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RESEARCH

Geneviève Castrée's Unmade Beds: Graphic Memoir and Digital Afterlives

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This article draws on comics studies, autobiography theory, and feminist theory to explore two autographics by the late Québécoise cartoonist Geneviève Castrée (1981–2016) and their mobilization online by a bereaved comics community. The article begins with Castrée's *Susceptible* (2012), a graphic memoir of coming-of-age in a dysfunctional family in 1980s Québec. By focusing on lettering, layouts, and the braided motif of the bed, I show that Castrée draws her maternal home as a conflicted space of both anxiety and security. This analysis extends to Castrée's 2015 series of self-portraits, 'Blankets Are Always Sleeping,' in order to reflect on the complex figure of the Sad Girl as a sign of gendered resistance. After her untimely death, images of the sleeping cartoonist were mobilized on social media by bereaved fans. I argue that this digital circulation inevitably simplified and sentimentalized her autographic persona, as the remediation of her self-portraits online transferred their signification from individual expression to communal grief. The article concludes with two graphic elegies posted online by Diane Obomsawin and Vanessa Davis in the week after Castrée's death to consider her posthumous place amongst North American female cartoonists.

Keywords: autographics; Geneviève Castrée; graphic elegy; online mourning; trauma

Canadian cartoonist Geneviève Castrée's graphic memoir *Susceptible* was published in both French and English in 2012. The two-tone cover of the French version published by L'Apocalypse features a circular portrait of an androgynous young person staring back at us, as tears fall out of their left eye (**Figure 1**). The polychromatic cover of the self-translated English edition, published by Drawn & Quarterly, uses the same composition and background, but there are two significant changes to the portrait inside the large circle: the androgynous young person's face is framed

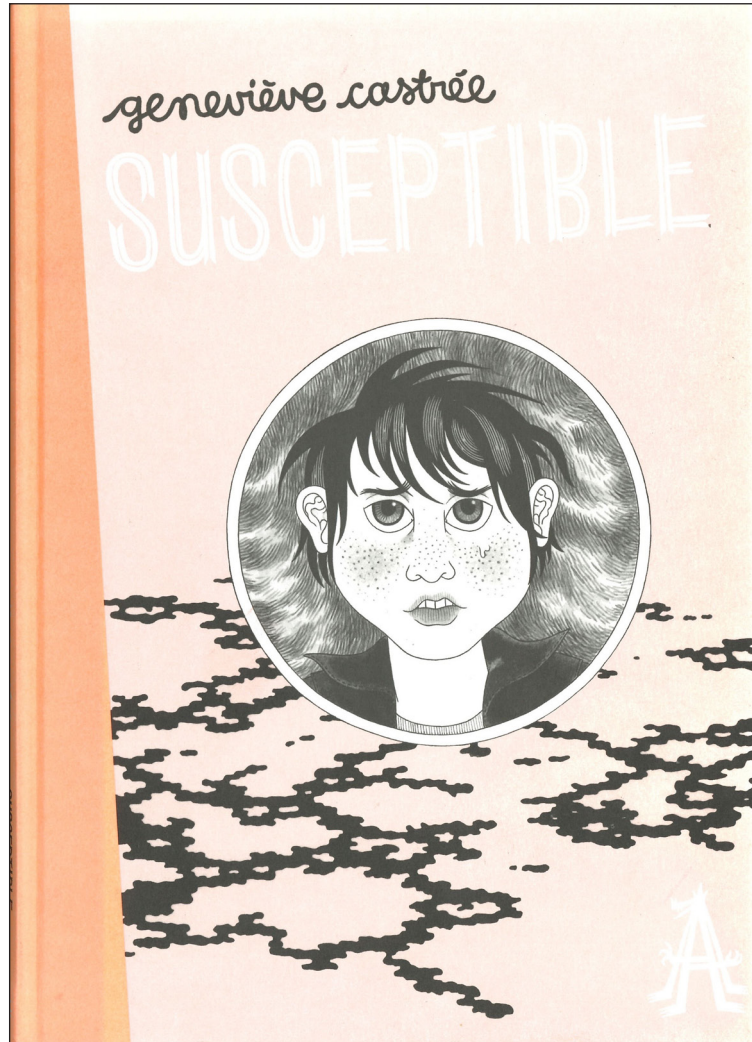


Figure 1: Cover of *Susceptible*, French edition, L'Apocalypse, 2012.

by a bright red hood and there are no tears in their eyes; rather, they look out at the reader with defiance (**Figure 2**). Placed side-by-side, these covers recall the two-volume edition of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2004, 2005), which likewise feature two different portraits of the protagonist's face enclosed in a frame. But, while the former announce that their protagonist has gone from child to adolescent in the gap between the volumes, the latter suggests that the cartoonist wanted to convey the multifaceted persona contained within one volume of her graphic life narrative.

