4 “Come Healing of the Spirit, Come Healing of the Mind”

The Evolution of Care in Sylvain Biegeleisen’s *The Last Postcard* and *Twilight of a Life*¹

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Confronting dementia often leaves family members not only helpless but also speechless, having insufficient vocabulary – verbal as well as affective – with which to come to terms with the condition. Taking care of and caring for a parent living with dementia is often unbearably difficult. This frustratingly mutual helplessness (of the person living with dementia as well as the relative-cum-caretaker) is surely a challenge. Yet, recognising these difficulties can also be an asset in dementia care because it foregrounds the necessity to find non-conventional means of communication. As a medium transcending the quintessentially verbal while reaching into visual, oral, and kinaesthetic modalities, film can illustrate, elicit, and encourage such new forms of care.

In what follows, I turn to a diptych of documentary films that depict family relationships and care in ageing, films that provide a rare and unique opportunity for viewers to follow the developmental trajectory of care relationships. The bio-political representation of the very old is too often comprised of “bed and body work,” leaving no room for dialogical exchange. The very old hence become a body with no embodiment, namely, a body literally devoid of metaphor and robbed of symbolic values. As a window into the dynamic caring relationship between adults, I analyse here two autobiographical documentary films. These films, *The Last Postcard* (2009) and *Twilight of a Life* (2015), were made seven years apart, by the same filmmaker, Sylvain Biegeleisen. Both focus on his relationship with his mother at two different points in her (and accordingly his) life. *The Last Postcard* documents their bond when the mother, Dianne, is 87 and fully in command of her mental and, to a considerable extent, her physical capacities. Seven years later, her son/the film director comes back to be with her, when the now-94-year-old Dianne is completely bed-ridden and not always lucid.

Sylvain Biegeleisen was born in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1948. The two documentaries about his mother, Dianne, were filmed in Belgium, in French, and are co-produced in Belgium and Israel. Dianne and her first

husband (Meir) fled from Nazi-occupied Belgium, were caught in France, and were sent to a concentration camp from which Meir did not return. Dianne survived, was reunited with her two sons, returned to Antwerp, remarried (to Jacque) and there had a third son, Sylvain, who left his home in Antwerp at the age of 18 and immigrated to Israel, where he has lived since then. This turbulent family history, which is never fully revealed within the documentaries, serves as a background for the issues discussed and exposed in the first film.

Watching the films in the chronological order of their making is a rare opportunity to examine and contemplate intra-psychic transformations in caring behaviour, and parent–child role reversal in the context of ageing. This chapter will describe how the first film raises issues of consent and obligation, but seen chronologically, the later film, *Twilight of a Life*, moves from the hierarchical, fraught relationship in *The Last Postcard* to a relationship that acknowledges vulnerability and is more respectful and, interestingly, reciprocal, and slower. In analysing care attitudes and practices in chronological sequence across the films, I hope to reinforce a concept of elder care that is not only holistic and compassionate but at the same time relational (Cohen-Shalev, “The Ties”; Hendricks) as well as creative (Bellas et al.) and evolving in accordance with late-life twists and turns.

Furthermore, the view of old age in these two films, seen together, captures an ambiguity inherent in older age of simultaneously possessing a sense of self and otherness about oneself (Cohen-Shalev, “Both”). The social space of the frail older person is characterised by many ambiguities: role reversal (of parents and children) as well as rolelessness; the incongruence between social image and self-image; and the replacement of linear time by cyclical time (Gubrium and Holstein; Hazan, *Old Age, The Limbo People*). Instead of the expected resolution in the social space, dilemmas become suspended; oppositions are dismantled and presented in their bare essentials (Hazan, “Beyond Discourse”). Where there used to be a firm, linear, and hierarchical logic, there is now a loose, cyclical reflection that may also be relevant to care.

Role Reversal and Care in Literature on Ageing

In gerontological as well as popular discourse, one often finds references to the notion of role reversal, where parents and children switch roles of care giver and care receiver. Early parenthood means taking care of young children. Late parenthood means, for more families than ever before in history, that adult offspring take care of ageing parents, while the latter may become physically, practically, and cognitively dependent on their offspring. Popular culture in general, and the mainstream film industry in particular, have over the past couple of decades given some attention to the necessities and difficulties embedded in elder care.

The growing Hollywood list features, for example, *Nothing in Common* (1986), in which Tom Hanks plays a glib Chicago ad exec whose parents split up, forcing him to take sole responsibility for his diabetes-stricken dad (Jackie Gleason); *The Savages* (2007), with Philip Seymour Hoffman as a theatre professor who, with his sister (Laura Linney), must figure out what to do with their confused 85-year-old father; or *Still Alice* (2014) and *What They Had* (2018), about caring for a spouse/parent with Alzheimer's Disease (played by Julianne Moore and Blythe Danner, respectively). Indeed, movies about older people, and the challenges their children face once they become a parent's primary caregiver, populated every corner of the Sundance 2020 festival (Mann).

Within the public discourse, taking care of the older person has led to the perception of this age as a "second childhood," dependent on others (Covey). A parallel theoretical conception is found in Bryan Turner, who discusses childhood and old age as homologous in terms of social liminality and disengagement, or what he calls lack of reciprocity. The derogatory view of older people as childish and dependent, and the "elderspeak" (equivalent to baby talk) sometimes used to address them, are an indication of what Jenny Hockey and Allison James call the discourse of infantilisation:

The cultural pervasiveness of metaphors of childhood within the discourses surrounding aging and dependency . . . has become "naturalized." It is seen as somehow inevitable, as the way things are. Through this culturally constructed model of dependency, many of those in old age and others who are infantilized – the chronically sick or disabled, for example – may be made to take a conceptual position alongside children on the margins of society.

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Such a discourse of infantilisation, or childishness, is a powerful mechanism of social control. The discourse becomes so taken for granted that, although prescribed from the outside, it can turn into a lived-in reality, the so-called "mask of ageing" (Featherstone and Hepworth, "Images," "Mask").

Another indication of the social control of ageing is that research on late-life care relationships is mostly geared toward the practical aspects of caregiving (Ask et al.; Evans and Lee; Godwin et al.). However, for a simultaneous, two-way caring interaction to take place effectively, a certain degree of psychic maturation is necessary for both parties involved in the caring relationship. By this I mean that reciprocity underlies the move from the practical component of "taking care of" to the humanistic concept of "caring for," especially where caring for the old is concerned. It is a perception of the care relationship as a mutual, two-way interaction that transcends the dominant, functionally hierarchical perception of

care. However, such a shift is not simple. It requires seeing old things in a new light; a paradigm change propelled by a new point of view and new premises. Rudolf Arnheim argues that artistic development in late life consists in moving away from a hierarchical mode into holistic integration. Arnheim's distinction originated in the need to account for stylistic changes in the art of ageing painters of the past; yet, if we take art as the pinnacle of human potential (Jacques), the developmental move offered by Arnheim could have relevance to care relationships. Simply put, caregiving and care-receiving are interchangeable in actual situations, and the reversal of roles is more externally induced than internally evolving.

My approach to care follows Eva Feder Kittay ("Ethics," "Getting," *Learning*), who in a series of works developed an ethics of care emphasising relationality that is based on the personhood and dignity of people – including those with cognitive impairments. Such an ethics of care takes caring relationships as a morally fundamental form of relationship and value. The moral agent is a caring self, who can look past their own immediate needs and desires to take on the cares of the other as her own. Such care foregrounds the affective connection between people as prior to a calculative reason that binds self-interested persons. In this view, people without disabilities are only "temporarily abled." Dependency relationships between "unequals" are often inevitable, and therefore assistance should not be seen as a limitation but as a resource. Care, in this vein, should be gender-blind; as Amelia DeFalco also contends, both men and women are equally dependent on care for their survival and therefore are equally obligated to provide care for others.

Increases in longevity over the past few decades have had an impact on reciprocal caring relationships in which both the cared-for and the caretaker are old. What used to be a midlife person taking care of an older person is becoming an old person taking care of a very old one. The psychological barriers formerly separating adulthood from old age, thus providing security (albeit illusory) for the carer, have collapsed with growing life expectancy. The carer, now older, is often in the age brackets once allotted to the elderly. Care in the family has become the old caring for the still older. The result is a combination of reduced physical stamina and, to no lesser degree, the intra-psychic pressures stemming from felt proximity to death and dying on the part of the family member providing the care (Qureshi and Walker).

Part I. "Hide and Seek" Duality in *The Last Postcard*

The Last Postcard commences with Sylvain's efforts to gain his mother's consent to the filming. Approaching 60, he is driven by a palpable sense of urgency to record his mother's story. It should be more so for 87-year-old Dianne, but, for various reasons, the pressure is less immediate for her. She has to be coaxed. Sylvain's motivation for the project is clear-cut,

while his mother is ambivalent about the filming. He wants to expose his family's history; she is more given to hiding and suppressing. The necessity for Sylvain to detonate family secrets and find some closure has been burning in him for decades. Though not all is said, and large chunks are missing from the filmed narrative (e.g., the whole of Sylvain's adult life in Israel), there are occasional hints of family secrets, instigating a desire in the viewer for completion and contextualisation.

The title of the film refers to a postcard written by Dianne's first husband, Meir Chupko, while he was in a concentration camp – the last she heard from him before he was killed. Back in Antwerp, Dianne remarried and had a third son, Sylvain. The postcard was hidden by Dianne from her family, together with her first wedding ring. Years later, the postcard mysteriously disappeared. Dianne suspected her husband, whose jealousy of his dead predecessor made him try to erase his memory. Many years after the death of Jacque, and a few weeks before the making of the film, she discovers that her firstborn son "stole" the postcard as a souvenir of a father he was too young to know. Thus, the postcard as an object, and its real and imagined existences, uncovers a complex family story.

We also learn that Sylvain left his home in Antwerp at the age of 18 and immigrated to Israel, where he has lived since. In an interview after the release of *Twilight of a Life*, he mentions his mother's anti-Zionist sentiment (Biegeleisen). While not overtly acknowledged in *The Last Postcard*, it is very likely that leaving home and his mother against the background of the Holocaust and committing himself to Zionism in adolescence must have been a major force in the director's life and personality and a cause for significant tension between the two. It seems that what persuaded Dianne to consent to the making of the documentary was the embedded promise to get her son back:

SYLVAIN: Why did you agree to make the film?

DIANNE (HANDS CLENCHED, SITTING STIFFLY VOICE HARDENED): Why did

I agree? To gain my son. I had felt there was a something separating us, a gap. . . . I didn't understand where it came from [pause] but I felt it. . . . [increasingly restless] I don't know how to bridge this gap between us. . . . I don't know. I don't understand, I don't know (close-up on her hands nervously lighting a cigarette).

There is an implied question here: "gaining" a son (we will come back to the use of this mercantile jargon later in the chapter) seems such an obviously strong argument that we are left to wonder why there should be any hesitation or conflict. Yet there definitely is. The gain is explicit, yet there is an implicit loss too. Though for Sylvain there was something to be gained by the project (a sense of closure in a turbulent lifelong relationship), for Dianne it also spelled ambivalence. It meant risking a position of control. By consenting to participate in Sylvain's project, she

might find herself in an inferior position. Put differently, she would have to relinquish her well-kept position of taking care of a child, something she is certain of having fulfilled to the utmost, and instead must confront her son's perspective on their turbulent relationship. As the instigator and as the director, Sylvain also takes the lead. He is directing, while Dianne consents to be directed, for the first time.

Death Did Us Part: The Past Revisited

In *The Last Postcard*, Sylvain takes his mother on a tour of the fragments and ruins of their past in order to reconstruct a story of their dyad that will give them meaningful closure and a sense of resolution. The focus is on the movement from a more confrontational/hierarchical relationship to one of mutuality. Therefore, Sylvain intentionally avoids going into the gruesome details of the war and the Holocaust, careful not to offset the focus.

