THE SPATIAL IMAGINATION OF ACCELERATED GLOBALIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN-LANGUAGE NOVELS

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By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates how contemporary German-language novels respond to changes in the ways in which people imagine living in relation to others under current conditions of globalization. I pay particular attention to how literary texts evoke alternative frames of belonging and modes of living under conditions of social transformation. I use theoretical contributions from literary scholars as well as cultural and social theories to identify literary models of transnational, cosmopolitan existence. In particular, I draw on Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* to assess how literature grapples with issues of human space as their narrators and characters navigate socio-cultural, spatial and political boundaries. The selected novels explore everyday life on various scales of space. In *Die Vermessung der Welt* (2005), Daniel Kehlmann engages with Eurocentric notions of the global scale in the early modern era. I contend that the disjuncture between his protagonists’ models of fluid space in contrast to the dominant model of absolute space results from cultural conditions associated with the capitalist logic of competition and individual success, which leads to unethical, alienating forms of intersubjectivity and a lack of agency. I then elucidate how Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Heimsuchung* (2008) and Kerstin Hensel’s *Im Spinnhaus* (2003) question cultural dimensions left intact in Kehlmann’s world of flows by depicting the domestic space in eastern German provinces in order to unsettle patterns of behaviors that have resulted in fixity despite social
transformation. Lastly, I assess how Perikles Monioudis’ *Land* (2007) and Feridun Zaimoglu’s *Liebesbrand* (2008) challenge modern approaches to space by engaging with questions of interpersonal proximity and forms of affinity associated with postmigrant existences in translocal settings of post-Cold War Europe. With recourse to the discourse of globalization, I contend that these novels grapple with perceptions and experiences of globalization through themes of alienation, stagnation in the face of acceleration, and difficulty in creating emotional bonds. By investigating the everyday interactions and behaviors that occur in the respective imagined worlds, I uncover notions of Germanness and cultural conditions that the authors associate with the contemporary malaise depicted in their novels.
This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends for all of their support along the way. Profound gratitude goes to Adam for his unending encouragement and patience. I also extend deep gratitude to my mother, who has been there for every step of the journey. Many thanks to my faculty mentors and fellow graduate students of the Georgetown German Department. I also dedicate this work to the memory of Otmar Drekonja – his enthusiastic belief in me kindled the fire.

Brooke D. Kreitinger
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation investigates how contemporary German-language novels respond to changes in the ways in which people imagine living in relation to others under current conditions of globalization. I pay particular attention to the ways in which literary texts evoke alternative frames of belonging and modes of living in conditions of social transformation. I use theoretical contributions from literary scholars as well as cultural and social theories to identify literary models of transnational, cosmopolitan existence.

My approach is informed primarily by the work of the so-called spatial turn. In contradistinction to the paradigm of a priori, absolute space as a container or surface for humans and things, the “spatial turn” developed out of postmodern thought and espouses a notion of space as co-produced by social interaction, which includes the perception and use of space as well as the symbolic level of representations of space (Bachmann-Medick 292). Inasmuch as works of imagination and discursive constructs form the meanings of spaces and vice versa,¹ common images such as the “global village” or in virtual terms the “World Wide Web” exemplify ways in which many of us have come to imagine an interconnected world. These notions, while implying certain vague features of globalization, such as interconnectedness and, with “village,” an almost idealized sense of traditional community, are symptomatic of the diffuse associations of “globalization.” These images are not solely formed by the “reality” of global dynamics; they also represent images according to which globalization has been shaped. Despite the vagueness of the term, which seems to render its processes and dynamics inscrutable,

¹Henri Lefebvre poses a tripartite concept of space comprised of representations of space (eg the conceptualizations of urban planning, science, etc.), representational space as lived through its symbols and images, and the empirical level of daily spatial practices (33). Eduard Soja builds on Lefebvre’s conceptual triad with his notion of “thirdspace” according to which space is always both “real-and-imagined.” See Soja’s Postmodern Geographies and Thirdspace. In Space, Place and Gender, Doreen Massey addresses the meaning of human space specifically in relation to gender, problematizing how notions of gender have been constructed in relation to certain notions of place and space and vice versa.
globalization has not simply come into being on its own. Globalization is about politics and relationships of power. Therefore, understanding the ways in which space is organized by and in turn organizes social relations is central to making sense of the diffuse notion that is globalization. This is precisely where I see my approach to literature contributing to understanding how globalization shapes literature and how literature shapes globalization.

Speaking to the overdetermined character of the word, Ulrich Beck complains that trying to define globalization is like “attempting to nail a pudding to the wall” (“Cosmopolitan Society” 17). Therefore rather than attempting to nail down a definition, I will point out certain aspects of globalization discourse and the global imagination upon which I base my further analysis of literary texts. In language employing spatial and temporal imagery and directly referring to features of space and time, David Held and Anthony McGrew describe globalization as the stretching of social, political, and economic activities across political frontiers, the increasing magnitude of interconnectedness in many spheres of social existence, the accelerating pace of transborder interactions and processes via worldwide systems of transport and communication, and the deepening enmeshment of the local and global (2-3). Two aspects of this description are particularly relevant for establishing the theoretical framework for my study of contemporary German-language literature in an era of accelerated globalization. First, this description expresses how processes of globalization modify the spatial-temporal imagination and human experiences of space and time. Inversely, this description exemplifies how understandings of globalization are cast in a register of spatial metaphors and therefore form our imagination of the world.
Secondly, Held and McGrew’s description makes clear that globalization can accurately be applied to previous historical eras. As for the current phase, the term “globalization” itself was infrequently used before the 1990s but has since become a buzzword, indicating a widely held belief that globalization is something that first arose in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In efforts to revise this belief, Otmar Ette insists, “Die aktuelle Phase beschleunigter Globalisierung ist ein Spezifikum, kein Novum. In ihr sind noch immer die alten Bewegungsmuster früherer Globalisierungsschübe vektoriell gespeichert” (44). Importantly, Ette further argues that globalization is the result of successive historical waves of acceleration that are integrally bound with the early modern, modern, and postmodern eras (41). Accordingly, I suggest that the significance of the relationship between globalization and the historical periods of modernity and postmodernity (which I will for the time being loosely define as the second half of the twentieth century, but which I do not believe is a rupture with modernity) is linked to the foundations of European and German society and culture as well as the troubling existential conditions associated with modern and postmodern times. This link therefore indicates a necessity to attend to the specificity of our current phase of accelerated globalization as it relates historically to particular contexts and frames of reference.

This is particularly salient in regards to my discussion of Daniel Kehlmann’s Die Vermessung der Welt. The novel returns to an earlier phase of globalization in the late Enlightenment era that marked a shift in European understandings of global space and representations of the world. In the novel, Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Friedrich Gauss,

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2 In addition to our current phase, Otmar Ette outlines three previous eras of accelerated globalization, including the worldwide colonial expansion of the Iberian powers at the end of the fifteenth century, a second phase from the mid-to late-eighteenth century, led primarily by France, England, and later the Netherlands marked by the intensification of trade and communication systems, and a third phase in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century with the United States being the first non-European power to participate in a still primarily European-lead forced modernization and neocolonial division of the planet’s regions and resources (Ette 42-3).

3 See Giddens, Runaway World 26; Schlussbericht der Enquete-Kommission (Abbildung 1-1), 49.
whose ground-breaking work contributed to understandings of world space as a network of isothermal flows and intersecting trajectories, are portrayed as trapped in a mode of existence based on the then prevailing understanding of space as absolute, which I argue, clashes with their own novel understandings of the world and impedes their ability to relate to others. At this juncture between absolute and relativistic understandings of space, I see Kehlmann critically responding to the current phase of globalization, questioning which historical, culturally-specific forms of knowledge enable us to understand globalized existence.

The shift in experiences and perceptions of time and space and the understanding of globalization as a long process of different waves of acceleration inform two further foundational claims for the following study. First, the current transformations in understandings and experiences of time and space are perceived and imagined in the discourse of globalization as unsettling, uncertain conditions beyond the control of the individual. Indeed, the conditions of globalization appear to echo or even exacerbate conditions of modernity and postmodernity, such as time-space distanciation, time-space compression, desynchronization, and “disembodiment.”

My second claim is that images and experiences of globalization are simultaneously constructed by and mirrored in conceptualizations of space and time, literary depictions of the world, and cultural and social forms. On this basis, I argue that an approach that employs literary theory in connection to recent social and cultural theories on conceptualizations of space, spatial behavior, and globalized existence.

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4 In *The Consequences of Modernity*, Sociologist Anthony Gidden explicates “time-space distanciation” as relations between “absent” others who have no face-to-face interaction with those in a certain place but who shape the form of that place by means of their social influence (18-19). The notion of time-space compression, theorized by David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, is defined as “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves. I use the word ‘compression’ because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us” (240). Consequently, time horizons shorten to only the present and space seems to shrink, resulting in images such as the “global village” (Harvey 240). In *Beschleunigungen*, Hartmut Rosa diagnoses desynchronization as the experience of simultaneous acceleration and deceleration resulting from when the individual feels that different levels of time which comprise the frame of his/her life have gotten out of sync with one another. By “disembodiment” I refer to the supposed triumph over the body that has been embraced by many in the age of cyberspace. For more on this see Wertheim 24-26.
and spatial experience is a highly productive means to investigate how contemporary texts grapple with current conditions vis a vis past and present German social orders and cultural forms. Such an approach offers insight into how cultural practices contribute to the processes of meaning-making in the current age of accelerated globalization.

In the following chapters, I analyze five recent German-language novels: Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Heimsuchung* (2008), Kerstin Hensel’s *Im Spinnhaus* (2003), Daniel Kehlmann’s *Die Vermessung der Welt* (2005), Perikles Monioudis’ *Land* (2007), and Feridun Zaimoglu’s *Liebesbrand* (2008). These literary works were selected based on the configurations of their fictional worlds from diverse perspectives, which include East and West German authors of the post-68 generation and authors with migration backgrounds. The novels are connected loosely by genre, particularly regarding the literary function of movement. I underscore the function of movement because, first of all, figural motion imbues the human space of a literary world with meaning.\(^5\) Secondly, movement indicates subjective possibilities in a certain setting. Whereas *Die Vermessung der Welt, Land, and Liebesbrand* are travel literature in a more conventional sense of characters freely traveling and experiencing foreign places, *Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus* depict movement from an inverse perspective. That is to say that the narrative focus of these last two novels remains fixed on a particular microcosm to explore patterns of often coerced movement that define that space. Furthermore, each novel has its own particular historiographical interest and taken together, the narrated time of the novels spans roughly two centuries. This allows for a rich diachronic appraisal in that the novels stage returns to various

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\(^5\) Michel de Certeau underscores the centrality of figural movement by equating it with narration. In his theory *The Practices of Everyday Life*, “enunciative focalizations” are one of the three main narrative actions that necessarily create the space of a story. These focalizing perspectives, associated with both figures and narrators, articulate the story by an act of distributing and practicing the places in it (130).
moments in Germany’s past to reconsider how German culture shapes and registers experiences of globalized time-space and conditions of social transformation on different scales of space.

The chapters are arranged based on the spatial scale of the imagined world and chronologically based on the time frame of the story. In the first chapter, Kehlmann’s *Die Vermessung der Welt* engages with the global scale in terms of Eurocentric conceptualizations of spatial order in the early modern era. In the second chapter, Erpenbeck’s *Heimsuchung* and Hensel’s *Im Spinnhaus* focus on the domestic space of the family home in eastern German provinces from the mid-nineteenth century up to the post-unification era. In the third chapter, Feridun Zaimoglu’s *Liebesbrand* and Perikles Monioudis’ *Land* create a spatial order and corresponding spatial experiences associated with a transient existence in diverse translocal metropolitan settings in post-Cold War Europe with an eye to familial migration backgrounds. Importantly, all of these authors also engage with issues of human space on the thematic levels as their narrators and characters cope with subjective experiences and navigate social, spatial and political boundaries as well as the public/private distinction.

It is necessary to contrast Kehlmann’s global scale with the East German authors’ depictions of the domestic scale because the authors question significantly different aspects of globalization, subjectivity and culture. Kehlmann’s story of globalization addresses the white, male subject of the Enlightenment, who was free to move about and define the world through his intellectual work. By contrast, Hensel and Erpenbeck challenge both celebratory notions of globalization as a world of flows as well as reactionary appeals for traditional community by critiquing gendered and classed subjectivities of the domestic sphere which remain stubbornly unchanged despite transformation. The translocal scales in the final chapter differ from those in the first chapters, inasmuch as Monioudis and Zaimoglu shift the Eurocentric spatial imagination
to the east and south and challenge norms of ethnicity and gender in increasingly pluralistic European society as a result of migration and European integration. By exploring these different scales of space, I gain a multidimensional image of globalization that goes beyond the diffuse associations delineated above.

My selection of texts is further informed by larger trends in the literary field. The formal and thematic aspects of these trends suggest that they are essential ways of grappling with and staging the experiences of globalization. *Die Vermessung der Welt* can be located in a wave of recent popular (re)tellings of world travel in the age of exploration. Amongst these are Ilija Trojanow’s *Der Weltensammler* (2006), which tells of Richard F. Burton’s experiences of assimilating into foreign cultures while traveling and living in India, eastern Africa and Arabia in the nineteenth century; Felicitas Hoppe’s *Verbrecher und Versager: Fünf Porträts* (2004), which interrogates the (masculine) drive for exploration, imperialism and colonialism in juxtaposition to socio-political conditions in Germany from the seventeenth to the twentieth century; and Lukas Hartmann’s novel *Bis ans Ende der Meere* (2009), which explores questions of aesthetic representation as well as the consequences of invasive visits (ie the introduction of disease) on indigenous populations from the perspective of painter John Webber as he travels with and documents Thomas Cook’s third expedition around the world in search of the northern passage.

*Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus* can be counted among the large number of recent literary works that build on the literary tradition centered around the trope of a disintegrating house. Like Hensel’s and Erpenbeck’s texts, many of these works are set in rural settings in former East Germany. For instance, *Regenroman* by Karen Duve, *Landnahme* by Christoph Hein, *Endmoränen* by Monika Maron, and the short stories “Sommerhaus, Später” by Judith
Hermann and “Handy” by Ingo Schulze, all feature decaying houses in connection to various tribulations or failures of individuals, relationships, families, and communities, whereby they also address the context of post-socialist, unified and globalized Germany. The diachronic look at life in the provincial microcosm is one aspect that sets Hensel’s and Erpenbeck’s novels apart from these other texts.

Lastly, Land and Liebesbrand fit in with a current of contemporary literature and film by authors with migration backgrounds, whose protagonists live highly mobile lives of multiple attachments to various locations, maintain or seek ways to foster relationships across borders, and address their familial past. In doing so they question reified notions of ethnicity, culture, and belonging. Examples include Fatih Akin’s film Auf der anderen Seite (2007), Yade Kara’s novel Selam Berlin (2003), Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s story Der Hof im Spiegel (2001), Yasemin Samdereli’s film Almany: Wilkommen in Deutschland (2011), and Zafer Senocak’s novels Die Prärie (1997) and Gefährliche Verwandtschaft (1998). These works go beyond the themes and tropes of the exploited Gastarbeiter, of victimization of Turkish women by Turkish men, or of a diaspora community living in isolation from ethnic Germans which were common in earlier works by authors of migration background. They also shift from previous concepts of immigration and assimilation by depicting protagonists with migration backgrounds who blend in and maneuver strategically in German culture but who nonetheless choose to move from their “new home” to explore alternative ways of living.

These novels were published in a narrow timeframe; however, their selection is justified given my claim that the current conditions and discourse of globalization reflect a transformation of the spatial imagination and experiences of space and time in heretofore unseen ways. One way in which the novels articulate these experiences is through a palpable sense of malaise and sense
of being out of synch with the times. I therefore chart the ways in which the novels associate alienation, detachment, and stagnation with conditions of globalization.

In *Globalization and Literature*, Suman Gupta argues that literary works in the current era of globalization convey a sense of social awareness that understands its location and context in terms of world-embracing systems or global interconnectedness. This “global social awareness,” she argues, is “ultimately dispersed in the everyday life of people” and registered impressionistically in literary works as well as assumed and discerned by globalization theorists (23). If literary works in the age of globalization indeed understand themselves as part of a global system and then communicate this global social awareness, the effect this has on cultural notions of space and spatial experience manifests directly in literary texts. In the following, I foreground the specificity of the present era with particular focus on the German context.

**A. Accelerated Globalization: Transformation and Anxiety in the German Context**

Global climate change and environmental destruction, global economic crisis, global war on terror, clashes of civilizations—this collage of apocalyptic images reflects the manifestation of a deep unsettling in the current phase of globalization. I delimit the current phase of accelerated globalization to an ongoing process beginning in the second half of the twentieth century. World War II and the post-war era played an initial role in establishing geopolitical dynamics and advances in technology and communication. In addition, the rapid process of culturally experienced globalization can be attributed to the dissolution of the European colonies and the liberation movements of the “Third World,” the consequences of which are seen in the flows of migration and tourism as well as increased hybridization of cultures in the twenty-first century (Honold “Literature in der Globalisierung” 6). With the end of the Cold War, the rapid
expansion of neo-liberal capitalism and the rapid advances in communication technologies, the current forces of globalization gained their present impetus and features. The ideological and political division of the world into two blocks was replaced by an image of a world without borders as a vast network of people and places interconnected in diverse ways, for instance by the establishment of English as the global lingua franca, and in constant flux due to the unprecedented speeds and volumes of, among other aspects, global trade and capital flows, information and communication exchange, migration, and tourism (Schlussbericht der Enquete-Kommision 50-1).

Since 1989, globalization has developed to be a paradoxical set of processes with uneven outcomes. It has been seen by some as “Americanization” led by the United States and other wealthy countries, with the developing countries of the South playing almost no role, and the divide between the world’s rich and poor continuing to grow (Giddens Runaway 33). In the findings of its inquiry into globalization in 2000, the German Bundestag’s Schlussbericht der Enquete-Kommision highlights the cultural, environmental, and social imbalances that have resulted in the marginalization of cultural minorities, insufficient political representation and negotiating ability for the weakest members of the global society, and an international division of labor that forces many, especially women, into dangerous dependencies (53). What surfaces here can be connected to the discrepancy between what Balint Balla underscores as the uniqueness of the current era of globalization as following almost entirely economic goals in a program of “Wohlstand durch Globalizierung” in the material sense, in contrast to the sociological perspective which registers the dangers, failures, and inequality of globalization (21).

Even among the “winners” of globalization, to which Germany could be counted in terms of its robust economy and as a global leader in exports, there is a sense of foreboding. With a
hint of cultural superiority, Peter Fäßler refers to a survey that shows “Insbesondere im hoch entwickelten Deutschland dominieren bei einem wachsenden Teil der Bevölkerung Ängste vor dem sozialen Abstieg, wohingegen nur noch eine Minderheit überzeugt ist, dass die Globalisierung für den Einzelnen mehr Chancen als Risiken berge” (16). This fear of social decline and sense of risk is befitting of an age of rapid social transformation in which the mutually constitutive relationship between globalization and technology has modified the dominant form of modern society, thereby altering the mode of production, which Farhang Rajee explains, referencing Marx and Engels, comprises “a sophisticated web of interaction in a given society used to meet its material needs and its more important need for meaning” (64). These shifts in the mode of production have rendered traditional industries and skill sets obsolete, leaving individuals and communities to determine new meaningful livelihoods.

This has particular resonance in the German context, where in the course of the reunification, the East German social order and mode of production was replaced in a manner that in ways parallels colonization, as Paul Cooke carefully argues. In my third chapter, I investigate how Hensel and Erpenbeck tackle this perception, showing that globalization appears accelerated from the East(ern) German perspective not because of the common perception of forces of neoliberal capitalism crashing down upon the newly opened states and the take-over by the West German system, but rather because (East) Germans are stuck. That is to say, Germans,

6 Cooke is cautious in his use of postcolonial theory to flesh out the experiences and perceptions of reunification. On the one hand, he shows how reunification can be understood as a form of colonization of the former GDR on the basis of the eradication of the East German economic structure, the exploitation of economic resources, the social elimination of the political and intellectual elite, and the destruction of a collective identity (Representing East Germany 2). He is however also highly aware and upfront about the potential weaknesses to his approach and delineates a number of ways in which the analogy of colonialism does not fit the context of reunification. For instance, Cooke point out that the Treuhandanstalt’s efforts to protect East German companies and jobs in the process of privatization and the monetary union at the exchange rate of 1:1 which benefitted individuals (but not businesses) greatly do not correlate with colonialism (Representing East Germany 5-6).
especially women, are depicted as fixed in subject positions that have been propagated in successive social orders and do not allow for agency unless one collaborates with the system.

