer, feminist, and socialist, Austin was a visionary thinker, yet few of her designs were realized in material form and her work has been largely forgotten. As architectural historian Annmarie Adams and sociologist Peta Tancred point out, one of the difficulties in discussing women's work is that "the discussion is necessarily inserted into male 'containers,' since our vocabulary for discussing the workplace has, in the main, been formulated on the basis of men's experience and priorities … since women are entering a domain that has been tightly defined and controlled by their male colleagues…a discussion of women within the profession of architecture is usually limited to what males have considered to be architectural practice and what has been codified in the rules of membership of the provincial professional associations. As a result, many of women's contributions are neglected and ignored" (*Designing Women* 9).

expanding vertically, like North America's skyscrapers were doing at the same time,[167] Roadtown winds endlessly into the countryside. Chambless included three levels of underground trams below the kitchenless rowhouses of Roadtown, offering mass transit, private house and cooperative housekeeping in a single structure (246). Believing he had solved the problem of domestic drudgery as well as the "woman problem," Chambless saw himself taking the "apartment house and all of its conveniences and comforts out among the farms by the aid of wires, pipes, and of rapid and noiseless transportation" thus creating a linear, train-like structure linking city to countryside (*Roadtown* 20).

[167] In Manhattan, for instance, The Tower Building, 1889, and Woolworth Building, 1913.

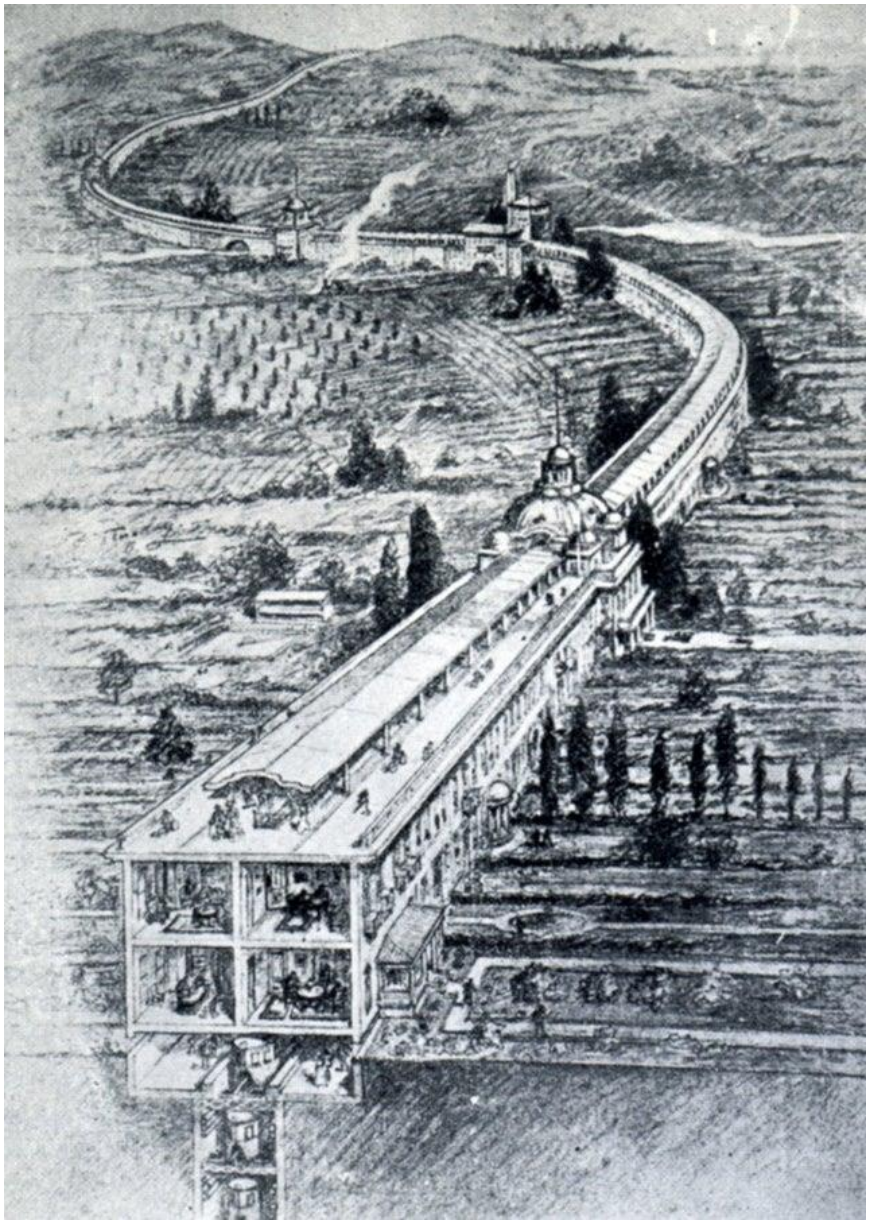

Fig. 17. Roadtown Concept by Edgar Chambless. Chambless planned for a soundless monorail to run below the rowhouses, and an open promenade above the two levels of dwellings, which cooperative housekeeping centres located at intervals along the structure. This image, first published in 1910, appeared in the *Ladies Home Journal*, February 1919.

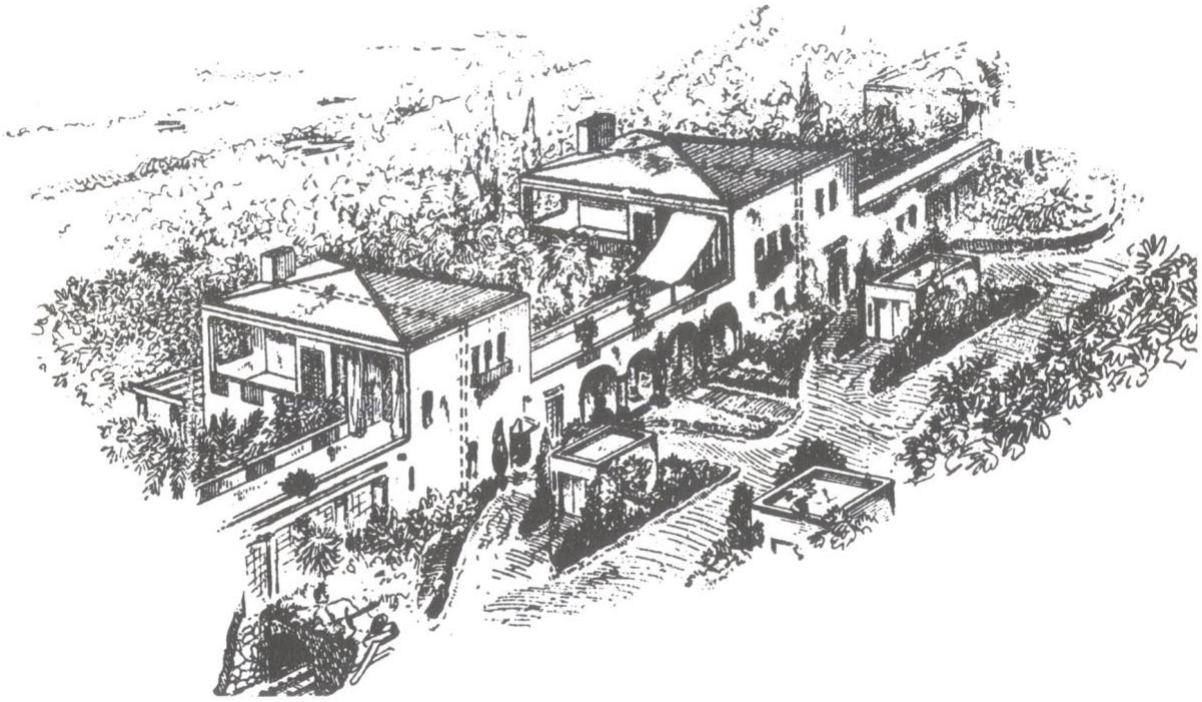

Fig. 18. Axonometric drawing of two houses showing underground tunnels with train tracks created for socialized domestic work from Alice Constance Austin's book *The Next Step* (1935).

Though Roadtown was never built, and though Austin's plans for the feminist city would not be realized (her largest and most celebrated design for the feminist city, the Llano Cooperative Community, was abandoned due to a lack of capital and water) Austin and Chambless' architectural designs can be read as a set of questions for the future, as well as a feminist socialist utopia from America's past. Their blueprints prompt important conversations about persisting attitudes towards women's relationship to domestic work. Even if they exist more as fictive offerings than solid structures, these unbuilt designs, like Munro's depictions of lives in transit, open up the possibility of other ways in which life and work could be organized.[168]

[168] Recently, young artists in California have celebrated the colony's hundredth anniversary with a series of projects titled "Squaring the Circle: Llano del Rio Centennial," including one called "The Next Step" named after Austin's book. https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/squaring-the-circle-llano-del-rio-centennial#/

Like the issues raised by the early materialist feminists, the constraints faced by Munro's female narrators—her scholarship girls, housewives/aspirant artists in the 1960s—continue to exist, although sometimes in different forms and disguises. Indeed, half a century after Munro started publishing, the quest for privacy, creative idleness, and time continue to haunt women's writing production with rigorous obstinacy, as do the double standards women writers face regarding emotional labour, motherhood, creative communities, and publishing opportunities. Consequently, the past two decades' renewed interest in women's autobiographical fiction, or even what has been termed "domestic fiction," responds in part to the tenacious double standards surrounding female ambition and work/life balance.[169] A return to critical literary predecessors, such as Alice Munro, and a reacquaintance with the work of social reformists and architects, such as Gilman and Austin, can offer purchase on the present decade's engagement with the problem of creativity verses domesticity.

Munro's biographies of feeling, of form, and of creative access reveal the genius that sprung in spite of—and, in some cases, because of—these constraints. They are the residue of that "long period of aimless time" spent in the fleeting nowhere space—the passenger's seat, the observation deck—of the imagination. Yet, how many more books might Munro have written if her living situation had resembled something closer to the Roadtown project, with its underground meal and laundry service, or Gilman's women's apartment hotel, with socialized

[169] See Allison Yarrow's *90s Bitch: Media, Culture, and the Failed Promise of Gender Equality,* Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness*, and Jenny Offill's *The Department of Speculation*. The persistence of restrictive conditions surrounding women's narrative production have been taken up directly in recent mixed-genre, autobiographically inflected works by many acclaimed contemporary woman writers, such as Jenny Offill, Sheila Heti, Maggie Nelson, Eileen Myles, Chris Kraus, Renee Gladman, Olivia Laing, Elena Ferrante, Claudia Rankine, and Rachel Cusk, to foreground the inherently provisional nature of narrative making but also its ability to imagine alterative, more inclusive futures. They too use autobiographical material at the level of feeling and form—although also often fact—to emphasize the ways in which the search for a viable artistic consciousness and experiments in artistic method are as crucial as the final product itself, especially when the definition of woman as artist still remains contested.

childcare, or in Austin's utopian city, wherein the beds folded into the walls, and the dirty dishes were sent off along an underground train track to an industrial machine? How many more hours would have been her own?

CHAPTER 4: The Bad Vacation: Failed Leisure as Good Life Critique

The world had become a place to see. A life had become something to have. There were family vacations at the beach or a lake ... a middle classness spreading across population expanses.

—Kathleen Stewart, "The Fifties," *Method Acting*

That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain … they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself.

—Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

A tourist—almost by definition a person immersed in prejudice, whose interest was circumscribed, who admired the *weathered* faces and *rustic* manners of the local inhabitants, a perspective entirely contemptible but nonetheless difficult to avoid…By my presence alone, I reduced their home to a backdrop for my leisure, it became *picturesque*, *quaint*, *charming*, words on the back of a postcard or brochure.

—Katie Kitamura, *A Separation*

The Bad Vacation Story

Cocktails with tiny floating umbrellas replicating in miniature the sun umbrellas on the beach; Raybans hooked into the collar of an over-sized Hawaiian shirt; the aquamarine surface of a swimmerless pool; hot stone massages, facial wraps, tiki bars, complementary rosé; a stack of

unread novels and celebrity biographies beside a sunbather dozing under a wide straw hat. All household chores temporarily shelved; work forbidden. *You're on vacation!*

The luxury vacation is the western barometer for happiness: its iconography is instantly recognizable. Readily familiar too is the vacation script: *Is everything to your satisfaction? Let us take care of you. It's your duty to relax.* It seems fitting that this project's inciting question—What plots arise for women when domesticity is suspended?—should culminate within the ultimate small dislocation: the vacation. Indeed, it is the expected suspension of domestic work that defines the vacationing tourist. As the cultural critic Cynthia Enloe puts it, "After tourists land at their destination, they expect to be freed from humdrum domestic tasks. To be a tourist means to have someone else making your bed" (*Bananas, Beaches and Bases* 67).