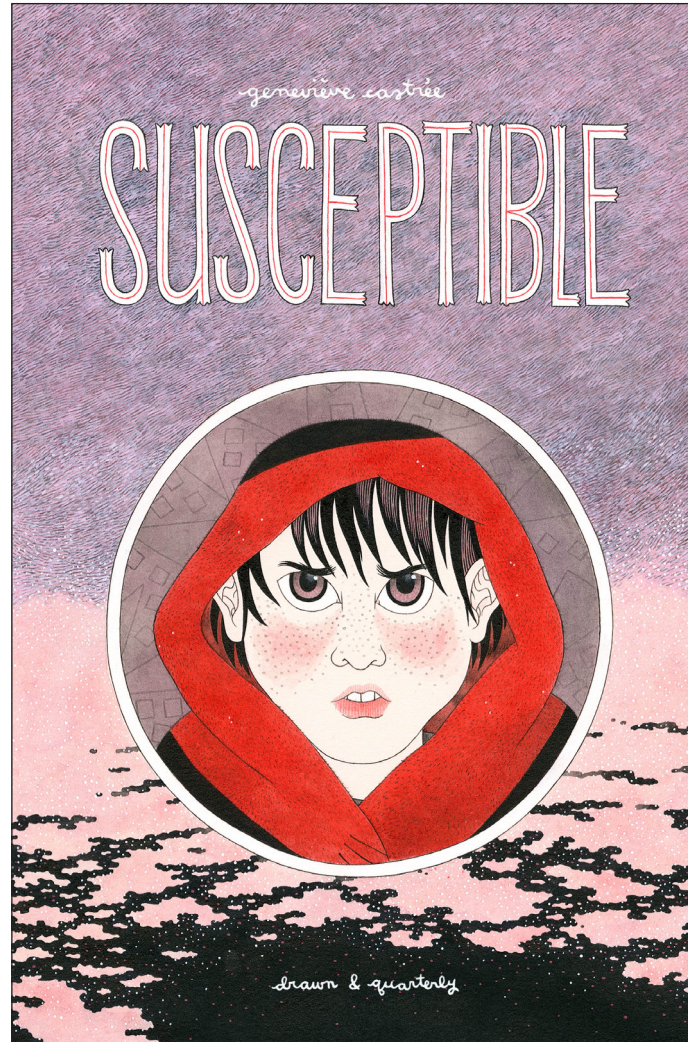


Figure 2: Cover of *Susceptible*, English edition, Drawn & Quarterly, 2012.

The sadder, younger face on the French edition combines with the title to suggest a vulnerable character, in keeping with the French nuance of 'susceptible' as a synonym for 'moody' or 'touchy.' The bold gaze and protective, yet vaguely ominous, red hoodie of the English edition complicate the cognate English title: to what could this confrontational adolescent be susceptible? what have they endured or survived?

This tension between vulnerability and resilience evident when the two covers are read together reflects Castrée's complex representation of her childhood and

adolescence in 1980s Montreal and British Columbia. Although Castrée uses an avatar for herself named Goglu, *Susceptible* is clearly autobiographical. Like *Persepolis* and Lynda Barry's *One! Hundred! Demons!* (2005), *Susceptible* uses captions for retrospective adult narration over drawings of difficult, and at times traumatic, childhood experiences. In a four-page prefatory sequence that depicts the protagonist moving from infancy to late adolescence, Castrée draws herself naked, suspended on the limbo of a white background without panel borders, as she is progressively ensnared by a leafy plant (5–8). In floating captions, the narrator wonders whether her sadness is the result of nature or nurture. Family, identity, depression, and growth are all introduced in this botanical nightmare sequence. Their convoluted interrelationships shape the rest of this graphic memoir that constructs the family as a conflicted site of intimacy and isolation. As *Susceptible* unfolds, Castrée recalls memories from her early childhood to late adolescence that dwell on emotional abuse in the Montreal home of her francophone mother and stepfather, renamed Amère and Amer, the feminine and masculine forms of the French word for 'bitter'. Castrée said that she introduced this mild distancing effect in part to protect her real family members and because, 'true autobiography is pretty much impossible' (Fry 2013). *Susceptible* also depicts Goglu's attempts to reunite with her anglophone father, who has left for British Columbia, and with whom she ultimately has a more successful relationship. *Susceptible* joins a group of graphic memoirs by women, including *Persepolis*, *One! Hundred! Demons!*, and Julie Doucet's *My New York Diary* (1999), that represent very different girlhoods as nevertheless united by similar experiences: anxiety, vulnerability, depression, alienation, self-harm, and drug use, from which the protagonist emerges as a comics artist and speaking subject of her own graphic *künstlerroman*.

Gillian Whitlock, whose neologism 'autographics' is often used to describe graphic memoirs as a distinct form of multimodal self-representation, suggests that 'what charges life narrative in comics is the particular tension and dissonance it generates by mixing codes from juvenilia into autobiographical narratives of history and trauma' (2007: 198). Castrée draws on the juvenilia of fairy tales to frame her childhood within houses and homes, drawing herself primarily in bedrooms and living

rooms. These interior spaces dominate the autographic and highlight what Kathy Mezei calls the 'domestic effects' (2006) of women's autobiographical practices, the significance of interior spaces to the shaping of memory and the construction of an emergent self. Castrée draws Goglu in domestic spaces that are at once punitive and protective to convey the disjunction between a desire for home and its often-brutal reality. While her themes overlap with those of the better-known works by Satrapi, Barry, and Doucet, Castrée has a distinctive comics style that hovers between cartooning and illustration, naiveté and complexity, dreaminess and ugliness. The signature style of *Susceptible* shows how lettering, page layout, framing, and visual braiding can produce a domestic visual space that conveys complex family relationships of affection, obligation, and dependence.

When I first started to work on *Susceptible* in early 2016, I was drawn to Castrée's complicated representations of the child and young woman in bed, an image that appears throughout the graphic memoir as an ambivalent topos of anxiety and security. As well, in June 2015, Castrée published in the *New York Times* a series of illustrations that develop this motif, 'Blankets Are Always Sleeping,' and which were later republished in the Drawn & Quarterly twenty-fifth anniversary volume and *The Best American Comics 2016* (Devlin et al. 2015: 448–55; Chast 2016: 295–303). These self-portraits extend *Susceptible's* concern with the bed space as identity space, as Castrée uses blankets as material sites of memory. I was researching this topic in the summer of 2016 when I opened my Twitter feed on July 10th to learn that Geneviève Castrée had died the previous day, of pancreatic cancer, at the age of 35. Like her other fans, I spent the subsequent days on social media drawn to the accumulating posts registering people's sadness and shock. On Twitter, the posts started to produce a social network of bereavement, an intense yet ephemeral relationship organized by the hashtag #RIPGenevieve.

In the week following her death, two established female cartoonists, Diane Obomsawin and Vanessa Davis, published autobiographical online comics commemorating her passing. This essay begins with analysis of Castrée's autographics and then moves to her visual and digital commemoration because I think we need to

acknowledge that any reading of her graphic life narratives now carries with it readers' knowledge of her untimely death. It has become a critical commonplace to assert comics' medium specificity through the intersubjectivity of comics reading: the ways that the reader inserts herself into the gutters to participate actively in meaning-making. In reading, writing, and thinking about Castrée's prematurely interrupted artistic career, I bring together my interests in comics studies, autobiography studies, and feminist theory to explore how her self-representation in autobiographical comics relates to her biographical commemoration on social media and by other cartoonists. I believe that somewhere between the works she left behind and the work we undertake reading them lies a powerful intersubjective practice of meaning-making, one that networks self to other, text to context, and artist to community.