The film makes clear that as a school child, Sylvain remembers feeling left out, rejected by a dominant mother and unable to connect to his father. This is the motivating force behind his persistent efforts to involve Dianne in his cinematic project. Yet, when he eventually succeeds, he meets a different narrative, one that openly clashes with his. In Dianne's narrative, her love for him was unconditional and total. Being a mother and raising and taking care of her family had been at the centre of her life. Her life story clearly validates her argument, leaving her son little room for debate. She sums up her life project in the statement: "I have succeeded in keeping the family together." With this hard truth, mother Dianne acknowledges Sylvain's core narrative of parental deprivation but at the same time transcends it. When Sylvain tries to defend his claim for recognition of his lifelong hurt by arguing that "a small child is expected to respond like I did," she reminds him that an adult with a childhood wound, justified as it may be, is expected to take responsibility for his life. It is significant that, at this point in the film, the director-son appears for the first time in front of the camera. The two protagonists are filmed seated side by side in the open space of a beach resort. The medium two-shot is the first one to show both people in a film where Sylvain is usually behind the camera, heard but not seen. Moving in front of the camera is a visual parallel of mutuality.

From this point on, the camerawork signals a move from a proto-therapeutic conscious endeavour by the filmmaker to a reciprocal caring platform. The collaboration in front of the camera transforms their parent-child dyad into an equal dialogue of care and respect. The two protagonists have moved from confrontation to collaboration, with the old child's (Sylvain's) anxiety re-centring on the welfare and survival of the other as a whole person.

Reading Sylvain's struggle with unresolved childhood difficulties through the lens of Erik Erikson's model of life span ego-development

(*Life*), we can place Sylvain in transition between the stage of middle adulthood, singularly concerned with the dilemma of Generativity and Stagnation, and the eighth and final stage, in which the Ego is occupied with Integrity versus Despair. My understanding, using Erikson's terms, is that making *The Last Postcard* facilitated this transition. Sylvain comes to realise that the hurt he had insistentlly clung to throughout his life has become a manifestation of Ego-Stagnation. The pull toward Integrity, nurtured by his mother's sharp straightforwardness (in itself a manifestation of Integrity) offers an opportunity to re-work, perhaps for the first time, unresolved ego dilemmas and climb the ladder of ego development (Erikson et al.).²

As Integrity replays earlier dilemmas and binds these dilemmas together within a life-review process (Butler; Erikson, *The Life*), it reshapes and reframes issues of trust, autonomy, guilt, identity, and care. Taking centre stage, Integrity means – as Dianne makes clear – renouncing childish narcissistic hurts and doubts, painful as they may have been or still are, and replacing backward circular movement with compassionate consideration of the present.

From a Past Tense to a Present Calm

A change of tone, from interpersonal tension to calm wistfulness, characterises the closing moments of *The Last Postcard*. The camera now mirrors, as its movements become restricted, the slowing down of activity in advanced old age. It is a new reality for the old Dianne, and these last scenes capture her learning the steps. Climbing a home ladder to get to the upper shelves of a kitchen cupboard shakes her confidence; the news of a newborn great-grandchild has her in tears (tears of happiness, but still a change in affective vocabulary). The ending of *The Last Postcard* becomes a quiet lamentation for old age, descriptive and not analytical, its orientation turned from the vagaries of the past toward the conditions of the present. Sylvain returns to his position behind the camera, becoming more a sympathetic observer than an interested participant. *The Last Postcard* becomes in these later scenes a contemplation of the condition of old age. What the camera reveals is that behind the hard-headed determination of a Holocaust survivor who had kept her family together against all odds lurks an 87-year-old human being, who, for the first time in a life crowned by physical stamina and strength of character, experiences a different vision of her life and is forced to negotiate a difficult relationship with her son. Sylvain's camera continues to record, but now, perforce, it records the uncertainty and anxiety of physical decline. Sylvain does not disappear, but he seems to demand no attention, and his being behind the camera yields itself for the sole purpose of attending to his mother. In this new capacity as a caring attendant, he accompanies her when she is hospitalised, through moments of frailty, neediness and

anxiety. At her bedside in the hospital, we get a glimpse of what is in store for the next film. Although neither protagonist could have predicted the future, the nature of care and caring behaviour that are expressed in the last moments in *The Last Postcard* is a nod towards their meeting seven years later that is characterised by reciprocity, mutuality, and creative imagination in care relationships, as depicted in *Twilight of a Life*.

Part II. “Sunset, Sunrise”: Life-Giving and the Reciprocal Model of Caring in *Twilight of a Life*

The Last Postcard is about the repair work of mother–son relationships, reconciling their loaded personal history of memory and loss. In *Twilight of a Life*, repair work is substituted by a different kind of work that I wish to term, after Monterescu and Hazan, a “business of the present.”

Watching the two documentaries one after the other is a disorienting experience. *Twilight of a Life* introduces the viewer to dementia-driven changes of identity and the self and the enigmatic emergence of a person whose parental identity is only partially present, or not at all. A few months before the filming of *Twilight of a Life* started, Dianne became bed-ridden, occasionally confused, and requiring full nursing care. She was returned to her home from the hospital, and most of the 70-odd minutes of *Twilight of a Life* take place in the room she is confined to, her only living space made into a location of filming. This confined space is the location of a momentous transformation, already glimpsed in the final scenes of *The Last Postcard*, in the nature of care, moving towards a reciprocal exchange of affection and support.

The opening shot is a frontal close-up of Dianne’s face, with the camera positioned vertically above it. For viewers who have not seen *The Last Postcard*, being put “face to face” with the protagonist’s ravaged, yet curiously alive, portrait of extreme old age can be a disturbing experience. Viewers who saw her in *The Last Postcard* will probably be doubly shocked because they may not recognise the woman in the face in front of them. The strong-minded, immovable matriarch who defended the stability of her family has been changed almost beyond recognition.

Twilight of a Life opens, in the same way as *The Last Postcard*, with Sylvain trying to establish a “working contract” with his mother; however, this is a different task altogether seven years later. The ethics of consent are more challenging when lucidity is in doubt, and *Twilight of a Life* documents a condition of consciousness in very old age that expresses on-off fluctuations of lucidity in dementia. When Sylvain presents the project to her as “a film about you and me,” it is not any longer “you the mother and me the son” but two human beings in the process of rediscovering each other, with knowledge of their past nexus put aside, or

practically "forgotten," in line with Anne Basting's imperative in the title of her book about dementia, *Forget Memory*. Sylvain and his mother's caring interactions are marked by confusion and lucidity, disorientation and re-orientation, to breed a caring universe singularly their own. This environment of care is contingent upon a willingness (in both) to convert confusion and bewilderment into the certainty and immediacy of the senses. These in turn depend on suspension of binaries and hierarchical categories.

Starting in utter stillness and with no discernible backdrop, the seemingly protracted silence of the opening shot is broken by Sylvain in voice-over: "This is a film about you and me," he says, not asking for permission but rather announcing it. In this exclamation the issue of consent becomes superfluous. In place of formal consent, the opening quickly arrives at a proposition of equal partnership. Instead of Sylvain bargaining for her consent, Dianne plays along with her son as a partner, making an offer he cannot refuse. Moreover, she offers herself as a script writer.

They discuss the question of utility versus futility in a fascinating dialogue:

DIANNE: In nine out of ten, you gain [pause, then emphatically]. Nothing! [right hand pointing toward the camera, drawing a circle denoting "zero"]

SYLVAIN: The point is not necessarily to make profit, but to create emotions.

DIANNE [EVIDENTLY MAKING AN EFFORT TO ORGANISE HER THOUGHTS]: That is all? What is this "emotion?" We gain from it? What are you trying to say? On one hand you say we gain nothing, on the other hand "emotion." If there is emotion, it means people will come to watch the film. You are talking nonsense. . . . You can't imagine the clientele we are going to have. So on with the work!

Dianne actually "means business." It is not the first time she uses mercantile vocabulary: as previously noted, at the beginning of *The Last Postcard* she confesses to having been persuaded to take part in the film because of the prospect of *gaining* her son back. In *Twilight of a Life*, she is outright excited by the prospect of gaining an audience. The gain-loss paradigm has become a central organising principle in a life that has seen both sides in the extreme and has learnt to skilfully manipulate it for sheer survival. The choice of vocabulary stays the same, yet the content has changed, from survival (in the first film) to benevolent altruism, from material gain to arousing emotions, in her words, "touching" others. It is touching other lives that profoundly connects mother and son, taking their partnership onto another level. Contrary to their previous effort, where a film was intentionally made for a specific relational system, here

it is a wide group of others who will be touched. Dianne makes a move in social consciousness, from self-oriented to other-oriented.

Dianne's change in the second film involves more than the expected decline of health or mental deterioration. At the end of *The Last Postcard*, Sylvain left her wistfully awed by the growing need to come to terms with ageing and loss of autonomy. Seven years later, we meet a Dianne who is totally dependent and yet curiously joyful and uncannily optimistic. As the film unfolds, she manifests an affectionate, emotionally expressive and socially outgoing side, at odds with the affectively, expressively reticent self of the previous documentary. At one point, looking directly and intensively at her son, she says, "I love you." Sylvain is heard sobbing in the soundtrack. After *The Last Postcard*, this moment of mutual care is moving because of the sadness embedded in the situation, through the direct, childlike authenticity of the affect, together with the realisation that Sylvain may be hearing it for the first time.

The close-up of the very old Dianne, uttering the words "I love you" while looking directly at her son, conveys the emotion as if it had been given birth with the words rather than having existed before. In the film, the emotion finds its place in the very moments when the mother does not fully recognise the man in front of her as her son. Even when her memory is failing, and her home as it used to be is no longer there, even when she is constantly dependent on others, Dianne opens her eyes and says to Sylvain: "I love you." Or she is seen caressing his face with her hand, without saying anything.

Collapsing Categorical Barriers: The Underlying Logic and Internal Validity of De-differentiation

The power of emotional and affective connection also characterises the more abstract discussion that the mother and her son have concerning the purpose of the film and how it is meant to influence its audience. The opening dialogue exemplifies the old woman's leap of consciousness as a dialectical process. First, Dianne produces a thesis: gain as a material thing and therefore unlikely to be obtained out of a film about "you and me." Sylvain, in response, makes a distinction between material gain and emotions (antithesis). Criticising her son for this very distinction, Dianne provides a synthesis whereby emotions are profitable in and of themselves. Touching the lives of people is not dichotomous or antithetical to making a profit but a real possibility of gain in and of itself. This flip, from mercantile materiality to things of the soul, going back and forth (a moment later she inquires as to the possibility of selling the film) demonstrates mental agility that is far away from the limiting and negative picture of old age drawn by gerontology or popular culture. The dual meaning of value, that of profit and that of merit, plays out at the service of a partnership with a significant other, the man behind the

camera who seems to be willing to participate in spreading a message of pressing importance.

Once the commercial prospects of the film-to-be as well as its purpose (touching the emotions of the audience) are established, there remains the question of content, namely, what it is to be about. 94-year-old Dianne, disabled and bed-ridden, emphatically announces her plans:

SYLVAIN: When you talk about life and death, it touches everyone.

DIANNE: I'm building something that rests on the future. Not the past . . . the future.

S: Are you talking about death?

D: I'm talking about life . . . about life, not about death. . . . Don't people see enough death on TV? Do they need a supplement? We need to talk about life!

In these lines, future and life, like profit and emotion, the concrete and the abstracted, merge together. With limited future and little time left ("I don't have much time left," admits Dianne in one of her many painfully clear moments) the present, combined of multiple fleeting moments, becomes a unity rather than something to de-construct analytically. This emergent temporal unity depends on the abolition of the past and with it of the impending future. *The Last Postcard* is about life too, yet it has the familiar chronotope of a "road movie," organising time vertically and linearly. This sense of time is no longer operative in this second documentary, replaced by a centrifugal, circular atemporality. Where cinematography de-constructed time for psychological re-construction in the first film, it now captures moments of a dyadic interaction.

Contraction of Time, Care, and the "Business of the Present"

Whether forgetting, suppressing, or consciously ignoring the past, restructuring time to exclusively address matters of the present transforms the demands of affective care. Having established a resonant rapport with the person his mother has come to be, most of *Twilight of a Life* is devoted to Sylvain experimenting with an altered caring repertoire. Such care is attuned to Dianne's momentary, sense-centred experience. Most memorably significant for the issue of care are their mutual excursions in the realms of sound, touch, movement, and taste. The complete return to sensual feelings is manifested by the mother's expressed joy in touch, taste, sound, and movement, restricted as it is. "Caressing is a language . . . it is everything!" says Dianne in eloquent French, at the same time converting language into almost abstract, pure sensuality as – in a close-up – her hand caresses/talks with her son's hand.

Moving from touch to sound, the role of music in therapy, especially for people with dementia, is well documented in nursing literature and research (Bellás et al.). In *Twilight of a Life*, the effect of music is presented in terms of interpersonal contact and pleasure rather than in the usual cognitive terms. Sylvain sings songs by Jacques Brel, accompanying himself on the guitar, not so much, it seems, to improve memory or promote continuity of self in Dianne but for the sheer pleasure of the intimacy these sounds foster. In one scene he sings to his mother a song he wrote especially for her, a song characterised by tonal simplicity and repetition, in which her joy in mouthing the refrain is evident. It is music *qua* intimate communication, more than a therapeutic tool.

Dianne provides a unique illustration of the actual twilight, blending light (lucidity) and darkness (disorientation) in a way that evokes the many types and stages of dementia in old age. Lying in her bedroom, in her house, she asks Sylvain: "There is here a bedroom, where I am sleeping . . . I don't know where they put me . . . where am I exactly?" Sylvain, with a plate of food in his hand, reassures her that this is indeed her home. Dianne says: "Bon appetit. . . Since you say you are in my home, I am saying 'Bon appetit.'" This is one of many examples illustrating how Dianne reflects on her own lack of orientation. She identifies the working elements (recalling the conventional etiquette of interpersonal behaviour) and employs them while acknowledging her fractional awareness. With her son as a partner, such played-out patterns of interaction also become signals of introspection, for example, when she says: "You always want to stay at home, to have a hand that warms you. But where is my home?" These moments of dialogue hinge on and are realised through interaction. As Dianne sums it up: "You are the one that gives me strength. When we are two, we have so much strength."

Conclusion

The two films discussed here provide several important insights into the dynamics of care in old age, more specifically regarding the move from a personal to meta-personal mode of relationship. My reading highlights old age and dementia as an expression of "other-wise" personhood: a state of lost hierarchies, social as well as interpersonal hierarchies, and the egalitarian sense-centredness that potentially emerges instead. When the very old are represented through the bio-political lens of "bed and body work," this leaves little or no room for dialogical exchange. This is where *The Last Postcard* and *Twilight of a Life* offer something new to this paradigm, even if they are not the only films to do so. Moving beyond the accepted role of a child-cum-caretaker, Sylvain assumes another, more pertinent role: that of participant observer. This may be key for communicating with a parent with dementia.

Instead of the apparent rationality of consent, autonomy, agency, and rights (*The Last Postcard*), *Twilight of a Life* shifts into a contract of relationality and caring. What distinguishes *Twilight of a Life* as a creative portrait of the very old living with dementia is its humanistic normalisation of old age. Relational care, in the sense exemplified in *Twilight of a Life*, is contingent upon *normalising* old age. When Sylvain asks Dianne how old people should be treated by others, she replies with astonishing simplicity, in a single word: "Normal." Such normality expresses itself in simple things of the present (Hazan, "Holding"): joint activities (singing, touching, affective responsiveness) and humour; open, wide laughter; and self-irony ("I'm not old enough to know"). Interaction, no longer informed by past or future conflicts hinged on lost or anachronistic roles, becomes a trans-generational experience of bare humanness, made up with the work of here and now in its concrete and sensuous antics, touch, smell, taste, movement, and sound.

Notes

1. This paper incorporates some material that originally appeared in Amir Cohen-Shalev, "From the Unbearable Weight of the Past to the Bare Lightness of the Moment," *Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 2016, vol. 43, no. 3, pp. 83–96.
2. This kind of self-treatment is reminiscent of that undergone by Dr. Borg, the elderly protagonist in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957). Erikson found this inspirational (see Cohen-Shalev, "Both" and *Visions*).

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