This project set about to trace counternarratives to the mid-century's mass subscription to the domestic models of the good life, which include, as we have seen in the past three chapters, the dream house, and now, in the following chapter, the vacation. If the dreamhouse is the quintessential symbol of American achievement, then the vacation, a temporary escape from the home and its demands, is the ultimate signifier of American leisure. As anthropologist Kathleen Stewart notes, in the 1950s, "the world had become a place to see. A life had become something to have. There were family vacations at the beach or a lake ... a middle classness spreading across population expanses" (*Method Acting*). This spreading of middle classness, or at least middle-class values of the good life, meant a radical change in North America's cultural script and also the global carbon footprint. Indeed, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates that internationally there were just 25 million tourist arrivals in 1950. More than half a century later this number has increased to 1.4 billion international arrivals per year: a 56-fold

increase.[170] These increases in North America are due to several factors, including holiday entitlement, increased disposable income, advances in travel technology and lower airfares, mass packaged vacations, and media coverage promoting the vacation as an essential ingredient of the good life.[171] As an expanded version of the dream house, the luxury hotel or the cruise ship resembles the American exhibition's sentient model homes and miracle kitchens that we looked at in Chapter 1, wherein meals arrive already prepared, floors seem to vacuum themselves, and a fleet of invisible domestic staff replace the housewife, ensuring the beds are always made, the towels folded into swans. The hotel operates as a well-oiled machine for producing for the guest the experience of the good life. That is, when things go right.

But what happens when things go wrong? When baggage is lost, rooms double booked, when weather or relationships turn foul, when the view outside the window does not correspond to the brochure, or when the staff go off-script, when *everything is not to our satisfaction*—this leads to the bad vacation story.

What is the bad vacation story? It is a narrative depiction of disappointing, miserable, and even disastrous vacations, set, for the majority of the narrative, in a leisure site, such as a resort, campsite, retreat, hotel or mobile accommodations, such as a ship, train, or RV, wherein the vacation setting and situation directly inform the plot. This means the vacation is more than a setting; it is a situation that shapes the narrative in significant ways. These situations include family holidays ("A Good Man is Hard to Find"), honeymoons (*Marnie*), all-inclusive resort and cruise-

[170] For charts visualizing this increase see: https://ourworldindata.org/tourism

[171] These good life trends come at a substantial ecological cost. As the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) shows, U.S. economy's biggest source of greenhouse gases is transportation, and the U.S. is the second biggest source of greenhouse gases in the world. For example, following a 2017 study published in the journal Environmental Research Letters, the Washington Post's climate reporter Sarah Kaplan wrote that canceling a single round-trip ticket on a trans-Atlantic flight saves the equivalent carbon dioxide emission as the average citizen of India emits all year. For more see Natalie B. Compton's article in The Washington Post: "How to actually make your travel better for the planet" (2021).

ship experiences (*Death on the Nile,* 1937) and David Foster Wallace's satirical cruise-ship essay "A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again" (1997), beach vacations (Alex Garland's *The Beach;* Mike White's *The White Lotus* (2021) and budget family trips (*National Lampoon's Vacation*, 1983; *Lost in America, 1985*), wherein expectations are shattered and plans go awry. The bad vacation genre lends itself to horror, tragedy, melodrama, and comedy alike. Broadly, examples include many of Agatha Christie's detective novels (*And Then There Were None*; *Murder on the Orient Express*), and Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley,* as well as thrillers that intersect with the bad vacation genre, such as *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *Bitter Moon*, and Hitchcock's horror film *The Birds*; Joan Lindsay's novel and Peter Weir's film adaptation *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, and Stephen King's novel and Kubrick's film adaptation, *The Shining* (this could be considered a bad vacation because the aspiring novelist Jack gets no work done, apart from writing over and over again, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy"). Bad vacation stories in film include *Two for the Road* (1967), *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961); *Losing Ground* (1982), *Out of Africa* (1985), *Y Tu Mamá También* (2001) *Open Water (2003)*, *Vacation* (Jonathan Goldstein 2015), *Midsommar* (2019) and *Bait*. Even *Titanic* is a contender, considering the now popular cruise ship industry. The Modern Gothic paperbacks, advertising themselves as being "in the Daphne Du Maurier tradition" are also proprietors of the bad vacation story: as Joanna Russ notes in "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic," "the Heroines are either on vacation or honeymoon … They always find themselves in exotic locales (the Virgin Islands, the French wine country, New Zealand, The Camargue etc). They are essentially idle women" (*The Female Gothic* 35-36). Contemporary fiction titles that contain bad vacation stories include Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981); Roxane Gay's *An Untamed State* (2014); Jenifer Egan's "Safari," a story/chapter in *Visit to the Goon Squad*

(2011). Recently, several women writers have used the bad vacation story as the structural premise of their novels in order to produce a treatise on loneliness: examples include Eimer McBride's *The Strange Hotel* (2020), Katie Kitamura's *A Separation* (2017), in which the unnamed narrator tails her estranged, disappeared husband to Greece, and, similarly, Laura Van Den Berg's *The Third Hotel* (2018), in which a newly widowed woman on a trip to Havana, Cuba, discovers her husband standing outside a museum. Recent TV series that utilize this genre include the psychological thriller *Flight Attendant* (2020), the British comedy series *Camping* (2016) and *The Trip* (2010-2020), and the satirical mini-series, *The White Lotus* (2021), which I will turn to later in the chapter. In most of the examples I have looked at, when the vacation ends, so does the story.

The bad vacation stories I am interested in examining include female narrators, and/or protagonists, and look at the gendered dimensions of the good life script. Taking as case studies a diverse selection of contemporary American media and literary portrayals of the bad vacation, including Lydia Davis, Lorrie Moore, Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories, and Mike White's darkly comedic six-episode mini-series *The White Lotus*, this chapter looks at what kinds of interventions the bad vacation story makes in a culture built on the pursuit of happiness, wherein the vacation is emblematic of what Thorstein Veblen names "conspicuous leisure"—that is, visible leisure engaged in for the sake of displaying and attaining social status, such as going on vacation and returning with souvenirs—but instead becomes the grounds for despair (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*). By suspending domesticity, I argue, the vacation opens up a temporary alternative to the everyday routine: it promises a conspicuous, full immersion in the good life fantasy with its attendant scripts.

Yet, as the vacations-gone-wrong in the cultural and literary texts that I examine reveal, this immersion exposes the limits of the good life. The bad vacation story foregrounds the failure

of the happiness scripts by making visible the emotional work and capitalist oppression that goes into maintaining the good life and shows how this fantasy is not sustainable. Attachments to the unachievable fantasy are thus, in Berlant's terms, "cruelly optimistic" as they act as obstacles to flourishing. By exposing this sense of cruel optimism, the bad vacation story becomes a container for envy, irritation, paranoia, or anxiety and other minor griefs that come with blighted expectations. These dysphoric feelings index larger social conditions of powerlessness and frustration, which, as affect theorist Sianne Ngai has pointed out, "often seem to be the psychic fuel on which capitalist society runs" (*Ugly Feelings* 3). What is good about the good life? What does it promise? And why do these promises remain appealing to us? These are the questions the bad vacation story invites.

As the following investigation will show, the bad vacation story presents a particularly critical "contact zone" a term the anthropologist Mary Louise Pratt coined to describe those spaces where "cultures, meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). Similar to other concepts that address relationality and contiguity, such as positionality and intersectionality, the bad vacation as contact zone is a space wherein cultures and nations define themselves and are defined by their limits. At the intersection of leisure and work, the pampered and the pamperers, the hostile and the hospitable, the familiar and the new, the bad vacation addresses social ideals and desires formed by dystopic feelings, rather than by positive ones. The bad vacation becomes a contact zone between the fantasy of the good life and the reality of its inaccessibility.

Questioning our enduring optimism towards the good life narrative, Berlant frames the attachments and objects of desire that gather around the good life fantasy as a "cluster of

promises" that are never realized (20). These promises offer the security of a script, but do not deliver the results. In other words, the optimism rooted in the possibility of the promise is what urges us to continue to invest so much hope and energy in the good life fantasy.[172] The vacation—the ultimate promise of leisure, yearned for all year, expectantly awaited—becomes not only a defining ritual of the good life, but an organizing structure for future projections. Thus, if the vacation is the ultimate symbol of the good life, the bad vacation signifies the failure of its promise. The bad vacation story asks the vacationers, those whose utopic fantasies have been dashed: where is there to go from here? It asks us viewers to reconsider our own participation in the pursuit of (un)happiness and question the exploitative and potentially self-destructive nature of the good life fantasy by exposing how the concept of the good life is built upon bad feelings and worse relations.

My particular interest in the gendered dimension of bad vacation stories stems from a desire to map out the ways in which this suspension of domesticity may challenge and transform gendered scripts. The bad vacation story exposes the risks, the challenges and, in many cases, the impossibility for women of truly suspending domesticity, even when on vacation. Ultimately, I argue that, rather than offering their female narrators a suspension of ordinary routines, these narratives reveal a more compressed, more urgent framing of everyday anxieties wherein women persistently remain the default managers of the intimate and the domestic.[173] However, they also

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[172] Promises, as Hannah Arendt shows, "are a uniquely human way of ordering the future;" they labour to make the concept of the future "predictable and reliable to the extent that this is humanly possible" (*Crisis of the Republic* 92).

[173] We see an explicit example of women being the default managers of the intimate and the domestic in *The White Lotus*, where the mother and family breadwinner feels responsible for her family's dysphoric feelings: her children's rivalry, her daughter's friend's wellbeing, and husband's midlife crisis, and feelings of inadequacy. The fact that she cannot put her laptop down or pause her conference meetings further emphasizes how, for the female vacationer, the family vacation presents a double shift. We see another example of this in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story "The Boundary" wherein the vacationing mother fetishizes traditionally female domestic chores, such as hanging her family's laundry on the line.

reveal that when vacations go wrong, their conventional scripts are no longer prescient or even effective. The bad vacation story is a demand for a new script.

The Luxury Vacation: When Having It All Is Not Enough

In Lorrie Moore's "Paper Losses," a short story that portrays a divorcing couple's final, miserable Caribbean vacation together, the female narrator Kit observes: "A woman had to choose her own particular unhappiness carefully. That was the only happiness in life: choosing the best unhappiness" (*The New Yorker*, 2006). What does it mean to choose the best unhappiness? Is this, as Kit's pessimism suggests, a particularly gendered anxiety? Or a particularly contemporary one? What does it mean in the context of the quest for the good life? What does it mean while on vacation?

Recognizable and humourous is the awareness of privilege embedded in Kit's complaint about women's "only happiness in life." After all, Kit, the (White) middle class narrator, is off to a luxury resort in the Caribbean. The only complication is that her husband of twenty years has already served her divorce papers and, as Kit observes, is tanning himself for another woman's benefit. Her "unruinable daughters" Beth and Dale—which Kit often refers to as "Death and Bale"—don't seem to care, and due to the machinations of the state's divorce laws, her sensitive environmentally-aware son Sam (he refuses the dolphin rides because "they speak a language") will soon be living with his father and Kit will no longer see him every day: "he would become a boy who no longer saw his mother every day, and he would scuttle a little and float off and away like paper carried by wind" (5). Along with this image, echoing the story's title, "Paper Losses," we glimpse an even more tragic shift in the mother and son's relationship. "With time," Kit foreshadows, her son "would harden: he would eye her over his glasses, in the manner of a maître

d' suspecting riffraff. He would see her coming the way a panicked party guest sees someone without a nametag" (5). In this uncanny image, mother and son have become strangers to one another. Moreover, as the image of the suspicious maître d' and the panicked party guest suggest, they will no longer know how to be hospitable with one another either, and will be forced to play new rules as simultaneously reluctant hosts and anxious guests. The absence of Kit's "name tag"—which, in this scenario would be "mother"—points to a breakdown of their common script. Yet, while on their last vacation together, the dissolving family must perform as the role of happy American family for the duration of the trip. Interestingly, their performance of a happy family is even more convincing than the squalling and squabbling families who are actually still bound together. Kit notes that "by comparison theirs—a family about to break apart forever—didn't look so bad" (4). This is because they understand the script and know their parts by heart (without the need for nametags). Artifice is more convincing than reality.

For Moore, artifice, theatre, and method acting are central to understanding the performance of marriage, family, and the acquisition of the good life. When considering how she will conduct herself on the Caribbean vacation Kit observes: "this, at last, was what all those high-school drama classes had been for: acting" (4). Kit goes on to list her experience as an actor in high school, which she believes has readied her to play the part of wife and mother on their staged family vacation.

> She had once played the queen in "A Winter's Tale" and in a changeling child in a play called "Love Me Right Now," written by one of the more disturbing English teachers in her high school. In both these performances, she had learned that time was essentially a comic thing—only constraints upon it diverted it to tragedy, or at least, to misery. Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde—if only they'd had more time! Marriage stopped being comic

> when it was suddenly halted, at which point it became divorce, which time never disturbed and the funniness of which was never-ending (4).