Throughout *Susceptible*, Castrée draws Goglu in domestic spaces that are both safe and dangerous to illustrate her complicated relationship to her family. In narrative structure, *Susceptible* is similar to Barry's *One! Hundred! Demons!* because it subverts autobiography's more typical linear, chronological timeline for a series of named memory-events, such as 'Mummy,' 'Drunkard,' and 'I am Not Well.' This vignette structure refuses the illusion of autobiographical coherence that attends seamless, chronological life narratives. As Shaun Huston comments,

Goglu's fragmentary 'walk' through childhood has this sense of entry and exit from a series of rooms holding different memories that may or may not be directly connected or related to the prior room of memories. Comics is an ideal medium for showing memory, time and mind, as having 'physical dimensions,' dimensions which can be explicitly defined by the spaces of the page and the panel. (2014)

In this way, the vignette structure of *Susceptible* highlights Mezei's notion that women's autobiographies are particularly attentive to the 'domestic effects' (2006) of houses and homes in the representation of female self and identity, from exterior facades to interior design and decoration. Mezei asks: 'Is one's house or home in itself an autobiographical practice? That is, do the design, possession, inhabitation, and decoration of the house articulate and display the self – and which aspects of

the self?' (2006: 84). As a small child, Goglu does not have much power to decorate her house; as an adult cartoonist, however, she does draw the memories of her childhood around the material objects and her two childhood homes, such that the intersections of space and time in her memories become manifested in the narrative structure of the graphic memoir.

Castree's hand lettering enhances the fraught feelings she draws into her memories of home by making the rooms of her memory space feel claustrophobic. She slows down reading time by using a lot of verbal text and presenting it in a cramped and childish cursive style. The juvenile carefulness of the lettering echoes visually the confessional mode of handwritten diaries. The lettering throughout the graphic memoir is the same for characters' speech balloons and the retrospective narration, which Castrée does not contain in caption boxes but rather moves around the panels dynamically. The words of the adult Castrée float between panels, usually in the horizontal gutters, and interrupt the often-disturbing sequences with text that ensures us the child protagonist has survived to tell the tale. In their study of Eddie Campbell's autobiographical *Alec* comics, Craig Fischer and Charles Hatfield observe that Campbell's use of handwriting blurs the conventional borders between 'illustration' and 'text': the calligraphic line is 'the vanishing point where illustration, diagram, pictogram, and writing are all so many hand-drawn extensions of a single artistic sensibility' (2011: 75). Likewise, Castrée's handwriting has an autographic affect, especially because the diminutive rounded cursive is at once girlish and confessional. As much as the reader must strain to read the words, the lettering assumes the quality of 'marked text' Johanna Drucker argues exceeds the 'material presence of words on the page' (1994: 95) to become a system of signification in itself that, in turn, 'forces language into the public domain' (1994: 97). The juvenile, diaristic style of the lettering conveys the cramped, claustrophobic experiences of Goglu's childhood and transcends this abusive past in the very act of transcribing these experiences for the reading public.

A main source of Goglu's childhood trauma is that her mother refuses to perform the maternal emotional labour associated with the home. Moreover, in *Susceptible*, home is doubled and divided, sometimes on the same page, because her parents

are separated and live in different provinces. She spends most of the time at her mother's in Montreal, but visits her father several times. Although her mother is far more abusive than her father, with whom she ultimately reconciles, Castrée shows that both parents are drug users, drinkers, and often need Goglu to take care of them. While she does not excuse this behaviour, Castrée does suggest that her parents are products of specific times and places. Her father is a typical 1970s back-to-the-land hippie who lives in a cabin in the Vancouver Island interior; the narrator describes British Columbia as 'a mythical kingdom where dads go to disappear' (23). Meanwhile, her mother is rebelling against her own conservative rural Catholic upbringing, and Castrée highlights how much gender roles have shifted in Québec through portraits of the three women in her family. In the first narrative sequence, Goglu is at her grandmother's house, going through family photographs and asking about her relatives. She narrates a history of twentieth-century Québec socio-political change through her family: her mother is 'the youngest of a family of sixteen children' born to her 'very Catholic' grandparents (9). Later, in a sequence titled 'I hear,' Goglu overhears that her mother got pregnant while living in Alberta when she was seventeen. When she turns seventeen, Goglu herself become pregnant. She confides in her mother, who for once is understanding (seeing her own mistake being repeated by her daughter) and takes her to an abortion clinic (69). The female reproductive history of Goglu's family maps the gendered history of Québec sexual politics over the twentieth century, from her grandmother's mid-century commitment to the Duplessis ideology of 'revenge of the cradle,' to her mother's post-Quiet Revolution sexual liberation yet adherence to Catholicism, to her own late-century feminism and secularism. In this way, *Susceptible* reflects Leigh Gilmore's observation that 'the cultural work performed in the name of autobiography profoundly concerns representations of citizenship and the nation,' including the 'national fantasy of belonging' (2001: 135) that seems particularly heightened in the context of 1980s Québec and the province's accelerated changes in gender equality.

Although she relocated to Portland before publishing *Susceptible*, Castrée is sometimes compared to her fellow Québécoise cartoonist, Julie Doucet, perhaps because they have both produced French-language confessional comics of

adolescent female artists grounded in the specificities of Québec cultural identity. However, their styles are very different. Doucet's cluttered rough wave comics reflect her post-punk feminist aesthetic and politics. Castrée works in a clear line style of organic shapes and inky washes, with highly stylized layouts that celebrate negative space and play with disruptions to the regular comics grid. Whereas Doucet's bodies are grotesque, Castrée's caricatures are charming and recall the illustrative styles of Richard Scarry, Maurice Sendak, and European folk art. As one reviewer noted, 'the imagery's strange serenity makes its violence still more disquieting' (Randle 2013). The illustrative style of her drawings aligns *Susceptible* as much with children's books as comic books, and its primary settings of the home and the woods – there is little of urban Montreal by comparison – evoke the old world of European fairy tales. Whitlock's observation that autographics often deploy codes from juvenilia is quite apparent in how *Susceptible* plays with and inverts fairy tale references. Amère, her biological mother, takes on the qualities of an evil step-mother, which are amplified by her boyfriend, Amer, and their homonymic names suggest they are a two-headed monster. Her father lives in a cabin in the Vancouver Island interior and is a benevolent wood chopper who builds Goglu her first home at the end of the story, a log cabin near him where she can 'sleep during the day and draw at night' (72). Her migration between the two parental homes ends adjacent to the father who, like the woodsman who saves Snow White from a murderous maternal figure, installs her in a rustic safe house. In this cabin, she begins to draw her life narrative at a temporal and spatial distance: 'I discover true solitude and I savour it,' she recalls (73). This domestic turning point is her artistic birth, and so the red-hooded child on the cover of the English edition has made it through the woods and past the big bad wolf to her own little house where she is safer than amongst her evil maternal family. The little cabin her father builds is her first independent home, and it makes it possible for her to later return to Montreal and get her own apartment, despite her mother's accusations that she has abandoned her family.

Susceptible's echoes and inversions of fairy tale codes is enhanced by its highly stylized layouts. While the dominant layout adheres to the comics grid, and Castrée establishes a rhythm of six square panels to which she returns throughout, she also

interrupts it at key moments with full-page splashes, frameless sequences, and round panels. These simultaneously flag important traumatic moments in her past and introduce an artificiality to the naturalized comics grid in order to emphasize the present narrator's distant, aestheticized focalization of her childhood experiences. This juxtaposition is most obvious in Castrée's representation of herself in bed. In their essay 'The Rumpled Bed of Autobiography,' Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson start with British performance artist Tracy Emin's gallery installation, 'My Bed,' to think through contemporary practices of female life writing that test the limits of conventional autobiography. They write,

Rumpled, unmade, at this contemporary moment the bed is a generative metaphor for approaching contemporary experiments in self-presentation that mix a grab-bag of autobiographical modes, tropes, and histories. Paradoxically, the autobiographical is a conspicuous staging arena for the public world, if one with a foot lingering in the intimate bed of the personal. (2001: 2)

Inspired by their analysis, I read Castrée's unmade beds as material and metaphoric images of self-presentation, and also as metonyms of dysfunctional domestic spaces. The first time we see Goglu in bed she is visiting her father in BC, and the sequence is titled 'Nap' (17). Goglu is a toddler, and she lies awake sucking her thumb next to her sleeping father. As the sequence progresses, we see him waking up to a bad smell that, it turns out, is Goglu's dirty diaper. In a speech balloon that floats over her head rather than his, he says, 'bad little girl! No doing this! Not nice!' (**Figure 3**). The sequence ends there, establishing that when Goglu shares a bed with her father it results in shame about her own body, not of a sexual kind but of its basic functions.

To be clear, there is no sexual abuse depicted in *Susceptible*. Rather, Goglu is traumatized by the shame attached to her physical existence. In their article on beds as cultural signifiers in picture books for children, Maria Nikolajeva and Liz Taylor suggest that 'beds are areas of power struggle between child and adult, as well as a border between self and the world, private and public' (2011: 145). Goglu's Montreal

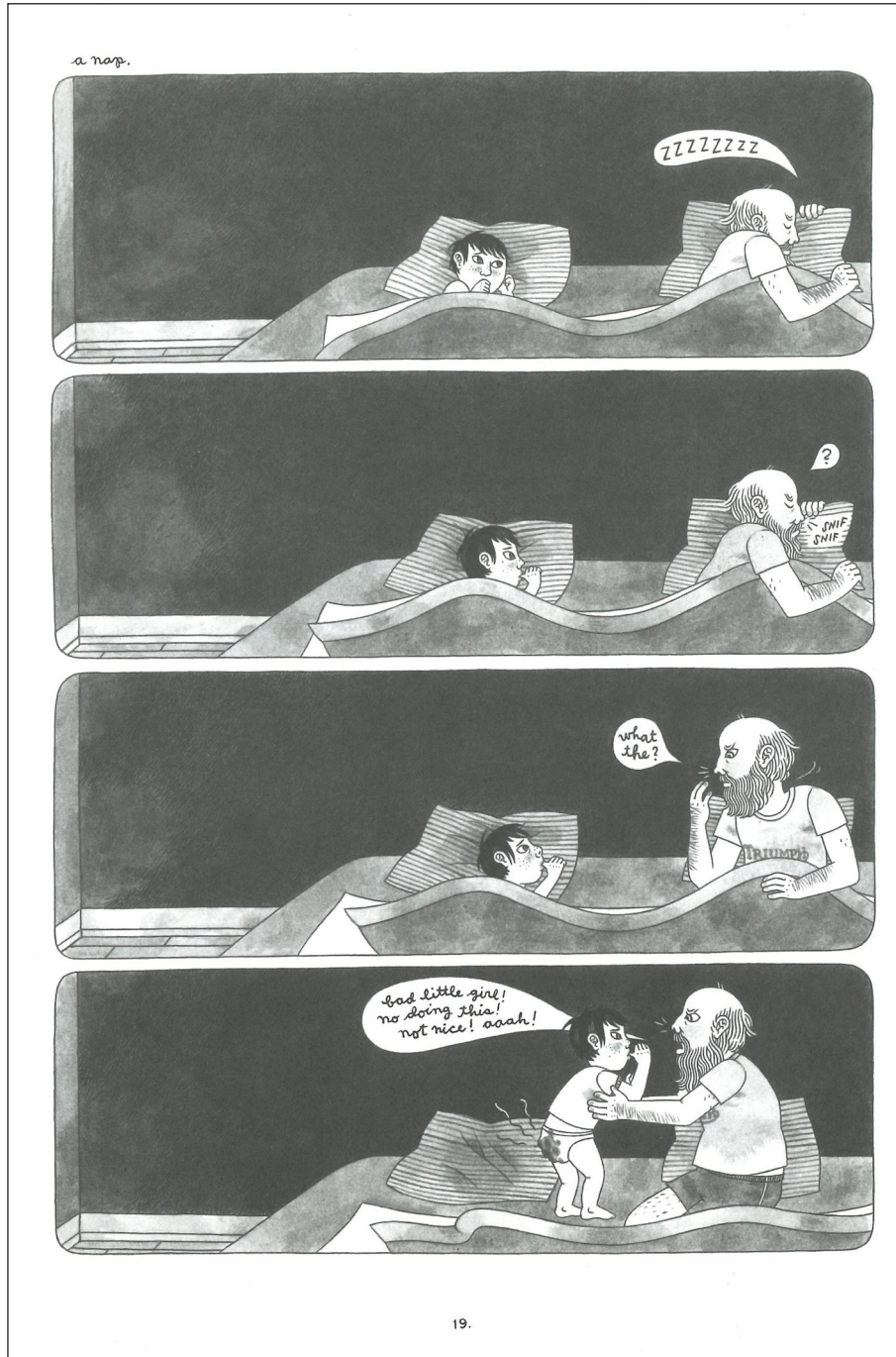


Figure 3: 'Nap' from *Susceptible*, page 17, © 2012 Geneviève Castrée, courtesy Drawn & Quarterly.

bed becomes just this kind of material, physical border zone, whether she wakes up to the sounds of a fire in the next bedroom and is sent back to bed in a state of fear and confusion, or her sleep is disrupted by her mother's drunken infidelities. Perhaps the most significant moment of Goglu's bed-space as border zone between self and world, protection and punishment, is a circular panel that disrupts the dominant grid layout of much of the comics narrative to flag the moment as particularly traumatic (**Figure 4**).

Goglu lies in bed listening to her mother's voice blame her for all their problems. The last speech balloon, clearly the voice of her mother's boyfriend, carries to her

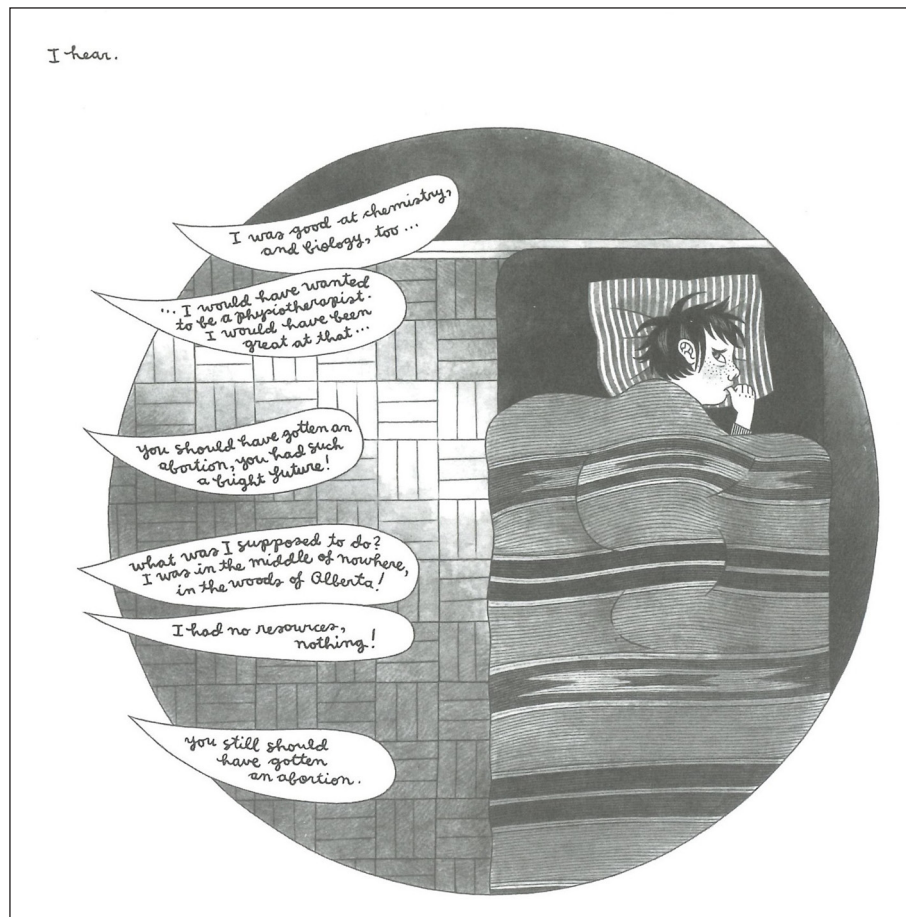


Figure 4: 'I hear' from *Susceptible*, page 35. © 2012 Geneviève Castrée, courtesy Drawn & Quarterly.

ears the cruel comment, 'you still should have gotten an abortion' (35). The unattributed speech balloons float into Goglu's bedroom like a noxious gas, invading her intimate space with the poisonous effects of her domestic environment. Goglu sucks her thumb like an innocent child, yet she is gaining adult knowledge and no amount of self-soothing can save her from its noxious effects.

When Goglu later breaks down and calls her mother a 'drunkard,' she is punished by being sent to bed without any television for three weeks (43). As she lies on top of her sheets, Goglu internalizes the punishment and tries to smother herself with her pillow, thinking 'I don't know how to be normal, I only know how to act stupidly' (43). Her bed is a lonely place of exile and self-interrogation that destabilizes Goglu's sense of herself as a social agent. There are many other bed images in *Susceptible* that function similarly, as the rectangles of beds become both internal framing devices and the stages of childhood memory. As such, Castrée's beds become a network of associations recurring across the entire work, and even beyond it, to perform what Thierry Groensteen calls 'braiding'. More than just a visual motif, braiding occurs when the information and organization of a panel connects to everything else on the page and in the text, sometimes even beyond that one text, so that symbolic and metaphoric repetition is part of the text's design and forms the architectonics of the whole work: 'images that the breakdown holds at a distance, physically and contextually independent, are suddenly revealed as communicating closely, in debt to one another' (2007: 158). I believe that Castrée's beds are braided throughout *Susceptible* and that their complex symbolism moves outside of the bedroom, into the other rooms of the house where space and time meet at the scene of memory.

The sequence that follows 'I hear,' titled 'Mummy,' shows how the bed-space moves with Goglu, yet it is often verbally and physically intruded upon by adults. In this sequence, Goglu has retreated to the basement, to watch television cocooned in a sleeping bag, while adults upstairs drink wine and smoke hash (36). Her mother comes downstairs because, as the narrator says, 'When she drinks, she often needs a friend, so she comes and finds me, wanting us to play together' (36). Amère climbs on top of Goglu in her secondary bedspace, laughing at her and saying 'you look like



Figure 5: 'Mummy' from *Susceptible*, page 36. © 2012 Geneviève Castrée, courtesy Drawn & Quarterly.

a mummy' because Goglu has wrapped her face up in the sleeping bag to avoid her mother's bad breath (Figure 5).

The only way Goglu can end this intrusion is to submit to her mother's desire to play with her, and so she gives her a piggy back up to the kitchen. It all ends badly, when Amère comes back downstairs and looms over Goglu, saying 'You're ashamed of me? Huh?' (37). The child is accused of being a mummy and also ashamed of her mother, subverting conventional domestic roles and affections. Castrée's beds and related domestic settings become material sites for a network of spatialized traumatic memories. The domestic effects of beds in *Susceptible* is so closely tied to

feelings of shame, guilt, and loneliness that when teenage Goglu starts to have sex, Castrée hides this experience visually under a blanket fort (66). Over the first panel of the bed fort, the narrator says that they did 'things which aren't too serious but I still want to keep them private' (66). Just as the teenagers shut out the adults to experiment with sex, so does the cartoonist shut out the reader from this intimate experience. The bed fort is a childish space in which Goglu seems to come of age sexually, and the joyful 'heehee!' and 'hoo!' speech balloons around it suggest that she needs to build her own domestic interior to escape that of her family.

Susceptible ends with Goglu's assertion of her independence by moving into her own apartment in Montreal. Rather than reconciling her childhood traumas by drawing Goglu in a bed of peace or pleasure, the final circular panels depict her lying on a shag rug (**Figure 6**). Suspended in white space, the narrator writes, 'I'm eighteen/I have all my teeth,' and after the page flip there is an even smaller circle of the rug under which the narrator concludes, 'I can do whatever I want' (77). The diminishing

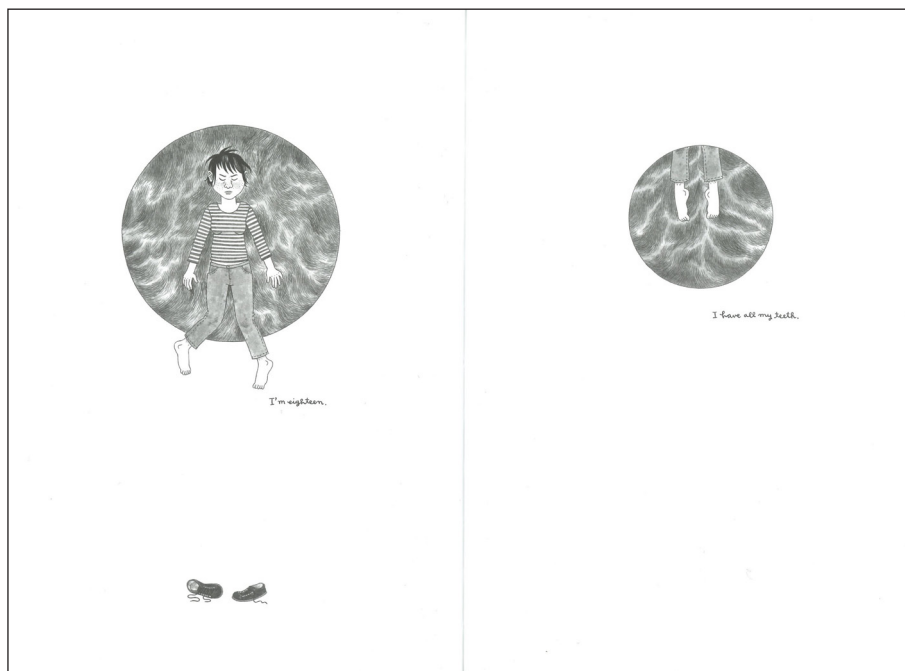


Figure 6: 'I'm eighteen' from *Susceptible*, page 77. © 2012 Geneviève Castrée, courtesy Drawn & Quarterly.

circles on these final three pages close the story down cinematically, mimicking the shutting of a camera iris. They also use the circular frame that *Susceptible* hitherto deploys to contain Goglu's traumatic experiences and make them stand out from the regular grid, thereby illustrating through framing and panel shape that she has overcome the domestic effects of her abusive childhood. The obscure reference here to her teeth situates Goglu as the subject of a modernizing Québec. I believe this line suggests she has escaped the rural tradition of prenuptial dental extraction: in parts of French Canada (and other countries) it was common practice for a father to pay for his daughter's teeth to be extracted and replaced with dentures prior to marriage as a dowry gift to the husband. This practice, which is still within living memory in the region, saved the woman from years of tooth pain in areas with few dentists and the man from having to pay for dentures later on (Gordon et al. 2011). However, Goglu is a modern young woman, living in her own apartment, freed from this patriarchal tradition and from maternal shame and guilt. She lies on top of her own rug, not under blankets, on her back, open to the future rather than hunched in the fetal position fearful of the present. The cramped, claustrophobic cursive of her diaristic lettering combines with lush monochromatic illustrations, irregular layouts, and empty space to communicate the tensions between belonging and foreignness, neglect and filiation, and control and fragility, that structure the narrative. Castrée's beds thus become a network of associations spread across the entire work, and they also extend beyond it.

Few apart from close friends knew of Castrée's brief terminal illness until her husband, the musician Phil Elverum, started a GoFundMe page to help cover their expenses. When she died in July 2016, the alternative comics and music communities – she also recorded several albums – mourned collectively on social media. In a year of the higher profile celebrity deaths of Prince and David Bowie, Twitter had already become a venue of collective bereavement. Candi K. Cann observes that there is now 'a common syntax of grief' to social media mourning and the standard practice is to post a picture of the deceased as part of the visual rhetoric of memorialization (2014). Numerous photographs of Castrée circulated as Twitter users quickly identified themselves as mourners. As well,

Tweets and online obituaries started to share a series of illustrations Castrée published in *The New York Times* in June 2015, titled 'Blankets Are Always Sleeping' (Figure 7).



Figure 7: 'Blankets Are Always Sleeping,' from *Drawn & Quarterly: Twenty-Five Years of Contemporary Cartooning, Comics, and Graphic Novels*, page 449. © 2012 Geneviève Castrée, courtesy Drawn & Quarterly.

In this series, Castrée draws herself underneath specific blankets, whose history is identified in clear cap lettering, over eight full-page colour illustrations. The single speech balloon on each page announces the value of sleep: 'Sleep is Peace'; 'Sleep is Sanity'; 'Sleep is Love' and so on. The first page, 'Sleep is Peace,' explains: 'I find security in blankets. When I start worrying about all the people I have flaked on, and all the ones who have bailed on me, I hold tight and let the appeal of a restful night take over my body.' An adult Castrée lies under a Hudson's Bay point blanket her dad gave her; at the bottom of the page, lying in the other direction, are her dad and his girlfriend, sleeping peacefully underneath a 'cheap comforter (drawn from memory)'; a speech balloon emanating from her sleeping father says, 'Ever think of calling?'. Castrée collapses separate spaces and times into the frame of the bed and unites them under the blankets.

In the 'Blankets' series, Castrée revisits the bed-space as a site of memory imagined as an inverted fairy tale. 'I am the Princess and the Pea's perfect opposite,' she writes, 'She sleeps on a pile of mattresses in the hopes of not feeling a thing. I sleep under thick, heavy blankets for the same reason' (Devlin et al. 2015: 449). The sadness that Castrée draws and describes in this series recalls the prefatory vines sequence of *Susceptible*, in which the narrator wonders 'if my depressions could be caused by emotions accumulated by me, but also by my parents, my ancestors even/or if those difficult moments are simply provoked by what falls onto me' (6). As much as her graphic memoir is about her conflicted relationship with her mother and her possibly related depression, Castrée's different self-images on the French and English covers, in addition to her 'Blankets' self-portraits, invite a re-reading of the figure of the sad girl as purely passive and tragic. Indeed, Castrée's self-portraiture intersects with the rise of Sad Girl Theory related to fourth wave feminist practices of self-portraiture on social media, especially Instagram selfies, and recent artistic and theoretical investigations of this figure in popular culture (see Fournier and Holowka). Artist Audrey Wollen describes her project, *A: Sad Girl Theory*, as 'a gesture of research that is structured around the idea that the internalized suffering women experience should be categorized as an act of resistance [...] Sorrow, weeping, starvation, and eventually

suicide have been dismissed as symptoms of mental illness or even pure narcissism for girls. I'm proposing that they are actually active, autonomous, and political as well as devastating' (Tunncliffe 2015). As well, Sad Girl Theory engages with feminist theories of affect as that which can bind communities together, in this case via social media, and form what Ann Cvetkovich calls in a different context 'archives of feeling' (Fournier). While Sad Girl theory has its limitations, notably that most of its proponents are white, middle-class, social media savvy activists, it nevertheless challenges the popular idea that sad girl self-portraiture is purely vain and vacuous with the possibility that these images resist the overly objectified and commodified young female body. In the 'Blankets' series, Castrée draws herself as sleepy and sad, but I believe these self-images are equally ambivalent to the bed-space images in *Susceptible*. Moreover, in keeping with the androgynous self-portraits on the books' covers, Castrée draws herself against the dominant gendered norms of white femininity. Across these autographics, the artist uses beds and blankets as the staging ground of her complicated feelings of belonging and isolation, suffering and resilience, thereby challenging the sexual objectification of young women's bodies by redrawing the domestic effects of beds as non-erotic spaces of identity formation, and reclaiming sadness as both debilitating and resistant.

When her fans mourned collectively online, the image of Castrée cocooned under blankets in her bed became a visual sign of the hashtag #RIP in ways that strip this motif of its autographic complexity. Castrée's untimely death and the phenomenon of online collective mourning transposed her self-portraits in bed to the collective work of memorialization, offering her fans a visual rhetoric of solace, even if she herself rarely found beds and blankets quite so consoling. The ambivalent topos of the bed as border zone and staging area of the self in Castrée's autographics was resignified on Twitter and liquidated of its complexity, so that the signified became the poster's own grief and formulaic, sentimentalized hope that the deceased is 'resting in peace.' Users performed themselves as members of the grieving community of alternative comics and music fans because her relative obscurity in mainstream culture positions those who mourn Castrée's loss as insiders to a specific subculture.

As much as we are constantly producing ourselves online in the everyday autobiographies of Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and so on, this 'social media culture of self-generating documentation' has 'consequences for death and bereavement' (Gibson 2014: 224). Castrée was relatively absent from social media, but her 'Blankets' self-portraits are available online for cutting and pasting. Their deployment as part of the visual rhetoric of grief shows how the meanings of images shift when they are remediated. It also highlights Margaret Gibson's argument that 'digital remains' cannot easily be privatized back into a possessive source of ownership once they become social network objects. As Castrée's graphic self-representations transform into the bereaved's performances of identity and solidarity, their signification shifts in ways that contest the boundaries between 'mine and yours, alive and dead, subject and object' (Gibson 2014: 233).

Castrée's death also produced several of what I will call graphic elegies: short, first person comics about her death posted online by other cartoonists. I will discuss two of them by way of conclusion. Diane Obomsawin is an established Montreal cartoonist, graphic novelist, and animator for the National Film Board of Canada who was a friend and mentor to Castrée. Her distinctive minimalist style of drawing humanoid creatures tempers tragedy with playfulness in her works, including her graphic biography of Kaspar Hauser and her autographic, *On Loving Women*. A few days after Castrée's death, Anders Nilsen wrote an editorial for *The Comics Journal*, 'Remembering Geneviève Castrée,' that includes a twelve-panel graphic elegy by Obomsawin (**Figure 8**).

Obomsawin draws herself on a hot Montreal day writing a letter of gratitude and well wishes to Geneviève. The drawings contrast her own realistic setting to Geneviève's imagined celestial journey. Of course, epistolary direct addresses to the deceased long predate both comics and the internet, but Gibson notes they are a common observable feature in social media mourning that help the bereaved maintain a social bond with the deceased (2014: 227). In this case, the digital publication of Obomsawin's short comic with Nilsen's tribute allows others to enter her space of mourning and demystifies grief as part of everyday life, the lighting of a memorial

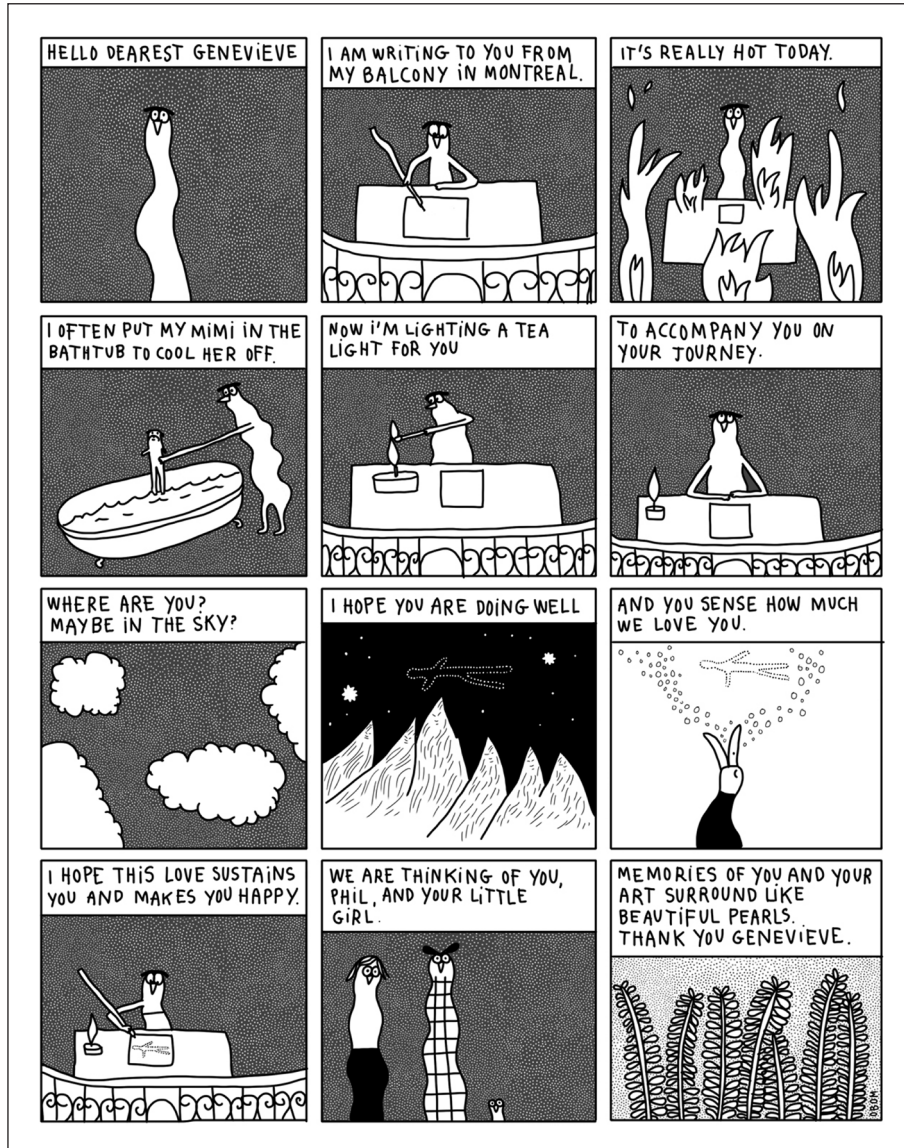


Figure 8: 'À Geneviève Castrée (1981–2016)' by Obom, © 2016, courtesy Diane Obomsawin.

candle juxtaposed to giving her pug dog Mimi a cold bath. Obomsawin draws herself writing to the spirit of Castrée; in so doing, the living cartoonist writes Geneviève's death into her own life narrative, drawing her affective attachment to the deceased as a way of marking their shared identities as Québécoises, as artists, and as women.

American cartoonist Vanessa Davis also posted a graphic elegy for Castrée in her own distinctive style of colourful watercolours and pencil sketches. Best known for her autographics *Make Me a Woman* and *Spaniel Rage*, Davis is typically far more personal, candid, and confessional than Obomsawin. 'A Cut from This Weekend' was posted on *The Paris Review* blog on July 13, 2016, also less than a week after Castrée's death. It works as a vertical scroll, so that readers follow the panels down in the same way that we read the Twitter scroll, in the form of online comic termed by Scott McCloud the 'infinite canvas' (2000). Form does reflect content here, as Davis depicts her own experience reading about Castrée's death on social media at the same time that she has cut herself badly; the physical pain and the sudden grief mingle and make her cry. The final panels are self-reflexive: she draws herself reading people saying they are crying and then she starts crying. The sequence concludes with the irony that her feelings about Castrée's death are almost unrepresentable, that social media and comics are inadequately serious forms for this level of grief, but here she is posting a comic about how she will post it on Facebook anyway.

Like Obomsawin, Davis draws Castrée's death into her everyday life narrative. Even though she did not know Castrée well, the shock of the untimely death of another young female cartoonist forms an attachment between them, and the network sociality of the bereaved community compels her to perform as one of its members. The title, 'A Cut From this Weekend,' describes the physical cut to her hand and the emotional wound of learning of Castrée's death; it also plays with the idea of the film cut, a transition from one scene to another, as if Davis's corporeal and affective experiences of the news are interruptions in her autographic proper. This graphic elegy, then, conflates the trivial and the tragic, the digital and the embodied, in a form of auto/biographic bereavement. Both of these graphic elegies do a lot of work: they assert that Castrée's loss is personal as well as public; by drawing themselves coming to terms with the loss at home, both cartoonists show solidarity with Castrée's interest in the domestic effects of women's autobiography; and, by posting their comics online, they assert the value of Castrée's life and work in relation to the larger comics community. The fans and cartoonists who posted online about Castrée's death demonstrate that the landscape of online mourning is an affective

topography whose contours are defined by a visual rhetoric in which the dead are both present and absent, haunting us with self-created images transformed into digital remains and becoming the source of graphic elegies. In this way, we can read across Castrée's autographic persona, and its remediation online, a series of performances of the vulnerable self in relation to other selves, each one shaped and iterated through the genres, forms and platforms of their expression. Finally, this irony does not escape me: in death, Castrée's persona has been extended online the very affection and protection that is missing in her childhood graphic memoir.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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