LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

There is no Space, There is No Time, There are Only Objects: The Onto-Cartography of Richard McGuire's *Here* (2014)

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Abstract:
Some object-oriented philosophers conceive of time and space as if they were emerging from objects. In this paper, we suggest that the graphic novel *Here* (2014) by Richard McGuire gives visual form to these conceptions. The graphic novel tells the story of a place – namely, one corner of a living room – moving backwards and forwards in time using the superimposition of various panels on each page. Through these 'time windows' the narration exceeds the limits of human life and embraces manifold spatio-temporal virtualities within a single page. If objects themselves are maps involved in the processes of spacing and timing, creating connections like resonating echoes, *Here* functions as an onto-cartography that proposes objects as archaeological sites. Telling coexisting stories of ancient pasts and possible futures, McGuire's graphic novel creatively attunes us to the worlds of objects, providing an aesthetic mapping of the lives of objects.

Keywords: object-oriented ontology; graphic novel; mapping; onto-cartography; comic book cartographies.

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Introduction: The Visualisation of Onto-Cartographies

By examining the graphic novel *Here* by Richard McGuire (2014), our article explores one of the many possible points of contact between the field of map studies and the philosophical movement known as 'object-oriented ontology' (Harman 2018; Morton 2013; Bogost 2012; Bryant 2011). We suggest that McGuire's *Here*, through a set of stylistic choices and verbo-visual narrative expedients, is able to visualise the conception of time and space as emerging from objects, which is a thought advanced by some object-oriented philosophers. This renowned graphic novel is the expansion of a six-page comic strip that McGuire first published in RAW magazine in 1989. The short comic, narrating the lifetime of a single human protagonist, became a comic book in 2014. It tells the story of a single place, more precisely, a corner of a living room in the house of McGuire's parents. For this second extended work, the author has kept the original narrative expedient of a multi-layered representation of time, also using the material form of the comic book as a support to further develop his initial idea: 'with the spine of the book mimicking the corner of a room in a Pennsylvania home' (Rodriguez 2018: 366), the extended comic book format permits McGuire to expand and multiply the storylines, bringing human and non-human characters to the centre of the room/page. In fact, the author still uses the co-presence of different panels in the same double-page spread to introduce time-windows that are open to manifold timescapes (Mertens and Craps 2018: 138-9) set in the same location. Moving backwards and forwards in time from three billion years in the past to a faraway future, the reader's gaze is offered a fixed framing representing the permanence of this single place – the living room shown in Figure 1 – while time changes around it.

In his well-known essay *Reinventing Comics: How Imagination and Technology Are Revolutionizing an Art Form*, Scott McCloud discussed the potentialities of web comics to break the limits of the comic book page by rearranging narrative sequences through what he calls the 'infinite canvas' system (McCloud 2000). McCloud proposes 'strategies based on treating the screen as a window rather than a page' and affirms that, from the perspective of a comics author, 'the advantages of putting all panels together on a single "canvas" are significant and worth exploiting' (McCloud 2009). At that time, the provocation was ground-breaking – for both authors and scholars in the field of comics studies – showing how the encounter between imagination and new technologies could enhance a revolution in this art form. Though McCloud's reflection starts by tracing a distance between paper and web comics, showing how different material supports and new technologies can influence the narrative form of comics, nonetheless, McGuire had already found his own way to create a 'map of time' (McCloud 2001: 210) and rearrange narrative sequences while still working with printed paper. Playing with the limits imposed by the material support of the double-page spread of the comic book format, McGuire imagines it as a 'potentially infinite' canvas, where a 'potentially infinite' number of windows (panels) can be open, bringing readers into an extended, more-than-human timescale. The sequence of structured panels is broken, the timeline is fragmented, and the storyline is continually recomposed by each reader in infinite combinations. Like an unfolding map, *Here* is open