The first allusion to Hermione, the stoic queen in Shakespeare's "A Winter's Tale,"[174] who, after being falsely accused of adultery by the king, fakes her death and goes into hiding for sixteen years, at which points she returns to court disguised as a life-like statue of herself, who appears to magically come to life when the king repents. This reference is apt because it draws attention to the elaborate performance involved in the theatre of marriage, as well as the ways in which we might mistake life for artifice and vise versa, the replication for the reality.[175] Kit, like the long-suffering queen, wishes to stage her husband's atonement on the vacation—she brings along "a little love sack" with "condoms and candles" with the hope of a "final lovemaking scene of sentimental vengeance" that would contain "the still beating heart of marriage" (9)—but her husband refuses to play along. Like, Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde, they have run out of time. In another performance analogy Kit observes, their once-happy marriage is "a dance team of bad feeling," wherein the dancers have "shoved their hate centre stage and shone a spotlight down for it to seize" (1).

While Kit grapples with her nuclear family's disintegrating roles, she appears to be eager for a new vocabulary to address marriage, while, at the same time, remaining ambivalent to the possibility of a changing script. For instance, when trying to articulate Rafe's new hostility towards

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[174] Hermione, Queen of Sicily, is the wife of King Leontes and the mother of Mamillius. After she's unfairly accused of adultery, she's thrown into prison, where she gives birth, prematurely, to a daughter, Perdita. Faking her death, Hermione goes into hiding for sixteen years until she's "resurrected" and reunited with her repentant king.

[175] In *Touching Feeling* (2003), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick uses the notion of the periperformative to develop the Althusserian concept of interpellation, the means by which subjects are incorporated into ideological formations. To dis-interpellate from a scene, Sedgwick argues, usually requires the invented, referential act of a periperformative, rather than another explicit performative or the negative of one. The dis-interpellation requires a breaking of the consensus, a changing of the nature of what is being agreed, a secondary appeal to the witnesses on other grounds.

her, she considers how to frame his transformation within the social lexicon of their suburb, Beersboro, wherein "one put things neutrally" to maintain the social script (1). In her neighbourhood, adultery, divorce, and other crisis were couched within careful terms, Kit acknowledges: "No one ever said that a man was now completely fucked-up. They said 'The guy has changed' … He'd become *a little different*. He was something of a *character*" (1). Thus, when attempting to describe her role in the shifting dynamics of her marriage, the coded language fails her. Unsure of the right words, Kit questions, "which was the correct lyric?" and acknowledges, "she didn't know" (1).

Another example of a crack in the script occurs while on vacation, and denotes the end of their marital performance. After a stressful morning with the children, Kit announces that she needs a drink. "Don't expect me to buy you a drink" her husband says (9). This remark, which signals that Rafe refuses to adhere to the gendered social script that requires men to pay for women, or rather, that Kit is no longer his date and so, according to social etiquette, he will no longer pay for her, initiates the full breakdown of the façade of the happy family that they have attempted to maintain while on the vacation. Rafe's deliberate break in the script both liberates Kit—she no longer even tries "to act natural"—while also releasing her suppressed anger and ambivalence to their shifting roles: "Had she even asked? Did she now call him the bitterest name she could think of? Did she stand and turn and slap him across the face in front of several passers-by? Who told you *that*?" (9). Her anger also releases her from other social scripts. Later a neighbour will consul Kit about her husband's adultery with another social script that dictates "as a feminist, you must blame the other woman," to which she replies: "As a feminist, I request you no longer speak to me" (9). These dueling scripts outline the gendered double standard Kit names as the "only happiness in a woman's life": choosing the best unhappiness.

Alongside Kit's recognition of the "best unhappiness" is the tension between the feminist focus on agency (women now have a "choice," even if it is only between different registers of their unhappiness) and the postfeminist lament (too many choices are making women unhappy).[176] But most importantly, Kit's observation speaks to the overfamiliar, and what some mark as the "seemingly endless" and "increasing exhausting debate" about the (im)possibility for women to "have it all" [177]—in other words, the debate surrounding women's limited or obstructed access to the objects, attachments, and privileges that cluster around the promise of the good life narrative. Can it be, Kit's point seems to suggest, that, due to the failures of our so-called postfeminist culture, "having it all" has become synonymous with "choosing the best unhappiness"? Moore's choice of the word "unhappiness" instead of simply "sadness" or "despair" is particularly resonant as it signifies a proximity to happiness, the idea that if we could just get rid of that bothersome and apparently insignificant 'un', then happiness would be attainable. On the other hand, the term "unhappiness" points more to a global condition than a temporary feeling, and the condition of unhappiness is far more familiar than its opposite. In fact, unhappy feelings may even have liberating potential. As Ahmed insists, the exposure of unhappy effects is "affirmative" and gives "us alternative sets of imaginings of what might count as a good or better life" (50).

Type "having it all" into the search engine and the top searches are all by women and directed towards women: *Having it all kinda sucks: only women would sign up for this much crap* (Huffington Post); *Having it all, and hating it* (*The Atlantic* 2016); *Having it all is impossible, what women really need is balance, fairness and respect* (*Salon* 2016). "Having it

[176] For more on this, see Ahmed on postfeminism.

[177] What working moms really need are wives — Jezebel; Gurley Brown *Having It All: Love, Success, Sex, Money . . . Even if You're Starting With Nothing* (1982)

all," many have noted, has become equivalent to "doing it all," and though the value "it all" and burden of "having it" is disputed, few satisfying solutions have been reached (Szalai "The Complicated Origins of 'Having it all'").[178] As Jennifer Szalai writes, "The most common incarnation of these three little words is now reserved for the endless debates over whether women can balance the demands of career with the demands of motherhood—an equilibrium that, as the economy continues to grind its gears, feels increasingly out of reach" ('The Complicated Origins"). Like many such impasses, it has become part of an economy of female exhaustion.[179] "Having it all" for women has become synonymous with achieving the good life. Just as the fantasy of the happy housewife conceals the traces of domestic labour under the sign of happiness, the "liberated" woman's endeavor to "have it all" often conceals the labour of other women, who might then be required to take over the domestic duties in her place (Ahmed 51).

Indeed, one of the reasons why the good life is unachievable for most—or put differently, why the good life remains a fantasy rather than a reality—is because it is fundamentally structured around a hierarchy of privilege and social access. Working class women, minorities, women of colour, and other marginalized groups are not entitled to even entertain the good life fantasy, though they are instrumental—or, as we saw in Chapter 2, "infrastructural"—in enabling privileged others to approximate its form (hooks 2; Ahmed 51). While good life scripts appear to ensure happiness, they in fact regulate our entrapment within class and gendered structures. As a genre of disappointment, the bad vacation story makes this entrapment visible. Moreover, the

[178]For Jennifer Szalai's full article see: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/magazine/the-complicated-origins-of-having-it-all.html

[179] In fact, *The New York Times* has reported that the percentage of American women in the work force has been falling over the past decade and that 61 percent of nonworking women cite family responsibilities as the reason. This was reported before the COVID 19 pandemic, which exacerbated these numbers. For more information see: https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/14/upshot/us-employment-women-not-working.html

bad vacation story underscores the destination culture's dependency on the good life fantasy as a means of livelihood. Since WWII, tourism has been promoted as an alternative to the one-commodity dependency inherited from colonial rule. As Enloe notes: "Foreign sun-seekers replace bananas. Hiltons replace sugar mills" ("On the Beach" 392). Thus, beneath the trivial affects that the bad vacation story produces are deeper fault lines that signal the material conditions and social inequalities inherent in the machinery of the good life. It is the very frivolous nature of vacationer's complaints, that, by contrast, makes visible the more insidious ramifications of the labour required to ensure the good life. The suspension of domesticity for what Enloe calls the "societies of departure" means the domestic work has been transported to the "societies of destination,"—it sets up a hierarchy of labour from which the female tourist benefits: with domestic labour outsourced, it is her chance to "have it all." Yet, has the bad vacation story reveals, the vacationer is not free of the patriarchal and colonial system; she is perhaps even more acutely aware of its structures.[180]

Indeed, this confirms my own recent experience at an all-inclusive resort on the coast of the Yucatan peninsula, which was very similar to the "La Carib" of Moore's "Paper Losses." Upon arrival at the Ocean Mayan Paradise, guests were issued bracelets which released them from all domestic responsibilities for the duration of their stay. Every morning at daybreak staff combed the seaweed and debris—old shoes, baby bottles, beer cans—off the beaches so that it

[180] In *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* Enloe outlines how the tourist industry is reliant on patriarchal structures in order to thrive. Enloe writes, "Without ideas about masculinity and femininity—and the enforcement of both—in the societies of departure and the societies of destination, it would be impossible to sustain the tourism industry and its political agendas in their current form. It is not simply that ideas about pleasure, travel, escape, bed-making, and sexuality have affected women in rich and poor countries. The very structure of international tourism has needed patriarchy to survive and thrive. Men's capacity to control women's sense of their security and self-worth has been central to the evolution of tourism politics. It is for this reason that actions by women—as tourists, airline flight attendants, hotel housekeepers, union organizers, women in prostitution, data collectors, wives of businessmen, and organizers of alternative tours for women—should be seen as political, internationally political" (82).

would match the white sands of the poster. Excursions were offered with "sunshine guaranteed." Braceleted, complimentary cocktail in hand, we newly minted vacation babies, were golf-carted off to our villas—with their views of the sea, for $29 extra a night. At first I thought I could be an observer, perched at an anthropological distance from the buffet or the karaoke enthusiasts, but I was soon pulled up out of my seat by a salsa dance instructor and whirled around the stage. They were going to force me to be entertained—like sunshine, fun was guaranteed. There was no escaping the fact that I was part of this industry; I was a well-oiled cog in a machine tasked with sustaining the codes of the good life.

Another thing I noticed about the luxury resort was that everything from deck chairs, and bar shelves, to menu items communicated a sense of social hierarchy amongst the vacationers. In fact, this immersion within the good life encouraged a narcissism of small differences. My room looked out on "The Privilege Beach," a roped-off section of the shore reserved for guests who paid an extra premium which availed them access to several ocean-facing queen-sized beds on the sand, decked with waterproof pillows and flowing white curtains. It occurred to me that this hierarchy had been put in place to give the "Privilege Guests" the allusion of exclusivity—even though the Privilege Beach was directly beside the regular beach, and was attended by the same gulls and coatis (furry racoon-like creatures) pestering the guests for food, the rope fence reminded us of the difference. As I walked through the compound at night I peeked into their lighted villas, comparing their rooms to mine, and wondering if they were having a more relaxed, more inebriated, more culturally educational, or more blissful vacation than I was. Even within paradise, there must always be an example of an even more desirable form of the good life. The adjacent hotels replicated this hierarchical structure too, for it was always possible to find newer, more luxurious hotels, or to stumble upon others whose peeling paint and hurricane-weathered

vistas had seen better days. If, on a walk a vacationer should pause to admire a view or wade through a lagoon on a hotel's shoreline, a polite uniformed staff member would instantaneously appear, inquire as to where the guest was staying, and suggest that next vacation the guest should stay at their more superior resort. There were signs along the beach cautioning vacationers that once they left the boundary of the resort, food and drink were no longer free, and the resort could no longer guarantee guests wellbeing or safety. A large notice warned: *Beyond this point, nature is running wild*.

Fig. 19. A sign on the boundaries of a vacation resort warning guests that "nature is running wild." Source: Author's collection.

This sign, meant to alert the guests to possible encounters with wildlife, in fact delineates the parameters of the manufactured paradise, and calls attention to the ecologies that are crowded out by the tourist industry. The sign also emphasizes how the resort is dislocated from the cultural fabric and ecology of its setting, reminding the vacationer of the artificiality of the heterotopic world constructed within its limits.

Though it offers a humourous approach to an emotional crisis within an idealic setting, Moore's bad vacation story uniquely brings together gender, class, and environmental concerns to show how the good life fantasy is built upon the exploitation of women, post-colonial nations, and environments. Consider Moore's setting, the Caribbean resort, which she depicts through Kit's privileged, ambivalent and self-ironic gaze—one presumably closely aligned with the New Yorker readers themselves. Never far from the surface of Kit's focalization is the dual acknowledgement of extreme privilege of the cultures of departure alongside the island's inhabitants.