Given the extent of change for Germans of the former GDR, continuing higher unemployment rates, comparatively lower incomes in the new eastern provinces, and the perception of reunification as a swallowing-up of the GDR by the West, there has been less acknowledgement that in the 1990s forces of neo-liberal capitalism did not leave the “old” West German model intact as the unshakable foundation of the new Berlin Republic. Stuart Taberner discusses how the certainties of the West German social order built around the “worker as the leading actor on an exemplary path to modernization” (Bude in Taberner “Introduction: Globalisation” 2) were not preserved as the reunified country quickly came out of Cold War seclusion into a new world order ruled by the free market (“Introduction: Globalisation” 2). Taberner points out that for most globalization was primarily an economic phenomenon that threatened the dominant German model. Citing economist Karl-Heinz Paqué, Taberner comments on how globalization was widely registered among Germans as something unprecedented and fundamental happening in the world economy and working counter to their interests (Taberner “Introduction: Globalisation” 3).

The disintegration of the GDR, reunification, expansion of the European Union, new cultural fears in a post-9/11 era, increased migration, an increasingly ethnically diverse and fragmented population that challenges traditional, reified and normative notions of national communities, identities and values, and participation in a still forming (global) social order therefore account for numerous disjunctures in the cultural, economic, and political self-assertion

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7 Taberner describes the “German Model” as derived from the 1950s Wirtschaftswunder era. In this model, companies encouraged long-term value and product innovation and focused on high production values and high compensation for a skilled workforce whose input into decision-making was valued. On this basis, a wide-ranging social framework and adequate safety net was fostered (Globalisation 3).
of Germany. Katrin Sieg addresses Germans’ wariness toward globalization in light of this multi-faceted context, “Germans have good cause to view globalization with suspicion, as the state is unable to control the speed and scope of globalization and unable to absorb its social costs. The postindustrial reconstruction of Europe, the liberalization of the capital and labor market, and increased migration have profoundly rearranged social relations, including the gender order (8).”

The profound transformations in Germany are a vernacular iteration of the larger picture in which supranational bodies, such as the United Nations, NATO, and the European Union jostle for position vis-a-vis national governments, which themselves struggle to determine their own role and maintain sovereignty and relevancy in face of globalization’s rescaling, which includes, according to Saskia Sassen, transnational business networks, diasporic networks, nongovernmental organizations, global cities, new cosmopolitanisms, and transboundary public spheres (5). 8

The shifts and experiences outlined above correlate with Ulrich Beck’s assertions that the present is marked by new forms of risk, uncertainty, and failure that elude the capabilities of our present society based on modern, industrial society to comprehend on political, legal, ethical, and disciplinary levels what is happening in the world around us:

It can be shown that not only organization forms and measures but also ethical and legal principles and categories … as well as political decision procedures (such as the majority principle) are not suited to comprehend or legitimate this return of uncertainty and uncontrollability. Analogously, it is true that social science categories and methods fail in the face of the vastness and ambivalence of the facts that must be presented and comprehended. (Reinvention 10)

8 The discourse of cosmopolitanism has been reinvigorated by ethical questions resulting from a shift to governance based on human rights and the difficulties that arise when nation-states do not adhere to regulations established by supranational bodies such as the U.N. See Another Cosmopolitanism by Seyla Benhabib et al.
Similarly, Anthony Giddens, primarily in reference to European social welfare states, refers to this sense of crisis as the experience of a “runaway world,” a world that seems out of our control and forces us to face unprecedented and likely self-created “situations of risk” and uncertainty in which we make decisions with no possibility of knowing the outcomes, despite the Enlightenment-based promises of more stability and predictability resulting from advances in science and technology (Runaway 20-1). The condition of crisis, of a “runaway world,” is revealed in transitions and transformations across all strata of society by which the foundations of the modern nation-state and industrial society and the Enlightenment-based ontological and epistemological frameworks are rendered inadequate for coping with and ethically participating in the current phase of accelerated globalization.

In light of this discourse, one of my central claims is that conditions of globalization continue or even exacerbate conditions of modernity and postmodernity identified in Western societies. However, the picture sketched out above conveys a somewhat exaggerated sense of helplessness and hopelessness in the face of uncontrollable and vague global forces. Therefore, other versions of the globalization story need to be addressed.

Roland Robertson offers a contrasting perspective by rejecting “the nostalgic paradigm in Western social science” that “suggests that we—the global we—once lived in and were distributed not so long ago across a multitude of ontologically secure, collective ‘homes’” (30). With his much cited notion of “glocalization,” Robertson counters the view that globalization is a homogenizing force that obliterates locality and history (Robertson in Krossa 161). He emphatically argues that throughout the course of modernity, globalization has constructed and required standardized forms of locality (eg neighborhood, city, country) that have been
inevitably both universal and particular (Robertson 36). Indeed, he argues, globalization may have the opposite effect, “… there is in fact much to suggest that it is increasingly global expectations that have produced both routinized and ‘existential’ selves” (35). Robertson therefore substitutes globalization with his term “glocalization.” Glocalization signifies that globalization has involved the creation and incorporation of locality, which in turn contributes to how the world is “compressed” as a whole and may account for the increased interest in local contexts (40).

Political scientist Roland Axtmann takes issue with Beck’s claims that global risks have caused the formation of cosmopolitanism as a social reality which manifests in a “’[cosmopolitan, RA] awareness of unicity and the encounter with the Other,’ which would lead to reflective changes of self-understanding and the opening up of possibilities for action” (Axtmann 28). Axtmann argues that Beck’s privileging of global risks is tantamount to adopting a “globalization perspective,” which Axtmann faults for approaching globalization by questioning transformations to social, economic, cultural, and political macro-structures (29). Therefore, Axtmann urges for “analyses of the social, economic, cultural, and political practices of individuals and their everyday development and reproduction of social forms and individual strategies of action” to complement macro-structures assessed in the globalization perspective and understand the transnationalization of social interaction and exchange that has become a part of everyday life (29).

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9 Robertson points to the standardization of time-space that occurred in the period of 1880-1918 in which world time was organized in terms of particularistic space (Robertson 36).

10 Axtmann takes further issue with Beck’s assertion, which is foundational for contemporary conditions of risk and crisis, that welfare states have begun to “’self-destruct’” (29). Here Axtmann foregrounds that Beck’s theory is missing a political subject, which for Axtmann implies that the state, to which Beck frequently refers without formulating a state theory, is that subject (Axtmann 32). This further supports Axtmann’s view that Beck’s theory emphasizes “anonymous macro-processes.” It is such theoretical shortcomings that leads Axtmann to conclude that Beck’s cosmopolitanism as a social theory fails to convince (34).
The prevalent understanding of globalization has been based primarily on notions and claims made in political-economic terms, but as Axtmann points out, globalization is also the result of decisions and activities of individuals in their everyday lives. This is precisely where literary studies informed by the spatial turn with its focus on social relations can contribute to demystifying the lofty images of globalization and its seemingly out-of-control forces. If one analyzes individuals and their everyday lives in literature, what then does globalization look like?

Farhang Rajaee argues that the combination of the fall of the bipolar world system, the information revolution, and the emergence of postmodern thinking ushered in a new epoch (xiii). He continues, “Its new mode of production requires an imaginative mode of thinking. The existing paradigms do not completely grasp the nature, the consequence, and the implication of the present transformation” (xiii). He concludes that humanity has however not changed; therefore, this imaginative mode of thinking requires a holistic view that accounts for both change and continuity (Rajee xiii). My approach informed by postmodern geographers and poststructural thinkers provides for a holistic view of continuity and change. Moreover, the tension between continuity and change is a central theme for the contemporary authors whose work I investigate. The flip-side of the discourse of existential anxiety and epistemological failure outlined above is a contemporary predominance of reflexivity, that is to say a consciously critical engagement with the tenets of modernity, what Beck has dubbed “reflexive modernity” in contrast to the first “simple modernity” (“Cosmopolitan Perspective” 81). This reflexive mode of operating against and within a particular cultural context is central to the authors’ engagement with the present via the past and central to my approach to space and everyday practices.

11 Beck distinguishes his second phase of modernity from postmodernism, “While the followers of postmodernism emphasize the destructuring and end of modernity, my concern is with what is beginning, with new institutions and the development of new social science categories” (Beck, “Cosmopolitan Perspective” 81)
B. The ‘Spatial Turn’ and German Studies

Fleshing out the relationship between modernity, postmodernity, and globalization is a helpful step in historicizing and contextualizing my use of theories from the spatial turn and locating my study within developments and shifts in academia in general and German Studies in particular.

Rajaee’s identification of postmodern thought as a foundational feature of a new epoch sheds light on the supposed epistemological challenges of the current age of globalization. As modernity’s universalizing “metanarratives,” which defined modernity in European terms and affixed all elements of the world to a “proper” place and rigidly ordered society in terms of a fixed male subject and the model of the nation, lost their normative power with the postmodern shift, Linda Hutcheon identified a postmodern condition of “crisis.” She defines this as the destruction from within of the prevailing theoretical model of modernity based on positivism, empiricism and historicism, which has been dominant since the seventeenth century (Hutcheon 74-5). Hutcheon’s claim of “crisis” echoes the claims made with regard to globalization, namely that existing knowledge paradigms fail in the face of globalization’s dynamics. Whether this is truly the case or not is not what I am seeking to answer. What is more important is that the tensions between those who advocate for the project of modernity and those who align themselves with postmodern worldviews, the differences between which have always been blurry, are reinvigorated and recast in the twenty-first century, in both theoretical discourse and literature. Even as Beck rejects “the followers of postmodernism” because of their emphasis on destructuring and the end of modernity, his notion of reflexive modernization parallels the same reflexivity or critical interrogation of modernity that Hutcheon identified, though as Paul
Michael Lützeler points out, Beck places more emphasis on the modern in the postmodern (Lützeler 6).

This seems hasty to proclaim the death of postmodern thought, insofar as the postmodern engagement with the worldview and practices of modernity have informed German Studies’ engagement with the discourse of globalization. Lützeler concludes that the postmodern worldview and anti-dichotmous philosophy paved the way for globalization discourse. He underscores that postmodern thought has not been opposed to the Enlightenment pursuit of furthering democracy and human rights. He argues that, like modernity, postmodernity was connected to democratization processes in the Western world, and the critique of the metanarratives of modernity was aimed at the “tabuisierten geschichtsphilosophischen Grundnahmen der Aufklärung, nicht aber auf die Zielsetzung einer weiteren Demokratisierung (abzielend auf Toleranz, Gleichheit, persönliche Freiheit)” (4). Lützeler further associates feminism, multiculturalism and postcolonialism with the democratization tendencies of the postmodern condition (Lützeler 4). Out of postmodern thought were also born new fields such as cultural studies and new objects of analysis such as popular culture and the history of the everyday (Lützeler 6). Furthermore, the postmodern manifested in the emphasis on pluralism, on the particular over the universal, the specific over the general, the contingent over the necessary, and the individual over totality (Lützeler 14).

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12 As Andreas Huyssen strongly cautioned already in his classic 1984 article “Mapping the Postmodern,” postmodernism (as a movement in art and literature) gained its emphatic connotation in the United States in the 1960s. In the U.S. it was not a rejection of modernism but a revolt against the modernism which had become a part of the liberal-conservative consensus of the times and turned into an anti-communist propaganda weapon (18). In the U.S. context, it was an attempt to revitalize the heritage of the European avant-garde in an American form (Huyssen 16). Huyssen emphatically asserts, that what was happening in Germany in the 1950s and 60s could not be construed as postmodern (19). West Germany was recovering its “own moderns who had been burnt and banned during the Third Reich" to reclaim a civilized modernity (Huyssen 19). This new set of moderns included among others Brecht, the left expressionists, political writers of the 1920s, Adorno, and Benjamin (Huyssen 19). The crucial point that Huyssen makes is that postmodernism emerged in Germany only since the late 1970s, not in relation to the culture of the 1960s, but in relation to architectural developments and, importantly, new social movements and their critique of modernity (19).
The “spatial turn” is a “Kind der Postmoderne” (Bachmann-Medick 284) and seeks to unseat the modern paradigm of absolute space. The initial shift to spatial thinking was intended to rectify modernity’s supposed privileging of time over space and overcome historicism. In his introduction to the edited volume of literary criticism on place, politics, and identity in post-war German literature, David Clarke argues that one reason for looking at place is that the ‘spatial turn’ “… has been closely allied to theorizations of the ‘post-modern’ condition of Western societies in this same period [post-World War II], which have sought to interpret the alleged distinctness of the epoch in terms of the way it organizes space and the way in which space is experienced in it” (3). Postmodern and other recent theories on space appear to offer heuristic tools for understanding pressing aspects of the current age. With the ever-changing spatial relations in a world of flows and networks, the analysis of the production of space and the interrelation between space and social relations has continued to gain new traction. As Doris Bachmann-Medick frankly states, “Vernetzung als Eigenschaft von Globalisierung macht die Raumperspektive unvermeidlich” (287).

German Studies transformed along with the reshaping of academic praxis and efforts to decenter the Western-centric spatial imagination. As I previously pointed out, the discourse of globalization has been mostly defined by the political and economic realm. A common appeal by German scholars in the U.S. has been for cultural and literary studies to complement the one-sided narratives of globalization with their own contributions, which would also provide new

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13 Michel Foucault is often credited with initially heralding this spatial shift when he claimed that scholars see space in opposition to time, as fixed, dead, and therefore socially and politically ineffectual. In his seminal 1967 lecture in which he introduced his notion of heterotopia, Foucault claims “Our own era, on the other hand, seems to be that of space” (22). Urban geographer Edward Soja, who is credited with coining the term “spatial turn,” enumerates the agenda of shift to space as the need to raise awareness of how human space is wrought with politics and ideology, how space is made to hide consequences, and how relations of power and discourse are written seemingly innocently into the spaces of social practice (Postmodern Geographies, 4).
opportunities for reassessing German culture and literature. Speaking to this in his contribution to the German Quarterly’s 2005 forum on globalization, Frank Trommler appealed for a recasting of the spatial paradigm to be the theoretical gateway to how German Studies can gain from the increased awareness of cultural interconnectedness, which he sees as the field’s most apparent link to globalization discourse:

Fascinated by the ascent of the concept of globalization in the 1990s, I cannot but connect it with the simultaneous demise of the concept of postmodernism. It might sound far-fetched at first but the shift from time and modernity to geography and space as premier frames of reference for formulating the distinctive trends of the present is more than accidental. It is part of a paradigm shift of major proportions that fully emerged with the end of the Cold War when the long frozen geography of the world opened and the tendency to trace social and cultural developments according to their place within twentieth-century modernization gave way to their reevaluation within old and new spatial configurations. (240)

Trommler sees globalization discourse replacing postmodernism (‘postmodernism’ here refers to “a frame of reference that anchored the present in a temporal succession to modernism … and produced an amazing array of theories of the present” (Trommler 18)), or more accurately, his appeal reveals a desire for the demise of certain postmodern methods. Trommler calls for German Studies to reassess modernization within old and new spatial configurations by means of approaches with space as a premier frame of reference, but he wants this done with a

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14 For Sara Lennox, the influence of globalization on German Studies needs to be located in efforts to address Germany’s colonial past, its role as a colonial power, the influence of colonialism on the German metropole, and how various German governments and individuals later interacted with countries and peoples from the “Third World” as a means to correct the Eurocentrism of German history and self-definition (518). Lennox highlights these foci in light of her claim that German history, society and culture would change if Germany’s centuries of ties to the rest of the world were acknowledged and ‘race’ and racialization recognized as foundational to German self-definition (518).
more grounded approach than he thinks postmodernist methods with, as he says, their lack of definitory substance and lack of direction except for play with history have provided so far (Trommler 240). This therefore entails “stripping the current obsession with flows, webs, connectivity, and networks of their cyber-veneer ...” in order for German Studies to “… reconnect our analysis with the older notion of German culture as a culture that for centuries was decentered in numerous regions with their specific identities yet also was coherent thanks to the determination of these regions to belong together culturally and linguistically” (242). Trommler concludes, “And as the shift from time and modernity to space and geography as premier frames of reference gains ground in new theories of the present (not without revisiting modernity and projecting a second step beyond it), German Studies find new access to century-old concepts of German culture beyond its nineteenth-century fixation with the nation”(242).

Trommler’s indications for analyses by means of the spatial paradigm to recognize that Germany was “networked” and interconnected with many cultures in many ways long before the current era of world-wide flows and networks may also be seen as a call for German scholars to find a location for Germany in the “cyber-veneer” of the globalized spatial imagination. Korieh and Okeke-Ihejirika validate Trommler’s sentiments in their comment that “Integral to the transformation and integration that has occurred [in the post-cold war period] is the attempt to negotiate the “local” within the broader framework of the global” (3). Trommler’s appeals for unearthing concepts of German culture invoke the scholarly engagement that arises from concerns with societal shifts in the present era of revived nationalisms, new violent cultural conflicts, and a desire in Western culture in the face of qualitatively new uncertainty and risk to embrace the ego-centered ways of life and absolute truths of “simple modernity” to make sense of the world and oneself.
In this context of a return to or perpetuation of unreflexive modernity, the work of literary and cultural studies vis a vis globalization discourse has more to accomplish than unearthing historical concepts of culture. Anne Sophie Krossa explains, as it developed out of political economy, the discourse of globalization has largely followed the conventional model of modernity and modernization, namely as social transformation that follows the exemplary paradigm of the West, founded on progress-based transition toward a highly-developed and democratic society (160). This echoes Doreen Massey’s claim that neoliberal capitalist globalization is spoken about as inevitable, as a description of the world, when it is really an image in which the world is being constructed, and this image functions with a “cosmology of ‘only one narrative’” that “reduces simultaneous coexistence to place in the historical queue” with regions of the world “left behind” and expected to catch up to the West (For Space 5). Therefore, diminishing the “cyber-veneer” of the spatial imagination of globalization by connecting those flows and networks to specific cultural and historical contexts and practices could work toward cultivating correctives to the prevailing image of globalization as Western modernization. To this end, the unevenness and local reception and construction of globalization would be brought into focus.

Because the worldviews of both modernity and the postmodern era inform the construction of the discourse of globalization, the tension between these competing worldviews is one that must be foregrounded regarding the current age. Old foundations and worldviews persist and new ones are sewn together in resistance to but at the same time out of the tattered or liberated fragments of the old models. In the meantime, there are gaps between the seams that seem to result in a condition of (cultural) ‘existential crisis.’ Grappling with these gaps is the
work I see being carried out by the contemporary authors in this study. Understanding these gaps is one goal of my engagement with these recent novels.

One problem with Trommler’s advocacy of “Space instead of Time: Recasting the New Paradigm,” as his title asserts, is that he perpetuates the supposed antagonism between space and time that was the initial impetus at the outset of the spatial turn. It has long since been acknowledged that any engagement with space must also address time. Indeed, the concept of space at the root of the spatial turn is a relative one; it therefore necessarily depends on bodies interacting in space and time. In fact, this gets at the crux of how the “spatial turn” can be applied in literary studies and to the heart of the debate on whether or not the “spatial turn” evidences something qualitatively new. Attention has been paid to space and place in literary studies previously, and when one mentions the relativity of space and time, this harkens back to Einstein’s theory of relativity and Nietzsche’s perspectivism, which so greatly affected modernist artists and authors. This is in part what leads Karl Schlögel to laconically claim: “Spatial turn: das heißt daher lediglich: gesteigerte Aufmerksamkeit für die räumliche Seite der geschichtlichen Welt – nicht mehr, aber auch nicht weniger” (68).

In this context, Detering, Seifert and Winkel provide insight regarding ways in which the ‘spatial turn’ is able to offer something qualitatively new. The trio responds in part to Sigrid Weigel’s influential article from 2002, “Zum ‘topographical turn’. Kartographie, Topographie und Raumkonzepte in den Kulturwissenschaften.” Weigel’s starting point is that concepts of

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15 For a thorough discussion on the origins and development of the ‘spatial turn’ in various disciplines and cultural contexts see Doris Bachmann-Medick’s chapter “Spatial Turn” in Cultural Turns. For a differentiation between the spatial turn, the topographical turn and the topological turn with regard to their use in literary studies, see Stephan Günzel’s contribution in Döring and Thielmann’s volume Spatial Turn: Das Raumpardigma in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften. For a follow-up to Günzel’s arguments, see Detering, Seifert, and Winkler’s article “Literaturwissenschaften im Spatial Turn” in the Journal of Literary Theory. For a discussion of the benefits of the “spatial turn” in the analysis of literary representations of Heimat, see Friederike Eigler’s recent article “Critical Approaches to Heimat and the “Spatial Turn”.”

16 For an informative discussion on modernist engagements with time and space, see the chapter “Modernity and Modernism” in Harvey’s The Condition of Postmodernity.
space have developed differently in the European *Kulturwissenschaften* in contrast to Anglo-American cultural theory. In Anglo-American cultural studies, Weigel argues, the topographical discourse has stemmed from criticism of colonial history, and therefore the minority language of symbolic topographical figures that has been established is less about theorizing topography than a political program of “die Rekonzeptualizierung des Raums und seiner (Be-)Deutung” (reconceptualizing space and its meaning) (159). In the European *Kulturwissenschaften*, the engagement with space has focused on historicizing and, in the late twentieth century, the reconceptualization of space and its meaning as a signature of material and symbolic practices connected to the graphic turn (Weigel 160). Weigel insists that these respective theories should not be translated into “neutral tools” independent of their historical and cultural origins.

Detering et al argue that Weigel’s narrow definition of the “topographical turn” has confined literary scholars to more or less studying representations of space in literature and has stymied their ability to consider the connection between extratextual places (“Geo-Raum”) and places in literary texts (“Text-Raum”) (262). Thus, they continue, Weigel’s notion of textual space as solely representation reinstates the dichotomy between “real” and “imagined,” which geographers such as Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja eliminated (262). Importantly, Detering et al insist, “Der reale Raum enthält bereits eine imaginäre Dimension, die Literatur fügt ihr nichts hinzu, sondern macht Implizites explizit” (264).

I underscore this last argument because it is central to my claim that literary texts shape and are shaped by the experiences of globalization and the discourse of globalization. I insist on this because, as I argued earlier, it is by means of the literary representation of globalized existence that one gains new insight into the power dynamics of everyday space. Moreover, the combination of theoretical tools from both sides of the Atlantic can be combined to innovatively
assess the contemporary spatial imagination, without making them “neutral tools.” Indeed, Anglo-American scholarship on the so-called literature of migration has developed particularly innovative theoretical approaches out of both traditions, which I address in more depth in my fourth chapter on postmigrant novels.

C. Contemporary Literary Tactics in Accelerated Globalization

I draw on the work of Michel de Certeau and Doreen Massey to determine how global space takes root in depictions of everyday contexts in recent novels. By means of these theoretical tools, I inquire how literary works pose notions of globalized German space that serve to invoke and explore concepts of culture and everyday life under contemporary conditions of transformation. Furthermore, I draw on spatial theories to achieve a grounded approach that is invested in understanding how literary worlds fashion modes of subjectivity and intersubjectivity and thereby grapple with particular notions of culture and cultural identity.

Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* details a post-structuralist theory of consumption. Certeau is intent on uncovering how the ordinary person actually uses products, images, language, certain places, etc. in his or her everyday life rather than how such things were meant or prescribed to be used by established rules and norms. For Certeau, these individualized ways of going about everyday life are emancipatory, they “reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production” (xiv). Revealing the influence of structural linguistics, Certeau draws a notable distinction between “space” and “place.” He explains that “The law of

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17 Here it is important to note that Certeau’s theory is a reaction to Foucault, who he says focuses solely on the ‘discipliners.’ Certeau does not agree with Foucault that there is no escape from the mechanisms of discipline, “If it is true that the grid of “discipline” is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it …” (xiv).
the ““proper”” rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another each situated in its own ““proper”” and distinct location (place), a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability” (117). While place is normatively sanctioned and stable, space by contrast ... exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. … In short, space is a practiced place. (117, emphasis original)
The fixedness of proper place can therefore be fleetingly undone as one uses places for his or her own needs or desires. In this way, the production of space is a process and always in progress.

Certeau distinguishes two categories of everyday practices. “Tactics” are subversive and dependent on time; they are decisions, “tricks of survival,” made on a synthesis of available elements (xix). Tactics therefore describe how humans function or enunciate their lives relative to particular situations in normatively imposed places. In contrast to the tactic, the “strategy” reproduces the normative order. It delimits space to a “place as proper” and tries to manage relations vis a vis an exteriority of threats. Strategies are thus associated with the static concept of place in which subject positions and ways of operating are authoritatively indicated.

Importantly, Certeau equates everyday practices (also referred to as “ways of operating” or “procedures”) with enunciative acts of self-narration, whereby his theory becomes readily applicable to literary analyses focused on issues of spatiality:
By adopting the point of view of enunciation—which is the subject of our study—we privilege the act of speaking; according to that point of view, speaking operates within the field of a linguistic system; it effects an appropriation, or reappropriation of language by its speakers; it establishes a present relative to a time and place; and it posits a contract with the other (the interlocutor) in a network of places and relations. These four characteristics of the speech act can be found in many other practices (walking, cooking, etc.). (xiii)

Enunciative acts of self-narration hereby manipulate both place and language and call for a “tactic” relative to particular situations.

What is especially productive about Certeau’s work for literary analysis is the function of narrativity and literary techniques and figures. He reserves a special subset of practices for literature, namely “spatial practices.” In his well-known essay, “Walking in the City,” Certeau introduces his notion of spatial practices by equating narration with walking or “pedestrian speech acts,” asserting that these are “ways of moving into something different.” These spatial practices are identified as literary devices, such as metaphor, synecdoche, asyndenton, euphemism, ellipsis, and naming, etc. A story is thus “delinquent,” insofar as it “lives in the interstices of codes that it undoes and displaces” (130).

Certeau creates a direct connection between the extratextual world and the literary text, which underscores the significance of literary works as epistemological frameworks. Insofar as he equates both spatial practices and other everyday practices with an act of writing or living within and in response to established concepts of place, this suggests that the literary text

18 Other scholars have also found Certeau’s connection between space and narrative theory productive for literary analysis. See Friederike Eigler’s recent article in the New German Critique “Critical Approaches to Heimat and the Spatial Turn” and Andrew Thacker’s book Moving through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism.

19 For de Certeau theorization of spatial practices see the chapter “Walking in the City” and “Spatial Stories” in The Practice of Everyday Life.
performs tactics and strategies on two levels. First, the author “moves” within a cultural context, a “place,” drawing on and reconfiguring the established cultural practices of literary traditions, such as conventional genres, tropes, techniques, and semantic traditions. By attending to this level of literary practices, I gain insight into how contemporary authors aesthetically grapple with constructing and mediating meaning in the current age. In this context, the reflexivity attributed to the current age is directly relevant to my investigations of literary works.

My selection of German-language novels was informed by the authorial spatial practices, that is to say, by the ways in which the authors appropriate conventional tropes, for instance the house and the province (see my third chapter) and genres (which themselves operate to a certain extent as “proper places” organized by techniques of socio-cultural reproduction), such as the historical novel, fairy tales, travel literature, the adventure novel, *Heimatliteratur*, and the *Bildungsroman*. I explore how these genres, which have been historically bound with the construction of German culture and society according to the spatial imagination of the nation, are cited and recast vis-a-vis the spatial imagination of globalization. Both on the formal and content level, the novels employ an aesthetic program of self-reflexive metaspaces by which spatial and cultural frames of reference are critically constructed with regards to the specificity of Germany’s past.

As for the second level of everyday practices, in constructing an imaginary world, the text creates the same constellation of culture that provides the basis for Certeau’s claims regarding social reality. Namely, the text creates a prescriptive level that functions as “place.” In other words sets the parameters and conditions for how its subjects are able to operate within the social order. On the figural level, by contrast, actors are depicted practicing place in ways that at
times strategically reinforce and reproduce the social order and at other times tactically subvert, reappropriate, and upend the normatively intended purpose of places.

A further notion that is central to my analysis is the “relationality” of everyday behaviors. Recalling the quote above in which Certeau adopts the point of view of enunciation, a significant component of ways of operating is that they are performed in relation to an immediate time and space and in relation to an interlocutor. This relation is central to Certeau’s notion of subjectivity, which he addresses in the following statement: “Analysis shows that a relation (always social) determines its terms and not the reverse and that each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact” (xi). The subject is then a “locus” constructed in the interplay of the relationship with the “other.” For Certeau, this is not only “other” in the sense of the “original spatial structure” of the subject-object split in which the subject gains localization and exteriority against the background of the absence of the mother, becomes other and moves toward the other (109-110). In the end, “other” is also the place imposed and organized by the law of “foreign power,” whereby “foreign” is here understood as that which is not determined by the self. This implies that even when alone the individual always performs in relation(ship) to an other. On account of this notion of spatiality, an analysis of everyday practices needs to consider how the “event” of the decision or tactic is conditioned by the immediate time-space of the subject and the presence of “others” in all senses, in other words the social context.

Here it should be noted that I am modifying Certeau’s agenda in one fundamental way. Certeau is not interested in the individual subject. He emphasizes this on the first page, “the question at hand concerns modes of operation or schemata of action, and not directly the subjects (or persons) who are their authors or vehicles” (xi). This explains why Certeau turns a blind eye
to many of the power relations of daily life. I however am not only interested in the practices that produce space, but also in the political dimensions of subjectivity, of inhabiting and moving about in certain places. What good does it do to uncover “invisible traces,” which is precisely what literature enables, without looking at the greater implications of those traces, at whether they are subversive or not and how or why this might be connected to the politics of place that are bound up with cultural dimension such as gender, class or ethnicity?

Along these lines, cultural geographer Doreen Massey adds a helpful revision to Certeau’s work by demanding that the content of the relations of everyday practices be recognized (For Space 101). Like Certeau, Massey articulates her notion of place, which is inextricably bound up with time, by means of metaphors of narration, “It is what I am calling space as the dimension of multiple trajectories, a simultaneity of stories-so-far. Space as the dimension of a multiplicity of durations” (For Space 24). Essentially, the emphasis on the multiplicity of stories and histories associated with particular places is how Massey envisions shifting away from Europe-centered understandings of space derived from the Western philosophical tradition—space as a surface to be crossed and conquered—that continues to inform the notion of globalized space as a “depthless,” simultaneous present (For Space 78). It is also the way in which Massey rejects Certeau’s static notion of place. Massey’s main plea is for the actual politics of space to be recognized by shifting from the position of analyzing space from above to “leap[ing] into space” in order to recognize the “actual practices of relationality” (For Space 80).

I therefore perform close readings of the time-space events that are everyday practices with a deeper focus on the content of the relations. The practices of relationality lend themselves to an investigation of both the cultural frames of reference that (unconsciously) inform the tactics
and strategies chosen on the formal and figural level of the narrative while also investigating the
performance of intersubjective relations. Such an analysis of the content of everyday behaviors
not only promotes discovering the possibilities and experiences of subjective practices staged in
literary worlds, but it enables investigating literary performances of identity construction. The
multiplicity of selves that are called for and constituted in the context of various practices are not
only informed by the experiences of globalized time-space, but they are also entangled with
aspects of gender, class, social position, age, geographic location, ethnicity, and nationality.
Therefore, everyday practices reveal much about individual and collective self-definition under
conditions of social transformation.

Such processes of identity construction take on greater significance in light of the
contemporary context that challenges but also gives rise to, as Massey points out, nostalgic
responses to globalization that look for an old boundedness and authenticity in the past that never
existed (*For Space* 123). I contend that this desire for the boundedness offered by the paradigm
of simple modernity, whether in terms of essentialist notions of identity or clearly defined spatial
boundaries of the nation, perpetuates the experience of crisis in the current era, insofar as
reaching back to these out-of-date notions obfuscates the ways in which identity, space,
subjectivity, and culture function.

In this context, the notion of cultural identity posited by Segers and Viehoff is
informative for my investigations of imaginary worlds. Employing the notion in their inquiries
into European identity vis-a-vis globalization and regionalization, Segers and Viehoff work with
a definition of culture as a “program” or “Verweisungsstruktur” that directs thought, emotional
responses, actions, and behavior (34). Theirs is not a reified concept of culture; rather it is a
concept that is relative, learned, and continually being constructed (Segers and Viehoff 35).
Segers and Viehoff, drawing on Geert Hofstede, delineate six cultural dimensions that they argue constitute the frames of reference for more or less all individual identity formation, and to this extent are able to function on intercultural levels as well. These include a “national” or geographical dimension, an ethnic, religious and language dimension, a dimension based on gender and gender-roles, a generation-specific dimension, a dimension based on social position of both the family and the individual, and an organizational-cooperative dimension connected to work life (Segers and Viehoff 35).

Integral to “cultural identity” are processes of individual formation as well as processes by which diverse individuals and diverse groups are able to identify themselves with each other to some extent, ultimately creating a multi-faceted, fluid form of cultural cohesion, which can extend to the intercultural level as well:

Bezug auf das Kulturprogramm einer bestimmten Gruppe oder Gesellschaft weiterhin besteht und handlungsorientierend wirkt. (Segers and Viehoff 10)

At times of greater opposing and particular interests, as I argue one finds now as a result of social transformation and the uncertainties of globalization, there arises a need to negotiate and communicate the common “Metabezug” in order to confirm the sense of continuity, security, and coherence of a culture. “In den Medien materialisiert sich permanent der Vorgang der Kulturierung der Gesellschaft und der Entwicklung des Kulturprogramms selbst” (Segers and Viehoff 36). Literary texts thus play a significant role in mediating and constructing cultural identity.

Insofar as literary texts revise the cultural dimensions that inform cultural identity, I assess which cultural dimensions, discourses, images, traditions, spaces, customs, etc. are written into the spatial order and spatial practices in this group of contemporary novels. In this way, I piece together a multi-faceted, composite notion of cultural identity as it takes shape in an age of globalization perceived under the sign of transformation and crisis, which also provides insight into modes of subjectivity under such conditions.

My work contributes to previous scholarship on German literature and cultural practices in the age of globalization. In particular, two edited volumes on post-Wende literature provided a jumping off point for my study. In *German Literature in the Age of Globalization* (2004), edited by Stuart Taberner, the collection of articles mainly investigates the narrative construction of globalization on the local level, with particular attention paid to the strengthening of the local against the global, as well as the need to redefine notions of “Germanness” and positions vis-à-vis *pre-Wende* social orders now in flux. These axes of inquiry account for approaches focused on the depiction of first, certain regions, with regard to geographic locations and literary forms,
such as East Germany (Paul Cooke), the “old” West Germany (Andrew Plowman), the German province and *Heimatliteratur* (Taberner), and a nondescript “Germany” as an implied background (Beth Linklater). The contributors to the volume address how contemporary authors position themselves in relation to globalization by assessing whether those authors are pessimistic (see globalization as homogenizing and exploitative) or optimistic (see the possible benefits of worldwide communication and global citizens). Although they address the representation of certain locales in relation to globalization and connect that to revisions to notions of collective identity, what the contributors to Taberner’s volume do not do is employ a spatial lens informed by social or cultural theories on space. This is where *Zwischen Globalisierungen und Regionalisierungen* (2008), edited by Martin Hellström and Edgar Platen, provides further context to my own work. Like Taberner’s volume, this collection also focuses on post-Wende literature with an eye to the representation and function of certain locations in constructing notions of identity. In addition, the contributors draw on prevalent cultural and social theories on space and postcolonial theory. Therefore, the scholars explore contemporary texts for the relationship between the global and the local by means of Foucault’s heterotopias, Marc Auge’s non-places or *Transiträume*, or Homi Bhabha’s *Zwischenräume*. Certeau’s work however does not surface in this volume nor is subjectivity a primary interest. Katrin Sieg’s monograph *Choreographing the Global in European Cinema and Theater* (2008) contributes brilliantly to addressing issues of subjectivity in relation to globalization and further informed my work. From a German Studies and Theater Studies perspective, Sieg reads back and forth between cultural practices and political discourses to investigate how films and plays produced from 1992-2005 represent neoliberal policies and their social consequences. She offers a feminist critique of the way in which transnational and global relations are imagined and focuses on
themes of war, international relations, work, and migration. Her emphasis on not only cultural but also sexual difference addresses an analytic that she identifies as lacking in German studies’ engagement with globalization (Sieg 6).

I locate my work in this field by emphasizing my dual optic fixed on globalization and the production of space by means of everyday practices, which allows me to uncover dimensions of subjectivity and interpersonal relationships on different scales of space that comprise global existence. The particular heuristics provided by the spatial turn enable me to recognize correctives that are explicitly and implicitly provided in literary productions of space, whereby literary works can then serve as discursive interventions in the perpetuation of the above-mentioned insufficient, in some cases unethical, gendered, or imperialistic cultural frameworks. Working with the notion of everyday practices provides a framework by which I investigate how the narrative performance of space refracts or revises the contemporary spatial imagination, experiences of globalized time-space, and the modes of subjectivity in an era of transformation and supposed crisis. I look to these novels to see how they simultaneously invoke and counter current images of globalization as crisis, as an unanchored network of flows, or as another model of Western modernity and modernization.

Chapter two investigates how Daniel Kehlmann’s Die Vermessung der Welt critically deconstructs Germany’s role on the global stage in the age of exploration as a foil for questioning the country’s current self-assertion as a global player. I track how Kehlmann’s highly successful novel about Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Friedrich Gauss and the late Enlightenment pursuit of documenting and quantifying the natural world throws into question the ability of modern scientific and aesthetic methods to adequately represent the vast realities of experience and experiences of reality. I explore how the novel’s play with the realistic stability
integral to the genres of travelogues and the historical novel unsettles the Eurocentric model of
the globalized world as defined in the late Enlightenment era. The chapter advances its argument
through a close reading of the protagonists’ depicted practices of surveying, which are shown to
conflict with their own innovative models of space that anticipate a relational understanding of
space. I show how the disjuncture between the protagonists’ models of fluid space in contrast to
the dominant model of absolute space results from cultural conditions predicated on the capitalist
logic of competition and individual success, which leads to an unethical and alienating mode of
intersubjectivity and a lack of agency. Furthermore, the chapter locates Kehlmann in the German
literary scene as the disputed, long-awaited “global player” who gives contemporary German
literature a place on the global literary stage. In a parallel to Kehlmann’s own fame, I further
track how the depiction of Gauss and Humboldt is informed by recent public discourse that
celebrates the two historical giants as pivotal for grappling with the intellectual challenges of
globalization, whereby Germany is ascribed a pivotal global relevance.

Chapter three entitled “Cleaning the Glocal House: Breaking Cycles of German Domestic
Practices in the East(ern) German Province” explores one of the central tenets of globalization
discourse, namely the relationship between the local and the global, through close readings of
novels by East German women authors. In *Heimsuchung* by Jenny Erpenbeck and *Im Spinnhaus*
by Kerstin Hensel, major historical events and social transformations of roughly the last century
are narrated in relation to single houses in eastern German provincial settings. In this way, the
microcosm instates a multidirectional exchange between the local and the translocal, which I see
as significant inasmuch as the authors understand such dynamics as long-occurring processes,
rather than the novelty of the current global age. This chapter argues that these texts foreground a
tension that arises between the dynamic trajectories of the characters and a simultaneous fixity,
which is a fixity culturally and historically ascribed to certain subject positions associated with the highly codified, gendered and classed place of the domestic sphere. I track how the novels unsettle subject positions and corresponding everyday behaviors that have been both perpetuated by and complicit in recurring patterns of fixity despite transformations to the social order. This chapter details how Erpenbeck and Hensel use literary regionalism and the trope of the house to counter nostalgic longing for a secure, knowable provincial community in the post-unification era and criticize the perception that East Germany was merely a helpless victim of neoliberal globalization’s colonizing forces.