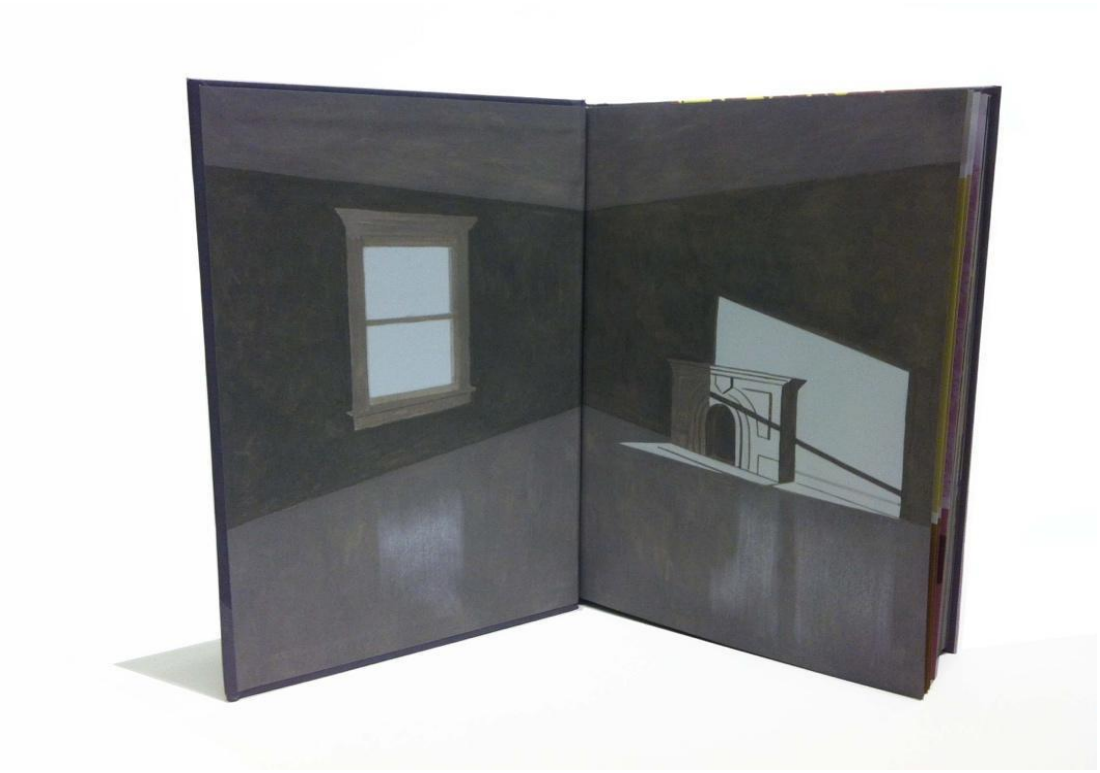

Figure 1. The corner of the living room, namely the 'here' where Richard McGuire's graphic novel is set. Reproduction with permission of the author. In: McGuire, R. (2014) *Here*. London: Penguin.

to multiple paths and ongoing practices of narrative reorientation. Needless to say, the e-book version of *Here* 'reinvents' the same graphic novel by making use of the potentialities of this different format, confirming McCloud's intuitions.

If, according to McCloud, each comic is a 'temporal map' realised by the author (2001: 210-1), who organises time through the fragmentation of space, we ask ourselves: what peculiar combinations of time-spaces emerge from *Here*? And, consequently, what stories are told in this 'map' that moves beyond human experience of time and space? From our own perspective, it is particularly intriguing to notice that what has become an object in its own right, namely a printed comic book hosting the extended version of *Here*, seems to be also a creative mapping of the lives of *things*, whose existential trajectories cross and overlap in the same location. We understand *Here* as a (comic) book and thus as an object; moreover, since it is a story in comic form, we read it also as a (temporal) map, which spatialises time through the fragmentation and re-organisation of space.

Scholars have already explored the relationship between comics and maps: indeed, a carto-centred approach does not only register the presence of maps in comics but especially analyses the map-like features of comics, such as their 'alternation of figurative and non-figurative elements', and 'opened, plurivocal and unfinished essence' (Peterle 2017: 49). Similarly, scholars in comics studies have highlighted their diagrammatic and 'quasi-cartographic forms' to interpret recent works by Chris Ware and Nick Sousanis (Sarafin 2019: 258): these authors, according to Wyatt E. Sarafin, recognise 'that the

standard spatiotemporal means of representing information in comics is in fact restrictive' and play with the map-like potentialities of the comics medium, whose diagrammatic and quasi-cartographic form 'represents all temporal possibilities in condensed, potent structures' rejecting the hierarchical order of a purely sequential narrative (243). In our view, mapping all temporal possibilities in the same place (a comic page, a living room), *Here* moves in the same direction. Therefore, we propose a carto-centred reading of *Here* taking into account comics' map-like features as well as the potentiality of using a cartographic metaphorical lexicon as an analytical tool. Our carto-centred reading of this peculiar graphic novel is object-oriented and explores how the interconnections between comics and maps (Peterle 2019) can help us visualise one of the possible points of intersection between object-oriented onthology (OOO) and map studies (on the thingness of maps, see Rossetto 2019). After a theoretical part devoted to the encounter between OOO and map studies, in the second part of this paper, we propose an evocative combination of theories in object-oriented ontology and onto-cartography alongside images from McGuire's work. These juxtapositions between panels from the graphic novel and quotations extracted from the works by Timothy Morton and Levi R. Bryant aim to reproduce in our paper the same process of visualising onto-cartographies through a combination of images and words used by McGuire in his graphic novel. Indeed, as geographers have recently been discussing the potentialities of 'thinking geographically through comics' (Fall 2021), so we pose the question: what if we think 'cartographically' through them? What if this 'cartoGraphic' reading of comics (Peterle 2021) helps us think about and creatively map the lives of things? Answering these questions is one of the reasons we happened to 'come in here' – as the human protagonist of Figure 2 asks herself.

Cartographic Allusions within Object-Oriented Thinking

Briefly stated, object-oriented ontology is a theory that belongs to the broader return to realism that emerged after the hegemony of post-modern anti-realism (Bryant 2011; Bogost 2012). It is based on the rejection of 'correlationalism', which is the idea that objects exist only for humans and within human understanding. On the contrary, OOO states that objects do not exist just for us; they bring non-human actors and their own private lives and unpredictable experiences to the fore. Object-oriented philosophy is sometimes considered the offspring of a broader movement towards material and non-human philosophies initiated in the 1990s alongside the so-called 'turn to things' (Fowles 2016). Indeed, despite theoretical distances and failed dialogues, the established field of object studies and the fascination with things seem to have been revamped by the philosophical convolutions of OOO. As Wasserman (2017) reminds us, while writing about thing theory in literary studies, through the expanding influence of philosophical tendencies such as actor-network theory, speculative realism, vibrant materialism, and object-oriented ontology, the interest in things, objects, and materiality, which had already emerged in the early 2000s, is hardly waning among literary scholars.

Specific literary engagements with OOO have emerged, as in the case of Hamilton (2016)'s *The World of Failing Machines: Speculative Realism and Literature*. While wondering what a speculative-realist literary theory would look like, Hamilton suggests that literature offers forms of speculation which allude to the world beyond our reach: literary texts are actors in the world that work to defamiliarise the reader and interrupt the habitual human ways of navigating the world. Indeed, also the graphic novel *Here* by Richard McGuire seems to work through a process of defamiliarisation. In what follows, we will engage with OOO thinkers through a focus on the aesthetic gesture of mapping things.

Now, interestingly for us, among object-oriented philosophers, speculative realists, and flat ontologists, the idea of 'mapping' is popular, and the cartographic lexicon is abundantly used. Of course, this use is metaphorical – something similar to the attraction to and pervasive employment of the map figure that emerged within cultural studies and the humanities, particularly after the so-called spatial turn. It is worth noting, then, that Bruno Latour, who very much inspired object-oriented philosophy, also borrows from the cartographic lexicon in describing actor–network theory (ANT). For Latour, the ANT is a kind of cartography, an act of flattening, a theory claiming 'that the social landscape possesses […] a flat "networky" topography' (Latour 2005: 242).

Object-oriented philosophers still work with the cartographic lexicon at a metaphorical level, sometimes using it to define their intellectual gestures by analogy. In his work *The Quadruple Object*, Graham Harman writes that his ontography provides a 'cartography' or 'a strange but refreshing geography of objects' (2011: 77). He adds, 'Rather than a geography dealing with stock natural characters such as forests and lakes, ontography maps the basic landmarks and fault lines in the universe of objects' (125). Significantly, this last quotation is reproduced by Ian Bogost in his work *Alien Phenomenology* (2012) to echo the 'spirit' of Harman's approach to things. Demonstrating a fascination with the cartographic lexicon, Harman also plays on the figure of the 'atlas' (Harman 2011: 135) and elsewhere compares his philosophical model to a 'globe' (Harman 2018: 41).

Advancing the idea of approaching objects rather than knowing them, in *The Democracy of Objects*, Levi R. Bryant writes:

> It is only through tracking local manifestations and their variations that we get any sense of the dark volcanic powers harbored within objects. In other words, (…) we form a hypothetical diagram of objects or a map (…). (Bryant 2011: 281)

Whereas here he refers to a cartography which consists of mapping the network of objects, it is in his more recent *Onto-Cartography. An Onthology of Machines and Media* (2014) that Bryant embraces the cartographic universe in an explicit manner. He explains that onto-cartography, 'from "onto" meaning "thing" and "cartography" meaning "map", is [his] name for a map of relations between machines' (7), where 'machine' is synonymous for 'object'. More playfully, to give an idea of the displacement of the human as enacted by object-oriented thought, in his work *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, Timothy

Morton writes, 'It's like one of those maps with the little red arrow that says You Are Here, only this one says You [the Human] Are Not Here' (2013: 136).

OOO philosophers, Harman and Morton in particular, take into great consideration the aesthetic dimension as a mode for humans to indirectly access the unknowable reality of objects. According to these philosophers, because objects are always withdrawn, there is no way to know reality or to deeply access objects, if not in their sensual properties or relations. However, art has the ability to induce feelings of accessing reality. The aesthetic event has something to tell us about the inner lives of things; it can provide an experience of coexistence, an intimacy with non-living entities. The aesthetic experience allows for the intrusion of an alien presence. Now, if researching the worlds of things and doing pragmatic ontographies (to use Ian Bogost's terminology) relate to aesthetics and mapping, then we contend that, following these thinkers, aesthetic activity and the gesture of mapping could also be somehow related.

Here, we refer to a work of art, namely McGuire's graphic novel, as an aesthetic mapping of the worlds and lives of objects: a pragmatic onto-cartography in its own right. In light of OOO, this work seems to provide a point of 'indirect access' to the worlds of things and a sense of the secret lives of objects. Most remarkably, this work of art has the potential to attune us to the notions of space and time as configured by object-oriented philosophers, particularly Morton and Bryant. This notion can be summarised as follows: There is no space, there is no time and there are only objects, as Morton contends: 'Relying on Newton, Kant thinks of space as a box. But in this book, space is emitted by objects' (Morton 2013: 35).

Even though the book Morton refers to is his own *Realist Magic*, we believe this passage perfectly suits the McGuire's graphic novel *Here* – and maybe even resonates with the mysterious yellow book lying on the small tea table in Figure 2, which seems to be the reason for the woman to be 'in here' (as revealed in Figure 8, presented at the end of the paper).

CartoGraphic Traces of Objects' Lives: Mapping Time through Space

When reading *Here*, scholars have focused on its ability to reflect on the mechanisms of memory, reproduce the repetitive rhythms of ordinary life, represent the perception of time through re-configurations of space, and provide access to an anthropocenic and more-than human timescale (Mertens and Craps 2018; Rodriguez 2018). *Here* captures 'the geological timescale' by rapidly moving back and forth from the distant future to the remote past: the simple gesture of leafing through the pages moves readers across a time-window that crosses a dystopic projection of life on Earth in 2313, a pre-human planet Earth in 1,000,000 BCE, and many other eras. Yet, the small captions indicating the temporal setting of each scene – placed on the top left corner of the double page spreads – are just one of the different time layers that cross and inform each other on the page. Indeed, McGuire gains a translinear representation of time by piling up panels rather than placing them is a linear sequence (Mertens and Craps 2018: 139). Each single panel has its

Figure 2. The first appearance of a human character in the graphic novel, after three silent double pages, where only the changing furniture accounts for the passing of time. Reproduction with permission of the author. In: McGuire, R. (2014) *Here*. London: Penguin.

own caption indicating its temporal setting, and it is up to the reader to find the possible interconnections between the different panels, or 'time-windows'. As Mahlu Mertens and Stef Craps observe, the window metaphor helps to think of how narrative time is spatialised and conceived in a non-linear way in McGuire's graphic novel: in *Here*, the page itself is treated as a window (McCloud 2014) or, more precisely, as a space where infinite 'time-windows' can be opened.

As anticipated in the first section, what characterises this graphic novel is not simply the fixed spatial framing of panels, all set in the same corner of a room, where the boundaries of the walls align with the borders of the comic page; rather, the most innovative stylistic choice made by McGuire is the superimposition on each page of various panels representing scenes moving from past eras to a distant future. Through this narrative expedient and graphic device, the author is able to infinitely multiply the temporality of the page, introducing narration that exceeds the limits of human life and embraces manifold spatio-temporal virtualities within a single double-page spread.

Significantly, while merging human and physical geography perspectives, Daniels and Bartlein (2017: 31) have addressed *Here* in terms of 'chronology', comparing it to other devices that are capable of telling temporal and spatial stories through forms of 'repeat imagery', such as repeat photography. The repetitional strategy that permeates McGuire's graphic novel could be considered object-oriented. In fact, repeat imagery has been acknowledged by Bogost (2011) as a practice of *seeing things* in pictures, or a form of

Figure 3. Moving in time: The place around the woman and cat we met in Figure 2 suddenly changes its aspect, turning into a natural environment with no trace of human presence. Reproduction with permission of the author. In: McGuire, R. (2014) *Here*. London: Penguin.

aesthetic visual ontography which is in tune with object-oriented thinking (Rossetto and Vanolo 2022). As Bogost (2011: n.p.) comments with respect to the rephotography technique, 'All the human memory and vulnerability and experience is still there, but with a strange loop that pulls inanimate things up to the level of human surfaces'. However, in *Here*, chronology and the experience of repetition are further expanded and made complex in comparison with other repetitious visual devices. As shown in Figure 3, by turning the page, readers are suddenly moved by the fixed framing to a past time, where there is no sign of human presence, and the living room, which we came to know from the first pages of the graphic novel, is replaced by a natural landscape. Like readers, the woman and the cat (two characters that we already met in Figure 2) seem displaced: indeed, even if they are still 'here', in the same place, they have moved to 1623, an era before the house and living room were built. The book represents 'a visual translation of the complex temporality of climate change' (Mertens and Craps 2018: 139): while many panels site the location of the house in the distant future, others move back to a geological past when the building was not there, in a past time where there is no trace of human life.

Humans are no longer at the centre of this comic book, for which stories are told by what David Rodriguez (drawing from both Morton's and Marco Caracciolo's works) calls 'strange stranger' narrators (Caracciolo 2016). As Rodriguez notes, the concept of strange strangers 'is difficult to define precisely even in Morton's own writing; in short, he

introduces the term in place of "animal", but it slides around to cover all life forms and even non-living entities' (Rodriguez 2018: 371). According to Caracciolo, by making things strange, literary texts are able to 'de-automatize readers' perception and increase their awareness of a number of objects and processes' (Caracciolo 2016: 59). We hold that McGuire's narrative mapping, namely his reconfiguration of time through space, works through a sense of defamiliarisation intended as a process of making strange (59). In *Here*, even the experience of observing the ordinary image of the corner of a living room turns into a defamiliarizing reading process, where the lives of living and non-living objects become visible and, thus, accessible through an external, distant stance. The living room itself, together with the living and non-living entities that inhabit it, represent 'strange stranger' narrators, whose role in *Here* is to tell us the story of a single place by their simple presence on the page: what happens, however, is that we move far beyond that single place and beyond the human timescale, becoming aware of the entire history of planet Earth and of the entanglements of all objects that lived, still live, and will be living on it.

A CartoGraphic Composition of Collectives: Visual Echoes, Rhymes, and Resonances

If, according to Bryant, 'a collective is an entanglement of human and nonhuman actors or objects' (2011: 271), McGuire seems to assemble his comic book pages through a composition of collectives, placing all kinds of machines, human and nonhuman bodies, objects, and animals, side by side without any apparent logic or temporal sequentiality. Through a narrative structure that Thierry Groensteen calls 'braiding' (2007), the author presents a kaleidoscopic and plurivectorial reading path: the co-presence of different actors and storylines forces readers to move back and forth through the pages to find graphic or textual clues that can help them find their way through the story. As Julia Round observes, reading Groensteen's work, 'the system of comics relies upon three concepts: spatio-topia, arthrology and braiding, all of which require the simultaneous mobilisation of the entirety of the visual and discursive codes that make up the comics page' (2014: 135). By the term spatio-topia, Groensteen refers to 'the layout of the page', on which we already focused in the previous paragraphs; through 'arthrology', he explains the either sequential or interrelational connection between panels (Round 2014: 135). Even if both of these terms could be used to analyse the narrative structure of *Here*, it is the concept of 'braiding' that seems particularly important to understand McGuire's graphic novel as a map of time that works through the composition and re-composition of collectives. In fact, according to Round, whereas gridding is the way a page is spatially organised, '*braiding* represents the relationships between any panels that supplement the coherence of the work' (135). She continues: 'For example, panels which appear spatially and contextually independent may still be linked through an identical construction (with different content), a repetition of a single motif, or so on' (135). In *Here*, lives (and panels) that appear independent can be linked not just thanks to their presence in the same place but also through the repetition of similar constructions, motifs, gestures, movements. Moreover, even visual or verbal

Figure 4. Bodies, gestures, and movements as narrative threads connecting stories and lives over time. Reproduction with permission of the author. In: McGuire, R. (2014) *Here*. London: Penguin.

echoes of colours, short sentences, and words resonating from panel to panel, from one time to the other, contribute to the interconnection of panels and pages in the comic's story. This transcalar process of braiding provides *Here* with narrative coherence, suggesting readers to find the intimate interrelations between different objects' lives beyond their mere virtual copresence in the same place.

Throughout the graphic novel, readers are invited to listen to the echoes that resonate from one page to another in order to recognise the rhymes that structure the lives of objects. Echoes do not simply emerge from the words spoken in the balloons; rather, they reverberate in chromatic parallelisms. Resonances further emerge through repeated gestures and actions; for example, a family photo taken in the same pose over several years or different bodies dancing at disparate ages within the same room, as shown in Figure 4.

Mapping Coexistences: The Narrativisation of Inter-Objective Realities

Leafing through the pages, readers find themselves searching for traces of disparate machines inhabiting various times, turning the reading practice into 'a mode of spatial orientation' through space and time and 'a mapping experience' in its own right (Peterle 2017: 47). Indeed, 'comics as maps, as "emergent mappings," offer their authors and readers mapping experiences that are relational, contingent and processual' (62). The experience of reading *Here* is like a mapping process that recomposes, through braiding,

the footprints left by manifold coexisting lives. This idea of comparing the reading experience with the practice of collecting traces recalls a passage from Morton's *Realist Magic*, where he affirms that a dinosaur coexists with the palaeontologist that finds its footprint imprinted in ancient mud:

> The print of a dinosaur's foot in the mud is seen as a foot shaped hole in a rock by humans sixty five million years later. There is some sensuous connection, then, between the dinosaur, the rock and the human, despite their vastly differing timescales. (Morton 2013: 71)

The alternation between appearance and disappearance is completely reconfigured through the idea of coexistence. The footprint is at the same time a trace of the dinosaur's presence and a sign of its absence:

> Grief is the footprint of something that isn't you, archaeological evidence of an object. […] Like a petrified slab of ancient mud with a dinosaur's footprint in it. Like a glass whose shape was molded by blowers and blow tubes and powdered quartz sand. Every aesthetic trace, every footprint of an object, sparkles with absence. Sensual things are elegies to the disappearance of objects. (Morton 2013: 18)

Just as a map is based on what appears on it as much as on what was discarded from its cartographic representation, the same applies to comic narration. Like maps, comics are made up of an alternation of representational and non-representational features 'and the interplay of what is on the page (the visual) and what is not (the anti-optical)' is key to readers' practices of meaning-making (Dittmer 2010: 228). Like a map of multi-layered times, *Here* plays with the combination of presence and absence of the optical and anti-optical, training the readers' eyes to search for footprints and 'archaeological evidence' of objects (Morton 2013: 18).

What is also absent in McGuire's graphic novel is a dominant narrative voice, be it a human or nonhuman narrator (Bernaerts et al. 2014; Rossetto and Peterle 2021). While reading it, we ask ourselves with Jan-Noël Thon 'who is telling the story?' (2013) The absence of an explicit character's voice, of an 'identifiable teller persona' (Thon 2013: 70), contributes to the perception of *Here* as a narratorless story, a type of graphic narrative which Thon calls a 'nonnarratorial verbal-pictorial representation' (71). We believe the absence of a recognisable narrator, of an active speaker that guides readers throughout the pages, contributes to McGuire's representation of a world with no hierarchies between machines, where space and time and objects have the same relevance and inhabit coexisting layers of meaning. In this way, the comic book visualises Bryant's conception of a flat ontology: indeed, in this graphic narrative, 'there are only immanent planes of machines affecting and being affected by one another without a supplementary dimension that structures all their interactions' (2014: 116).

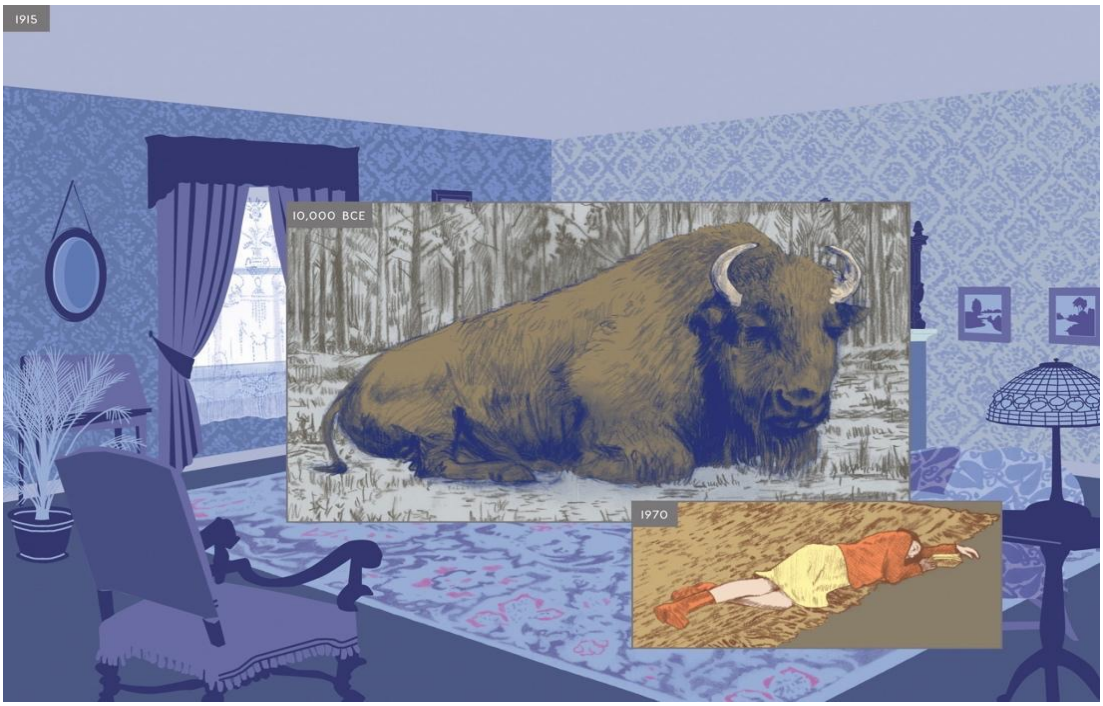

Figure 5. Coexistences: human and non-human bodies lying on the living room's floor. Reproduction with permission of the author. In: McGuire, R. (2014) *Here*. London: Penguin.

In *Here*, a girl sleeping on the floor in 1970 is placed alongside a bison resting on a carpet of grass in 10,000 BCE. Their distance in time is reduced by their virtual coexistence in the same place, while they both occupy the space of the same double-page spread:

> One simply wakes up on the inside of another object, amongst things. Existence is coexistence. Coexistence hollows out the being of a thing from within since even a hypothetical isolated thing coexists with its parts. (Morton 2013: 145-6).

The box is unfolded, and the container's walls are flattened out: even 'what is called Universe is a large object that contains objects such as black holes and racing pigeons' (Morton 2013: 42).

A (Comic) Book, an Object, a Map of the Lives of Things

If, according to OOO, existence is coexistence and we simply co-inhabit a large object that contains other objects, the question we are trying to answer here, through McGuire's example, is an aesthetic one, and, more precisely, one about how we can tell the lives of all these objects. McGuire's graphic novel seems to propose an original verbo-visual solution to this recurring question in OOO. Indeed, according to Morton, 'aesthetics plays a fundamental role in object-oriented ontology', and it is especially relevant to reflect on the

peculiar 'aesthetics of beginning' in order to know how to start telling a story about things (2013: 124):

> The feeling of beginning is precisely this quality of uncertainty, a quality well established at the beginning of Hamlet, whose first line is a question: "Who's there?" Isn't that the quintessential issue at the beginning of a drama, whether it's a movie or a play? Who is the lead character? Who are we watching now? Are they minor or major characters? How can we tell? (Morton 2013: 124)

As we have seen, there is neither a leading narrator's voice nor a major character in *Here*'s story, except for the place itself and its chronological extension. On the contrary, the focus in this graphic novel seems to be on the interconnected lives of objects and on how they resonate with each other. The question here, then, is more about how these things' lives begin: consequently, the 'aesthetic of the beginning' of this comic's story, as Morton would call it, simply follows a flat ontological logic of coexistence, where there are neither hierarchies nor main characters:

> How do objects begin?
>
> Crash! Suddenly the air is filled with broken glass. The glass fragments are fresh objects, newborn from a shattered wine glass. These objects assail my senses, and if I'm not careful, my eyes could get cut. There are glass fragments. What is happening? How many? How did this happen?
>
> I experience the profound givenness of beginning as an *anamorphosis*, a distortion of my cognitive, psychic and philosophical space. The birth of an object is the deforming of the objects around it. An object appears like a crack in the real. This distortion happens in the sensual realm, but because of its necessary elements of novelty and surprise, it glimmers with the real in distorted fashion. Beginnings are open, disturbing, blissful, horrific. (Morton 2013: 124).

Morton's 'glass fragments' reverberate in Figure 6, where the birth of a new object, of a new story, seems to start from all the different 'cracks in the real' McGuire is trying to map on the comics page. While a flood has broken the window and water gushes into the living room, other cracks and broken glasses mark the start of new lives and objects. If 'every event in reality is a kind of inscription in which one object leaves its footprint in another one' (Morton 2013: 71), then in *Here*, the interconnection between apparently disconnected existences is made visible through the multiple panels on the same page. Braiding in *Here* not only sustains the narrative coherence of the comic's story but also aesthetically visualises Morton's idea of interobjectivity: 'Interobjective reality is just the total sum of all these footprints, crisscrossing everywhere. It's nonlocal by definition and temporally molten' (Morton 2013: 71). As a map of time and a comic book showing an interobjective perspective on reality, *Here* 'has a story to tell about the relationship between time and space' (Konstantinou 2015: 2). Indeed, in *Here*, not only is that 'space and time

Figure 6. Fragmentary lives of objects coexisting in 'here'. Reproduction with permission of the author. In: McGuire, R. (2014) *Here*. London: Penguin.

are emergent properties of objects' (Morton 2013: 35) but also that objects themselves are maps, involved in the processes of spacing and timing:

> Just as onto-cartography rejects the notion that there is one homogeneous space containing all entities (…) onto-cartography rejects the notion that there is one time containing all entities. In the same way that spaces arise from machines rather than containing them, times arise from machines as well. (Bryant 2014: 157).

On the one hand, seeing page after page how the living room changed over time helps us as readers to perceive how space itself unfolds through dynamic processes; on the other hand, in Figure 7, the flight of the bird, the movement of this object's body influencing the girl's own body, visually reminds us that in a single space 'there is a plurality of times' (Bryant 2014: 157). As an onto-cartography, *Here* does not simply place the lives of objects at the centre of the narration, but further proposes objects as strange strangers – archaeological sites telling coexisting stories of ancient pasts and possible futures. Thinking of objects as 'archaeological sites' we refer to Morton's idea of sensual things as 'elegies to the disappearance of objects' (Morton 2013: 18): through their own materiality

Figure 7. The spatialisation of narrative time and movement through the co-existence of different fragments of time in the same double-page spread. Reproduction with permission of the author. In: McGuire, R. (2014) *Here*. London: Penguin.

objects can become sites where footprints – intended with Morton as the evidence of other objects' existence (2013: 18) – are stratified and preserved. Observing an object as an archeological site, then, means thinking of it as a palimpsest where transcalar more-than-human stories coexist.

As a map, the comic book itself multiplies the virtualities of space and time. Thus, if we want to think of McGuire's graphic novel as a work of art that is able to aesthetically trace the lives of things, we have to consider it both as a *book*, namely an *object*, and a *map*, more precisely an onto-cartography, in its own right. If, according to Bryant, 'what onto-cartography maps are relations between machines or networks of machines composing a world' (Bryant 2014: 111), then *Here* tells and visualises an entangled narrative network made of all the crisscrossing stories of the lives of the objects that inhabit(ed) the small world of this single living room over time. Just as this book, as an object, appears as an actor in the narration, symbolised by the yellow book in Figures 2 and 8, in the same way, each map is itself a machine in the world it maps. As Bryant go on to say: 'Because machines are dynamic assemblages, these maps are not maps of fixed entities and relations (…) but rather are maps of the vectors along which a world is unfolding' (2014: 124). The dynamic effort made by the reader, who shuffles and reshuffles the pages in search of a reading path, makes the experience of reading the book like that of reading an ever-folding map of things.

Conclusion

For object-oriented thinkers, art is not knowledge; it is not a representation or a mirror of reality, nor is it a culturally constructed translation of reality. Instead, it can provide indirect access to a reality made of things that are always withdrawn. Our reflection started from this idea and from further carto-centred questions: can we think of forms of cartography that are not aimed to represent reality, but rather to attune us to the worlds of objects and, thus, provide us with a sense of the real? As we have shown through the both object-oriented and carto-centred (or onto-cartographic) analysis of McGuire's graphic novel, we believe that *Here* provides a narrative cartography that stretches the boundaries of codifications and norms and creatively approaches the lives of things. McGuire seems to evoke the tendency of contemporary realist thought. However, he also gives shape to an elusive form of onto-cartography that is able to visualise the conception of time and space as emerging from objects.

Yet, if McGuire's map is so profoundly object-oriented, why are human figures still present in *Here*? Why is this 'here' so anchored to a sense of domesticity that is profoundly human? Our analysis showed how this mapping of time and space through objects uses visual echoes, rhymes, and resonances to causes a perspectival and perceptual shift 'that exercises the reader's cognitive abilities in full' (Sarafin 2019: 255). Through its mesh-like non-linearity (Caracciolo 2021: 37) and 'rejection of conventional modes of anthropomorphism and character individuation' (Hegglund 2019: 198), *Here* challenges the usual sequential structure of comics and 'convergence of temporal, causal, and thematic linkage in narrative' (Caracciolo 2021: 36). This way, the aesthetic event of *Here* contributes to an object-oriented perspective telling us something about the inner lives of things through an experience of coexistence. According to Menga and Davies, McGuire's work 'signals a new way of thinking' and functions as 'an encouragement to move beyond a humanist perspective and to abandon a social discourse and a worldview fundamentally centred on the human' (2020: 664).

Defamiliarisation in *Here* emerges through both the form and content of the graphic novel. McGuire defamiliarises not just the experience of reading a comic book but also the space of 'home', questioning our sense of domesticity: what we call 'home', be it the corner of a living room or the planet Earth, exists beyond the merely human scale. In fact, the coexistence of human and geological temporal scales, mapped within a single site, lets the 'specter of the Anthropocene' emerge (Caracciolo, 2021: 37). Humans, we argue, do not disappear completely from the map traced by *Here* because, as Jon R. Hegglund affirms, 'the world-without-us is also somehow always with us' (2019: 199). Producing a sense of displacement while staying here, in our own home, this object-oriented map drawn by McGuire 'helps us see the Anthropocene from within the frame of everyday spatiality rather than through the rhetorical distance of scientific objectivity or the displaced futurity of post-apocalyptic narrative' (195-6). Only by being *here* we can disappear.

Figure 8. The yellow book, an object whose presence counts as an epiphany that reveals the reason for us to be in 'here'? Reproduction with permission of the author. In: McGuire, R. (2014) *Here*. London: Penguin.

Notes

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