> She was not deceived by the equatorial sea breeze and so did not overbake herself in the colonial sun; with the resort managers, she shared her moral outrage at the armed guards who kept the local boys from sneaking past the fence onto this white, white beach; and she rubbed a kind of resin into her brow to freeze it and downplay the creases—to make her appear younger for her departing husband, though he never once glanced at her. Not that she looked that good: her suitcase had got lost and she was forced to wear clothes purchased from the gift shop—the words La Caribe emblazoned across every single thing. (7)

We see Kit's awareness of the ways in which the tourist industry is a legacy of colonial rule—she notes the "colonial sun" and the "white, white beach" which, made whiter by western bodies, prohibits local access. In one of the best lines in the story, Kit notes how the other vacationers share a displaced guilt over their experience of the good life amidst the world's suffering. "On the beach, people read books about Rwandan and Yugoslavian genocide," Kit observes. "This was to add seriousness to a trip that lacked it. One was supposed not to notice the dark island

boys on the other side of the barbed wire, throwing rocks" (7). One was supposed to ignore local and rather tour remote crises within the pages of the vacation reading, crises that can't physically interrupt the vacation experience. Indeed, the vacation supposedly has the duty of "making things vanish temporarily." When "a woman on a towel, reading of genocide, turned and smiled," Kit acknowledges, "In this fine compound on the sea, the contradictions of life were grotesque and uninventable" (7).

Yet merged with these global concerns is Kit's personal dilemma of separation from the familiar—her lost suitcase, her soon to be divided home—as dressed in giftshop souvenirs and performing a role she no longer holds, the wife of a "departing husband" who "never once glanced at her" (5), Kit realizes that without access to her old script, for instance, the one in which she has wife status and in which her husband happily offers to buy her a drink, "One could disappear oneself, in movement and repetition." This revelation is at first frightening to her, but later she reconsiders the role she played in her former life and recognizes it for what it was, a scripted part that she no longer fits:

> When they finally left La Caribe, she was glad. Staying there, she had begun to hate the world. In the airports and on the planes home, she did not even try to act natural: natural was a felony. She spoke to her children calmly, from a script, with dialogue and stage directions of utter neutrality.

In this bad vacation story, Kit's experience of suspended domesticity ends up prompting a realization of the ways in which the conventional scripts she and her family were running their lives by were no longer sustainable—for instance, the nonconfrontational, neutral language used in the family's suburban culture, put in place to avoid addressing trauma and abuses of power but

instead naturalizing those abuses. Kit realizes that acting natural, itself an oxymoron, or naturalizing scripts that may seem neutral but are really harmful, perpetuates an unrealistic ideal of the good life. This, she decides, is "a felony." Acting natural takes effort. She stops acting, and instead reads out the stage directions, drawing attention to the artificiality of the script.

It is, however, on the last morning of the bad vacation that Moore gives us the clearest description of the cruel optimism that drives the pursuit of the good life in the form of an ecological metaphor. The family requests a wakeup call so that they can go to the beach and "see the hatching of the baby sea turtles and their quick scuttle into the ocean, under the cover of night, to avoid predators" (8). But no one wakes up them up and by the time they get to the beach it is 10am and long past the hour of the sea turtle's safe migration to the sea. Strangely, however, the sea turtles are still on the beach, caged and held back by the hotel personnel to show them off to the tourists "who were too lazy or deaf to have got up in the night":

> "Look, come see," a man with a Spanish accent who usually rented the scuba gear said. Sam, Beth, Dale, and Kit all ran over. (Rafe had stayed behind to drink coffee and read the paper.) The squirming babies were beginning to heat up in the sun; the goldening Venetian vellum of their wee webbed feet was already edged in desiccating brown. "I'm going to have to let them go now," the man said. "You are the last ones to see these little bebes." He took them over to the water's edge and let them go, hours too late, to make their own way into the sea. And that's when a frigate bird swooped in, plucked them, one by one, from the silver waves, and ate them for breakfast. (8)

Will the family suffer the same plight as the delayed baby sea turtles, determinedly scuttling to towards the ocean, even though, due to their delayed release, it means certain death? Is the desire for and the perceived entitlement to the good life experience—which includes cocktails on faraway

beaches, dolphin rides, and turtle migrations—also what is threatening the rhythms of the planet? These are the questions that the bad vacation story poses for the reader.

Sunshine (not) Guaranteed: The Narcissism of Small Differences

What is travel in the age of Instagram if not mimetic desire with airline miles?

—Sophie Gilbert, *The Atlantic*[181]

Acting as a postcard version of Lorrie Moore's "Paper Losses," Lydia Davis's micro story "Contingency (vs. Necessity) 2: On Vacation," outlines a bad vacation in four lines by foregrounding the emotions that make the good life unattainable: envy and disappointment provoked from the comparison of status and assets, what Freud has termed the "narcissism of small differences."[182] Reading as a trivial complaint, the following story subtly maps out the bad vacation's grammar of disappointment; that is to say, it contains a hopeful projection swiftly followed by a recognition of dashed expectations within its compact structure:

> He could be my husband.
>
> But he is not my husband.
>
> He is her husband.
>
> And so he takes her picture (not mine) as she stands in her flowered beach outfit in front of the old fortress.

[181] Gilbert makes this observation in her review of the season 2 finale of *The White Lotus*: https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2022/12/white-lotus-season-2-finale-literary-references/672438/

[182] The narcissism of small differences (in German: der Narzissmus der kleinen Differenzen) is the thesis that communities with adjoining territories and close relationships are especially likely to engage in feuds and mutual ridicule because of hypersensitivity to details of differentiation (Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion* 131; 305).

The repetition of the word “husband,” which punctuates the first three lines (and is also the word that occurs most frequently in the story), signifies the speaker’s anxiety—her mimetic desire for the other woman’s “happy object”—the thing one associates with happiness. For, even if happiness is imagined as a feeling state, or a form of consciousness that evaluates a life situation achieved over time (Veenhoven 22–23), as Ahmed argues, “happiness also turns us toward objects” (*The Promise of Happiness* 21). On a more formal level, though, the word “husband” evokes a form of narrative frustration that reflects the speaker’s affective frustration. The word itself becomes an impasse, one that the speaker runs up against at the end of each sentence. Each narrative thrust is obstructed by the recognition that the “happy object,” the husband and all he comes to stand for, is unavailable to the speaker. (As Ngai points out envy, a paradigmatic ugly feeling, can be an actual recognition of social and economic inequalities—and yet our culture's tendency is to stereotypically dismiss envy as a merely "feminine" affect and hence, in this prejudicial logic, merely trivial.)

Fig. 20. This 1937 ad for the Packard Six, which came out the same year the term “the good life” was formally introduced into the American lexicon, proposes an unambiguous message: by buying their product the couple can move from those who envy, and are stagnant, to those are envied and are mobile, as well as upwardly mobile. What’s more, in the second image, we, readers, are placed in the position of those who envy, and so the cycle continues. As such, these two images, offer an early cultural example of how envy is the psychic fuel on which the 20th Century’s late capitalist formulation of the “good life” runs. Source: Packard Six Ad, 1937 issue of "The Literary Digest" magazine.

Ultimately, though, it seems that the speaker doesn't desire the husband or "a husband" but rather what the figure of the husband makes possible: access to a conventional life, to the display of status that comes with a coupled life. As Berlant suggests, what love secures is "evidence that you have had an impact on the world by being the condition of possibility for someone else" (*The Female Complaint* 218). Our speaker wishes to be the condition of possibility for someone else because, by doing so, she gains recognition from a culture that does not traditionally recognize women or their achievements. The husband and his camera, the floral beach outfit, the couple's companionship, airtight and fortress strong (as the backdrop in the photograph suggests)—all these are the happy objects that cluster around the promise of happiness, recognition, and reciprocity. The fact that the story ends with a photograph, a freeze-frame vision of the good life is important too. It suggests that the good life fantasy only exists as an image, and that it is these very images—the documentation of a posed and curated happiness—that proliferate the fantasy.

Davis's bad vacation story, I believe, reveals an explicitly gendered anxiety about the good life narrative. On one level, it questions whether happiness—at least this version of happiness—is pre-determined, or whether it is contingent upon women's choices. This recalls Lorrie Moore's ironic description of the women's goal to select the best unhappiness. We see a similar throb of longing in the link between the conditional verb "he could be" and its swift denial "but he is not"—the signal of possibility fused to the foreclosure of that possibility. This failure of optimism is, by definition, the grounds for the narrator's complaint. It reveals the way in which the narrator acknowledges her complicity with the fantasy of the good life, as well as her pragmatic recognition that this fantasy is, ultimately, "not mine"—thus prompting her to question her subscription to it.

The narrator's complaint is predicated on an affective mode that alternates between desire and critique—an investment in the "happy object"—as well as a critique of such an object. We see this mode at work in Davis's "Contingency (vs. Necessity): On Vacation" on a formal level as well. Formally, Davis's story reads like a ghazal, an Arabic amatory verse form consisting of syntactically and grammatically complete couplets, each line ending on the same word or phrase. Traditionally ghazals deal with themes of loss and romantic love; however, in the case of "Contingency (vs. Necessity): On Vacation," rather than grieving the loss of romantic love, the speaker grieves the loss of the good life fantasy (the contingency or possibility of the good life), and perhaps the impossibility of such a life in the first place (necessity). The first two lines suggest that the desired object is the husband, but, as we have seen, the final sentence implies that it is not the husband but rather the life (of which the husband is a token) that is the coveted fantasy. Further, the third mention of the word "husband" de-couples the romantic unit, introducing an awkward third wheel, the voyeur, who, like the reader, lingers just outside the scene of supposed happiness.[183] One can imagine the speaker scrolling through pictures on social media, or eyeing the couple from behind her sunglasses, longing for the solace that conventionality promises: a life that consists of durable intimacy, floral beach outfits, and a disposable income that allows for vacations beside historic seaside fortresses.

Yet, "Contingency (vs Necessity): On Vacation" works to counteract this vision of the good life, to point out the ways in which this promise is nostalgic. The narrator's observation makes legible the ways in which, for women, love and intimacy are often presented as an

[183] We see this weird sense of voyeurism repeated again in the honeymooning couple's near-sex scene in *The White Lotus*, where the camera conspicuously pulls out behind the curtains. This is a horror trope that invites us to expect that someone's there, watching, but in *The White Lotus* scene, and in Davis's short story, the voyeur turns out to be us, the viewer/reader.

economy of scarcity (here, for instance, the ratio is two to one). At its heart, then, this four-sentence story speaks to a prevailing double standard deeply ingrained within our culture, the notion that in order for her life to "add up to something," a woman must be the "condition of possibility" for someone else—her partner, her children. The narrator reveals an anxiety about being defined by what she is not and by what she does not have. Furthermore, "Contingency vs Necessity: On Vacation" plays with the constraint produced by an external structure: the rules of logic detailed by Contingency vs. Necessity. In grammar rules, the difference between contingency and necessity is that a contingency is the quality of being conditional, of happening by chance; while necessity is the quality or state of being unavoidable, or absolutely requisite.[184] Both the desire for unpredictability and the acknowledgment of an unavoidable script are at play within this story.

Davis often uses grammar exercises, or texts that sound like grammar exercises—sometimes borrowed from the grammar of foreign languages or found texts wherein the incorrect use of grammar takes on new meanings because of their defamiliarizing nature. At the same time, this playful use of form often satirizes the structures it employs by portraying narrators searching for rules to give shape to their banal and disappointing experiences. For instance, "Contingency Vs Necessity: On Vacation" depicts the way in which the good life aspiration, here in the form of the vacation, works within the established rules of a genre or of an accepted mode of thinking and relating—as is produced by logic or grammar—while at the same time contesting the mold through defamiliarizing the language, and thereby dislocating or surprising the reader. Davis sees this experience of dislocation, what she has termed in interviews as a sense of readerly "alienation," as a positive quality, as it positions the reader "outside" of the text and

[184] In philosophy and logic, contingency is the status of propositions that are neither true under every possible valuation (i.e. tautologies) nor false under every possible valuation (i.e. contradictions).

"looking in on it and not taking it for granted" ("Honoring the Syntax"). Experimenting with grammatical formulas, Davis explains, allows her to stand "apart from it enough to be able to see what's going on and hear every single word" ("Honoring the Syntax"). Notably, Davis's intensive treatment of grammar often becomes more prominent in stories which deal with grief or mourning—such as is exemplified by "Contingency vs Necessity: On Vacation" which deals with loneliness, and even more unambiguously in "Grammar Questions," a story about a father's death which starts with the query, "where is he living? Well actually he's dying. So is he living?" (*Collected Stories* 527). Though this technique might suggest a form of evasion of feeling through logic, it can also be a way, in Davis's words, "of staying close to the subject without dealing with it frontally" ("Honoring the Syntax"). Put slightly differently, to borrow from Emily Dickinson, it is about telling the truth but telling it slant.

In "Our Trip," another one of Davis's bad vacation stories, the female narrator recounts a miserable family road trip but satisfies herself with the calculation that she didn't have the worst vacation: "50 percent of people I saw looked as though they'd had a better vacation than we had," she observes; "But then 50 percent of them looked as though they'd had a worse one, so I felt alright about it" (*Collected Stories* 322). Like the narrator in "Contingency vs Necessity: On Vacation" the speaker is concerned with the way in which she is following, or failing to follow, the "happiness script." What percent of people, her statement seems to ask, have managed to unlock the secret to the good life? The narrator's equation picks up on a tension fundamental to the perpetuation of the good life fantasy: Is the good life only recognizable and therefore achievable, when confronted with its opposite? If the world is divided by people whose vacation has been better and people whose vacation has been worse than the narrator's (or non-existent), does acquisition of the good life make one ordinary or extraordinary?

These questions speak directly to the ways in which the bad vacation complaint functions as an embodiment of both the desire to be aligned with the happiness script—in this case the desire to be aligned with the conventionality of the good life—while at the same time aware of one's alienation from such a script. It is the wish to be included within the performance of the good life, here in the form of the road trip vacation, but also the frustration of an ill-fitting script, one that does not actually allow the wife/mother to take a vacation, that dominates women's dislocating experience of the good life promise. For example, as the caretaker of the domestic and the intimate, the narrator in "My Trip" is faced with a situation demanding a feat of emotional gymnastics as she goes on to describe how she attempts to manage the tensions between her domineering husband ("Anything a little out of control makes him nervous") and irritable child. In the end, she finds that the only way to ease the tension between father and son is to allow them to gang up against her: "So I shut up and started cleaning my hands with some pre-moistened towelettes called Wet Ones, which have a sickly smell to them, and the smell filled the car so badly that now the two of them turned on me" (321). Recalling these minor catastrophes that make up the family vacation, the narrator seems to express some relief that at least the incident with the "Wet Ones" afforded the family an opportunity to re-direct their irritation to an object, even if it meant she ended up being excluded from the "kind of loyalty" set up between the male members of her family (322). Finally, the whole family is united as spectators, as they all "quieted down to watch the remains of a pretty dramatic accident by the side of the road," the larger disaster distracting them from the crisis—or perhaps simply mirroring it in a more dramatic form—within their own vehicle (322). This oscillation between banality and tragedy, repeated throughout many of Davis's short stories, especially in her portrayals of female labour, female disappointment, and emotional clean up, provides a

humourous critique of the gendered double standards her narrators face—be they the unequal divisions of labour within the traditional family structure, or the choices that go into creating such a structure in the first place—through the genre of the complaint.

Both formally and thematically, the postcard-size of Lydia Davis's stories signifies how though it may seem to be simply a minor, trivial, yet persistent irritation, over time a complaint can come to define the limits of a life. Another story, entitled "Waiting for Takeoff" depicts a scenario familiar to the traveller or vacationer—that of the delayed flight. The entirety of the story, which is five sentences long, details the passengers' complaints and behavior towards the flight staff.

> We sit in the airplane so long, on the ground, waiting to take off, that one woman declares she will now write her novel, and another in a neighboring seat says she will be happy to edit it. Food is being sold in the aisle, and the passengers, either hungry from waiting or worried that they will not see food again for some time, are eagerly buying it, even food they would not normally eat. For instance, there are candy bars long enough to use as weapons. The steward who is selling the food says he was attacked by a passenger, though not with a candy bar. Because the plane had been delayed so long, he said, the passenger threw a drink in his face, damaging one eyeball with a piece of ice.

This portrait of bad leisure offers a critique in miniature of the sense of entitlement and exceptionalism we see expressed by the vacationers in *The White Lotus*, and in some of the other bad vacation stories I look at in this chapter. Complaints accelerate into violence.

Another bad vacation story, "Letter to a Hotel Manager," a humourous piece of micro-fiction executed in the form of a complaint letter, goes into detail about how a vacationer's stay at the hotel was compromised by a spelling mistake on the menu. The complainant writes "My

stay in your grand hotel was delightful, apart from, perhaps, the coolness of the restaurant manager, every aspect of the service and presentation was flawless except for this one spelling mistake"—one that the narrator can't let go of (*Can't and Won't* 231). The misspelled word prompts five pages of complaints out the absence of certain traditional dishes on the menu, suggestions for re-arranging the hotel's art, as well as a reflection on the narrator's deceased mother, whose habits of striking up conversations with strangers bothered the narrator while her mother was alive, but now, the narrator admits, she herself has adopted. Like in "Contingency Vs Necessity: On Vacation" the focus on the particularities of grammar rules, or in the case of "Letter to a Hotel Manager," correct spelling, illustrates the narrator's efforts to exercise control over her life, to contain affects, such as envy or loneliness. However, the idiosyncratic and almost obsessive focus on grammar becomes a vehicle to expose those affects. Taking the tiresome and trivial forms of complaints or lessons, Davis's bad vacation stories both attract and repel the reader. They exemplify how the good life fantasy is built on a narcissism of small differences, while exposing its grammar of disappointment.

Leisure Work

Eat. Drink. Walk. March. Back to the hotel. To the Hotel of Arrival, the Hotel of Departure, the Hotel of the Future, the Hotel of Martinique and the Universe….Back to the hotel without a name in the street without a name. You press the button and the door opens. This is the Hotel Without-a-Name in the Street Without-a-Name, and the clients have no names, no faces. You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room. The room says: 'Quite like old times. Yes?...No?... Yes.'

—Jean Rhys, *Good Morning Midnight*

Both Lorrie Moore and Lydia Davis's bad vacation stories contain a kernel of dumb hope within the overwhelming register of disappointment; these narratives show that it is the combination of these affects—the desire for something or someone unattainable when you know that the desire gets in the way of happiness—that sustain the good life fantasy. Filmed in 2020, a year wherein vacations were unadvisable due to the global pandemic, Mike White's HBO mini-series, *The White Lotus*, takes the combination of these dysphoric feelings to an extreme on both sides of the hospitality line. Our introduction to the hotel in the pilot episode reveals the hospitality workers preparing to welcome the VIP guests, who will arrive at the 5-star Hawaiian resort via boat. Staff are instructed to dissolve into the background, while sticking to a strict script. "Here self-disclosure is discouraged," the resort's manager, Armond (the Australian actor Murray Bartlett), instructs Lani (Jolene Purdy), a native-Hawaiian trainee, who is concealing a pregnancy—from the staff, and from us, viewers—in order not to lose her job. "Especially with these VIPs who arrive on the boat," he explains; "You don't want to be too…specific?...as a presence, as an identity. You want to be more generic." The script that demands the staff become generic entities also demands a performance of compulsive happiness. "Wave like you mean it," Armond warns the staff. When Lani begins lactating, Armond, mistaking the stain on her shirt for a regurgitated tuna sandwich, advises her to hold her tray of hot towels higher, to hide the mark from the guests. No one suspects the situation until, no longer able to mask her distress, Lani goes into labour and ends up giving birth in Armond's office, while Armond desperately tries to conceal the event from the vacationers and cater to their petty demands and complaints—which becomes a central theme of the plot.

Fig. 21. Lani and Armond await the VIP guests with forced frozen smiles, which, because of their artificial nature, appear grimace-like, illustrating the affective labour that goes into hospitality work. Their smiles recall what Sarah Ahmed calls the "happiness duty" or "happiness script" required of housewives, domestic, and hospitality workers to keep up the appearance of the enjoyment, thus concealing the labour under the sign of happiness.

From its central opening image of the staff awaiting the guests on the shore, an image we see in the first episode and which also serves as the series' HBO banner, this upstairs downstairs bad vacation story puts into tension two diametrically opposed conspicuous forms of leisure and labour.[185] Notably, the groups face each other, as in some distorted reflection of wealth disparity—in one reviewer's words, "as if they were equal expressions on two sides of a mathematical equation, but the equivalence is just an illusion" (Fry). The false equivalence flows, in part, from the film's relentless horizontality. Staff are invited to dine with guests, the

[185] Though, as there are no actual upstairs and downstairs partitions between staff and guests such as we see in films and series like *Gosford Park*, *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs Downstairs*, class difference lacks physical verticality in *The White Lotus*. A better analogy would be Erving Goffman's concept of "front stage/backstage" behavior. An important distinction between front stage behaviour, which are actions that are visible to the audience and are part of the performance; and backstage behavior, which are actions that people engage in when no audience is present.

wealthy Tanya invites Belinda to dine with her the restaurant, and on the sunset cruise, staff and guests fraternize, Mark and Armond have a drink together at the bar, and even have affairs with guests, in Paula and Kai's case; this however does not make them equal. In fact, this insistence on horizontality just exaggerates the power difference between the staff and guests: by accompanying the lonely Tanya, Belinda ends up working overtime; Paula manipulates Kai into engaging in petty theft, and, because of his economic and racial status, receiving severe punishment—unlike the guests, who are shown to be untouchable by the law. Lani's actual labour and childbirth add a third dimension to this false equivalence by foregrounding the double-shift of the female hospitality worker who must be both mother to the guests, treating each of them, in Armond's words, like the "special chosen baby child of the hotel" while also tending to her own children.[186] Thus, by putting pressure on these dueling states of leisure and work—and specifically domestic and emotional labour—the bad vacation story animates the following questions: who does the work to provide leisure? Alternatively, for whom is leisure "work"?

[186] As Sylvia Federici reminds us in "Wages Against Housework": "every miscarriage is a work accident" (*Wages Against Housework*).

Fig 22. Staff members Belinda and Armond (right) await the incoming VIP guests who have just arrived by boat on the island. This image brings together leisure class, in Armond's words, the vacation babies, and the workers whose physical and emotional labour is required to sustain their leisure. The horizontality of the shot creates a false equivalency between the two groups.

The tourism and hospitality industry has grown exponentially in the last century: In 1950 there were 25m international tourist visits, rising to 166m in 1970, and 435m in 1990. An estimated 1.8 billion tourists traveled worldwide in 2012, creating 7 percent of all jobs globally and generating revenues amounting to at least 5 percent of the global gross domestic product.[187] Middle-class vacationers in search of authentic cultural experiences have changed the patterns of the global economy. Tourism has become an industry that can turn poor countries very poverty into an experience—one that is now part of the tourists' self-edification, another ingredient in the fantasy of the good life. "The thing you suspected about yourself the minute you became a

[187] This data was sourced from the UN Women and UN World Tourism Organization's Global Report on Women in Tourism, 2010. See also Thomas Baum, "International Perspectives on Women and Work in Hotels, Catering and Tourism" in which Baum estimates tourism's contribution to global GDP as having reached 9 percent by 2012 (8).

tourist is true: a tourist is an ugly human being," Jamaica Kincaid observes in her book length essay on Antigua's history of exploitation, *A Small Place*:

> That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain. For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. Every native lives a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and depression, and every deed, good or bad, is an attempt to forget this. But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere … they are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist wants to go—so when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you, they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to run their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself. (14-19)

What Kincaid describes is the contact zones wherein the societies of departure and societies of destination "meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 34). The emotion fueling this exchange is envy—an emotion that, like anger, offers a lot of important information about a relationship or situation. Yet unlike anger, which has the capacity to be wielded as "a legitimate weapon in social reform" (Schoeck 172), envy lacks cultural recognition as a valid mode of publicly recognizing or responding to social disparities, even though, as Ngai points out, envy "remains the only agonistic emotion defined as having a perceived inequality as its object" (128). Further, Ngai argues, when this antagonistic emotion is "moralized and uglified to such an extent that it becomes shameful to the subject who experiences it," envy becomes "stripped of its potential critical agency—as an ability to recognize, and antagonistically respond to, potentially real and

institutionalized forms of inequality" (129). It is the institutionalized form of inequality that Kincaid details in this passage.

Yet, what is most animating in Kincaid's depiction of the native/tourist dichotomy is the repurposing of the host culture's "banality and boredom" into the guest culture's "source of pleasure" (18). The banality and boredom mentioned here derive in part from the lack of access to global autonomy and sources of income that don't rely on tourism. In neocolonial terms, to be a poor country in the late twentieth century is to be 'unspoiled'" (Enloe 52); it means to be seemingly untouched by capitalist exploits. However, the growing tourist industry has meant increasing the host's reliance on the guest and the guest's whims, thus further stratifying the asymmetrical relations of power. For instance, popular vacation destinations such as Jamaica, Bahamas, Samoa, and Fiji depend on tourism for 40 percent of their export earnings. Nepal, Croatia, Egypt, Tanzania, and Morocco have come to depend on the tourism business for at least 20 percent of their export earnings.[188] This means the societies of destination—the populations who provide service for vacationers and tourists—have taken it upon themselves to provide the good life experience by learning its scripts. The "periphery" of the western world thus provides a mirror to reflect Western culture—and more specifically, the American dream—back at twice its size. The bad vacation story, however, mars the image of the dream, challenging, even if only temporarily, its scripts.

The vacationers in *The White Lotus* include the Mossbacher family helmed by the matriarch, Nicole (Connie Britton), a Sheryl Sandberg-like tech C.F.O.; her husband, Mark (Steve Zahn) in the throes of a midlife crisis; their video-game-addicted teenage son, Quinn (Fred Hechinger); and their spoilt, performatively woke daughter, Olivia (Sydney Sweeney),

[188] This data was sourced from Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (38), and from Dan Smith's *The State of the World Atlas* (52—53).

who has brought along a college friend, Paula (Brittany O'Grady), who is the only non-White member of the guests and is uncomfortably aware of the resort's exploitation of the indigenous population—though maybe not as aware of her complicity in it. There is the honeymooning couple—the insufferable Shane (Jake Lacy), an aggrieved rich kid who feels like he is consistently being poorly treated, and his new wife, Rachel (Alexandra Daddario), a journalist-turned-ambivalent-trophy-wife, who already has misgivings about the marriage, especially when her husband's domineering mother shows up in their suite. The only guest to arrive alone is Tanya (Jennifer Coolidge),[189] an insecure and lonely middle-aged woman who can't quite part with her emotionally abusive mother's ashes, so carries them with her on vacation like a ghostly albatross, while manipulating the spa manager Belinda (Natasha Rothwell), a Black woman whose sole job is to cater to the White vacationers, to be her nightly dinner date and informal therapist. The guest's behaviors and power struggles over what they each deem to be their vision of the good life make the situation a bad vacation for everyone, but each character reacts differently to their perceived crisis. The resort setting—chosen due to constraints on filming venues during the pandemic—adds to the claustrophobia and, like reality TV, doubles down on the narcissism of small differences. Indeed, as Naomi Fry notes in her New Yorker review of the show, "owing to a slew of rivalries, and a foreboding, tribal-drum-heavy score, composed by Cristobal Tapia de Veer, White's show also has ample tinges of 'Survivor.' After duking it out for a week on an island, who will come out alive?" This is the question lingering on the viewer's minds, especially since the series' first framing scene flashes forward a week, to the end of the

[189] Coolidge knew Mike White prior to being thrust onto the cramped boat where she gave her spectacular "eulogy" despite severe seasickness. She explains they were longtime friends who had both acted together in the movie Gentlemen Broncos and had traveled together. White invited Coolidge on a safari in Africa, which she suspects inspired *The White Lotus* 'analysis of privilege on vacation.
https://www.thrillist.com.au/entertainment/nation/the-white-lotus-jennifer-coolidge-boat-scene/

vacation, where we find Shane, alone and bitter, in the airport waiting room, while a casket of human remains is wheeled onto the plane. Who does the body in the casket belong to?[190] How bad can a bad vacation get?

Fig. 23. VIP guest and honeymooner Shane (right) confronts the concierge Armond (left) about the error in his room reservation and demands to be moved to the Pineapple suite, while his Rachel and pregnant hotel worker Lani look on.

The closed location also reinforces the narrative of bad leisure: the island resort corrals all the guests into unbearable proximity, exaggerating their power struggles and turning their complaints—about not getting the right room, having to share a common space, or losing a backpack on the beach—into plot arcs. The hotel's domestic architecture, particularly in the scenes that take place in the VIP guests' luxury suits, the Palm, the Hibiscus, the Tradewinds and the notorious Pineapple Suite, emphasizes the threat of proximity, often in the form of an unwanted guest. For instance, intimate and supposedly private spaces, like hotel bedroom,

[190] Since Shane is alone, we are led to believe the casket may contain his wife, Rachel.

become vulnerable to voyeurism[191] and even invasion, as we see first with the coerced act of theft—Paula convinces an Indigenous Hawaiian man Kai to steal Nicole's bracelet in order to fund a lawsuit against the hotel, which has stolen his family's land—and Armond's visit to the Pineapple Suite to enact his revenge on Shane (he defecates on the floor of the Pineapple suite). In both these cases, however, the act of trespassing is interrupted by the hotel guest returning to their suite unexpectedly, with dire consequences for the trespasser. Both scenarios scrabble hospitality, confusing host and guest, as we saw earlier in Shirley Jackson's apartment swap stories. Hospitality worker Armond's status of host is usurped by Shane, who mistakes him for an intruder, thus justifying an attack. The unjust displacement of host and guest is particularly acute in Kai's case. As an Indigenous Hawaiian, whose family are the rightful owners of the island on which The White Lotus now stands, Kai is a kind of ultimate host—a host whose home has been invaded by the colonial legacy symbolized by the resort. A usurped host, Kai is now refigured as an invasive bad guest relative to the Mossbacher's hospitality, even though the Mossbacher family, like all the hotel guests, are in fact intruders upon on Kai's land. What is more, the discovery of the uninvited visitor to the hotel suite just becomes another experience for the guests to consume, further highlighting the exploitative power of the vacationers in their quest for the good life. Kai's break-in allows the insecure Mark Mossbacher to play the hero, saving his wife and thereby reinvigorating their sex-life; facing no repercussions for Armond's death, Shane is greeted the next day by the police with handshakes instead of handcuffs. On the other hand, because of these situations of unsettled hospitality, Kai pays with his future; Armond pays with his life.

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[191] The sense of voyeurism in the stalker-like shots filmed from just beyond the Shane and Rachel's bedroom window accentuate the sense of threat and infuse these intimate scenes with a subtle terror that recalls the bad vacation scenes in the 1970s gothic novels Johanna Russ describes in "Someone's Trying to Kill me and I Think It's My Husband."

As well as the suggestion of voyeurism, hotel-room invasion, and the underlying pulse of threat created by the knowledge that one member of the cast will not make it off the island alive, the hotel's leisure spaces, such as the poolside gauntlet, in which the young female guests belittle one another, the yacht hired for the sunset tour, on which the newlyweds and the Tanya's mother's ashes compete for space, and the double-booked Pineapple suite, produce a growing sense of claustrophobia and unease. In this way, the architecture takes on the psychology of its inhabitants and reflects the pathologies of their privilege, greed, and obsession with status back at them. This is particularly the case with the elusive Pineapple suite. Furnished with pineapple throw pillows, pineapple lamps, pineapple curtains, a hot pink portrait of a pineapple, and an awkward porcelain pineapple in the bathroom, the gaudy suite satirizes Shane's conspicuous consumption and status-driven desire for excess. After a tyrannical crusade against Armond, Shane acquires the Pineapple suite; however, the pineapples, along with Shane's bad behavior, crowd Rachel out. Intended as a space for newlyweds' nuptials, the Pineapple suite instead becomes the setting for the honeymooners' separation, and following that, in an Agatha Christie-like twist, for murder.

With what is perhaps a nod to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," itself a story of seasonal dislocation, the opening credits extend the thematic relationship between interiority and interior decorations by narrowing in on details from the hotel's hyper-decorative nature-themed wallpaper. As the wallpaper appears to grow damp and the colours begin to bleed, the seemingly benign patterns begin to take on a life of their own, transforming the lush Edenic ecosystem into a threatening landscape that reflects the psychological distress brewing within the guests' suites. A boat full of oarsmen, like the one that takes off from the beach each morning, is caught in a monstrous wave; a fish, upside-down, is strangled by jellyfish tentacles; fruit appears

to bruise and rot, while caterpillars demolish a palm; a poisonous-looking snake lurks in a banana tree. The wallpaper predicts the guests' harmful and callous entanglements and abusive hierarchies, as well as a willful myopia—myopia surrounding their own destructive narcissism, and the severe repercussions to their actions—that generates the show's complex intersections of class, gendered and racial tension.[192]

Fig. 24. Details of the hotel wallpaper from the opening credits of *The White Lotus*.

The strained proximity that is part of the vacation setting also parodies the suburban ideology of "togetherness," a fifties catchphrase propagated by McCall's magazine, that views the married couple as a domestic partnership, spending time together and working to build their dream "happy place," thereby creating a "new and warmer way of life not as women *alone* or

[192] In her review of the HBO series, "The Leisure Class Always Wins" Megan Garber points out how the staff, instructed to be a "generic presence," are supposed to function, effectively as wallpaper: "omnipresent, decorative, cheerfully fading into the background" (*The Atlantic*). She compares this image to the murals, and sculptures of native Hawaiians used to decorate the hotel, specifically the mural that stretches behind the hotel's front desk which depicts "native Hawaiians, frozen in pastoral idyll on the land now occupied by the hotel itself."

men *alone*, isolated from one another, but as a *family* sharing a common experience" (Otis L. Weise quoted in Wojcik 197). Notably the ideal of togetherness, or familism, was introduced as opposing careerism, especially female ambition. In a throw-back to the 1950s ideal of domesticity, *The White Lotus's* female characters' commitment to careerism is tested by the pressure of the families to perform the ideal of togetherness. The career-minded journalist Rachel and the workaholic corporate star Nicole are not only pitted against each other but are pressured to question and even give up their identities as career women and made to feel guilty by the partners and, additionally in Nicole's case, families that they are supposedly neglecting. Ironically, forced togetherness brings with it isolation, and the shared "common experience" ends up being the bad vacation. In the newlyweds' case, the forced familism—Shane's offer to pay Rachel to quit her job and become a full-time trophy wife, contributing to the home by hosting charity luncheons—threatens to split them up.

In one of the most agonizing and hilarious scenes in the show, the honeymooning—and now constantly bickering—couple, Shane and Rachel, find themselves upon a yacht which the lonely alcoholic Tanya has chartered for the evening to dispose of her mother's ashes at sea (episode 3). The cramped cruise becomes a microcosm of the resort—a dislocation within a dislocation and a space wherein all the characters are stuck and forced to confront their different versions of unhappiness while projecting their sense of themselves onto the vacation expectations. Shane and Rachel's romantic, in Shane's words "instagramable," dinner is literally shoved aside—cutlery, napkins, and all—by Tanya to make room for her brutally honest monologue about her deceased mother, who had no "maternal instincts or skills," was a "nymphomaniac," had "borderline personality disorder," and was "cruel." The spa manager, Belinda, still hoping that Tanya will financially fuel her business plan as promised, stands by as

support. Thus, upon a sunset sail in one of the most idyllic settings in the world, Tanya tearfully acknowledges the ways in which she is still held hostage by her dead mother (she still can't bring herself to scatter the ashes), even though she is desperate to discard the role she has endured for most of her life.

Fig. 25. Tanya interrupts the honeymooners' dinner aboard the sunset boat in an attempt to scatter her mother's ashes, which fly back into the guests' faces.

The guests' two different intentions for the vacation come into play aboard the boat: the diametrically opposed rituals of marriage and death, the conflicting cultural genres of the honeymoon and the funeral, upturn the evening for everyone. Tanya is reminded by the honeymooners of the intimacy that she craves but doesn't have—like the narrator in Lydia Davis's story "but he is not my husband"—thus being forced to face a conventional image of (supposed) bliss as she mourns her difficult mother, for now she claims, she is truly alone. On the other hand, the dramatic disruption of the honeymoon script, and the proximity to a woman who has been manipulated, and in turn, manipulates her way through life—the long-suffering

Belinda serves as her target—prompts Rachel to question the future role she will play as the wife of the manipulative Shane. Two episodes later, once they have transferred, on Shane's shameless hourly insistence, to the largest suite at the hotel—the "pineapple room" which is a lot less picturesque than the sea-view room the couple had before—she declares: "I have made a terrible mistake." This moment of awakening, however, only lasts the duration of the bad vacation. As we see in the final scene of the series, Rachel re-unites with the petulant Shane at the airport, forfeiting her autonomy and submitting to the role of trophy wife. She also subverts viewers initial assumptions that it may be her remains in the coffin loaded onto the plane. Undermining expectations, and therefore perhaps even disappointing viewers, Rachel's re-appearance in the finale implicates the viewer in a highly condensed way: we are made aware of how TV viewing is its own form of tourism and, indeed, nightly vacation. The frustrating ending—Rachel going back to Shane, Kai being punished for Paula's set up, Belinda's entrepreneurial hopes being dashed, Armond's breakdown and untimely death, the insipid, narcissistic vacationers being completely unaware of the havoc they've caused and lives they've ruined—is then the TV viewer's version of the bad vacation where things didn't turn out as expected.[193]

However, even though in the season finale Rachel goes back to Shane, and thus, back to the conventional script, the bad vacation prompts a moment of recognition of the threat to her autonomy within this performance. Rachel realizes that she is making a Faustian bargain by marrying into Shane's family: she is giving up her autonomy to become a member of the leisure class. As her reunion scene with Shane reveals, she is complicit in her own unhappiness. Like all guests at *The White Lotus*, including the performatively "woke" Olivia and her friend Paula, who

[193] Unless, like Lydia Davis's narrator in "Our Trip," the viewer gains a sense of satisfaction from observing the results of other people's bad vacations.

sneer at the luxury and complain of the class disparities around them, but fall short of owning their part in perpetuating these disparities, Rachel would rather be miserable than forfeit a fraction of her privilege.[194] As Mark tells his family during a tense dinner debate about the legacies of colonialism, "nobody cedes their privilege …That's absurd. It goes against human nature. We're all just trying to win the game of life."

Similarly to Rachel, the bad vacation prompts Tanya to have a temporary revelation about her manipulative mother. After an impromptu therapy session from Belinda, who is still hoping, though now wanly, for Tanya's financial backing for her wellness business, Tanya can finally let go of her mother. After withdrawing her promise to support Belinda's wellness business, Tanya takes her mother's urn to the beach. As one critic notes, "The image of Tanya frolicking in the ocean, a free woman whose freedom has come at someone else's expense, hits the viewer's eyes like a splash of salt water" (Rachel Syme). Tired of thanklessly supporting White women in their moments of identity crisis brought about by the bad vacation, Belinda turns Rachel away when she seeks council over whether or not to leave Shane. Sobbing, Rachel launches into a speech about the woes of being married to a rich White man to which Belinda answers, "You want my advice?" When Rachel nods, face tear-stained, Belinda delivers one of the most satisfying lines of the show: "I'm all out." The bad vacation has prompted a revelation for Belinda too: she discovers that the cruel optimism she held out for the wealthy vacationers—that they might actually care about anything beyond their own comfort—has been a delusion.[195]

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[194] Although the upper class patrols the boundaries of the good life, many of the VIP guests in The White Lotus, particularly Shane, seem laughably incapable of finding the good in the good life. The show's characters can be interestingly sorted between those who retain some access to simple pleasure or even joy and those who know not a moment of it.

[195] Belinda does, however, accept the money Tanya offers her in a weak apology for leading her on, or even in informal payment for her emotional labour. This exchange maintains a sense of complexity within an overarching framework of injustice and disappointment

However, despite this moment of pushback, we viewers are still aware that while the vacationers get to leave relatively unharmed—Shane literally gets away with the killing of Armond, the hotel manager—Belinda must go back to work servicing a new batch of wealthy White holidaymakers. As writer Melanie McFarland put it in *Slate*, "Belinda is a woman caught in a nightmare that looks a lot like a dream." The nightmare is the continuous bad vacation. Yet the moment wherein Belinda goes off script and declares "I'm all out," leaving the White woman alone to decide her best unhappiness, suggests a temporary shift in power relations. This fracture in the script is hopeful.

Emma Cline's recent short story "The Iceman," also set at an American luxury hotel, except this time explicitly during the COVID 19 pandemic, further explores the physical and emotional labour required of hospitality staff to maintain the good life for script for the vacationers. This time the story is told from the point of view of a young male hospitality worker named Sam, a devoted disciple of the fitness guru, Wim Hof, a.k.a., the titular "Iceman," who is obsessed with bettering himself through endurance work outs, social conditioning, and self-restraint. As such, Sam's disciplined, restraint-based lifestyle stands in stark contrast to those enjoyed by the vacationers at his workplace, whom, he observes, remind him of "drowsy animals by a watering hole: lolling around, moving their bodies only from their loungers to the pool. Something primitive about their steady imbibing of food and drink, their sleepy yawns. Their masticating jaws working through the crab cakes" (55). Like Armond and the fleet of The White Lotus staff, he has learned that all the hotel guests desire to be "the special chosen baby child of the hotel" and that it is his job to accommodate their whims. Sam notes that "the idea of being on vacation sent people into a frenzy, their clothes communicating the message that they were

starring in a movie called “PLEASURE” (53-54). The staff are the extras in this movie, part of a generic presence that fuels the good life.

There is also an insidious form of exceptionalism that comes with believing one is starring in one’s own film or believing one is the “special chosen baby child of the hotel.” Further analyzing the scripted nature of his role as a hospitality worker, Sam notes that though the guests have all but abandoned their attempts at hygiene and mask-wearing, “couching full force into the water without covering their mouths” the staff “still had to perform all the rituals and to make sure the performance was obvious” (54). The staff’s performance of health regulations—testing the chemicals in the pool water, wiping down the unused novelty chess set, wearing masks and face shields—enacts a particular ritual of care that the vacationers crave: a mother, or as Sam puts it, someone to “worry … so they didn’t have to” (53). The hospitality worker thus becomes the repository for the vacationers’ complaints and anxieties.

Sam’s self-reserve and commitment to his performance is put to the test when he is tasked with ushering a disruptive, drugged-out, half-naked, though also potentially famous—as in an actual movie star as opposed to a vacationer believing they are one—L.A. couple to their room, after they have caused a disturbance at the pool. Though much younger than the guests at the hotel, Sam is charged with parenting them. The area around the couple’s loungers “looked ravaged, like it had seen wartime”:

> The side table knocked dover … the girl’s book soaked, the pages already rippling. They both were sunburned. Their glasses nowhere in sight. They clung to each other, lying on the flagstones. The girl’s nipple winked at him … at some point she had popped her zit—it was a bloody dot on her chin. The man opened one eye, roving around before it seemed to click onto Sam’s face. He shut it instantly.

Like true special chosen babies of the hotel, the couple seem unable to take care of themselves, to dress themselves, protect themselves from the elements, or even get to their room without Sam's help. When he delivers the "soft city people with their weekday psychotics" to their room they "trundle in after him like children" (58), and then, in an unexpected turn of events, attempt to seduce Sam. Like the guests in *The White Lotus*, everything about the couple is, in Sam's words, "about being more comfortable, grabbing more pleasure" (59). Still, he considers their proposition; hesitating at the threshold of their hotel room, he wonders: "should he hate them?" (59). He decides "he was probably supposed to … he tried to muster hatred but it didn't come" (59). But his moment of ambivalence, which has such a dislocating effect on him that the couple notice and even express concern, prompts him to question his own self-denial of pleasure. More broadly, it prompts him to question his own adherence to the Iceman's rules for attaining the good life, such as self-denial and cold showers: "Who would ever give him a medal for refusing?" he wonders, "Tell him he had done the right thing? … what exactly was the point again?" (59). Perhaps, Sam concludes, he should have seen what would have happened if, for once, he'd gone off script.

Another bad vacation narrative that scrutinizes class and gender constraints within the good life genre is Jhumpa Lahiri's deceptively simple short story, "The Boundary" (*The New Yorker* 2018),[196] whose narrator, a daughter of an immigrant family who takes care of a guest house, offers insight into how the good life scripts are learned and performed by a hospitality worker who is both repelled and captivated by the wealthy White family she serves. The tension in this vacation story is not brought about by things going wrong, but, like the Cline story, rather

[196] The Boundary was translated from Italian by the author and published in *The New Yorker* on January29th 2018. As the digital copy of the story does not include page numbers, I have tried to contextualize quotes for reader accessibility. The story is archived online at: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/29/the-boundary

by things going right for the vacationers. The dystopic feelings are felt rather by the witness to their happiness; the girl on the other side of the boundary, the one whose labour makes the good life fantasy possible. Yet the narrator's act of witnessing and recording the good life script casts doubt on the vacationing family's happiness. The narrator's observations have a dislocating effect for the reader, and, as we find out in the final line of the story, for the vacationing wife.

The story takes place at a guest house in an idyllic setting near sea, away from the bustle of the city. The city and country are unidentified—though the use of the word "piazza" suggests rural Italy—which lends to the universality of the vacation situation: the divisions yet proximity of leisure and work between the haves and the have-nots, in this case vacationers and hospitality workers whose "clothes mingle and dry on a shared line." Yet the two families have opposite experiences of the same setting. These opposed models, however, rely on each other to sustain the good life and ensure its desirability.

"Every Saturday, a new family comes to stay," notes the narrator, who serves the steady stream of guests while her mother takes care of an elderly vacationer in another town. "Some arrive early in the morning, from afar, ready to begin their vacation. Others don't turn up until sunset, in bad moods, maybe having lost their way. It's easy to get lost in these hills; the roads are poorly signposted." What follows is the narrator's meticulous observation of the everyday habits, actions, and power dynamics of the vacationing family, made up of a husband, wife, and two daughters. She is especially interested in documenting the wife's experience, acknowledging their parallel but vastly different roles as observers: "She studies everything I look at every day. But I wonder what else she sees in it."

Throughout the story, which, like *The White Lotus*, covers the week of the vacation, both families—the guests and the hosts—exhibit an envy towards each other's situation. "I realize

how much the guests like this rural, unchanging landscape," the narrator notes; "how much they appreciate every detail, how these things help them think, rest, dream … At the same time I wonder what they know about the loneliness here. What do they know about the days, always the same, in our dilapidated cottage?" While on vacation, the "only week in the year without appointments or obligations" the family fetishes the bucolic life, settling into a routine of conventional domesticity that greatly differs from their lives back in the city. The wife, especially, finds pleasure in performing simple domestic tasks while on vacation. As the narrator notes: "The mother does what I do: she sweeps the floor, cooks, washes dishes. At least once a day she hangs up the laundry … She tells her husband, clasping the laundry basket in her arms, how happy this makes her." While away from her life in the city, the female vacationer exhibits a nostalgia for a 1950s vision of the good life. She recognizes the good life script as one in which she plays the role of housewife, erasing the signs of labour under the sign of happiness.

On the other hand, the narrator's mother, a long-time hospitality worker who comes from much farther away than anyone who vacations here "can't stand this place." Describing her immigrant family's social ostracization, the narrator reports how her mother "hates living in the country, in the middle of nowhere" where, she complains, "the people here aren't nice … they're closed." It's only when the vacationing couple mention the piazza in the city that provided the family birthday cake that we hear the crisis instigated the narrator's family's move to the country.

> We used to live in the city, too. My father sold flowers in that very piazza. My mother used to help … One night three men showed up. My father was alone [and] it was late.

> Then, together with the others, [the man ordering flowers] started beating my father until his mouth filled with blood, until his front teeth were shattered.
>
> My father yelled, but at that hour no one heard. They said, Go back to wherever you came from. They took the bouquet and left him like that on the ground.
>
> My father went to the emergency room. He couldn't eat solid foods for a year. After I was born, when he saw me for the first time, he couldn't say a word … He can live and work here without opening his mouth.

This account comes at the height of the vacationing family's celebration, the emotional extremes casting a stark light on the inequalities that the situation brings to a head. We see one family listening in on the vacationing family's festivities and 'conspicuous consumption'—they offer the hospitality workers slices of their cake—while the disenfranchised immigrant father is silenced—due to his shame surrounding his broken teeth, he is often mistaken for a mute.

The host's suffering is kept from the guests in their festivities, but these two tableaus side by side, almost sharing the same wall, complicate the image of familial bliss. It makes more explicit the dichotomy between the guests and the hospitality workers, who are required to support the vacationing family's attachment to the good life, not only by taking over the domestic duties, but by remaining mute about any suffering that may disrupt the image of familial bliss. In the last lines of the story we find out that the vacationing family were more aware of their hospitality workers than the narrative has revealed. "They've forgotten, or left on purpose, a few things they don't need, things I hold on to," the narrator discloses. "Pictures the

girls drew, shells they picked up at the beach, the last drops of a perfumed shower gel. Shopping lists in the faint, small script that the mother used, on other sheets of paper, to write all about us." By including this meta-fictional move in the last line of "The Boundary" Lahiri suggests that the seemingly invisible narrator–domestic worker, who has so meticulously documented the wealthy urbanite family's vacation, has become the central character in the vacationing mother's notebook; both women have created narratives of each other's lives. This soft twist invites the question: which is the story we have just read: the hospitality worker's story, or the projections of the guest? This uncertainty further demarcates the vacation as a contact zone wherein cultural identities are challenged and re-negotiated.

Going Off Script

The bad vacation story does not—as the word "vacation" promises—liberate the middle-class vacationers from the tedium of their lives but rather puts their banality and boredom under a microscope. Rather than acting as an incidental setting, the vacation sites and the situations that grow out of theses settings function as a particularly privileged locus for representing the failure of the American dream and its happiness scripts. The bad vacation story, which most often ends with the end of the vacation, sends its guests home frazzled, distraught, or even relieved, having challenged the value of their ideals.

In all the cultural texts that I've examined here, the only escape from the bad vacation is through narrative—not just beach reading, but rather actively resisting the conventional happiness script and, in some cases, even devising a new script. In many of these narratives, the bad vacation prompts the female protagonists to ask: What is good about the good life? What is desirable about an ideal that is predicated upon sustaining bad affects? Moore's narrator Kit critiques the good life

by switching narrative modes: first she "spoke to her children calmly, from a script, with dialogue and stage directions of utter neutrality," yet later she "learned to tell this story differently" (13). Davis's complaint stories inscribe the grammar of disappointment into the good life depiction of the vacation. The female characters in *The White Lotus*—both guests and hospitality workers—come to recognition about the ways in which they uphold scripts that keep them hostage. Cline's narrator, Sam, also questions his loyalty to a restrictive script. The bad vacation thus mediates these failures of the good life script by prompting moments of fracture. Lahiri's meta-fictional move in the last line of "The Boundary" wherein the narrator discovers the notes on which the vacationer has written "all about us" brings the guest's and hospitality worker's narrative acts to a point of contact. What we have understood as the hospitality worker's scrutiny of the good life, could alternatively be the vacationer's scrutiny of her own privilege and performance of the good life script. Lahiri allows it to be both. Thus, the dislocation of the bad vacation story dislodges old scripts and provokes, in its protagonists, a self-conscious choice—even if it is only temporary—to question conventional formulations of the good life.

EPILOGUE: Shelter in Text

One writes to make a home for oneself, on paper.

—Alfred Kazin, “The Self as History: Reflections on Autobiography"

Whenever my environment had failed to support or nourish me, I had clutched at books.

—Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

During the COVID 19 pandemic, which, for many, became a time of extreme domesticity due to lockdowns and curfews, I found myself obsessively reading literature about Cold War era nuclear bunkers. Specifically, I read survival guides which instructed families on how to make their own fallout shelters. In June of 1959, the same year that the General Electric and Miracle kitchens were touring the Soviet Union, the U.S. Office of Civil and Defence Mobilization distributed across the nation twenty-two million copies of *The Family Fallout Shelter*, a Do-It-Yourself manual instructing civilians on how to build their own backyard or basement bunkers. Survival from nuclear fallout, the manual claimed, was contingent upon the amount of material insulating the family from radioactive nuclear drift. The manual explained, “There is about the same amount of shielding in 8 inches of concrete, for instance, as in 12 inches of earth, 16 inches of books or 30 inches of wood … these thicknesses would provide ample protection for a basement shelter” (6). I was struck by the notion that “16 inches of books” was included in the materials proposed to shield bunker occupants from a nuclear holocaust. Could books, I wondered, really weld such protective power?

The pamphlet's bunker blueprints share a commonality with the act of storytelling in the sense that both provide symbolic protection, though not, as the case was with *The Family Fallout Shelter*, physical protection. Even when built—and less than 3% of Americans actually built such structures in their yards and basements (Lichtman 50-51)—the proposed bunkers provided only illusory security—peace of mind though not material safety. As symbolic and narrative acts, then, the fallout shelter instructions open up important questions about the relationship between shelter and narrative in times of crisis. They speak to the ways in which books—and, more broadly, storytelling—serve as psychological, ideological, and material shelters during the times of emergency.[197] The question then is: how might "16 inches of books"—or more broadly, narrative—deliver us to a more hospitable future?

Taking up the notion of narrative as a protective infrastructure, Renee Gladman writes that "we move through language because we place it between ourselves and the world" ("The Sentence is a Space for Living" 94); in this way each "sentence is a street."[198] To attend to narrative is to be housed within "a thinking text;" pages are "walls that enclose," the ground, "the floor of the book, the horizon of the sentence" (*Houses of Ravicka* 115-116).[199] As pedestrian and inhabitant of the sentence, the writer is an active participant in creating her environment,

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[197] Indeed, the shelter fallout manual instructs occupants to use writing practices to endure the experience of the bunker. "To break the monotony it may be necessary to invent tasks that will keep the family busy," the booklet advises: "Records such as diaries can be kept" (17).

[198] The second quotes come from Gladman's artist statement which can be found here: https://www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org/recipients/renee-gladman

[199] As Gladman writes of her own experience as a Black, queer woman navigating the largely White city of San Francisco in the mid-nineties: "it was the fact of the body—this body turning corners, passing other bodies, being seen and read by other bodies, climbing hills, touching the sides of buildings—it was the fact of this body, following lines, making new lines, resting, moving that gave the city a sense of syntax… Walking became a way of reading the city, of writing one's subjectivity and thinking into it" ("The Sentence is a Space for living" 95). Here Gladman moves subtly from the general "body," to the particular "this body" to mark the ways in which racialized, queer bodies read and are read by their environment. Gladman's prose architecture—her speculative cities wherein buildings migrate, disappear, or flicker between visibility and invisibility[199]—illustrates the ways in which subjectivity is formed through encounters with ideological and physical spatial structures.

thinking pathways into existence. The writers I have looked at in this dissertation have all used, in Gladman's formulation, the sentence as "a space for living." Despite restrictions within their built environments due to disability, class, gender and race, these writers have all pointed to the importance of place in their work and the sheltering power of narrative in their own lives. Shirley Jackson reflected in her journals that the "the sound of the typewriter in an empty house is comforting," that the act of writing provides, a "refuge, a pleasant hiding place;" Ann Petry saw that the way in which to induce "an explosion inside the head of the reader" was to force the reader to inhabit the visceral architecture of her novel, to immerse them in "the sounds and the smells and sights of Harlem…to create a vivid sense of place" (Sarkissian 265) Using the language of hospitality, Alice Munro has famously referred to her act of writing as an act of building houses for the reader to visit. A story, she writes, is like a house:

> You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from these windows. And you, the visitor, the reader, are altered as well by being in this enclosed space, whether it is ample and easy or full of crooked turns, or sparsely or opulently furnished. You can go back again and again, and the house, the story, always contains more than you saw the last time. It also has a sturdy sense of itself of being built out of its own necessity, not just to shelter or beguile you.[200]

These reflections on narrative architecture move beyond metaphor. I have shown how, in Munro's words, "the world outside is altered by being viewed from these windows"—in other words, the perspective that the story brings; and the "the visitor, the reader, are altered as well"

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[200] This passage comes from Munro's introduction to *Alice Munro: Selected Stories.* Toronto: Penguin, 1998. i-xvii.

by the spatiality of the text. As I have shown in this dissertation, these are the vital ways in which narrative occupies and reconfigures our social and built environments.

This dissertation has combined core ideas from affect and cultural studies, narrative theory, and urban studies to make substantial cross-disciplinary contributions to the study of 20th/21st century North American feminist poetics. I have traced diverse experiences of female dislocation over the past four chapters, parsing the ways in which narrative depictions of domestic architecture, its absence, or its alternative, offer critical insights into North American practices of domestic labour, leisure, and hospitality. The narrative acts in my title should be read as both noun and verb, for these chapters have revealed the active power of storytelling to effect structural change by turning the fantasy of the good life into a site of ambivalence. I have shown how heterotopic spaces that blend the private and public, such as the train, the porous apartment, the hotel in the bad vacation story, offer their female occupants' a perspective through which to observe the present more carefully. In this reshuffling of narrative space and story trajectory, traditional story structures, such as the marriage plot, are temporarily suspended to make room for alternative models of women's participation in the world. Exploring how domestic symbols, such as the suburban home or the futuristic kitchen, have shaped the elusive ideology of the good life, this study has shown how mid-century women writers' depictions of alternative homes, and failed or suspended domesticity, have unsettled this ideology, questioning its value and exposing its discriminatory history. As the idea of the good life was formed through narrative techniques, it can be destabilized by narrative means as well. Adjusting our cultural scripts, I believe, is the first step to imagining a new, more equitable and sustainable mode of living.

This dissertation's contributions are conceptual, methodological, and field expanding. In the following paragraphs I summarize some of the most notable offerings I have made during

this project's research and writing process and how these offering extend feminist thought, narratology, American and Canadian literature studies, and affect and cultural studies.

First, I have combined several important strands of recent feminist affect theory and new materialist theory to think about 20th century feminist poetics in spatial terms. Through my close readings of unique parings of cultural and literary texts, I have developed an analysis of the formal qualities of affects, such as envy, unhappiness, and disappointment, and have shown how these forms offer unexplored critiques of the good life. I have offered an original approach to analyzing North America's unsustainable and cruelly optimistic subscription to the good life ideal through the lens of bad leisure. Identifying and theorizing the bad vacation story as a response to neoliberalist values of individual happiness and over-consumption, I show how this popular subgenre opens up a critique of the good life by announcing its failure.

On an architectural front, I have also sought to spotlight little-known histories of early 20th century female-designed architecture and revitalize some of these ideas within a contemporary literary context. For instance, by bringing Shirley Jackson's hospitality plots and Alice Munro's train travel stories into conversation with the early housing reformers, such as Ebenezer Howard, Alice Constance Austin, Charles Harris Witaker, and Edgar Chambless, and Charlotte Perkins Gillman, and alternative housing designs planned to free women from housework, such as the kitchenless apartment, the women's hotel, and the Roadtown project, I revealed a continuity of this under-examined material feminist legacy.

I have also expanded American and Canadian literary studies by viewing several key authors' work through an interdisciplinary lens, thus harmonizing the links between the formal and historical impacts of their writing in inventive ways. Though much work has been done on the rural and suburban gothic aspects of Jackson's novels, scant attention has been paid to how

her stories of urban domesticity grapple with the mid-century's shifting philosophies of American urbanism. Through my analysis of her themes of unsettled occupancy within in the city, the "apartment swap," I show the distinctive ways in which her cosmopolitan spaces of transient domesticity prove to be important sites on which ideas of gender, sexuality, class and race are forged as well as questioned. In this way I offer a unique perspective on this important aspect of Jackson's oeuvre, and also include her work in broader canon of writers responding to the politics of urban renewal. I also expand on Wojcik's concept of the apartment plot by theorizing this spatially-determined narrative genre within a different medium—the short story instead of film—and by focusing on the theme of dislocation, rather than location, thus shedding light on how this late 20th century genre engages different dimensions of the philosophy of new urbanism. I have also contributed to the growing body of scholarship on Petry—until recently an understudied literary icon—and I have agitated for new ways to think about the gendered politics of focalization within her work. Within this dissertation and in collaboration with a research team investigating situation as a transmedial narrative concept, I have expanded upon the ongoing study of situation as an important narrative model, presenting my research at the annual conference for the International Society for the Study of Narrative and the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English. Through these modes of engagement, collaboration, and knowledge distribution, my project has expanded the field of narratology as well.

Though American literature is my primary field of study, I have contributed to the Canadian literary studies as well by tracing Alice Munro's border stories—her travel stories taking place alongside the US and Canada. I am also the first scholar to discuss in depth Munro's interest in train travel and have offered a formal and contextual analysis of her cross-country

travel stories. To date I have published a chapter in a peer-reviewed essay collection[201] and an article on Munro's poetics of the train and the ways in which her train stories speak to mid-century female mobility. This article, entitled "A Life in Transit: Spatial Biographies of Alice Munro's Artist Figures" from which my third chapter emerged, was published in one of Canada's top peer-reviewed journals, *English Studies in Canada*.

As I have noted, a major contribution of this project is its interdisciplinary approach to the concerns of gender and domesticity. By combining the aforementioned theoretical fields, I have shown how so called "domestic fiction" makes visible the links between architectural, feminist, cultural and environmental concerns. In this way, my project has sought to broaden the scope of scholarship pertaining to gender studies, urban, and narrative studies by revealing their symbiosis. Bringing together multiple disciplines can risk generality. I have attempted to avoid this by grounding my multipronged analysis in careful close readings of my primary cultural and literary texts and by selecting authors whose biographies and whose work portrays different experiences of class and race. Still, there are areas in which I wish I could spend more time on—and which I will spend more time on in future projects. These areas of study include an analysis of queer travel stories and queer narratives of late capitalist domesticity—as we see, for instance, in Patricia Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train* and *The Price of Salt*. They include Indigenous experiences and narratives of (forced) hospitality and homemaking.[202] And they include

[201] "'The Problem Was That She Was a Girl': The Female Complaint in Alice Munro's Juliet Triptych" *Menstruation Now: What Does Blood Perform?*, edited by Berkeley Kaite,

[202] This will be the theme of the first project I will take as a postdoctoral fellow as I have been invited to contribute a chapter on the Indigenous poet Jordan Abel's use of digital humanities tools in his book *Un/Inhabited* to the forthcoming Routledge handbook, *AI and literature*.

developing the ecological strains of my dissertation with more complexity.[203] My postdoctoral project aims to explore in more depth the environmental elements presented by this dissertation project—the costs of 20th century North America's good life project—through an eco-feminist lens.

As part of this next project, I will be putting together a collaborative collection of essays and creative contributions responding to one of the ideas that evolved in the writing on my dissertation, the concept of sheltering in text. *Shelter in Text* will examine the now familiar idea of "shelter in place" by investigating the relationship between shelter and narrative. I argue that, like Jackson's child prophet, Eileen, we find ourselves at a critical juncture in the history of homemaking. In the midst of the climate crisis, with rising inaccessibility to housing and hospitable environments, we face new considerations about our future habitation. My next step will be to examine the ways in which we find we are sheltered—or unsheltered—by narrative in our current crises of domesticity, and how decolonial, Indigenous, and feminist approaches to land and storytelling can allow us, in the words of Daniel Heath Justice, to "imagine otherwise."

[203] For instance, I imagine a chapter on the relationship between ecology and housekeeping, which would draw on the ruined or unbuilt homes in Jackson's *We Have Always lived in the Castle* and Marilyn Robinson's *Housekeeping.*

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