Chapter four entitled “Seeking Proximity: Spatial Malaise in Postmigrant Novels” develops the concept of ‘postmigrant’ literature in relation to the “spatial turn” that has occurred in Anglo-American literary theory on texts by authors with migration background. The chapter charts how postmigrant authors and literary scholars alike have incorporated spatial metaphors into their work to explore forms of transnational community and interpersonal relationships. This chapter advances my argument through readings of novels by Feridun Zaimoglu and Perikles Monioudis, which tell stories of highly mobile protagonists who live in and travel between translocal, metropolitan settings and enjoy the financial, professional, and political freedom to travel or voluntarily relocate to new cities in search of a more fulfilling existence. This chapter investigates first how the authors draw on the migration backgrounds of their ‘postmigrant’ and ‘new migrant’ protagonists to shape the form of their novels and secondly how their self-reflexive protagonists grapple with their own ways of being and approaches to diverse places and others. The chapter seeks to understand how the figures’ condition of what I call ‘postmigrant malaise’ marked by dissatisfaction, estrangement, and stagnation despite a highly mobile lifestyle corresponds to conditions of accelerated globalization as they affect individual
perceptions and experiences of time and space. In that the novels grapple with questions of intersubjective proximity and forms of affinity in an existence across borders and comprised of multiple attachments, I identify forms of affiliation, belonging or proximity that are posited in the imagined world. Importantly, I read the authors’ interrogation of detached approaches to intersubjectivity as an implicit response to Kehlmann’s critique of the continuation of Enlightenment practices in the current phase of globalization, in the case of Monioudis and Zaimoglu specifically regarding cosmopolitanism and the supposedly borderless world of neoliberal capitalism respectively. This chapter aims to understand how these narratives of universalism are at the root of challenges to meaningful interpersonal relationships in these novels.

Chapter 2: Daniel Kehlmann’s *Die Vermessung der Welt*: Reconciling the Cracks in the Spatial Imagination of Accelerated Globalization

A recent wave of well-received German-language literature in which contemporary authors (re)tell stories of well-known historical journeys of discovery, exploration, and adventure to address globalization and colonization leads Alexander Honold to conclude that there is a new literary constellation of “Welthaltigkeit” among young German-language authors (“Literature in der Globalisierung” 9). Honold highlights Daniel Kehlmann as well as Ilija Trojanow, who in *Der Weltensammler* (2006) tells of Richard F. Burton’s experiences while traveling and living in India, eastern Africa and Arabia with a particular focus on the figure’s play with identity and assimilation. Additional noteworthy authors (of other generations) who should also be considered include Felicitas Hoppe and Lukas Hartmann. Hoppe’s portraits of German
explorers in *Verbrecher und Versager: Fünf Porträts* (2004), told from the perspective of a woman left behind at home, critically interrogate world travels from the seventeenth to the twentieth century and the (masculine) drive for exploration, imperialism and colonialism in juxtaposition to socio-political conditions in Germany. In his novel *Bis ans Ende der Meere* (2009) about the painter John Webber’s travels as the documentarian on Thomas Cook’s third expedition around the world in search of the northern passage, Hartmann explores questions of aesthetic representation as well as the consequences of invasive visits (ie the introduction of disease) by Europeans on indigenous populations.

Honold asserts that this “*Welthaltigkeit*” reflects “ein vitales Interesse an der Dimension des Globalen und an den weltliterarischen Beziehungen, in denen auch die deutschsprachige Literatur, *for good or for worse*, sich heute bewegt und schon in früheren Phasen der kulturellen Globalisierung bewegte” (“Literature in der Globalisierung” 9; emphasis original).

*Die Vermessung der Welt* fits squarely into this literary constellation and grapples with Eurocentric notions of globalized existence. The novel’s title already articulates not only the protagonists’ projects but also the author’s undertaking as global in scale. In a satirical, ironically depicted performance of a prototypical project of modernity by which spaces near and far were totalized and standardized based on a Eurocentric model of global space, Alexander von Humboldt surveys the spaces of the “New World” while Carl Friedrich Gauss surveys in the “Old World” of Germany. The story narrates the lives of these two figures as socially inept geniuses from early childhood into old age and juxtaposes their disparate experiences as they go about their daily life and scientific work.

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20 These include Georg Meister, Franz Joseph Ernestus Antonius Emerentius Maria Kapf, Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn, John Hebenbeck, and Leonhard Hagebucher, a literary figure from Wilhelm Raabe’s *Abu Telfun oder die Heimkehr vom Mondgebirge*. 
Die Vermessung der Welt returns to the pivotal moment at the turn of the nineteenth
century when modern practices of scientific realism (the understanding of the world based on
scientific observation) took root as the dominant paradigm of knowing and representing reality.
Importantly, this is a paradigm that sought to expunge the occult practices of alchemy, the
irrational, and the magical (Case 15). Scientific observation thus developed into a set of practices
that measured, quantified, categorized and above all rendered the natural world through
meticulous observation of individual details into a static mosaic of isolated elements that then
needed to be synthesized into a form that strove to be more universal and more real than the
original (Daston 99). It was also an age during which the travelogues and scientific writings by
European explorers, merchants, missionaries and colonizers established a cognitive map of
foreign lands for the reading populace back in Europe. This marked the establishment of what
Mary Louis Pratt calls the “planetary consciousness of Europe,” which designated the
construction of global scale meaning through descriptive apparatuses of natural history (24).

Kehlmann returns to this historical threshold to throw into question the ability of modern
scientific and aesthetic methods to adequately represent the vast realities of experience and
experiences of reality. In contrast to the standardization of space carried out by the surveying in
the plot, on the formal level, the text reconfigures traditional (Romantic, Classical, and
modernist) conventions of German literature by fusing them with narrative modes from other
cultures and incorporating scientific and philosophical traditions into the text’s form. In a
postmodern fusion, the author explores the forms and tendencies of several genres from German
literary history – the Bildungsroman or Entwicklungsroman, the adventure novel, the
hagiography, the historical novel, and travel literature – all of which privilege realist modes of
narration. Moreover, by drawing on the hagiography, the historical novel and travel writing,
Kehlmann invokes and unsettles narrative modes and functions intended to mediate or represent historical “truth” or “reality.”

Despite its historical core and reliance on genres of realism, *Vermessung* nevertheless sets out to dispel the illusion of realistic stability or that it provides any steadfast truth claims regarding depictions of historical travels, events and personages. The following exemplifies important aspects of Kehlmann’s narrative approach:


With the rise of the serpentine monster out of the sea as Alexander von Humboldt leaves the European mainland at the outset of his renowned journey to the “New World” from 1799 to 1804, a number of aspects surface that are central to Kehlmann’s engagement with depictions of the unfamiliar as they were established in the age of exploration and as it connects to the current age of globalization. For one, this scene is emblematic for the narrative program of what the author has dubbed “Gebrochener Realismus,” which means that the mode of realism is punctured by sudden random occurrences of inexplicable supernatural or irrational appearances and events. Kehlmann describes “Gebrochener Realismus” as “eine Prosa, die vorgibt, realistisch zu sein, aber unauffällig Brüche in die scheinbar zuverlässig wiedergegebene Wirklichkeit einfügt” (“Große Zeit”). In the text, most of these narrated breaks with reality are hardly “unauffällig,”
rather they are jarring for both the protagonists and the reader, who are unable to rationally locate such events within the otherwise realistic world order. Breaks are often ambiguously depicted, so that characters and readers alike remain uncertain whether or not they can “believe their eyes.” The ruptures therefore function to undermine the rational world order under construction by the author as well as the protagonists.

A second notable feature of the quote is the self-reflexive comment indicating that Humboldt decides to omit the occurrence or vision from his writings. This reveals how Kehlmann unsettles the authority and reliability of the fictive Humboldt’s findings as a basis for knowledge or truth. Therefore, “gebrochener Realismus,” which most commentators have referred to in English as “broken realism,” is better described as “fractured” or “fragmented realism,” because what seeps out of the fissures in reality is precisely that which is not accounted for by the paradigm of knowledge represented by Enlightenment endeavors to quantify and measure the world and Eurocentric notions of space that inform those practices. Furthermore, “fragmented realism” harkens back to the Romantic form of the fragment, of open-endedness and incompleteness, which is central to Kehlmann’s project.

Lastly, it is important to recognize in this quote that Kehlmann returns the scientist to the events of knowledge production. In the early modern shift away from alchemy to “new” science, the scientist took the authoritative subject position of outside observer, rather than participant in the processes of nature (Case 10). As Sue Ellen Case argues, with this shift, “the space of nature, then, as examined would be one that was enclosed, static and calibrated for isolated integers” (11). This will prove to be a crucial feature of Gauss and Humboldt’s approach to space and human relationships, inasmuch as their adherence to a concept of nature and space based on numbers is partially to blame for their difficulty in relating to others.
Ironically, the reader is placed into the exact subject position of invisible observer that the author denies Gauss and Humboldt. Kehlmann however undermines this voyeurism through the unusual use of *indirekte Rede*. An omnipresent narrator keeps a tight rein on the narration of all events, descriptions of the setting, and subjective experiences and thoughts in *erlebte Rede* (with the effect of immediacy), but, with the exception of a few occasions in the novel, all direct statements are narrated in the subjunctive mood (Konjunktiv I). Typically used in journalism and formal writing to report or reiterate the speech and ideas of others in Germany, this subjunctive form distances both the omniscient narrator and the reader from the events, speech, and thoughts of all characters by formulating them in a manner that flags the speech as second hand, and therefore cautiously leaves room for misinterpretations in the speaker’s rendering of those claims or even doubt about the veracity of the original speaker’s statements. Moreover, the speaking subject is denied the possibility of direct speech, of assuming the first-person position, since the use of indirect speech necessitates the use of the third-person.

A fundamental irony rests in the fact that the omniscient narrator, who “witnesses” and allows the reader to “witness” the historical events, does not claim the “authority” with which being an omniscient narrator would conventionally provide him when it comes to recounting events, experiences, statements, and thoughts of the characters. The narrative mode of *indirekte Rede* therefore destabilizes and denies the conventional function of history-writing in making authoritative claims about the past, scientific writing in making claims about the physical world, and travel writing in conveying a first-hand account of what the traveler sees and experiences. The unusual use of the subjunctive in novelistic prose parodies the authoritative claims that history-writing makes when using the indicative mode and the simple past of *erlebte Rede*. 
Kehlmann further refers to his style in *Vermessung* as writing like a “verrückter Historiker” by which he tries to overcome, as he states, the triviality and false naturalness of direct speech via a “Gestus der Distanz und Kühle eines Historikers, der berichtet, was gesagt worden sein müsse” (Vogel 39). However, as Nickel suggests, this is a “Scheindistanz,” an artificial distance (19). In other words, regardless of the distancing the subjunctive performs, the fact is that what is reported as being said nevertheless serves to establish the story, and therefore still makes certain claims. Hence, Kehlmann’s focus on the everyday level of experiences and perceptions of German historical giants Gauss and Humboldt brings into view that which is effaced from the material practices and grand narrative established by the era’s surveying of the world and its representation by means of numbers and literary realism. In this way, indigenous peoples of Spanish America, women, the body, interpersonal relations, emotions, and eroticism are all brought back into the picture, even if only to play a supporting role in some cases.

Based on Kehlmann’s efforts to reconfigure ways of imagining the world on both the textual and content level by tearing holes in the privileged epistemological practices of European modernity, particularly those of scientific and aesthetic representation, I seek to answer the following questions. Why at the beginning of the twenty-first century does Kehlmann deconstruct the prevailing paradigm and spatial imagination that was put into place two centuries earlier with the work of Humboldt and Gauss? How do Kehlmann’s quirky literary techniques enable him to achieve this? How do his satirical depictions of these two prominent figures address aspects of global existence and the contemporary moment? What does his detailed attention to the protagonists’ everyday interactions and experiences illuminate with regard to codified practices and ways of being that are cast as distinctly German and hinder the ability of the protagonists to live meaningfully in relation with others?
By means of innovative narrative tactics such as “fractured/fragmented realism” that primarily play with conventions of realism and incorporate scientific and philosophical thought into the text’s form, the author unsettles the epistemological methods and discursive constructions that have been the cultural foundations of modern Germany and the basis for truth claims that have held authoritative sway since the late Enlightenment. *Die Vermessung der Welt* performs precisely the “self-consciousness and metadiscursive pondering on catastrophe and change” that carries out Hutcheon’s postmodern destruction from within that emphasizes and unravels the inherent contradictions of modernity’s prevailing theoretical model of positivism, capitalism, experimentalism and historicism that has been dominant since the seventeenth century (74-5). Kehlmann however brings in new theoretical conjecture for the contemporary global moment, namely regarding the current age’s purportedly defining features of uncertainty and risk as defined by sociologists, such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. In the face of epistemological and ontological challenges posed by social transformation, the author’s imaginary world functions as a reflexive metaspace in which the work addresses the adequacy of modern Eurocentric ‘Dichter und Denker’ to account for global time-space and explores conditions of troubling transformation brought about in the disjuncture between competing theories of globalized/global space and the everyday experience of space and time.

Literary scholar Hans Vilmar Geppert argues that the historical novel has always been connected to crisis, that is to say it is motivated by a specific, problematic context. It is the creative, perspectivizing answer to an historical experience of transformation and discontinuity, and therefore arises after a crisis or rupture with the past (9-10). On this basis, I understand the realistic stability of the historical novel to be a search for continuity at a time when trusted modes of making sense of the world are called into question. To this end, *Die Vermessung der*
Welt carries out the work of reflexive modernization by offering its readership continuity and a sense of collective identity based on German literary and philosophical traditions and celebrated German historical figures to counter aspects of the contemporary perception of crisis and transformation as homogenization, loss, or threat to known ways of life, but, importantly, the text also combats nostalgic revisions of the past by satirically problematizing those very traditions and cultural frameworks that underlie the purported inability to adjust to a global era of flux, uncertainty and acceleration. Kehlmann’s novel carries out symbolic work also undertaken in more recent disciplinary approaches, such as those of postcolonial studies, area studies, cultural geography, poststructuralism, and transnational or transcultural approaches, which challenge and seek to flesh out the narratives that have previously comprised knowledge of the world and its peoples.

Moreover, Kehlmann’s novel contributes to the spatial turn by focusing on the historically and culturally specific (enunciative) acts that, as Mary Louise Pratt argues, eliminated space in the classificatory system of natural sciences (31). In this way, Kehlmann recovers portions of that lost space by focusing on the everyday lives of historical figures who contributed significantly to its elimination or rather its representation in numbers and measures. Therefore, the text engages with the spatial turn in line with Sigrid Weigel’s insistence that the particular historical and cultural contexts and intellectual traditions from which conceptualizations of space stem must be recognized.21 With recourse to notions of space posited by Gauss and Humboldt that more readily account for the dynamics of global(ized) space, Kehlmann unveils the personal cost of conforming to norms that adhere to flat, Euclidean space

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and precondition participating in the elite practices of measuring and defining the world. Hence, the figures of Carl Friedrich Gauss and Alexander von Humboldt are pivotal as they are depicted growing up and practicing place (navigating social strictures) in Germany in order to create knowledge and find meaning in life. Kehlmann seeks to resolve unethical, alienating ways of being, particularly those in a social order based on competition and the accumulation of social capital or fame, by appealing for a way of life lived in affective proximity with others. Ultimately, I maintain that the novel’s critical deconstruction of Germany’s role on the global stage in the age of exploration is a vital foil for questioning its self-assertion as a global player now in a new global era, in which we still live in a world set into motion by Humboldt and Gauss.

A. Enter the “Literator”: Germany’s Global Literary Fame

Kehlmann’s humorous literary surveying of the world and depiction of Humboldt’ and Gauss’ trials and tribulations have made him something of a celebrity. The novel has been one of the few post-war German literary texts to sell well abroad, comparable only to the success of Gunther Grass’ Die Blechtrommel (1959), Patrick Süskind’s Das Parfum (1985), and Bernard Schlink’s Der Vorleser (1995) (Meller 127). While Vermessung has enjoyed great success in terms of sales, Kehlmann has enjoyed the increasing solidification of his position as a quasi-savior of contemporary German-language literature and the poster child for young authors interested in the “weltliterarische Beziehungen” mentioned above.

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22 The novel spent thirty-five consecutive weeks at the top of the Spiegel-Bestsellerliste and has sold well over a million copies in the German-speaking world alone (Nickel 7). In addition, licenses have been sold to publishers in more than forty countries (Stein 137).
In December of 2010, the author served as the inaugural “Literatur” for the first annual
lectureship for world literature put on by the Universität zu Köln’s International Kolleg
Morphomata. According to the event organizers, a “Literatur,” a term coined by Goethe in
connection with his notion of Weltliteratur, is an expert communicator, who, through the
comparison of contemporary literatures, plays the central role of mediating the perception of
alterity in a manner that maintains and makes the recognition of differences productive
(“Literatur 2010”). Kehlmann’s appointment as “Literatur” attests to the status and role he fills
among some literary scholars and speaks to a desire for a renewal of German-language literature
and historical notions of Western culture. Of course, Kehlmann and his work are not held in the
same esteem by all. Ambivalence is perceptible among a number of critics who praise the novel
for its humor, but at the same time doubt its literary value or take issue with the “inaccurate”
presentation of historical figures. Even in his laudation of Kehlmann at the award ceremony for
the Kleist-Preis in 2006, Uwe Wittstock declared that Die Vermessung der Welt is not
innovative, but it is still great (115). Wittstock embeds his criticism in his explication of the
changed context of literature and literary criticism, in which literature no longer offers political
answers to aesthetic questions and modernism is not the only way for literature to be good (113-
114). Although literature certainly has a different status and function now than in past eras,
comments like Wittstock’s do not account for the discrepancy between what I see as his
lukewarm appraisal and, for instance, the appraisal of the literary scholars at the University of
Cologne, who ascribe to Kehlmann and his texts a social relevance in their ability to mediate and

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23 See Zeyringer’s article on the German reception of the novel in Gunther Nickel’s Daniel Kehlmanns “Die
discursively construct standard cultural images and notions in a manner that productively uses the strangeness or foreignness that they have gained through historical distance.  

The significance of the novel’s success and the author’s ambivalent reception must be recognized as squarely embedded in the national context as the continuation of the literature debates that have ensued since reunification and the intensification of globalization. These debates raise questions of not only the function and aesthetics of literature, but also its ability to sell. As Stuart Taberner points out, calls for aesthetics emulating the “Lesbarkeit” of Anglo-American bestsellers which were dominating the German literature market have strongly influenced positions taken in the debate and clearly illustrate the economic forces connected to the production of literature (“Berlin Republic” 7). In this case, the parameters of the debate are directly related to the globalization of the literary market, which has resulted in a mostly unidirectional consumption whereby the German demand for Anglo-American works far surpasses the Anglo-American demand for German-language literature. For some, the availability of and the demand for Anglo-American literary works (in translation) threatens the aesthetic value and sales of German-language literature even within the German-speaking world, while for others, the hybridization of German literature with techniques from other cultures has provided aesthetic opportunities.


25 In the _Literaturstreit_ of the early 1990s, German intellectuals debated the function and aesthetics of literature after the fall of communism and the reunification of Germany. It is important to note that at this time the debate was less about the aesthetics of literature and its commoditization but more about the power to define the past and the future, the function of literature and the role of authors in the German Federal Republic as moral leaders in light of the Stasi-involvement of GDR authors. Wolfgang Emmerich explains the literature debate of the early 1990s: “Allerdings wirken in das literarische Feld und seinen Diskurs häufig außerliterarische Faktoren mit Macht hinein, vor allem politische und ideologische Kräfte. Dann zeigt sich, dass das literarische Feld längst nicht so autonom ist, wie es oft scheint, und Fragen der Ästhetik nur eine sekundäre Rolle spielen. … Dieser Streit war kaum je ein Streit um ästhetische Fragen, sondern einer um die kulturelle Definitionsacht im Lande” (Emmerich, 116).
Based on Kehlmann’s own explanations, his style in *Vermessung* is a means to free himself from the constraining conventions of German literature between 1945 and 1989 (Tippelskirch 197). Kehlmann clarifies this by rejecting what he sees as “die zwei bedrückenden Eckpfeiler” of didactic, socially engaged literature and a minimalistic realism that is supposedly influenced by American literature (in particular, Carver and Hemingway) but is, he says, more likely to be found in the Leipzig Literaturinstitut than anywhere in the US (Kehlmann *Scherze* 14).

He credits his strategy of “Gebrochener Realismus” to the tradition of magical realism as it developed among South American authors.26 There is however an additional figure, Kafka, who plays a pivotal role in the spatializing narrative by means of which Kehlmann explains his “fragmented realism” and thereby cultivates an intercultural literary relationship. “Die größte literarische Revolution des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, das waren die Erzähler Südamerikas, die an Kafka anknüpften und die Grenzen zwischen Tages- und Nachtwirklichkeit, zwischen Wachen und Traum durchlässig machten. Romane als große Träume, in denen alles möglich ist” (*Scherze* 14). Here, Kafka serves *tout court* as the bridge between “Macondo und die alte Welt.”27 Kehlmann claims a place on the (global) literary stage. By linking himself to some of the South American greats, one of whom, Mario Vargas Llosa, won the 2010 Nobel Prize for Literature, via Kafka, the young author assumes the position of the offspring of literary legends from both the “Old World” and “New World,” while also indebting South American magical realism to cultural traditions of the “Old World.” In addition, and unacknowledged by Kehlmann, fragmented realism is indebted to German Romanticism’s logic of the narrated dream.

26 On various occasions, Kehlmann names Bolanos, Borges, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Gabriel García Márquez, in particular *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (“Montufar” 142; *Scherze* 14).
27 This was the title for Kehlmann’s opening address for the Literator series of events.
Standing on the shoulders of Kafka and the fathers of South American magical realism, Kehlmann dissociates himself from the realism of post-war German literature. He insists that he draws on South American literary techniques because it allows him to construct reality in ways which “oppressive” German literary conventions will not allow. “Also, in meinen Romanen ging es mir immer um das Spiel mit Wirklichkeit, das Brechen von Wirklichkeit. Und, ich sage das jetzt ganz offen, es gehörte zu meinem bedrückendsten Erlebnissen als Schriftsteller, dass so etwas in Deutschland einfach nicht verstanden wird” (Scherze 16). On the content and thematic level of Vermessung, Kehlmann vigorously critiques German culture in regard to German Idealism, Weimar Classicism, the Enlightenment, in particular the contributions and practices of German intellectuals, Prussian rule, the student movement, and the rise of nationalism in Germany. The crucial point of the author’s self-proclaimed program of “Gebrochener Realismus” as indebted to cultural hybridization is in its implication that the German past needs to be addressed in narrative modes other than those of the German literary traditions. However, the parallels to German Romanticism are noteworthy. In this case, I am inclined to consider Taberner’s concern that the risk of celebrating difference lies in its frequent use as a marketing strategy (“Introduction: Globalisation” 2). In addition, Kehlmann’s fragmented realism represents a common practice among German authors, by which the author tactically draws on global connections as a means to bypass dominant literary trends of German-speaking cultural space.

B. Questioning the Myth of the Good German Globalizers

Kehlmann’s own celebrity dovetails informatively with both the historic and the recently reinvigorated fame of Alexander von Humboldt and, to a lesser extent, of Carl Friedrich Gauss.
Based on the recent narratives created around the legacy of Humboldt and Gauss, Kehlmann’s reconfiguration of the two figures is central to the novel’s engagement with German cultural identity and epistemological practices in the current era. The two figures are upheld in post-’89 public discourse as celebrity models for good German globalizers, often in reference to their cross-cultural relevance and interdisciplinary approaches. The recent celebration of these two historical giants informs Kehlmann’s satirical deconstruction of the figures, insofar as in the novel they are both highly attuned to the value of creating a name for oneself and that capitalizing on one’s fame becomes a necessary everyday practice to participate in certain spheres of German culture.

The 200th anniversary of Humboldt’s travels in South and North America from 1799 to 1804 and, in 2009, the 150th anniversary of his death have given rise to a Humboldt renaissance, to which *Vermessung* contributes. This renaissance has included a multitude of new editions of Humboldt’s works, new biographies and analyses of his writings, exhibits, and international conferences. Newspaper and magazine articles have re-celebrated Humboldt as the ‘real discoverer of America” and the “second Columbus” (Knauer) or as “der geniale Abenteurer” (Matussek). The wave of fascination with and characterizations of Humboldt lead me to propose that the “Humboldt” of today functions as a projection for Germany to assume the collective identity of an exemplary and central player on the global stage, whereby aspects of his accomplishments, work, and lifestyle are selected or reinterpreted to provide a model German who is capable of successfully defining and coping with the current age of globalization.

28 An example of one such commemorative conference took place in 2009 in Washington, D.C. Titled “Alexander von Humboldt – Remapping Global Perspectives,” the conference was an interdisciplinary and collaborative series of events that drew on the resources and support of the German Embassy, the Goethe Institute, the German Historical Institute, and the U.S. Library of Congress.
Mathias Matussek’s feature article “Der geniale Abenteurer” in Der Spiegel serves as a prime example for how the historical figure is construed as a role model for a globalizing Germany. In the article, Humboldt’s work and lifestyle are situated as precursors to numerous aspects of the current global era; a few examples provided are the interdisciplinary nature of his projects, his notion of the universal library as a precursor to the World Wide Web, and his skillful networking practices. Moreover, Matussek labels Humboldt a “Vorbild-Deutscher” (162) because he embodies “eine Haltung, ein Prinzip” (163), which the author then associates with the “Universalgelehrte” Humboldt’s profound knowledge in many fields and the resulting, still-relevant advances in those fields, his honorable, ethical treatment of others, and his political relevance in his time. Matussek nostalgically longs for the golden days of Humboldt, who “war nicht auf die schnelle Vermarktung aus, sondern auf Exaktheiten, die auch in der Zukunft noch Bestand haben sollten.”

Matussek’s portrait of Humboldt registers a sense of anxiety caused by the cultural challenges and transformations of the last decade. He raises the question of scholarly praxis in regards to what he bemoans as the paradox between the increased specialization in individual disciplines (“Spezialisierungsexplosion der Einzelwissenschaften”) while at the same time interdisciplinary projects gain in importance and cultural strategies as well as the natural sciences strive for all-encompassing models (“Ganzheitlichkeitsmodelle”) (Matussek 174). The tension between the simultaneity of the interest in interdisciplinarity, the increase in disciplines and the interest in a universal model in the natural sciences reflects the constellation of higher education that arose with the postmodern era’s rethinking of past paradigms. It appears that the dynamics

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29 Humboldt expert Andreas Daum dispels the myth of Humboldt as disinterestedly publishing his works purely for the sake of science and improvement of human knowledge. When Humboldt published the first volumes of Kosmos, he was keenly aware of the need to sell copies of his work; he needed money, “Der Mann war in Geldnot, mehr denn je, und Öffentlichkeit zu schaffen sollte sich auch auszahlen” (Daum 19).
of globalization bring these older paradoxes and tensions into sharper focus now again as various fields, institutions, and scholars seek to determine how best to shape scholarly praxis for the current age. For Matussek, the solution is neither the traditional model of the German university nor the traditional notion of the *Universalgelehrte*. Rather, and here the link between cultural identity and epistemological issues of the global age is evident, it appears to be an idealistic hybrid that incorporates past and present trends and images associated with globalization in the model of Alexander von Humboldt as an ethical maverick *Universalgelehrte* qua “Extremsportler” (a label Matussek applies himself to Humboldt (170)) who eschews publicity, disciplinary norms and constraints of the academy of his time to pursue and provide lasting knowledge.

Methods used by Humboldt scholars and their in-depth readings of Humboldt’s work result in a similar but more moderated narrative of Humboldt as the solution for epistemic dilemmas of the current age. For instance, in *Alexander von Humboldt und die Globalisierung*, Ottmar Ette continues the *Universalgelehrte* theme by stressing opportunity and risk:

Der Autor *der Ansichten der Natur* ist ein Denker der Globalität, der als Querdenker seiner Zeit bis heute nichts von seiner Aktualität verloren hat. Sein Schaffen als Natur- und Kulturforscher, als Philosoph, Gelehrter und Schriftsteller ist für uns heute vielmehr unentbehrlich, um die gegenwärtige Phase beschleunigter Globalisierung in ihrer Geschichte, aber auch in ihren Chancen und Risiken analysieren und historisch fundiert denken zu können. (13)

Here Humboldt is fashioned as a “thinker of globality” and as such embodies a paradigm of knowledge construction that crosses temporal, disciplinary, and generic boundaries and is said to therefore be indispensable for understanding the opportunities and risks of the current phase of
accelerated globalization. This twenty-first century Humboldt correlates with general shifts toward greater interdisciplinary collaboration and communication and the rise of comparative, transnational, and postcolonial studies. I point this out because Ette’s rigorous scholarship, in a different manner than Matussek’s journalistic article, embraces Humboldt to forward an agenda that informs his own approach and reflects the continued development of theories and fields that seek to decentralize and challenge the meaning-making powers of empire by which the meaning of the world in Humboldt and Gauss’ time was established.

In contrast to the Humboldt renaissance since German unification, the figure of Carl Friedrich Gauss has not garnered the same main-stream attention. Gauss is often referred to as “der Fürst der Mathematiker,” which signifies how his legacy is firmly connected to his contributions in mathematics and science and often in a way that emphasizes his status as a nearly unparalleled genius. Although Gauss has not come to embody the Zeitgeist of accelerated globalization to the same extent as Humboldt, he has nevertheless been called upon to promote international and interdisciplinary scholarship. For instance, in 2002, the Deutsche Mathematiker-Vereinigung (German Mathematical Union) and the International Mathematical Union instated the Carl Friedrich Gauss Prize to be awarded every four years to mathematicians whose work has an impact beyond the field of mathematics. As the International Mathematic Union’s website explains, “The prize is to honor scientists whose mathematical research has had an impact outside mathematics – either in technology, in business, or simply in people’s everyday lives” (“Carl Friedrich Gauss Prize”). The resurrection of Gauss in Vermessung,

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30 I would locate the distinct place in the history of ideas that Gauss holds compared to Humboldt in the disciplinary and methodological differences between Humboldt and Gauss. The titles of biographies on Gauss illustrate his status as a genius in the fields of math and science: Carl Friedrich Gauss: “Der Fürst der Mathematiker” in Briefen und Gesprächen (Gauss and Biermann), The Prince of Mathematics: Carl Friedrich Gauss (Tent), Carl Friedrich Gauss: Titan of Science (Dohse, Dunnington, and Gray), and Scientific Genius: The Twenty Greatest Minds (Glenn).
regardless of its satirical deconstruction of the figure, and not to be overlooked, coinciding with the 150th anniversary of his death in 2005, returns to the public spotlight a figure that allows for collective identification with a national cultural heritage but that also has a global resonance because of the continued relevance of his work in scholarly fields today.

The examples above indicate a concern and anxiety that innovative ways to carry out scholarly work and discursively mediate ideas and findings need to be developed to meet the cognitive challenges of the current era. The above variations on the Humboldt theme illustrate how the historical figure and his work, methods, and travel function to provide a notion of a model German in an age of globalization. Humboldt is made into the figure par excellence for providing a means to solve the intellectual challenges of the present. Gauss’ legacy, although more narrowly connected to mathematics and science, also inflects interdisciplinary work with far-reaching implications with a German heritage. I consider the discourse around these two figures to be a means by which German culture constructs a space for itself within the maelstrom of the global. The twenty-first-century Humboldt and Gauss recapture the former centrality of Germany as an exemplary player on the global stage. However, Kehlmann’s return to historical figures rooted in the late Enlightenment practices of modernity is representative of the decidedly ironic and paradoxical gesture of the postmodern or the reflexive modern approach to the current era. The author rejects the elevation of the historical figures to the status of model Germans who provide the answers to epistemological challenges in the age of globalization.

In light of Kehlmann’s fracturing of the reality that he shows Humboldt discursively constructing by means of his scientific and travel writings, the historical Humboldt’s actual writings warrant further consideration. The celebratory image of Humboldt is a narrative that deviates greatly from studies in which Humboldt’s work and travel is interrogated for its
complicity in imperialist and colonialist projects, even as his work is valued for its innovative aesthetics. As Pratt explains in connection to Humboldt’s non-specialized writings, particularly his essays in the *Views of Nature* (*Ansichten der Natur* 1808) – notably one of the few works that he wrote in German – Humboldt sought to correct the failures of travel writing for its accumulation of boring scientific detail and “merely personal” trivialities (118). Significantly, narrative was not a viable mode of representation for Humboldt; rather, he developed the form of the tableau or the view in which he fused the specificity of science with the esthetics of the sublime (Pratt 118). Humboldt strove for an all-encompassing view or what he called a *Totaleindruck* in his representations of what he observed. For instance, his tableau of what was then thought to be the world’s tallest mountain, the Chimborazo, included detailed illustrations and information on geography, geology, botanic life, meteorological observations, and climate and vegetation zones (Schaumann 448-449). Despite his efforts to represent nature as a harmonizing whole, in his more narrative writings and letters, in line with the Romantics, Humboldt left descriptions fragmentary and open-ended – above all he emphasized the failure of his climb up the Chimborazo that so captivated European audiences (Schaumann 449).

Importantly, Humboldt worked against the shift in his era toward the severing of subjectivist from objectivist strategies, information from experiment, and science from sentiment (Pratt 117). Pratt notes that Humboldt’s rendering of “the subjects of natural history” differed from the prevalent followers of Linnaeus who categorized, labeled, and defined all that they observed (118). Rather she emphasizes the significance of Humboldt’s non-specialized writings for their reinvention of South America as nature in motion, as though it were motivated by inaccessible, unrecognizeable and uncategorizeable forces, like those of the occult (Pratt 118). In the structure of his writings and through his avoidance of the use of the first person, Humboldt
assumes a god-like, omniscient stance over the planet and his reader and erases the presence of humans in the place of a primal nature of forces (Pratt 122). Therefore, not only his innovative aesthetics that allowed for aspects of the occult, but a notion of nature in motion devoid of people and their history is also part of Humboldt’s legacy.

Humboldt’s “seeing-man” functioned as an intentional doubling of the first European explorers, especially Columbus, who invented the Americas; therefore, Humboldt’s newly reinvented “new world” lay ready to be transformed by what were at the time considered by Europeans to be the more advanced civilizations of Europe (Pratt 123-124). Both Pratt and Suzanne Zantop take Humboldt to task for his recreation of the South American colonial territories without inhabitants who populate or own the land, because at a time of violent political conflict and decolonization this catalyzed what Zantop refers to as the European colonial fantasy of potent European men penetrating the virgin forests and territories of South America (166-167). However, Pratt also shows that Humboldt did write about South America in archeological and demographic ways. She therefore emphasizes the extremely selective reception of his writings in Europe, which reduced South America to virgin territory immediately prior to the “capitalist ‘scramble for America’” (124).

Although accounting for the occult or the irrational, which was expunged by scientific realism, links Kehlmann to Humboldt’s work indirectly, Kehlmann is less interested in Humboldt’s actual writings and more attuned to his legacy and current place in German culture. Notably, upon his return to Paris in 1804, Humboldt became “a continental celebrity” as he capitalized on his travels among Parisian high society and intellectuals (Pratt 115). This vouches for the impact of his work, which functioned to shift his audience’s understanding of global space. Precisely this spatial imagination of global flows and interconnectedness with no account
for humans and intersubjectivity is what *Vermessung* unravels. Moreover, the focus on the everyday lives of the main figures and the meaning of their daily activities and interactions as subjects of the rational world of Prussian Germany striving for relevance on the European stage foregrounds habitual behaviors, particularly the economy of fame, which continues to found a disenchanted German cultural order. *Vermessung*’s satirical depiction of Humboldt and Gauss and their practices deconstructs a mosaic of a history of mentalities (Zeyringer 90), which is elided in the celebratory discourse of Humboldt and Gauss. This is a history however that stemmed from Gauss’ and Humboldt’s historical era, indeed in part from their work, and gave rise to the practices, values, and world views that brought about German nationalism and colonial endeavors.

C. A Corrective Metapoetic of Abstract Interconnectedness

Kehlmann’s text is thematically and formally consumed with the representation of globalized time-space and corresponding experiences thereof. This accounts for the novel’s exemplary aesthetic engagement with the spatial turn and the spatial imagination of the current age. Honold locates *Vermessung* in a long literary tradition in which, he argues, literary works function as aesthetic paradigms of poetic knowledge that correspond to the conceptualizations of the globe and geographical representations of knowledge of the same time period (“Literature in der Globalisierung” 1). As Humboldt and Gauss are depicted in the novel, precisely the differences between their respective spatial theories and practices provide the motor for a further noteworthy aspect of the novel’s formal program. Kehlmann utilizes the exploration of models of space to construct a metapoetic, in that the formal structure of parallel life stories enacts those particular theories of space that Humboldt and Gauss forward in their work.
The parallel storylines of the protagonists’ respective models to provide a corrective to their everyday practices whereby the modern, fixed notion of abstract geographical space became the dominant paradigm over the fluidity and relationality of socially produced space unrealized in their respective bodies of work. On account of this play with the form of the parallel biography, *Vermessung* employs what I consider to be a “tactic of relationality.” While Gauss and Humboldt’s storylines are central, their interaction with others and the explicit depiction of others’ reactions revises the dual track to show that the space of the text is an interconnected network of actors in relation to one another. *Vermessung* is therefore literary support for the spatial turn’s efforts to understand space as socially produced. This tactic of relationality is central to the text’s contribution to re-conceptualizations of narration and narratively constructed space vis a vis accelerated globalization.

The following text passages exemplify the respective theories posited by Gauß and Humboldt.31 Marking a break with the preceding paradigm, Gauß exclaims to a senile, elderly Kant:

> Ihm scheine nämlich, dass der euklidische Raum eben nicht, wie es die Kritik der reinen Vernunft behaupte, die Form unsere Anschauung selbst und deshalb aller möglichen Erfahrung vorgeschrieben sei, sondern vielmehr eine Fiktion, ein schöner Traum. Die Wahrheit sei sehr unheimlich: Der Satz, dass zwei gegebene Parallelen einander niemals

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31 Tippelskirch, Anderson, Honold, and Pütz also comment on the use of the parallel storylines. Tippelskirch argues that “Kehlmann parallels the world lives of his two protagonists in alternating chapters, creating a narrative structure that mirrors one of Gauß’s discoveries: that space is curved and that therefore parallel lines can meet” (194). In reference to Mark Anderson’s article “Der Vermessende Erzähler,” Tippelskirch historicizes Gauss’ discovery as a precursor to Georg Friedrich Bernhard Riemann’s theory which then laid the foundation for Einstein’s theory of relativity (Tippelskirch 194). Anderson however mentions the parallel storylines in terms of the Robert Musil’s parallellaxiom form as one which alternates between essay and plot in order to link “normal” life with “dem anderen Zustand” (Erzähler 65). In another article, Alexander Honold argues that parallelisms serve as both the narrative strategy and the organization of knowledge in the novel (“Ankunft” 92), while Pütz emphasizes the parallelisms as a structure of polarities (11). My argument differs in that I read the parallel storylines as an enactment of the protagonists’ respective models to provide a corrective to their respective spatial practices whereby the modern, fixed notion of abstract geographical space became the dominant paradigm over the fluidity and relationality of socially produced space unrealized in their respective models.
berührt, sei nie beweisbar gewesen, nicht durch Euklid, nicht durch jemand anderen.


Despite its simplicity, the claim that space is “wrinkled” or “folded” (faltig) and is “curved” (gekrümmt) awakens the world from the “fiction” or “dream” of Euclidean space as an *a priori*, universal, and constant theoretical category in which parallels do not intersect. In this scene, Gauss drastically revises the dominant spatial imagination of his day by introducing the imaginary world of the novel and the reading audience to the notion of curved space, the significance of which is programmatic for the novel and symbolically manifests itself precisely in the intersecting parallels of human trajectories, and, as Gauss further speculates, in many different parallels intersecting the same point. Historically, Gauss’ groundbreaking differential geometry, which advanced Euclid’s planar geometry by mathematically accounting for the curved, three-dimensional space of a globe eventually provided the building blocks of Einstein’s *Theory of Relativity* in which space is defined in relation to other bodies or objects and time (Mlodinow).³² Present in Gauss’ theory are thus the seeds for a seminal shift in human thinking and even the eventual postmodern notions of space that seek to account for the historicity and

³² For an informative discussion of the relationship between Gauss and Einstein’s theories from a mathematician’s perspective see Leonard Mlodinow’s *Euclid’s Window: The Story of Geometry from Parallel Lines to Hyperspace*. Or for a brilliant cultural history of space from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century see *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace* by Margaret Wertheim.
politics of particular spaces and the spatiotemporal flux of everyday life in understandings of space as socially produced.  

Complementing Gauss’ abstract mathematical model and further undergirding the narrative logic of the novel, the fictive Humboldt’s empirical model of physical nature as \textit{Totaleindruck} also conveys a sense of a global system of fluctuating interconnectedness based on air and water currents and isothermal regions, “Alle großen Ströme seien verbunden. Die Natur sei ein Ganzes” (\textit{Vermessung} 117). The link between these two theories is the possibility of paths (“parallels” or “streams”) to intersect. This importantly implies a precondition of motion, which can also be understood as narration, thereby prompting the intersecting of the scientists’ lifelines based on the metapoetic structure. In this way, the novel constructs an aesthetic that draws on the present-day spatial imagination of a world of flows, while also connecting it to the irrational, occult forces that the new science and aesthetics of the early modern era were seeking to eliminate.  

Instantiating the metapoetic of parallelisms and the tactic of relationality, the novel opens by establishing a specific time and place that functions as the teleological end point for the inner  

\textsuperscript{33} David Harvey explains the consequences of Einstein’s theories of relativity in terms of insecurities resulting from a notion of shifting relative space: “The certainty of absolute space and place gave way to the insecurities of a shifting relative space, in which events in one place could have immediate and ramifying effects in several other places” (261). Harvey further points out that the shifting perspectives of relative space became the issue of modernism (262), which I highlight because this is clearly a tradition with which Kehlmann is engaging, but now in terms of postmodern or reflexive modern aesthetics. Margaret Wertheim locates the significance of the theory of relativity not only in its refutation of Newtonian absolute space as the static container of the universe and frame of all action, but because it made space the primary active category of reality: “If the big bang gave rise to the basic particles – the protons, neutrons, and electrons – it is the stars that have given us the atoms of our flesh and bone, the carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and so on” (177). The theory of relativity thus provided a mathematical, non-religious account of the universe’s origin (177).  

\textsuperscript{34} The shift from the occult sciences to the modern “new” science, which, as Sue-Ellen Case outlines in \textit{Performing the Virtual}, was an ideological shift and political project whereby Europe began to construct an identity that expunged or dislocated the influences of Islamic and Arabic cultures where occult scientific practices originated (15). I see this as a noteworthy parallel in the post-9/11 climate of Europe which is home to millions of Muslims and where the “clash of civilizations” continues to comprise the mental map of the EU fueling the debate on whether or not Islam is compatible with or “belongs to” the Enlightenment values and heritage of European countries.
story in which biographies of Gauss and Humboldt are told alongside one another in alternating chapters until they intersect back at the point of origin.

Im September 1828 verließ der größte Mathematiker des Landes zum erstenmal seit Jahren seine Heimatstadt, um am Deutschen Naturforscherkongreß in Berlin teilzunehmen. Selbstverständlich wollte er nicht dorthin. Monatelang hatte er sich geweigert, aber Alexander von Humboldt war hartnäckig geblieben, bis er in einem schwachen Moment und in der Hoffnung, der Tag käme nie, zugesagt hatte. (7)

Beyond the basic form of parallel story lines, further contours of the dynamic of relationality manifest in this opening quote. Numerous oppositions are represented by the respective persons. Unlike Humboldt, Gauss is not called by name but referred to with a title signifying his unparalleled status, which grants him a position of superiority over Humboldt. In addition, Gauss is associated with stasis in not having left his hometown in years, and his current travel is the result of weakness, of doing something against his will, and an unrealistic or fatalistic hope that time would not pass. By contrast, Humboldt is associated with Prussian Berlin, is labeled stubborn, and appears to be coercive in having relentlessly pressured Gauss to travel. In this initial scene, it is clear that the narrative dynamic of parallels enables the continual comparison and contrast of themes, traits, and spaces with which the respective characters are associated.

The use of parallelisms does not pertain only to the parallel(s) between Gauss and Humboldt. The doubling and the mirroring of characters is multiplied and shifts throughout the story, and thematically, becomes one of the central realizations in the development of the two main protagonists. In other words, they come to understand life as a matter of living in relationship with numerous others in a way which is a doubling of the self that should result in necessary self-
analysis. The form of the parallel biography is a central tactic for not only telling the story but also constructing the space of the text and the cultural mosaic of the German past vis a vis the notion of curved space.

According to Certeau, “enunciative focalizations” are narrative actions that necessarily carry out the production of story space. These focalizing perspectives articulate the story by an act of distributing and practicing the places in it, performing acts of “social delinquency” whereby a diversity of codes are displaced and undone (Certeau 130). Certeau asserts, “… one can already say that in matters concerning space, this delinquency begins with the inscription of the body in the order’s text” (130). Because the various points of perception in a story construct the different regions of the world as they live in and move through space, I argue that the parallel storylines in *Vermessung* increase the significance of its protagonists’ perspectives. The narrative focus in *Vermessung* remains tightly bound to the two main protagonists, even as their paths intersect with those of others.

It is the disjunction between Gauss’ notion of curved space and its implications in contrast to the “flat” spatial imagination of the social order in which the protagonists carry out their everyday lives that gives rise to a physically palpable condition of transformation and crisis in the novel. This condition results from accelerating modernization and globalization. Gauss’ comment at the end of his speech to Kant above, “Nur eines sei sicher: der Raum sei faltig, gekräummt, und sehr seltsam” (*Vermessung* 96), hints at the condition resulting from the emerging spatial imagination. The conclusion that space is “sehr seltsam” (very odd or unusual) conveys a palpable but only vague sense of unease and indicates Gauss’ own limited

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35 This is why I disagree with Wolfgang Pütz, who describes the novel’s structuring principle to be one of polarity (11). Although the difference is slight, it is significant. I would argue that polarity implies a stable opposition, whereas parallels imply commonalities, despite being an arrangement that also allows for discrepancies to appear. My insistence on this distinction is justified by the fact that despite the numerous oppositions that are raised in the novel, they are reconciled when the parallels eventually meet.
understanding of the implications of his abstract model of space. The feeling of unsettling and the recognition of limitations further represent the cognitive and subjective challenges of the impending transformations that society will face resulting from his and Humboldt’s work. Kathryn Olesko indirectly speaks to this disjuncture between the spatial imagination and reality in commenting that the story juxtaposes the evidence of the metrical net of reality to the emotional and physical pain of reality (763-764). This disjuncture between the reality mediated through scientific findings and the physical experience of reality further speaks to the need to assess how the body is written into the text and how the text is written into the body. The ways in which the figures physically experience the world reveals significant aspects of the normative social order and its defining cultural dimensions. As I will show, the pain of existence will prove to be a result of these disjunctures on the threshold to modernity.

D. The Ethics of an Aestheticized Life: Alexander von Humboldt’s Approach to the World

The novel draws on the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* that deliberately foreground the normative order in which the protagonists are socialized. The familial interaction of the domestic sphere is the primary focus and the disparate upbringings of Humboldt and Gauss and how they learn to operate in society informs the dynamic of relationality. Humboldt’s aristocratic upbringing in a palace near the capital city is depicted as an aesthetic experiment of the cultural elite with ethical implications. His widowed mother turns to none other than Goethe for advice in raising her two sons. Goethe offers the following advice: “Ein Brüderpaar … in welchem sich so recht die Vielfalt menschlicher Bestrebungen ausdrücke, wo also die reichen Möglichkeiten zu Tat und Genuß auf das vorbildlichste Wirklichkeit geworden, das sei in der Tat ein Schauspiel,
Goethe’s poetic formulation, which compares the lives of the boys to a play that should model the most exemplary reality for expressing the diversity of human efforts, is said to be incomprehensible to all: “Diesen Satz verstand keiner” (Vermessung 19). The family steward nonetheless interprets the enigmatic response and the everyday practice of child-rearing is turned into an experiment that models the Zeitgeist of the late-Enlightment era and Weimar ideals, “Er meine zu begreifen, sagte Kunth schließlich, es handle sich um ein Experiment. Der eine solle zum Mann der Kultur ausgebildet werden, der andere zum Mann der Wissenschaft” (Vermessung 20). The family home is thus literally turned into a laboratory as a coin toss places each boy, as well as culture and science, in opposition to one another. This rivalry founds not only the relationship between the two brothers but also serves as a main tenet of early modern German culture and is deeply associated with the possibility to create knowledge and truth.

All aspects of Alexander and Wilhelm’s childhoods are drafted into the aesthetic experiment. Highly paid experts are brought into the home to educate the children, who lead a rigorous life of study with no breaks or vacation. Emotions are trained to conform to a certain notion of German masculinity and properly expressed in accordance with behavioral norms of salon culture or sublimated in aesthetic forms. Genuine fear, of the type experienced when Alexander believes he encounters ghosts in the house, is overcome by experiencing and learning to deal with the horror evoked by the newly popular genre of ghost stories: “Das sei nötig, erklärt Kunth, die Begnung mit dem Dunkel sei Teil des Heranwachsen, wer metaphysische Angst nicht kenne, werde nie ein deutscher Mann” (Vermessung 21). A further method of fear management taught to Alexander gives insight into his later behaviors, “Wann immer einen die Dinge erschreckten, sei es eine gute Idee, sie zu messen” (Vermessung 22). Measuring thus becomes a
procedure to cope with fear and encounters with the irrational or occult are bound to their “proper” place in narrative forms.

The importance placed on aesthetics shapes the brothers’ relationship, “Der ältere Bruder sah aus wie ein Engel. Er konnte reden wie ein Dichter und schrieb früh altkluge Briefe an die berühmtesten Männer des Landes (Vermessung 20), whereas “Der jüngere Bruder, Alexander, war wortkarg und schwächlich, man mußte ihn zu allem ermutigen, seine Noten waren mittelmäßig” (Vermessung 20). Although the elder brother is more beautiful and talented, Wilhelm is also cruel to his younger brother. The Humboldt household illustrates the ethical blindness and lack of empathy caused by the social elite’s extreme privileging of beauty and intellect. The younger brother, who does not meet the desired norms, has no recourse when the older brother puts arsenic in his food or endangers his life by deviously convincing him to walk out onto thin ice, which he then falls through. Alexander knows that the adults will not believe that Wilhelm, the embodiment of the child-rearing experiment’s success, would do such things. In a life-threatening struggle with fever, the outcome of plunging into the “erstarrte Landschaft” (Vermessung 24) under the lake’s ice, Alexander is faced with a pivotal decision, an ultimatum given by his doctor, “… entscheide dich, gelingen oder nicht, das ist ein Entschluß, man muß nur durchhalten, oder?” (Vermessung 25). In that moment, facing death in the frozen landscape of the childhood home and its norms, “durchhalten” (persevering or enduring) becomes Alexander’s approach to life. This rebirth symbolizes Humboldt’s resolve to conform to the requirements of his social milieu by pushing himself to physical and emotional extremes in the pursuit of knowledge. This way of life will eventually result in symptoms of what could be called “Enlightenment attachment disorder” or the difficulty to bond with others.
As the above examples show, the cultural norms require the denial or repression of subjective experiences or reactions that do not fit the accepted form of expression or the proper place. Based on this aestheticized model of life, there is only room for the metaphysical, not the particularity of the individual experience. Consequently, the internalization of these collective values and of learning to withstand anything to succeed determines how Humboldt comes to perceive his own body. Influenced by La Mettrie’s *L’Homme Machine* and symbolically embodying the lessons of his upbringing, Alexander sees himself and his brother as machines, wherein the soul is merely a complicated part. Therefore, the metaphor of the body as machine stands for the rigid control demanded in the German culture of his childhood, but in training his body to overcome its physical and emotional limitations, Humboldt is able to develop new knowledge and therefore achieve the social status that allows him to eventually pursue his desires more freely and shift the scientific practices and spatial imagination of society.

The younger Humboldt’s practical application of the human-as-machine mentality of *durchhalten*, of he who can withstand the most or worst, initiates a shift in his perception of time as he begins to pursue his self-proclaimed path in life, “Er wolle das Leben erforschen, die seltsame Hartnäckigkeit verstehen, mit der es den Globus umspanne” (*Vermessung* 26). Pushing himself to the limit by working excessively long hours and speeding up his pace, Humboldt overcomes the mediocrity and inferiority he experienced in his childhood in comparison to his brother. The consequences of this acceleration are depicted to be disconcerting and incomprehensible for those whom he encounters and for himself, “…überall erschrecke er die Arbeiter durch die Geschwindigkeit, mit der er sich Notizen machte. Er war ständig unterwegs, schlief und aß kaum und wußte selbst nicht, was all das sollte” (*Vermessung* 31). While Humboldt accelerates his pace, he simultaneously senses that time itself is accelerating.
Combating the sensation of time acceleration becomes a primary interest for Humboldt and feeds his interest in aesthetics and documentation along similar lines of measuring and noting anything that is frightening, “Das Romanschreiben, sagte Humboldt, erscheine ihm als Königsweg, um das Flüchtigste der Gegenwart für die Zukunft festzuhalten” (Vermessung 27). This comment suggests a sense of time in which there is no present, but rather a future-anterior whereby the present disappears into the past while the focus is fixed on the future.

Above all, the novel shows that the perception of accelerating time and the practice of outpacing others and reaching new limits is an impediment to developing reciprocal and empathetic relationships. For instance, when his brother marries, Alexander chooses not to attend the wedding with the reason that “ihm fehle Zeit” (Vermessung 30). This turn from the family signifies a shift to a solitary mode of existence and an individualistic, ego-centric mode of work in response to a socio-cultural context that seeks to achieve excellence.

The death of his mother, which essentially eliminates his relationships with all women aside from chance encounters or as objects of study, is the event that removes the heretofore most confining boundary in his life. The emancipation from his mother’s rule, and implicitly the financial freedom he gains because of his inheritance, enables Humboldt to resign from his position as a mine inspector for Prussia, thereby freeing himself from the political order. In this moment of self-assertion, facing the Prussian minister, Humboldt justifies his decision with the reason that “das alles zu wenig sei” and “weil er jetzt endlich aufbrechen könne” (Vermessung 36). This moment of “Aufbrechen”, of setting out, denotes Humboldt’s potential to more freely choose his own path.

As the boundaries of Humboldt’s world open up, the space of the narrative also expands as he moves from point to point. The first destination he chooses is Weimar, where he encounters
pillars of German Classicism, Wieland, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, and his brother Wilhelm. This moment is noteworthy, insofar as Alexander declares his intention to travel in the “New World” and is promptly ascribed a new position by Goethe as “unser Botschafter.” “Und nie solle er vergessen, von wem er komme. … Von uns kommen Sie, sagte Goethe, von hier.” (Vermessung 37), which Goethe clarifies by gesturing toward the group of Weimar giants in discussion and the Roman statues adorning the salon. As it will play out in his further travels and practices, he does not forget from whom he comes - the socialization and cultivation highlighted above informs Alexander’s mission to explore, quantify, and explain places beyond the borders of his youth.

Humboldt remains alienated from others. Put simply, he sees only objects, so there is no reciprocal relation. His way of life is detrimental to living in relation to others. Moreover, the story clearly depicts the early modern practices of scientific observation, which entailed obliterating fear and pain in training the body to work in harmony with the mind (Daston 91, 102). Notably, this was a way of life that concerned moralists critical of naturalists who sacrificed their health and family for their all-consuming scientific pursuits (Daston 102). In his depiction, Kehlmann challenges not only a way of life that leads to a society based on ego-centric competition and isolation of those who gain the power to make truth claims but also the aesthetic forms by which knowledge of the world was established. The Romantic-adventurer-naturalist’s performance of new science foregrounds the ethically spurious practices that correspond with his approach to the world, which Kehlmann ties securely to the frames of reference established in his upbringing and training in Prussia, for whom he now sees himself an ambassador.

Kehlmann’s depiction of Humboldt in the “New World” makes clear the inadequacy of his theoretical and aesthetic approximations of what and whom he encounters. Marking a
geographical and symbolic boundary to the “new hemisphere,” Humboldt and his crew are met at the equator by an unwelcoming committee of mollusks that pushes their ship backwards (Vermessung 49). The mollusks’ rejection of the travelers symbolizes the general dynamic of Central and South America, in that the figures encounter creatures and forces of nature to which they are unaccustomed and thus make the place seem inhospitable to them. Corresponding with Pratt’s claims about Humboldt’s actual depictions of Spanish America, Kehlman portrays the region as a fluid space of flows and flux, of streams of water and, moreover, stories, of incessant oral narration about fantastical creatures and events, told by both the indigenous peoples and the land itself. The jungle is said to have a “große Kraft” (Vermessung 134) and a “widerstrebende Natur” (Vermessung 116) with a history of resisting measuring and causing insanity among earlier European explorers such as Aguirre and Condamine. Of course, Humboldt’s practices are conducive to coping with such situations: he surveys, “Nicht weil es ihn interessiert habe, sondern um den Verstand zu bewahren” (Vermessung 117). The practice of measuring is therefore a continuation of his childhood methodology of maintaining reason. Importantly though, Humboldt’s epistemological methods often fail in this place of superstition, (super)natural forces, and “Fabelwesen.”

Kehlmann has been criticized for perpetuating a spatial binary logic of a rational, civilized “Old World” in contrast to a “New World” of savage, unsettled wilderness and peoples. I contend however that the stereotypical depiction of Amazonia does not just duplicate but also subverts the stereotypes and tropes of the discourse by which the “New World” has been constructed. Those stereotypes are appropriated and undermined through showing as ineffective Humboldt’s interpretive methods when he fails to understand or his unwilling to believe what he

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36 Schaumann claims that the text’s general tendency favors an extreme dualism over a complex reality, therefore, Kehlmann misses out on exploring inherent complexities and conflicts in Humboldt’s own writing wherein Humboldt encountered highly developed civilizations in Amazonia, not just untamed jungle (462).
experiences. His practices are therefore implicitly problematized and deconstructed, so that in the end he is left with a heap of measurements and specimens that do not enable him to comprehend what has happened around him. Of course, the ironizing of such stereotypes even to subvert them simultaneously reinforces them to the extent that they still function to construct the image of the “New World” as Humboldt sees it. However, a focus on Humboldt’s behavior in this region shows how the novel reveals the spatial imagination and metanarrative of European cultural superiority in global interactions to be an outcome of scientific and discursive practices that inadequately represent or even falsify Humboldt’s experiences and observations and efface aspects of reality.

“Surveying” is the foremost practice to consider, but this act is to be recognized as both the material act of measuring as well as an overarching metaphor for various types of seeing, that is to say interpretation and cognition in general. In terms of actual surveying, according to Stockhammer, the significance of a proliferation of surveyors in contemporary literature is to be located in the spatial turn, because the depiction of surveying is a means of showing that “space” is first constructed in being measured (100). To support this, Stockhammer refers to the often cited scene from Vermessung, where a Jesuit missionary insists to Humboldt that abstract space does not exist in Amazonia:

Linien gebe es überall, sagte Humboldt. Sie seien eine Abstraktion. Wo Raum an sich sei, seien Linien.
Raum an sich sei anderswo, sagte Pater Zea.
Raum sei überall!
Überall sei eine Erfindung. Und den Raum an sich gebe es dort, wo Landvermesser ihn hintrügen. (115)

This encounter clearly suggests that Humboldt’s measurements do not represent the realities experienced by the missionary and the protagonist’s insistence on his own methods shows his practices to be imperialistic and unidirectional—they are an attempt to fix an order of
place that does not take other perspectives into consideration. This way of interacting correlates with the techniques of surveying to the extent that, as Stockhammer explains, the surveyor’s use of the theodolite requires the focus on a single point and therefore everything else but that point is blocked out of sight (Vermessung 89).

This “tunnel vision” corresponds to Humboldt’s practice of empiricism that entails invasive investigations on the micro level, so as he moves through the imagined world, he often chooses not to assess or to “see” situations beyond any meaning or value for his own purposes. Humboldt’s relation to this region is imperialistic as he invades, appropriates, reinterprets, or effaces all landscapes, places, people, and objects he comes into contact with. As the narrator asserts, the figure examines everything, “was nicht Füße und Angst genug hatte, ihm davonzulaufen” (Vermessung 69). He picks through the hair of local women to study their lice (70); he disregards the traditions of local populations by plundering human remains from a sacred cave burial ground (121); and he goes so far as to search body cavities of miners as he carries out an inspection of a mine for local officials (198). The conclusion from his mine inspection shows his work to be bound to the efforts of modernization, colonization, and exploitation of the natural resources and local population, “Ein geregeltes Ausbeuten der Schätze der tiefen Erde sei nicht denkbar, wenn man nicht den Arbeitenden entgegenwirkte” (Vermessung 198-9).

The surveyor’s habit of fixing time and space clashes with the depicted colonial cultural norms. The practice of story-telling that is prevalent in the Amazon is perceived as a threat to both Humboldt’s rational world order and the law of place precariously installed by European/Spanish colonizers, who have forbidden writing down fictional stories in all colonies (Vermessung 114). Therefore, the practice of writing and disseminating a story is shown to be a
political act and a mechanism of control that constructs and mediates a certain “truth” or “reality” and effectively suppresses the alternative, local stories to the extent that they are limited to the oral tradition and risk being lost to time. In this constellation, Humboldt occupies a subject position in which he instates an official order of place based on the cultural frames of reference of his upbringing. On the occasions when his lived experiences do not correlate with his theoretical approximations, when his conceptual and epistemic frames fail, his performance of seeing or reading is shown to be a willful imposition of a law of order.

The prime example of this is an occasion at the ruins of Teotihuacan, where 20,000 people were said to have willingly sacrificed themselves in one day. The “Ordnung der Welt vertrüge derlei nicht,” Humboldt insists to the offended local workers telling him the history of the place (Vermessung 202). Later, standing on the temple looking at the landscape, he recognizes that the entire city is a calendar, “Wie gut hatten die Menschen die Sterne gekannt, und was hatten sie mitteilen wollen? Seit über tausend Jahren war er der erste, der ihre Botschaft lesen konnte” (Vermessung 207). Although he acknowledges the sophistication of the scientific knowledge and arrogantly asserts that he can read the message, the contrary is shown in the previous line, “was hatten sie mitteilen wollen?” (Vermessung 208). His comprehension falters in the face of what he sees as the impossible simultaneity of “so viel Zivilisation und so viel Grausamkeit … Gleichsam der Gegensatz zu allem, wofür Deutschland stehe” (Vermessung 208). The figure’s cultural superiority is clearly meant ironically from the author’s twenty-first century perspective. Humboldt performs an enunciative act that erases the history of the other time and place that does not fit into his worldview, “Er werde diese erschreckend intelligent geschichteten Steine verstehen lernen, als wären sie Teil der Natur” (Vermessung 208).
In this scene, the Eurocentric geographical imagination of modernity is (re)produced, whereby colonization was justified, inasmuch as the *new* world is made precisely that – it is wiped clean of its past and returned to nature or virgin territory in Zantop’s terminology.\(^{37}\) However, the novel’s tactic of showing this way of operating renders visible the effaced (his)tories of South and Central American space. While the story portrays the configuration of the early modern European imagination regarding the new world, it also instates conditions of postmodernity by deliberately contrasting Humboldt’s metanarrative with a simultaneous plurality of competing stories. The novel thus responds to cultural geographer Doreen Massey’s plea to attend to the politics of place by recognizing the coevalness of multiplicity trajectories and simultaneity of stories-so-far that comprise a particular location (*Vermessung* 24).

As Humboldt’s erasure of the local stories is acted out for the reader, those stories are archived by the novel and counter the one-sided picture Humboldt sends back in his self-censored correspondence. His journal and letter writing is self-reflexively performed in relation to his imagined (future) audience or his carefully selected addressees, which include Kant, Goethe, his brother Wilhelm, and Thomas Jefferson. Here, his experiences are self-censored to comply with the expected norms of proper comportment and above all the image he wants to convey, so for instance, he sanitizes his adventures to hide experiences of fear (108), experiences below his stature, such as having sand fleas burrow under his toenails (112), or experiences of disorientation, such as when climbing what he thought to be the world’s highest peak, the Chimborazo (180). The novel’s depiction of such deliberate retouching exposes the

\(^{37}\) In *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity*, Chenxi Tang associates the imperialist mentality of colonialism with the rise of the notion of geographic space in the late nineteenth century according to which space became understood as an array of objects to be exploited and amassed for the wealth of a nation (15). In the novel, Humboldt’s imperialist mentality is further illustrated in the scene in which he determines the location of the canal, in which he proclaims a new era of “Wohlfahrt” decisively in reference to financial prosperity and devoid of actors: “Daß der Kanal jetzt auf den Karten verzeichnet sei, erklärte Humboldt, werde die Wohlfahrt des gesamten Erdteils befördern. Man könne nun Güter quer über den Kontinent bringen, neue Handelszentren würden entstehen, ungeahnte Unternehmungen seien möglich” (*Vermessung* 136).
Enlightenment search for truth and meaning as highly invested in its participants’ own egocentric interests.

The mapping gaze in the temple example positions Humboldt in the god’s-eye-view perspective from above, thereby spatially symbolizing the cultural superiority that informs his reading of the ruins and his naïve comment about the impossibility of the simultaneity of civilization and cruelty on Germany’s part. Based on this attitude, his interaction with the local peoples is rarely one of respect, partnership or multidirectional exchange.38

Humboldt’s relation to his French travel partner Bonpland is particularly significant, insofar as his behavior and lack of empathy is problematized in the refraction through Bonpland’s eyes. For instance, the two men come across an unconscious girl lying in a field. Bonpland recognizes clear signs of violence and tries to help the girl, whereas Humboldt concludes that the heat must have gotten to her and continues on his way. “Bonpland warf ihm einen langen Blick zu. Wie auch immer, sagte Humboldt, sie müßten weiter” (Vermessung 105). Similarly, the two men witness Jesuit priests whipping chained indigenous people, and although Humboldt tries to intervene because of their cries, he again ultimately ignores the pain of the other in a rush to be on his way. “Humboldt zögerte. Bonpland, der dazugekommen war, sah ihn vorwurfsvoll an. Aber sie müßten doch weiter, sagte Humboldt leise. Was solle er denn machen” (Vermessung 118). Even though Bonpland does not rectify the situations either, these interactions are foundational to the novel’s program of relationality as implicit censures of Humboldt’s representation of unethical practices that are construed as culturally specific, “Müse man immer so deutsch sein” Bonpland is said to query (Vermessung 80).

38 Pratt addresses how European explorers were indebted to the local knowledge of their guides, yet the credit for this knowledge base is largely absent in travelogues. In Vermessung, it is shown how Humboldt can extrapolate from the local practices that curare is only effective as a poison when it enters directly into the bloodstream and, therefore, can be used as a pain medication when ingested (131).
In the two encounters above, it is further noteworthy that the figure’s habit of rushing is directly linked to his inability to ethically respond to the need and pain of others. Driven by the desire of Ruhm, Humboldt’s scramble to be the first to map the location of the canal between the Orinoco and the Amazon organizes space in a way in which there is no time for intersubjectivity. In this way, the novel shows the practices of the Naturforscher to be precisely those that eliminate human presence and interaction, ironically, given Humboldt’s earlier intention to explore life in all its forms around the globe.

The paradoxical practices of fixing the flux of the multiple trajectories of space while simultaneously accelerating one’s own movement has extensive implications for subjectivity. Harvey argues that “the intersecting command of money, time, and space forms a substantial nexus of social power that we cannot afford to ignore” because “those who define the material practices, forms, and meanings of money, time, or space fix certain basic rules of the social game” (226). In that Humboldt has operated tirelessly to accumulate social and cultural capital, and occupies a subject position in which he can define time and space, he has tactically fixed certain rules of the social game and strategically propagated a competitive order of place. The establishment of international lines of communication in letters is therefore as much the outcome of the thrust to tailor his image as it has been to disseminate his findings.

This is clearly articulated already in the depiction of Humboldt’s arrival in the “New World”: “Noch im Boot ... begann er seinem Bruder von der hellen Luft, dem warmen Wind, den Kokosbäumen und Flamingos zu schreiben. Ich weiß nicht, wann dies eintreffen wird, doch sieh zu, dass Du es in die Zeitung bekommst. Die Welt soll von mir erfahren. Ich müßte mich sehr irren, wenn ich ihr gleichgültig bin” (Vermessung 51). This statement uttered by Humboldt when he first reaches land in South America expresses Kehlmann’s emphasis on the character’s
awareness of his own cultural capital. The importance of the moment is above all signified in that the consistent use of *indirekte Rede* is broken and Humboldt speaks in the first-person for the first time, thereby founding his ego in relation to the world and indicating his interest in world fame.

Humboldt’s logic of *Ruhm* and his spatiotemporal practices eventually overcome him. Reaching the capital city of Mexico, the figure becomes a spectacle as he is met by international journalists who wish to cash in on his fame by documenting his experiences and practices. This marks a turning point as Humboldt loses control over his own story, “Da er seine Reise selbst beschreiben wolle, komme ihm das unnötig vor …” he tells a local journalist who nonetheless becomes his shadow to document “alles, was noch Zeuge verlange” (*Vermessung* 196). An aestheticized object as the subject of biographies and newspaper articles, Humboldt has achieved the immortality for which he strove, whereby his identity will be discursively constructed for an international audience and eclipse in importance the lived reality and interactions of his everyday life. His image is frozen in time and he becomes a living relic. Upon his return to Europe, cashing in on his image will be the only way Humboldt can move about in a world which he has helped to create.

E. Unbending in a Curved World: Carl Friedrich Gauss’ Pained Existence

Fundamental to the novel’s interest in intersubjectivity, Gauss’ upbringing contrasts starkly with that of Humboldt’s. Confined by lower class status, Gauss recognizes early in his life the value of cultural capital. Importantly, he has an entirely different relationship to the world – one that is extremely emotional and sensual. His participation in the elite and political circles of knowledge creation entail suffering and amount to a bifurcated existence that requires
him to separate the experiences of his body from the life of his mind. He too eventually suffers from Enlightenment attachment disorder.

Born into an impoverished family in the poorest quarter of Braunschweig, the sum of all advice received from his father founds Gauss’ notion of (cultural) identity, “Ein Deutscher, sagte er immer wieder, … sei jemand, der nie krumm sitze” (Vermessung 54). This advice is not meant as moral guidance, rather the young Gauss interprets it literally based on his father’s profession: “Schon längst hatte Gauss Gärtnern bei der Arbeit zugesehen und verstanden, daß sein Vater nicht die Unmoral der Menschen, sondern der chronische Rückenschmerz seines Berufsstandes umtrieb” (Vermessung 60). The humorous simplicity of this notion of Germanness, of sitting up straight, eliminates moral reflection and founds a mode of being that puts Gauss at odds with the conceptualization of curved space. Metaphorically speaking, Gauss operates as a square peg in a round world. The habit of holding himself upright belongs to a notion of space that he eventually transforms, thereby making his own mode of Germanness conflict with the emerging spatial imagination of curved space.

Unlike in Humboldt’s social milieu, comportment among the working poor does not require emotions to be suppressed and rigidly controlled. Therefore, Gauss learns by the example of his complaining father and melancholy, weeping mother to register and express in an unmediated manner the discomfort and pain of transformation and crisis, of being upright in curved space. The opposite of the machine-like model of Humboldt’s relation to the world, Gauss relates to his world in a sensual and emotional manner. The childhood home is thus a place of familial norms that do not enable Gauss to function well in the “proper” places in which he will later have to operate.
Gauss’ emotionally charged relation to the world is also significant in regards to his sense of time and informs his relations to others. From childhood on, Gauss is plagued by melancholy at the inevitable decay of life. This is not only the consequence of watching his beloved mother age, but also of his virtuoso way of seeing the world. The reflexively-modern figure suffers in a world in which his intellect automatically unravels the web of preceding metanarratives:


Thus, for Gauss the world is only an illusion and unknowable, and the passage of time is the only certainty.

Furthermore, he regards himself as exceptional, which is also registered in his perception of time and affects his interactions with almost all others, whom he believes generally function with an insufferable “Trägheit” and lack of desire to think and reason:

Lange hatte er gemeint, daß die Leute Theater spielten oder einem Ritual anhingen, das sie verpflichtete, immer erst nach einer kurzen Pause zu sprechen oder zu handeln. Manchmal konnte er sich anpassen, dann wieder war es nicht auszuhalten. Erst allmählich kam er dahinter, daß sie diese Pausen brauchten. Warum dachten sie so langsam, so schwer und mühevoll? … Ihm fiel auf, daß man sich ärgerte, wenn er die Pausen nicht einhielt. Er tat sein Bestes, aber oft gelang es ihm nicht. (54)

It is evident here that the practice of everyday life for Gauss requires a tedious reigning in of his reflexive way of being, and by his own admission, he is often unable to conform to the rules of
place and the corresponding practices of interaction, part of which is attributable to his lower-
class upbringing, part of which is attributable to trying to separate his sexual and emotional side
from intellectual activities.

It is significant that he is depicted as a different type of Genie than Humboldt. Rather
than attaining genius status out of meticulous cultivation among the cultural and intellectual elite
and developing a mode of brutal durchhalten, Gauss is portrayed as having been born with
unparalleled intellectual capabilities. This becomes clear in his self-described, near-effortless
approach to problems, “man [müsse] ein Problem nur ohne Vorurteil und Gewohnheit
betrachten, dann zeige es von selbst seine Lösung…” (Vermessung 57).

The value of Gauss’ genius is connoted in terms of political and cultural capital. For this
reason, he is able to pursue a life path beyond that ascribed to him by the coincidence of his
birth, but due to his financial need, his options in life depend on decisions made by the education
system and the political sphere. When he is recommended for a scholarship by one of his future
professors from the University of Göttingen, Gauss must prove he is worthy to the Herzog of
Braunschweig. He becomes a pawn strategically played for the interests of the university and the
political order:

Er interessiere sich mehr fürs Lateinische, sagte Gauß heiser. …

Der Herzog fragte, ob da jemand geredet habe.

Zimmerman stieß Gauß in den Rippen. Er bitte um Entschuldigung, der junge Mann
stamme aus groben Verhältnissen, sein Benehmen lasse noch zu wünschen übrig. Doch
er verbürge sich dafür, daß nur ein Stipendium des Hofes zwischen ihm und jenen
Leistungen stehe, welche den Ruhm des Vaterlandes mehren würden. (62)
This occasion illustrates Gauss’ initial lack of agency as he advances to the university. The instructor negotiates to provide the boy, made invisible by the duke’s response, with social mobility, whereby the boy’s work becomes an investment for increasing the renown, and thus power, of the fatherland and the university. Here, it is shown that the pursuit of knowledge is instrumentalized for political benefit, and the accumulation of “Ruhm” becomes the political and cultural capital that can purchase mobility and a certain semblance of agency within the parameters of the order. In this way, Gauss learns the rules and tricks of the social game in which the accumulation of fame serves to increase the “purchase power” of a name.

The successful performance of this adroit maneuvering within the socio-political order is pivotal for the young Gauss’ establishment of his name and becomes more significant insofar as it provides the occasion for the decisive epiphany of his life. “Das sei sonst nicht seine Art, sagte der Junge . . . Aber sein Name sei Gauß, er sei nicht unbekannt, und in Kürze werde er so große Entdeckungen machen wie Isaac Newton. Das sage er nicht aus Eitelkeit, sondern weil die Zeit knapp und es nötig sei, daß er an dem Flug teilnehme” (Vermessung 64). This practice of self-description is a means to an end, and as he insists, is not asserted out of vanity but rather to accelerate the interaction. Consequently, Gauss gains what he desires and hurries over the obstacle of his youth in convincing the French hot-air balloon pioneer to let him be one of the first to fly.

Gauss literally and figuratively rises above the boundaries of the world to see space in a new way. From this new vantage point, he perceives the curve of space and the intersection of countless parallels, observations that will eventually found his theory of curved space: “Aus Punkten Linien, aus Linien Flächen und aus Flächen Körper, doch damit war es nicht getan. Seine feine Biegung, von hier oben war sie fast zu sehen” (Vermessung 66). This event is not
only significant because of Gauss’ way of interacting with the pilot, it also ushers in a new way of perceiving, namely a God’s-eye view, “So sieht Gott die Welt, sagte Pilâtre” (Vermessung 66). Therefore, like Humboldt overlooking the ruins of Teotihuacan, Gauss physically and metaphorically assumes a “god-like” position above the earth, which is also to be understood as a position of theoretical abstraction. This position further symbolizes Gauss’ place in the world as one of alienation, because it literally positions him above the physical plane of daily human interaction.\(^39\) Notably, Gauss nearly sees curvature of space. Thus his sensual connection to the world gives rise to an epiphany that sets the foundation for a model of global space that allows for the messiness of bodies in relationship, namely the theory of relativity.

As Gauss becomes more ensconced in the world of scientific observation, at the university he develops work habits that lead to extreme isolation and loss of purpose. “In einer Nacht kamen ihm plötzlich die Wissenschaft, seine Arbeit, sein gesamtes Leben fremd und überflüssig vor, weil er keinen Freund hatte und außer seiner Mutter niemanden, dem er etwas bedeutete” (Vermessung 91-2). The isolation of the eccentric genius, literally ex-centric as in marginalized, who is hand-picked and deemed worthy of support by the university and the fatherland, reflects an extreme emphasis on and instrumentalization of the individual and individual achievement. The social order in which “Ruhm” functions as a precondition for agency dictates the increasing significance of the individual. The individualism fostered in Germany is however not based on the Enlightenment principles of inalienable rights as they were developing in neighboring France during Gauss’ formative years. In the depicted Germany, \(^39\) This is precisely the view of space that the spatial turn’s constructivist notions seek to correct. Certeau addresses the view from above in his well-known essay “Walking in the City” in which he looks down on New York from the top of the World Trade Center. He associates this elevated position with the “erotics of knowledge” that remove the body from the anonymity of the city and turn the walker into a voyeur, the “author” of a static view of space: “When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. … His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god” (92).
individualism is exemplified by the hyper-egocentrism of the *Genie*, who is ultimately supported and used by the state. Accordingly, this is a mode of existence and subjectivity that rely on competition.

The logic of self-advancement also motivates Gauss to choose the field of mathematics over his interest in the humanities, because “Zunächst einmal habe er eingesehen, daß er in der Mathematik mehr leisten könne” (*Vermessung* 86). This decision not only signifies the transformation of German society with the increased prominence of the “hard sciences” but it also stands for a shift to the spatial imagination or representation of reality, articulated in Gauss assertion upon the completion of his doctorate, “Die Zahlen entführten einen nicht aus der Wirklichkeit, sie brachten sie näher heran, machten sie klarer und deutlich wie nie. Die Zahlen begleiten ihn jetzt immer. Er vergaß sie einmal, wenn er die Huren besuchte” (*Vermessung* 86). Here, the concept of reality and truth based on numbers illustrates that abstract relations between numbers supersede the importance of relationships between people, inasmuch as the most intimate practices of interaction are performed with prostitutes, who become substitutes for fulfilling emotional relationships for which there is no time given Gauss’ absorption in his work. The outcome of the figure’s fast-paced work habits result in the early completion of what will be his life’s work. Consequently, the isolation and loss of purpose lead to a failed suicide attempt (98). Interpersonal relations are shown to bear the cost of this paradigm based on rigidly upright modes of subjectivity, abstract formulas, and the corresponding places organized by the logic of *Ruhm*.

Insofar as the individual can pursue his path freely only if he is financially independent in the place organized by the logic of *Ruhm*, individual interests and practices come into conflict with the political goals of and practices dictated by the fatherland or the current *Landesvater,*
when he calls for a measuring of his territories (145, 160). In this way, Gauss ends up unwillingly surveying, that is to say constructing official space and establishing borders as a means of survival. “Dann kam der Tag, an dem er kein Geld mehr hatte. ... Dem Herzog hatte es nie gefallen, daß er nach Göttingen gegangen war, an eine Verlängerung war nicht zu denken. … So fand er sich unversehens durch die verregnete Landschaft stolpern” (Vermessung 88-9). In this relationship, Gauss is clearly limited by the interests and politics of the Herzog, and his stumbling around the countryside is an impediment to his own work, in which he is starting to unravel the existing laws of physics and make discoveries in the field of astronomy.

Surveying is a strategy to make ends meet and eventually an alternative to being at home. It is also a medium for bringing him from the level of abstract thought into the realm of everyday interaction; literally it makes him go for a walk and experience the physical world. Therefore, it provides the occasion for Gauss to move about in the space of the German everyday and interact with others. Out in the countryside, he encounters two women, Johanna, who does not have to pause to think and so he eventually asks her to marry him, and her friend Minna, whom he marries after Johanna’s death, because he needs someone to care for his family. The outcome of this interaction is further informative regarding gender relations of German space of the Enlightenment era, which Kehlmann pretty much leaves intact. The women are limited to the roles of mothers, wives, or prostitutes. Johanna is given a few more contours, in that she is intellectually capable of keeping pace with the speed of Gauss’ thoughts and, unlike Gauss, is aware of the implications of the political context on their lives.

In such encounters, the explicit reaction of the interlocutor reflects and problematizes Gauss’ dysfunctional practices of being in relation to others. In the professional realm, his superiority complex is connoted with frustration but more so sympathy, “Gegen solche
Überlegenheit helfe nur Sympathie” (Vermessung 269), nevertheless he remains in high esteem because of his intellect. By contrast, in the private sphere his behavior causes him and others pain. Drawing on the discourse of astronomy en vogue in the late eighteenth century, Kehlmann turns Gauss into a metaphorical black hole. Acting as an important “mirror” for the figure, his wife informs him of his effect on others, “Sie habe den Verdacht, daß er Leben und Kraft aus den Menschen seiner Umgebung ziehe wie die Erde von der Sonne und das Meer aus den Flüssen ...” (Vermessung 93). Although his marriage gives new meaning to his life, Gauss continues on the same self-focused orbit, unable to recognize the symbolic implications of intersecting parallels for everyday life. This inability to give back or to relate to others traps Gauss in a place of interior individuation. In other words, he does not look outward to see the needs and pains of others, and thus he remains melancholy and alienated. In relation only with himself and his work while always longing for more, the bourgeois way of life is unfulfilling for Gauss, and his family suffers emotionally.

His tragic lack of empathy is depicted on the occasion of his wife’s death. The emotional impact of her death is experienced as a loss of orientation, “Was danach geschah, konnte sein Gedächtnis lange nicht zur Einheit formen. Es kam ihm vor, als wäre die Zeit vor- und zurückgeschnellt ...” (Vermessung 161), and signifies a transformative moment in the time-space of Gauss’ life, “Das, dachte er, ist es. Leben müssen, obgleich alles vorbei ist. Disponieren, organisieren: jeden Tag, jede Stunde und Minute. Als hätte es noch Sinn” (Vermessung 162). Life loses its meaning as Gauss loses the one person whom he saw as his near-equal and, aside from his mother, for whom he cared. His subsequent decision is a strategy that reflects his financial confinement in the socio-economic order and articulates his gender role as patriarch with a notable lack of emotional ties to his family life now that his wife is deceased, “... er
[müßte] wieder heiraten. Er hatte Kinder. Er wußte nicht, wie man die aufzog. Einen Haushalt führen konnte er nicht. Dienstboten waren teuer” (Vermessung 161). The purpose of surveying thus shifts for Gauss on account of his relation to his second wife, whom he does not love, the sight of whom makes him lonely, and the thought of whom makes him wish he were dead. Therefore, Gauss admits to himself that he has become a surveyor, “Um nicht daheim zu sein” (Vermessung 193). In this way, the practice of surveying is configured as a means of liberation from the family.

The irony of Gauss’ surveying is that he constructs the very same borders and reproduces the order that limit his movement in the world while at the same time they provide him with the financial means to sustain his intellectual pursuits and support his family. In general, his work fulfills the politically, socially, or culturally determined valuable contributions before he can pursue his own intellectual and personal desires (For example, he gains significant celebrity for naming a star, but rankles over the lack of appreciation for his calculation of the star’s orbit). Although he continues to make contributions to science, in particular astronomy, and develops new technologies, such as the telegraph, he does not pursue his work on differential geometry despite sensing that his model of curved space could alter the world significantly. Instead, his work, and thus the spatial imagination, shifts further away from the space of everyday relations as he devotes himself to astronomy and the magnetism of the earth’s interior. The work solicited by the government and valued by society therefore seems senseless in light of the individual’s own, more advanced understanding of the world.

Moreover, like Humboldt, Gauss performs his duties with tunnel vision, whereby the text again makes clear the cognitive blindness of the surveyor’s approach to human interaction. The culmination of this occurs on the property of “Graf von der Ohe zur Ohe.” Employing his
strategy of name-dropping and listing off his credentials, Gauss rudely blusters his way into the Graf’s house late at night to get permission to cut down one of the trees blocking the line of sight for measuring. The servant responds in kind by housing the prestigious surveyor in filthy quarters. Gauss becomes disoriented in the large home, but arrogantly takes pride in his superior spatial sense, thanks to which he eventually gains his bearings. “Die Anlage sollte wohl Besucher verwirren, und vermutlich funktionierte das bei Leuten ohne geometrische Vorstellungskraft ganz gut” (*Vermessung* 183). The irony of this pride is made clear in the encounter with the Graf, who symbolizes God. Gauss’ cognitive capacities fail to interpret the situation for what it is as he rushes to get on his way to continue measuring (*Vermessung* 189). Thus, he misses the opportunity to interact with the “creator” whom he had wanted to take to task earlier for His sloppy construction of the physical universe.

To the extent that the representation of Gauss functions as a collective symbol for not only Germanness but also wide-spread strategies in an era defined by competition and *Ruhm*, the text problematizes the ethics of socialization and interaction in such a cultural order. The internalization of the status as a *Genie* in the order of *Ruhm* results in a reflexive disposition of superiority that disables Gauss’ relations with others. In that the novel instantiates the Enlightenment’s impatient sense of time pressing forward in the face of “the ‘retarded time’ of recalcitrant forms of social organization” (Harvey 261), the conflict of interests between the individual’s work and the work he performs to make ends meet results in a sense of existence as meaningless. Longing for a home life but unable to live in relation to others and desiring the freedom to work unhindered, Gauss lives out the melancholy alienation and simultaneous acceleration and stagnation of the individual life of early modernity.
F. Conclusion: Reconciliation in the Frozen Space of Absolutist Prussia

In *Beschleunigung: Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne*, sociologist Hartmut Rosa investigates the mutually-constitutive relationship between culturally-dependent temporal structures, systemic requirements of a society, and how subjects organize their lives. He diagnoses two interdependent symptoms of a “Zeitkrise” that have been experienced repeatedly in the modern and current era, namely acceleration and desynchronization (39). Rosa explains that the fundamental experience of modernity has been the sense that everything is speeding up (*Beschleunigung* 40). Simultaneous to the experience of acceleration on the three levels of time that comprise an individual’s “Zeithorizonte,” which are everyday time determined by rhythms and habits of everyday life, biographical time as the planned course of a lifetime, and historical time determined by the epoch, a diametrically opposite but complimentary experience creates a sense of crystallization (*Beschleunigung* 40-41). This desynchronization then occurs when patterns of time on various levels of society become incongruent.⁴⁰

Both protagonists display the symptoms of a particular type of desynchronization, namely when the three “akteursleitendende Zeithorizonte” become incongruent: “Dies führe zum Verlust der Fähigkeit, das je eigene Leben narrativ in eine referenzstiftende Vergangenheit und eine sinnstiftende Zukunft einzubetten und daraus zumindest mittelfristig zeitresistente Handlungsorientierungen zu gewinnen” (*Beschleunigung* 46). For Humboldt and Gauss, the experience of this desynchronization is directly connected to cultural conditions and norms of German society, especially in the later phases of their lives, when they meet in Berlin in 1828 for

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⁴⁰ Rosa identifies three types of desynchronization: when system-institutional or structural patterns of time develop differently than those of the individual and vice versa (*Beschleunigung* 45); when subsystems become desynchronized when, for example, “die Wirtschaft, die Wissenschaft, die Technik und die durch sie ausgelösten Entwicklungen seien zu schnell geworden für eine politische Steuerung und rechtliche Regulierung der gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen” (*Beschleunigung* 46); and when there is an incongruency in the three “akteursleitende Zeithorizonte” (*Beschleunigung* 46).
the German Conference of Natural Scientists and their reputations have come to precede them. The time horizons of the individual are thus limited by the backwardness of the socio-political order.

In absolutist Prussia of the post-Napoleonic era, although vibrating uneasily with the rumblings of the student movement and revolution, a sense of desynchronization and crystallization is tangible. Space is militantly controlled with patrolled border crossings and stringent laws on “unlawful gatherings” (“Zusammenrottung”), whereby interpersonal interaction is policed and thus precludes to a great extent living in relation to others. Such a controlling political order more or less has final say over the life paths of the protagonists, requiring both to reproduce it in order to make ends meet and procure funding for their work. Hence, both Gauss and Humboldt, each in their own way, have participated in producing and reproducing the spatial order in which they are trapped.

Returning from his largely self-determined movement in the fluctuating, flowing space of the Americas to this frozen Europe of the Restoration era, carved by boundaries of competing geopolitical units, Humboldt unwillingly leaves Paris to return to Berlin because of his position as a member of the aristocracy and his relationship to the Prussian court in a time of political tensions between France and Prussia but also in order to finance his intellectual pursuits. Thus, against his own desires he ends up as chamberlain to the king and regards himself as an “Untertan” (239).

Descriptions of the city of Berlin articulate a cultural lag in comparison to other European capitals. The city appears as a disorderly settlement on the swampy periphery of Europe, defying the rigid order that the state seeks to impose:

In ein paar Jahren, sagte Eugen, werde das hier eine Metropole sein wie Rom, Paris oder Sankt Petersburg.

Niemals, sagte Gauß. Widerliche Stadt! (14).

Gauss’ skepticism of the eventual rise of Berlin and Humboldt’s similar attitude toward the “greuliche Stadt” (Vermessung 214) articulate a disgust with lagging German culture in which their pursuits and life paths have been greatly determined or limited. Moreover, both figures’ relationship to the world is embodied in Humboldt’s museumified presence in the nascent cityscape.

The experience of acceleration and desynchronization results not only from the repressive and regressive political order and lagging culture, but also from the laws of nature, or as Gauss reportedly avers “Die wahren Tyrannen seien die Naturgesetze” (Vermessung 220). Giving credence to Rosa’s theory that individual and historical time have gotten out of synch with one another, “Seltsam sei es und ungerecht, sagte Gauß, so recht ein Beispiel für die erbärmliche Zufälligkeit der Existenz, daß man in einer bestimmten Zeit geboren und ihr verhaftet sei, ob man wolle oder nicht. Es verschaffe einem einen unziemlichen Vorteil vor der Vergangenheit und macht einen zum Clown der Zukunft“ (Vermessung 9). The coincidence of existence, here experienced as imprisonment, is notably a consequence of modern thought on time, progress, and evolution. Gauss’ temporal horizon in which time is a linear, evolutionary progression traps him “in einer zweitklassigen Zeit” (Vermessung 260). Gauss articulates the condition of acceleration
that goes hand in hand with modernization and connects here to the “Ungeduld der Aufklärung” (Rosa Beschleunigung 86). Insofar as the temporal horizon is extended beyond that of the individual lifespan and is always focused on the future in modern society’s march toward progress, the individual life loses its significance by experiencing its own obsolescence. Gauss and Humboldt are trapped in German space that lags behind in an era that is only beginning to experience the advent of modernization which has in part resulted from their scientific work and which has enabled them to imagine a better future, for instance with faster forms of transportation and medical advances, particularly pain killers. In addition, the figures have been beholden to carrying out their lives in a cultural order in which the advances they envision have not been able to be realized freely. Their work has always been appropriated or limited by the socio-political order and the economic order of global capitalism.

When read under the sign of desynchronization, Humboldt’s obsessive work habits and interest in capturing his experiences in writings or drawings can be understood as coping mechanisms that diminish the perception of acceleration. In fact, he has altogether eliminated time in Prussian Berlin, “Hier gebe es keine frühe oder späte Stunde, murmelt Humboldt. Hier gebe es nur Arbeit, und die werde getan” (Vermessung 15). The symptoms of acceleration and desynchronization are also a catalyst for scientific and aesthetic development to archive the traces of a human existence. This is particularly clear when Humboldt seeks to freeze the momentous occasion of the arrival of the “Prince of Mathematics” in Berlin. The nascent medium of photography depends however on time, on the subjects remaining motionless, while the image is captured. Time is not freely available in Prussian space nor is the importance of this particular moment recognized. The implementation of the official order by the police officer who

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41 Rosa speculates whether the experience of acceleration and lack of time associated with waves of modernization might not actually be a precondition for technical acceleration rather than the reverse (86).
breaks up the “illegal” gathering (Zusammenrottung) results in the photograph’s failure. Therefore, forgetting and ignoring the ruptures in reality is a way to cope with the contemporary spatio-temporal conditions. While looking at the “gespenstischer Umrisse” of the failed image, “Sekunden später hatte er [Humboldt] sie [die Platte], wie alles was ihm je mißlungen war, vergessen” (Vermessung 17). Importantly, however, it is evident that the irrational forces, the ghostly shadows of the world cannot be captured in the aesthetic representations into which Humboldt tries to force them.

Gauss on the other hand accepts that there is more to existence than the purely abstract, rational image of the German Enlightenment. His admission of the limitations of human knowledge and the immeasurability of the world are expressed in a comment by which he nullifies the rational worldview that he and Humboldt participated in creating, “Doch die Regeln der Wahrscheinlichkeit ... galten nicht zwingend. Sie seien keine Naturgesetze, Ausnahmen seien möglich. ... Manchmal vermute er sogar, daß auch die Gesetze der Physik bloß statistisch wirkten, mithin Ausnahmen erlaubten: Gespenster oder die Übertragung der Gedanken” (Vermessung 13).

As Gauss and Humboldt watch the next generation build on their work, leading to new technologies that surpass their own methods, they themselves continue to work, and, especially Humboldt, strive to remain relevant in the advancement of knowledge. As the experience of obsolescence becomes both Gauss’ and Humboldt’s fundamental relation to their world, the implications of their intellectual pursuits come to symbolize the conditions of life in an age of intensifying globalization. In short, their contributions to the standardization of time and measure, cartography, mathematics, navigational and communication techniques prove to be
central to the acceleration of the processes of modernization and globalization in the late Enlightenment era.⁴²

With his sizeable accumulation of cultural capital, cashing in on his image becomes Humboldt’s only way to remain relevant and continue exploring the world. Therefore, he gives himself over to circulate as capital, which associates the flows of European space and the overcoming of borders with the circulation and commodification of images. As a symbol, his movement becomes contingent upon geopolitical interests. Consequently, he loses his freedom of mobility and, like Gauss earlier, the purpose of his life, “Die Hoffnungen seiner Jugend seien fern und unwirklich geworden” (Vermessung 218). His subsequent path is determined by the next source of funding as Russia finances a trip for him through its vast expanses. In Russia, Humboldt’s every move is dictated by the government and its guides as they seek to gain from the “Prometheus der neuen Zeit” (Vermessung 290). This no longer has anything to do with the opportunity to learn from his practices, which are by now seen by the next generation as outmoded, “wie im Geschichtsbuch” (Vermessung 274). Rather, this journey is made into a celebrity’s tour to increase the importance of Russia. Humboldt is put on display like the objects

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⁴² In this vein, Katharina Gerstenberger argues that the novel is “concerned with the compression of time and space that contemporary critics have identified as a central aspect of globalization” (Gerstenberger “Historical Space” 103). The notion of time-space compression, theorized by David Harvey in The Condition of Postmodernity, is defined as “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves. I use the word ‘compression’ because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us” (240). Consequently, time horizons shorten to only the present and space seems to shrink, resulting in images such as the “global village,” according to Harvey (240). There are however two issues that must be addressed when applying the notion of time-space compression to Vermessung. First of all, Harvey’s notion is connected to the financial crisis and historical context of post-1848 Europe. Gerstenberger deals with this anachronism by arguing that Kehlmann’s novel actually shows that the advent of time-space compression can be traced to the beginning of the nineteenth century, because its protagonists “make the compression of time and space their primary purpose” (“Historical Space” 110). While I agree that the condition of time-space compression can surely be traced to Humboldt and Gauss’ era, if not earlier, I disagree somewhat with Gerstenberger’s causality in the claim that their primary purpose was time-space compression. This gives too much agency to those involved in the project of measuring the world, because it does not recognize that time-space compression occurs only in relation to other structural and systemic processes. Therefore, reading the respective ways of operating in relation to the social, cultural, and political order, as I have, shows that time-space compression is dependent upon the context being ‘compressed.’ Harvey clarifies, “‘Compression’ should be understood as relative to any preceding state of affairs” (240).
in the museums he is scheduled to visit. Out of concern that Humboldt will involve himself in Russian politics regarding civil rights, Humboldt must promise the Russian government that “Er werde sich mit der unbelebten Natur fassen, die Verhältnisse der unteren Volksklassen aber nicht studiern” (*Vermessung* 265). Notably, his work no longer has anything to do with life. Humboldt is now tired, sickly, old, and completely powerless to determine his own path.  

Rosa is further informative as he claims that what is truly novel in the current era is not just acceleration and the perception of crisis, but rather the “Geschwindigkeit der Generationenfolge” (*Vermessung* 348). The experiences of Humboldt and Gauss at the advent of progress-driven modernity can be read with Rosa as addressing the twenty-first century German context faced with an increasingly aging population. Further, obsolescence is not only part of aging, but has become integral to the economic order with regard to commodities and images—products, companies, and individuals (politicians) meticulously construct and continuously adapt and recreate their image to remain relevant (Harvey 286-289). Moreover, with subsequent generations, the supposed absolute truths of the past are revisited and often revised, whereby the process of knowledge creation is shown to be a continuous cycle of crumbling and revised methods, forms and foundations.

In *Die Vermessung der Welt*, Kehlmann appropriates the images of cultural luminaries to foreground the lack of agency in such an order of place. At the same time, in strategically playing along with the law of place to gain the cultural and financial capital necessary and therefore attain a position of agency, the protagonists undermine the order of place but instate a

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43 It is on this trip that Humboldt reaches his final frontier—it is strictly forbidden by Russian authorities to cross over into Asia. In an encounter with the Asian “other,” the border is semanticized as the boundary to the European worldview. Here distinct bodies of knowledge and ways of thinking make communication between Humboldt and the Asian “other” impossible. This depiction can of course be problematized in terms of reinforcing stereotypical Eurocentric notions of the Asian “other,” but I read its significance in showing that Humboldt, whose reputation as the man “der alles wisse” reached the Chinese monk before the real person, cannot comprehend the monk’s metaphorical language nor his questions (286).
new normative order, namely one that fixes the flux of space, subject positions and identities, and one that misrepresents, excludes or fails to recognize or comprehend the experiences and meaning of everyday life. In sum, the Enlightenment search for universal truth performed in the novel rejects precisely such a metanarrative in favor of a postmodern acceptance of the strangeness of curved space, the unknown, and the particularities of multiples narratives. