Of Women and Homes: Poetics and/as Politics of Care in Marlen Haushofer's *Die Mansarde* (1969) and Caroline Muhr's *Freundinnen* (1974)

JULIA LÜCKL

University of Vienna

Introduction: Feminizing Home and 'Homing' Women

"[M]an is forever searching for, building, creating homes for himself everywhere: caves, huts, women, cities, language, concepts, theory, and so on," writes Luce Irigaray (1993 [1984]: 141) in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Her revealing list of male homes includes not only material-architectural buildings and abstract spaces of thought in which men find places of security, but also women: Within a traditional Western gender system, they are functionalized as objects of construction to become habitable space, intended to offer nurture, comfort, and, of course, care. With Irigaray, the concept of home might thus be understood as a profoundly patriarchal construct(ion) — both literally and figuratively. As such, it is, of course, not a historical a priori; rather, the discursive convergence of domesticity and femininity can be traced back to market economic developments of the eighteenth century (see Rulffes 2021: 11; Sieder 1987: 126). With the entry of middle-class men into the capitalist market and the exclusion of their wives from paid work, the dichotomy between a public sphere, in which men pursue their economic and political goals as (ostensibly) autonomous individuals, and the sphere of the home associated with a devalued and depoliticized femininity emerged. After all, the role of the housewife neither corresponds to the Western ideal of the male *homo oeconomicus*, nor do her caring activities fit into the pattern of what capitalism and later Marxism define as productive work. Since from this patriarchal perspective, care cannot be considered work, it is imagined as part of female nature — and over the centuries the boundaries between femininity, domesticity, and motherhood have become increasingly blurred. The safe, private place of the home was not only imagined as a supposedly natural 'habitat' for 'tender' women and their 'emotional and moral sensibilities' (see Vinken 2001: 122), but women themselves were discursively transformed into a caring shelter or "container" (Irigaray 1993 [1984]: 41) for men and their children. "She is assigned to be place without occupying a place" (ibid.: 52), as Irigaray observes about

the discursive spatialization or, more precisely, 'homing' of women. This conceptualization was particularly reinforced by modern twentieth-century psychology (e.g. Erikson 1963 [1950]; Winnicott 1974 [1965]): The female body serves as home for the unborn child; after birth, maternity is imagined to extend to the protected space of the home to ensure a loving environment for the growing child and its 'healthy' psychic development. The mother is expected not only to shape such safe environments, but to *embody* them through and through (see Schmidt 2021: 80).

Around the 1970s, the Second Women's Movement took up arms against this "cult of domesticity" (Fisher and Tronto 1990: 38), with numerous feminist thinkers fundamentally rejecting the (patriarchal) construct of home in and of itself (see Young 1997). For this article, I am particularly interested in the way German-speaking female authors contributed to this renegotiation of a politics of home. Given that home is a basic human need (see ibid.: 162), how can the desire for home and feminist care practices be thought of together? Beyond its radical rejection, are there ways of thinking of home as a female place and practicing care beyond patriarchal patterns? Or is a woman, as Irigaray (1993 [1984]: 52) writes, always homeless because she herself becomes an inhabited place through her care work? Literary texts written shortly before as well as in the wake of the Second Women's Movement pose these questions and seek answers in their attempts at a poetics and/as politics of home. In the following, I will examine two of these literary care scenes between burden and solicitude with regard to the interweaving of feminist, caring, and poetic practice — namely Marlen Haushofer's final novel *Die Mansarde* (1969),[1] written shortly before the upsurge of the New Women's Movement, and Caroline Muhr's *Freundinnen* (1974). Looking at three spatio-poetic strategies — (1) staging the home, (2) abandoning home, (3) making place within the home — I show how aesthetic composition, feminist discourses, and political demands interact to subvert the naturalization and mystification of female care work. By comparing the two novels in question, it is possible to trace a change in the literary depiction of care around the 1970s that correlates with a shift in feminist discourses in light of the Second Women's Movement. Thereby, I aim to offer a re-reading of Haushofer's canonical text, demonstrating its political far-sightedness, while at the same time giving space to Muhr's now forgotten novel. As I will show, relating Muhr's politics of home to Haushofer's uncovers striking similarities between these seemingly oppositional texts and their representations of domesticity and care.

[1] In general, the domestic is a central theme in Haushofer's oeuvre, as the titles of her stories and novels prove: She debuted with *Die Tapetentür* (1957), the last novel is called *Die Mansarde* (1969), in-between lies *Himmel, der nirgendwo endet* (1966), an autobiographical novel with the working title *Das Haus*. However, in keeping with the limited scope of this article, I will focus exclusively on Haushofer's last novel, *Die Mansarde*, which takes up and refines numerous motifs from her earlier texts.

Performing and Staging the Home: Marlen Haushofer's Poetics of the 'Banal'

> Ich […] lief ins Badezimmer, ließ einen Kübel Wasser einlaufen, ergriff ein Tuch und kniete mich im Wohnzimmer auf den Boden, um das versiegelte Parkett aufzuwischen. Ich nahm nicht den Stielbesen, sondern kroch auf den Knien herum und säuberte wirklich jede Ecke, was man mit dem Besen nicht kann […] und ich hörte endlich auf zu denken. (*M* 118)[2]

Meticulously, the nameless first-person narrator of Haushofer's *Die Mansarde*, wife and mother of two, describes her daily cleaning process, which is both an unpleasant effort and a welcome distraction. In the monotony of this activity, stylistically expressed by the anaphoric structure ("Ich"/"I"), the cleaning subject also tries to clear her head. The detailed documentation of this task shifts the focus from the subject to the activity itself, and the cleaning of the floor simultaneously becomes a form of personal mental hygiene. To the narrator, this act of keeping-in-order seems utterly necessary because the rigid but self-assuring structure of her everyday life threatens to fall apart during the eight days the novel covers: Day after day, she receives letters from an unknown sender containing old diary entries that she herself wrote more than two decades ago during a long-suppressed phase of suffering (or dis-order), when she could not fulfil her role within the home.[3] In the narrative present, the memory of this time of non-conformity unexpectedly intrudes in the domestic order into which the narrator has retreated out of resignation. The letters are, according to her, "Skelett[e]" (*M* 47), that is, something that has been buried but will not disappear. As eerie revenants, they force her to confront them. However, she only allows herself to give in to her past in the one room of the house that belongs entirely to her, namely, the attic that gives the book its title. Here, she can have a past as an individual rather than as a caring force within the family, and she strives to keep these two selves apart: "Diese Briefe haben nichts mit meiner Eigenschaft als Hausfrau zu tun und dürfen meinen Tagesablauf nicht stören." (*M* 179). To ensure that, day by day, she burns the letters as traces of her "unbürgerliche Ausschweifungen" (*M* 47) in the furnace in the house's basement. This is part of a cleansing ritual that erases her own history and serves as a precondition for being able to remain an orderly housewife, a task she sees not as a natural characteristic of herself, but rather as a role she has to fulfil. With this, Haushofer anticipates what the women's movement of the

[2] In the following, I use the sigla "*M*" (*Die Mansarde*) and "*F*" (*Freundinnen*) for direct quotes from the novels.

[3] After she had lost her hearing for reasons that could not be attributed to physical causes, her husband and mother-in-law sent her to a hunting lodge in the mountains, where she was supposed to recover to resume her role as a bourgeois wife and mother. The dis-order thus appears to be an (unconscious) exit strategy to escape from the domestic order, especially when considering the ambiguity of the German word 'hörig': The narrator loses her hearing, she can no longer function 'normally'; in a figurative sense, however, the term 'hörig sein' also means to be dependent to the point of will-less submission. Through her sudden deafness, the narrator — although not consciously — abandons this subjugation. She withdraws from the bourgeois sphere of the home in which she is emotionally and physically exploited, albeit at the price of illness and 'abnormality.'

1970s was to declare in its manifestos, as for example Silvia Federici in her *Wages Against Housework*:

> The difference [from paid work] lies in the fact that not only has housework been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character. (1975: 2)

Haushofer's narrator is well aware of this naturalization. However, unlike the New Women's Movement a few years after the novel was published (and also unlike Muhr's novel), this awareness does not lead to rebellion against this assigned role. Rather, the narrator tries to hide her 'inadequacy' to incorporate this role like other women seem to be able to do. She endeavours to carry out her tasks as flawlessly as possible — albeit joylessly: "[I]ch bemühe mich […]. Ich beklage mich nie und gehe meiner Familie nicht sehr auf die Nerven. Zumindest hoffe ich das." (*M* 51). This conscious effort takes the narrative shape of extensive descriptions of the protagonist's housework. The spectrum ranges from meticulous vacuuming (*M* 111-12), window cleaning (*M* 108), laundry (*M* 108), everyday cooking and shopping (*M* 26, 62, 186), to conversations with her husband Hubert, for whom she has to fill weekends and evenings with recreational programs, conversations, or her mere presence: "Er sitzt […] beim Fernsehen, und weil er nicht gern allein sitzt, vergeude auch ich auf diese Weise viel Zeit." (*M* 24). Descriptions of this kind reinforced Haushofer's reputation as a conservative, apolitical author, as which she was hardly recognized by the Women's Movement in the 1970s.[4] Yet, I argue that in this explicit and conscious focus on what is usually dismissed as banal and "non-literary" activities (see Seifert 2021: 141), Haushofer's political-feminist topicality can be found. Work that is normally not recognized as such, overlooked, and devalued, is spotlighted here. In this poetics, the novel is an incisive analysis of a practice that otherwise remains hidden in the 'black box' of the seemingly non- or re-productive domestic sphere. Considering representation itself as a profoundly political act (as Stuart Hall has argued), this will to stage the 'banal' appears to be a subversive strategy: It is precisely Haushofer's frequently criticized renunciation of formal aesthetic experiments and her laconic and repetitively structured narrative style that make the "katastrophische Normalität des patriarchalen Alltags" (Seidel 2005: 135), its repetitiveness and monotony, tangible to the reader. Through Haushofer's poetics of the 'banal,' as I want to call it, this experience of monotony is not only narrated but *performed* by the text; both the protagonist and the reader have to endure the same, never-ending tasks in the home.

[4] In her dissertation, Dagmar Lorenz even accuses Haushofer of "Egozentrizität" that ignores the political events of her time (1974: 71); to other reviewers, her themes are "biedermeierlich," "spröde und altspätzisch" (Fröhlich 1968: 23).

This focus on the homely mundane is also reflected in the macrostructure of the novel. It recounts eight days from the couple's life, divided into eight chapters, each of which is headed by a day of the week — from Sunday to Sunday — and thus takes the form of a calendar (i.e. a "quotidian" form, see Honold 2016: 53). With this in mind, a look at Martin Heidegger's theory of care is illuminating. In *Sein und Zeit* (1976 [1927]), he considers care as a preeminent part of being-in-the-world. As such, care, very briefly summarized, can manifest in two different manners — an authentic way ("Eigentlichkeit") in which it recognizes and realizes its own being, and an inauthentic one ("Uneigentlichkeit") that is only concerned with superficial, everyday matters and ignores deeper questions of being. In Haushofer's novel, the female narrator appears to be bound to inauthenticity by the iterative structure of the domestic space she both occupies and incorporates. This binding is also structurally inscribed in the temporality (calendrical form) and narrative structure (repetition) of the text. Pointedly, one could even formulate that female existence in the novel is, first and foremost, not a being-in-the-world but a being-in-the-home.

At first sight, it might thus seem that the narrator's being manifests in what Heidegger calls a condition of "fallenness" ("Verfallenheit," 1976 [1927]: 245-53, my translation) in which existence is dominated by routine and conformity. But this reading would not do justice to the text. The novel's finesse lies precisely in the fact that the narrator is always aware of her supposed 'inauthenticity,' exposes this narratively, and thus performatively undermines Heidegger's condition of fallenness: She presents her being-in-the-home in an often ironic, almost mocking manner, and the domestic sphere is portrayed as a stage on which sometimes comical scenes take place. Indeed, the narrator makes no secret of the fact that her day-to-day life is more about carrying out "übliche[]" — patriarchal — "Spielregeln" (*M* 81) and "ein bißchen Theater […] spielen" (*M* 119). The routine of housekeeping follows strict rules, as do the conversations between the couple, which resemble a ritualized question-and-answer game more than a real conversation, at times turning the care scenes into absurd constellations: "Wir sitzen hier und spielen eine Szene […]" (*M* 120). As Daniela Strigl has pointed out, how much of the narrator's comments can be read as ironic is debatable (see 2022: 179-80) — although it is worth noting that she herself comments on this mode of expression at the very beginning of the novel: "[I]ch möchte […] nicht gehässig oder ironisch werden, und dazu besitze ich eine leichte Neigung" (*M* 9). The female gaze, or more precisely, the gaze of the housewife transforms the home — from a romanticized or even natural female terrain to a stage on which the absurdities of gender *roles* play out. This staging at times remains not only on a metaphorical level, but is also reflected in the structure of the text, for example in the description of the visits of the so-called "liebe Dame" (*M* 183), a mother of four who shared a hospital room with the narrator when their children were born, and has since visited the narrator regularly to talk "von Frau zu Frau" (*M* 189). In the lady's ostentatious shallowness and her perfect façade as an

exemplary housewife, no deep conversation can develop. Their dialogues consist merely of farcical platitudes, which are staged theatrically in the novel:

> Die liebe Dame: "Dieser Kaffee ist wirklich ausgezeichnet."
> Ich: "Wenigstens ist er nicht zu bitter."
> Die liebe Dame: "Nein, er ist keine Spur zu bitter." (*M* 186-87)

In effect, metaphors of theatricality pervade the text (e.g. *M* 7, 32, 48, 119, 120), and it is with this omnipresent reference to role-playing that Haushofer anticipates a feminist critique that Frigga Haug and especially Christina Thürmer-Rohr were to formulate in the 1980s — the concept of female complicity. After women were portrayed as "defensive victims" in the first decade of the New Women's Movement — as well as in Caroline Muhr's *Freundinnen* — and as "suffering victims" towards the end of the 1970s (see Thürmer-Rohr 1988: 212), a new approach emerged in socio-pedagogical women's studies in the following decade. This approach focused on women's participation in patriarchy and vehemently rejected the discursive linking of "Machtferne mit Schuldferne" and "Machtlosigkeit mit Verantwortungsfreiheit" (ibid. 2008: 88-89). However, the point was not to blame women for their own oppression and thereby absolve social conditions, but rather to show the extent to which women develop and become "Werkzeuge […], mit denen sie das System stützen" (ibid.: 88).

Acting, understood as the adaptation to prevailing ideas of femininity, plays a central role here — as Haushofer's literary examination of care regimes already shows. By resigning herself to and accepting the role of a housewife — albeit reluctantly and with a certain spitefulness —, the narrator performs reproductive work in two respects: By cooking, washing, and cleaning every day, she takes on the domestic care and *reproductive* work in order to maintain the household, but this goes hand in hand with the *reproduction* of the patriarchal structures that forced her into this role in the first place.[5] For Haushofer — as in Thürmer-Rohr's complicity thesis —, the functionalization and exclusion of women by men is contrasted with the self-functionalization and self-exclusion of women, which leads to alienation, resentful passivity, and devitalization: "Ja, so war es, äußere Erstarrung war die einzig mögliche Form [of surviving] geworden" (*M* 111). The narrator completely isolates herself and stops participating in the outside world. Although she skims through the newspaper every day, she remains convinced that there is "[n]ichts von Bedeutung" in it, and when watching television — another opportunity where she could gain a glimpse of the world — she remarks: "Ich war unfähig zu begreifen, worum es eigentlich ging, aber das bin ich ja fast immer." (*M* 57). Along with Thürmer-Rohr (1989: 138), one could therefore speak of an "Ausmagerung der eigenen Person" (emaciation of one's own person). The narrator devalues herself

[5] Recently, this gendered distinction between productive and reproductive work has been widely debated, see e.g. Fraser 2022.

until she merely embodies the role assigned to her, forfeiting all of her own interests, which finally culminates in the burning of her diary entries by which she erases the "junge[] Person, die ich einmal gewesen war" (*M* 26). While other scholars have interpreted this act of self-erasure in the house's basement through the lens of psychoanalytical theory (see Mairhofer 2020), I read it as a literary analysis of female complicity: The narrator's radical striving for order and the rejection of any interference in her structured daily life leads to the loss of her individuality at the price of being presentable and filling the role assigned to her. This very tension between diligent work on the bourgeois family order on the one hand, with the result of a mock reality on the other, lends the text its political force which remains hidden when read only superficially. In *Die Mansarde* (as in many of her novels), Haushofer presents a female protagonist who, while not overcoming her constraint, no longer conceals abusive structures but lays them bare to open them up to criticism. Haushofer therefore shows how an ironic staging of the home and its endlessly repeated gendered care practices is itself a strategy of subversion.

Abandoning and Recreating Home: Outcry and Break-Out with Caroline Muhr

Only five years passed between the publication of Marlen Haushofer's *Die Mansarde* and Caroline Muhr's *Freundinnen* in 1974, but during that time major shifts had happened with regard to the political situation of women: At the end of the 1960s, the New Women's Movement gained momentum in Germany and Austria, fought against the ban on abortion, campaigned for a reform of divorce law and, above all, demanded wages for housework (see Klaus and Drüeke 2010: 244). The latter was a debate that particularly dominated the mid-1970s: "They [Men] say it is love. We say it is unwaged work" (1975: 1), is one of the most frequently quoted passages from Federici's manifesto *Wages Against Housework*. One year before this manifesto, German writer Caroline Muhr (a pseudonym for Charlotte Puhl) published her second novel which presents itself as an outcry against patriarchal structures of home:

> Damit hatte ich nicht gerechnet, als ich mich in Robert verliebte und ihn heiratete. […] [M]it dieser zehn- bis vierzehnstündigen Vergewaltigung meiner Person, die sich tägliche Hausarbeit nennt, damit hatte ich nicht gerechnet. Nicht mit diesen in tausende Stücke zerbrochenen Tagen. Nicht mit dieser eisernen, unzerbrechlichen Kette aus Kleinigkeiten, die meinem Geist nichts und meiner Aufmerksamkeit alles abverlangten. (*F* 22)

In a figurative sense, the novel describes housework as a severe form of male violence directed against the woman performing it. To the narrator Ruth, it seems like a "Vergewaltigung […], die meinen Verstand langsam zersetzte, deren Monotonie mich auslaugte und schließlich sogar meine […] sexuellen […] Freuden bis auf einen geringfügigen Rest *abtötete*" (*F* 23, my emphasis). Here, the novel seems to accomplish what critics found fault with in Haushofer's novel: Muhr's text is — as Kathrin Spiller has

termed it referring to Muhr's first novel *Depressionen* (1970) — a "cry for disruption and change" (2018: 12), a demand for rebellion against the patriarchal system and female care work as part of it. The two novels investigated here thus open up a tension between a resigned acceptance of existing care regimes (Haushofer) and active, sometimes angrily articulated rebellion against them (Muhr). Their different tone reflects the shift in public discourse at the beginning of the 1970s. While Haushofer is a precursor of the Women's Movement, Muhr is already actively involved in it, and her oeuvre can certainly be considered a part of her activist dedication.[6] However, her work has remained largely overlooked,[7] perhaps precisely because of its radical appeal to not uphold the (domestic) structures of female subordination. *Freundinnen* consistently implements this political plea on a poetic level: The novel not only calls for the abandonment of patriarchal structures and their replacement but also breaks with them on a poetic level by rewriting a male genre tradition, the Bildungsroman, and subversively adapting it into a feminist form. While the Bildungsroman traditionally deals with a man's integration into bourgeois society (with a home and family), Muhr transforms it into a female educational story that aims at the exact opposite — an escape from hegemonic domestic structures through female relationships. To this end, the novel juxtaposes two complementary characters, the narrator Ruth and her best friend Edda. While Ruth, a self-sacrificing and loyal, albeit emotionally reluctant, mother of four and caring wife of her ambitious husband Robert, lives up to her biblical name (an allusion to the ever-sacrificial Ruth in the First Testament), Edda's name already reveals her role as a counter-figure. Derived from the Old Icelandic term for 'primordial mother,' it alludes to an anti-patrilineal, female tradition that Edda embodies. As "Oberstudienrätin" (*F* 88) at a girls' school, she is financially independent, unattached, and, most importantly, she lives in her own home that she herself rules over. Large parts of the novel consist of conversations between the two friends, as Ruth recaps them in her diary. More precisely, her notes are protocols of *educational* conversations which initially oscillate between Edda's pathos and anger about patriarchy and Ruth's ostentatious naivety, and they do not conceal their pedagogical impetus:

> "Wo stehst du eigentlich politisch?"
> "Robert steht rechts."
> "Ich will nicht wissen, wo Robert steht. […] Ich will wissen, was du selber denkst." (*F* 27)

[6] Among other things, Muhr was a member of the Bonner Blaustrümpfe, a women's group who wrote and recorded feminist protest songs and parodies "to decry the status quo of women's position in German society" (Spiller 2018: 15).

[7] For while Haushofer's texts may be considered canonical today — at least in Austria —, Muhr's multifaceted oeuvre was quickly forgotten after her suicide in 1978. In German studies, the novel has so far only been mentioned in a printed email exchange between Liza Mattutat and Judith Niehaus (2023); a more detailed analysis has not been undertaken to date.

In dialogue scenes like these, Ruth's emaciation as a person — to use Thürmer-Rohr's expression (1989: 214) once again — is portrayed explicitly and sometimes even a little blatantly. At the beginning of the novel, she has no opinion of her own, in fact she is portrayed as a relative being, as Edda remarks: "Du bist kein Mensch mehr. Du bist ein Anhängsel von Robert geworden." (*F* 28). The novel's evolving plot is then characterized by Ruth's transformation from such a submissive "Anhängsel," an appendage to others, towards a critically thinking feminist who can — at least sometimes — stand up to her husband. In contrast to Haushofer's novel, Muhr thus tells a story of an 'awakening.' Edda appears as an educated feminist who increasingly politicizes Ruth and prophetically introduces her to feminism in order to awaken her from the 'slumber' into which patriarchy has put her. From today's perspective, such a highly pedagogical narrative can be scrutinized critically precisely because it loses sight of its own blind spots (which I will come back to in the third section) by absolutizing a particular political vision. However, when analysed against its historical and political backdrop, the novel's poetic form can best be understood as part of Muhr's political activism. It not only tells a story of female formation but also seeks to educate its female readers about feminism. Just as Ruth is supposed to be 'enlightened' through her conversations with Edda, so too is the female reader.

This pedagogical impetus is also reflected in the novel's appellative structure and its manifesto-like rhetoric: "Helft euch untereinander, haltet Verbindung […]. Euch wird die Chance gegeben, einen neuen weiblichen Menschen zu schaffen, der nicht mehr vom Mann erniedrigt und beliebig manipuliert werden kann." (*F* 102-3).[8] Simultaneously alluding to and rejecting Friedrich Nietzsche's "Übermensch" (1988 [1883]), a concept Muhr dealt with in her dissertation entitled *Nietzsche und die Transzendenz* (1954), a new female human being is called for. But in contrast to Nietzsche's patriarchally charged idea, based on ideals of an independent heroic being, Muhr's attempt at a new way of being is based on relationality, solidarity, and — above all —, care beyond its patriarchal imprint. In fact, the novel can be read as a feminist manifesto for a re-semantization and re-evaluation of care that seems attainable through establishing new domestic structures: (1) through the idea of a female home beyond the heteronormative household, as realized in the form of Edda's apartment that the two women temporarily share; and (2) through the constitution of a textual home, a mental space for retreat and reflection, that Ruth creates with her diary. On both levels, it is Edda who opens a door to new spaces for Ruth, both literally and figuratively: "In der vorigen Woche gab Edda mir ihren Wohnungsschlüssel, damit ich auch in ihre Wohnung kann, wenn sie nicht da ist […]. Ich kann mich dann ungestört von der Familie ausruhen." (*F* 54).

[8] This call for emancipation, in which Edda directly addresses a "you," can obviously not only be related to the internal communication system of the text, but it can also be understood as a call to the readers (see section 3 on "Making Place within the Home" below).

This spatial escape from a home that is now framed as Robert's (not Ruth's) is symbolically staged as a moment of insight when, on the way to this new home and shelter, Ruth pauses for a long time between the columns of the Monopteros, a historic temple in Bonn that clearly alludes to the Pillars of Hercules.[9] Accordingly, Ruth believes to be slowly transforming "aus einer Funktion (Ehefrau, Hausfrau, Mutter) in eine Person" (*F* 13). With her visits, Ruth iterates a movement across a spatial-semantic boundary and is thus (in the sense of Juri Lotman's spatial theory) semiotically marked as the (active) subject of the text: The crossing takes her from a patriarchal domesticity (Robert's home) to a radical feminist one (Edda's home).[10]

The novel thus unfolds along a spatial-semantic logic of binary structures that are connected by Ruth's iterative transgressions. In both places, however, she is confronted with domestic structures directly related to a gendered political stance that is expressed in particular care practices: In Robert's home, female care encompasses only those activities that are traditionally considered female household activities (cooking, cleaning, child-rearing) and which, as shown above, primarily contribute to the maintenance of patriarchal power structures through complicity. In Edda's home, by contrast, care is also and above all a practice of sharing experiences and mutual listening. Like the hegemonic concept of domestic care work, this feminist reconceptualization is based on the provision of space — but not for a male subject. Rather, feminist care work, as outlined in Muhr's novel, creates women as subjects beyond their discursively assigned and incorporated roles by giving them a space to work on their own history. This includes, in particular, the exchange of experiences that contradict the classic role images of the housewife — experiences that have been tabooed and excluded from public discourse, ranging from sexual violence (*F* 56-58) to regretting motherhood (*F* 143). The novel tells these stories on a level of second-order reflection: Rather than directly staging the conversations between the two friends, Ruth's written records of them are presented, as she notes them in 24 diary-like fragments. On an aesthetic level, this textual fragmentation reflects what is enacted thematically. Form and content are both characterized by the structure of breaking up fixed forms — on the one hand, a break with a continuous narrative form, on the other, a break with the bourgeois household. Towards the end of the novel, Ruth finally abandons Robert's home and spends seven days with the seriously sick Edda to care for her — against her husband's wishes and, above all, without asking for his permission:

> Ich wusch ihr mit einem warmen Waschlappen […] die blauen Streifen [i.e. ink] von der Stirn. Sie war für alles dankbar. Sie war wie ein Kind, das lange eine Mutter

[9] The Pillars of Hercules symbolically mark the boundaries of a known world and crossing them signifies a moment of enlightenment, just as it does for Ruth in this quote.

[10] The fact that Edda's home can be found on a street that is associated with disgrace and shame because it is also home to a "Hurenhaus" (*F* 14) is revealing: Her peripheral position in society as an unmarried feminist is reflected in the peripheral location of her home.

> entbehrt hat oder überhaupt jemanden, der sich um sie kümmert und Sorgen um es macht. Ich wäre am liebsten liegengeblieben und hätte mich neben sie ins Bett gelegt. (*F* 92)

In this friendship, too, Ruth takes on a motherly role. However, the connotations attached to this role are starkly divergent from those she embodies within her familial context. Here, the second semantic layer inherent in the German word for care — "Sorge" — becomes apparent: On the one hand, it signifies "burden" (which it is for Ruth in her marriage), but on the other hand it also signifies "solicitude" — a double bind Martin Heidegger (1976 [1927]) has pointed out. This second, positive and authentic ("eigentlich") form of care characterizes the relationship between Ruth and Edda, thereby providing an opportunity to abandon patriarchal complicity. Accordingly, Robert's reaction to Edda and Ruth's friendship is dismissive: "Unsere fröhliche Verbundenheit ließ ihn schaudern wie eine besonders seltene Art von Abnormität." (*F* 146). He marks the women's self-determined politics of home as deviant and even asserts the impossibility of their solidarity,[11] thus reproducing a centuries-old philosophical and pedagogical discourse — passed down by scholars like Michael de Montaigne (1999 [1580]: 88), Friedrich Nietzsche (1988 [1883]: 72), and Georg Simmel (1968 [1908]: 268) — that imagined women as incapable of friendship. When Muhr titles her novel with the, at first glance perhaps inconspicuous, term *Freundinnen*, it is an explicit counter-positioning to such misogynist discourses,[12] and it directly refers to what is at the core of her anti-patriarchal idea of care: While patriarchal discourses can imagine care only as reproductive, in that it passes on the hegemonic structures and is, thereby, devalued itself (just like the role of the housewife), Muhr's feminist approach reframes it as a productive, subject-constituting practice.

The novel clearly idealizes this feminist care relationship, yet also marks it as a utopia, unrealizable within a patriarchally structured society. In the end, Ruth returns to her husband and children, not only because she is afraid of the "Spott der anderen" (*F* 171), but also due to her financial dependence (see *F* 171). Edda dies in a car accident shortly thereafter, leaving open the question of whether or not her death was in fact a suicide. The new female being Edda calls for, the one that she tries to embody herself and that she seeks Ruth to be, remains an unattainable utopia that the novel must ultimately give up on. What remains is the diary which Ruth writes during her time with Edda. So, in contrast to Haushofer's protagonist, who burns all of her former writings, Ruth testifies to her attempt to undermine hegemonic domestic structures and a female's placelessness (Irigaray) within the home. Given that abandoning this structure does not seem possible (Muhr) nor is even attempted (Haushofer), what is left for the

[11] "Zwischen Frauen gibt es keine Freundschaft." (*F* 42).

[12] With this, Muhr anticipates later care discourses that attempt to revalue this concept by raising the question of how care is possible beyond exploitative relationships. Fisher and Tronto (1990), for example, but also Raymond (1986), refer to female friendship as the basis for feminist revolution.

two narrators is to create their own space *within* the spatio-temporal structures of the household — in other words: to break 'out' into a room of their own, with a desk to work on as its most important element.

Making Place within the Home: Chances and Aporias of a Room of One's Own

In her now famous essay "A Room of One's Own," Virgina Woolf explores the conditions for the material production of women's literature. According to her, two requirements must be met for women to produce "great literature": "five hundred [pounds] a year and a room with a lock on the door" (2021 [1929]: 23). In addition to financial independence, it seems to be, above all, a female enclave that makes creative work possible in the first place. Taking her thesis further in the context of female care work, Woolf's room of one's own can also be understood as a place where it is possible to break out of reproductive roles and discover oneself as a creative being — a notion that the two novels analyzed here take up: For Haushofer and Muhr, the escape from domestic, patriarchal housework thus takes place *within* the house, whenever the narrators may occupy or create their own places as spatial and temporal folds within a domestic structure that otherwise renders them (in Irigaray's sense) placeless.

Whenever she can, Haushofer's narrator retreats to her attic room to paint, and Muhr's narrator Ruth — inspired and encouraged by Edda — records at the beginning of the novel: "Ich habe mir das Recht genommen, einen eigenen Schreibtisch zu besitzen." (*F* 34). It is this desk that the fictional diary making up the novel is written on. At least at first glance, Haushofer's attic room and Muhr's desk become places of female autonomy, where the spatial separation between caring and artistic work[13] makes free creation possible — in Haushofer's case, the graphic model of a bird that looks as if it were the only one in the world (i.e. a symbol of freedom in solitude, see Burnett 2022: 302); in Muhr's case, the narrator's written reflection on her own history beyond the roles she is assigned. The creation of art or literature stands as a *productive* process in contrast to *reproductive* work in the household. It is a type of work that is not intended for a housewife and for which they must retreat into solitude, into their own spatial enclave: "Die Mansarde gehört mir. Selbst Hubert betritt sie nur, wenn ich ihn ausdrücklich einlade." (*M* 20). In the attic, Haushofer's narrator indulges in the last remnants of her lost freedom and past selfhood: As a successful graduate of graphic design, she illustrated books before her marriage, something Hubert later forbids her to do, making her financially dependent on him. In this respect, the attic can be understood as the last enclave of the narrator's creative freedom as it relates to two literary traditions: on the one hand, the bourgeois-idyllic tradition of a high-up artist's parlor, which is a romanticized symbol of poverty, and the associated ingenuity of the (mostly male)

[13] Tellingly, the attic in Haushofer's novel is located directly above the kitchen, the room traditionally assigned to the housewife as her own realm (see Hochreiter 2020).

subject retreating there; on the other hand, the tradition of *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Gilbert and Gubar 1979), which radically locks away threatening femininity (see Seidel 2005: 138). This second line of tradition already points to the ambivalent status of Haushofer's attic. To consider it a "präfeministische[] Freiheits- und Kreativitätszelle" (ibid.) seems all too enthusiastic upon closer reading. It is a place that is still determined by Hubert for *he* decides when the narrator is allowed to stay there (see *M* 47) in order to pursue her "unbürgerliche[] Ausschweifungen" (*M* 47), marking her behavior as something 'abnormal' for a housewife. From this perspective, the chamber no longer seems to be a revolutionary space in which the narrator achieves female autonomy. Rather, it is a self-imposed heterotopia of deviance (see Foucault 2006 [1967]) where she can satisfy her "unbourgeois" (my translation) desires while remaining within bourgeois structures. The retreat can therefore be read as a compensatory act that enables the narrator to 'refresh' for her daily domestic chores. In a Marxist sense, the attic takes on the same function as the private space for working men because it enables them to rest and regain their ability for work — thereby reproducing a capitalist and patriarchal system.

In Muhr's case, the purchase of the desk against the will of Ruth's husband is itself an act of resistance to her role as housewife and mother. It offers her a sense of place and purpose and forms the material basis that allows her to create another space of subversion — her diary. By presenting the novel's text as a product of Ruth's work that was produced within this place of her own, it is simultaneously framed as a product of feminist resistance itself. Here, two seemingly contrary literary forms, a highly intimate form (the diary) and a highly political rhetoric (a feminist manifesto), are intertwined. This is perfectly in line with the guiding slogan of the Second Women's Movement which states that "The personal is political" (Klaus and Drüeke 2010: 244). In Ruth's diary, political theory thus appears in the guise of a personal story as well as a feminist twist on the Bildungsroman. Yet, like in any political theory, this politics of care also contains certain aporias and blind spots that should not remain unaddressed here. From a literary studies perspective, it is particularly noteworthy that the aporias and political incongruities of Muhr's politics of home find expression in aesthetic incongruities — namely, in the abundance of quote- and trope-like passages, in which feminist slogans are woven into the narrative, sometimes even interrupting it. Here, a second communication system (text — reader) becomes perceptible alongside the diary fiction (internal communication system), that addresses the reader directly and displays the political-pedagogical impetus analyzed above.[14] One might even say that the political layer (the manifesto-like nature of the text) repeatedly overrides the poetic one (the diary fiction). In this light, the space of the diary is always already politically pre-

[14] For example, direct quotations from Edda's pleadings are woven into the (diary) text, e.g. "Laßt euch nicht entmutigen von der amüsierten Herablassung der Männer, die glauben, daß sie für alle Zeiten ein Monopol auf Freundschaft und Solidarität haben […]." (*F* 103).

structured by the ideas of second-wave feminism that are personified in the novel by the prophetically charged character of Edda. Just as she is made to appear flawless, the political movement she personifies is idealized in Ruth's diary, with its aporias left uncommented upon. For example, when Ruth writes about (un)paid care work: "Fräulein Bonnemann [the new housekeeper] wird für eine Arbeit gut bezahlt, die ich siebzehn Jahre lang umsonst getan habe. Auf einmal ist meine Arbeit mehr als tausend Mark im Monat wert, weil nicht ich, sondern jemand anders sie macht." (*F* 27). Writing, the subversive space of the diary, and the desk as the material basis for its production create the possibility for insights like these. However, Ruth's personal striving for emancipation is only possible at the expense of another woman, namely the housekeeper mentioned in the quote, Miss Bonnemann, a "Flüchtling aus Schlesien" (*F* 26), who takes over Ruth's role as a mother and housewife. It is only through Ruth's upper middle-class, wealthy background that she has the means to hire a "Haushaltshilfe" (*F* 26), thus creating the possibility to have a room of her own, both spatially and temporally. The patriarchal structure against which she rebels is thus not fundamentally questioned or even broken up by her rejection of domestic work but rather reproduced along other power gradients like social class. Within this system, someone needs to do the reproductive work, and it ends up in the hands of (multiply) discriminated women — yet this inequality remains a blind spot within the novel.

However, as can be concluded here, the political potential of these poetics of care, Muhr's as much as Haushofer's, might lie less in offering successful solutions for female subjugation *in*, *through*, and *as* homes than in exposing their failure, thus making visible the silent violence of existing and persisting domestic structures. Neither of the strategies discussed — (1) staging the home, (2) abandoning home, and (3) making place within the home — allows for a radical escape. In the end, the initial situation of each protagonist is restored, not to say reproduced. The women fulfil their 'naturally' assigned tasks, staying in their homes performing their family care work — with the only, but decisive difference being that they have become aware of their actual placelessness within the home, by reading about their past (Haushofer) or by reflecting on their present through writing (Muhr). Even if these insights are not accompanied by a prospect of change, they still hold subversive potential. For in the course of their narration, care practices — which were often dismissed as too 'banal' to be written about — have to find a poetic form. Subtly or explicitly, through subversive observation or active resistance, *Die Mansarde* and *Freundinnen* work on the de-naturalization of female care work and are both a mirror and a motor of the political developments of their time. An analysis of such literary care scenes must do justice to their double bind as both a feminist and literary practice that examines how politically appropriated, naturalized concepts of gender, home, and forms of labor are reformed in and through their poetic composition, but also how the aporias of political approaches become visible through their expression in poetic incongruities. Political demands and poetic form

cannot be separated but rather produce each other reciprocally. Ultimately, a patriarchal politics of home is made tangible in as well as challenged by the poetics of Haushofer's and Muhr's literary care scenes between burden and solicitude.

Works Cited

Burnett, Kassi (2022). "Feminism, Disability, and a Dragon: Transcending Classification in Marlen Haushofer's 'Die Mansarde'." *Oxford German Studies* 51.3: 302-20.

Erikson, Erik (1963 [1950]). *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton.

Federici, Silvia (1975). *Wages Against Housework*. Bristol: Falling Wall Press.

Fisher, Berenice, and Joan Tronto (1990). "Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring." *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives*. Ed. Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 35-62.

Foucault, Michel (2006 [1967]). "Von anderen Räumen." *Raumtheorie: Grundlagentexte aus Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaften.* Ed. Jörg Dünne and Stephan Günzel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 317-29.

Fraser, Nancy (2022). *Cannibal Capitalism: How Our System Is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet — and What We Can Do About It*. London: Verso.

Fröhlich, Jürgen (1968). "Rezension zu 'Die Mansarde'." *Stuttgarter Zeitung* 6 Sep.: 23-4.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar (1979). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Haushofer, Marlen (1988 [1969]). *Die Mansarde*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.

Heidegger, Martin (1976 [1927]). "Sein und Zeit." *Heidegger-Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 2, Abt. 1, Veröffentlichte Schriften 1914-1970*. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

Hochreiter, Susanne (2020). "'Dann ging ich wieder hinunter in die Küche'. Überlegungen zur Bedeutung der Küche in Marlen Haushofers 'Die Mansarde'." *Austrian Studies: Literaturen und Kulturen*. Ed. Desiree Hebenstreit et al. Wien: Praesens, 431-40.

Honold, Alexander (2016). "Gewäsch und Gewimmel: Zeitmuster und Erzählformen des Tagtäglichen bei Brigitte Kronauer." *Zeit, Stillstellung und Geschichte im deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsroman*. Ed. Tanja van Hoorn. Hannover: Wehrhahn, 47-73.

Irigaray, Luce (1993 [1984]). *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Ithaca/New York: Cornell University Press.

Klaus, Elisabeth, and Ricarda Drüeke (2010). "Öffentlichkeit und Privatheit: Frauenöffentlichkeiten und feministische Öffentlichkeiten." *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung: Theorie, Methoden, Empirie*. Ed. Ruth Becker. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 244-51.

Lorenz, Dagmar C.G. (1974). *Biographie und Chiffre: Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten in der österreichischen Prosa nach 1945, dargestellt an den Beispielen Marlen Haushofer und Ilse Aichinger*. Dissertation. University of Cincinnati.

Lotman, Juri M. (1972). *Die Struktur literarischer Texte*. München: Fink.

Mairhofer, Marlen (2020). "Ist der Brief ein Symptom? Zu einem komplexen Motiv in Marlen Haushofers 'Die Mansarde'." *geschlecht_transkulturell: Aktuelle Forschungsperspektiven*. Ed. Eva Hausbacher et al. Wiesbaden: Springer, 267-81.

Mattutat, Liza, and Judith Niehaus (2023). "Kinder, Küche, Krise der Reproduktion: Ein Mailwechsel über Konstellationen von Sorge-, Lohn- und Schreibarbeit in Romanen von Caroline Muhr bis Anke Stelling." *Literatur und Care*. Ed. Undercurrents: Forum für Linke Literaturwissenschaft. Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 61-80.

Montaigne, Michel de (1999 [1580]). "Über die Freundschaft." *Philosophie der Freundschaft*. Ed. Klaus-Dieter Eichler. Leipzig: Reclam, 83-97.

Muhr, Caroline (1985 [1974]). *Freundinnen*. Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1988 [1883]). "Also sprach Zarathustra [Vom Freunde]." *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden*. Ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Bd. 4. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 71-3.

Puhl, Charlotte (1954). *Nietzsche und die Transzendenz*. Dissertation. Marburg/Köln.

Raymond, Janice (1986). *A Passion for Friendship: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Rulffes, Evke (2021). *Die Erfindung der Hausfrau: Geschichte einer Entwertung*. New York: HarperCollins.

Schmidt, Susanne (2021). "Umwelt-Sein. Mutterschaft, Entwicklung und Psychologie, 1930-1990." *NTM: Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin* 29: 77-112.

Seidel, Sabine (2005). *Reduziertes Leben: Untersuchungen zum erzählerischen Werk Marlen Haushofers*. Dissertation. University of Passau.

Seifert, Nicole (2021). *Frauen-Literatur: Abgewertet, vergessen, wiederentdeckt*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.

Sieder, Reinhard (1987). *Sozialgeschichte der Familie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Simmel, Georg (1968 [1908]). *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.

Spiller, Kathrin (2018). *Repeat and Resist: Resignifying Injurious Language and the Gendered Female Subject in Works by Elfriede Jelinek, Caroline Muhr, and Maria Erlenberger*. Dissertation. Montreal: McGill University.

Strigl, Daniela (2022). "Wer hat Angst vor Marlen Haushofer? Humor, Sarkasmus, Grausamkeit in der österreichischen Literatur nach 1945." *Marlen Haushofer: Texte und Kontexte*. Ed. Andrea Capovilla. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 159-83.

Thürmer-Rohr, Christina (1988). "Mittäterschaft von Frauen: Ein Konzept feministischer Forschung und Ausbildung. Tagungskonzeption." *Beiträge zur feministischen Theorie und Praxis* 21.22: 211-14.

— (1989). *Mittäterschaft und Entdeckungslust.* Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 138-54.

— (2008). "Mittäterschaft von Frauen: Die Komplizenschaft mit der Unterdrückung." *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung: Theorie, Methoden, Empirie*. Ed. Ruth Becker and Renate Kortendiek. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 88-93.

Vinken, Barbara (2001). *Die deutsche Mutter: Der lange Schatten eines Mythos*. München: Piper.

Woolf, Virginia (2021 [1929]). *A Room of One's Own*. Ditzingen: Reclam.

Winnicott, Donald W. (1974 [1965]). *Reifungsprozesse und fördernde Umwelt*. München: Kindler.

Young, Iris Marion (1997). "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme." *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 134-64.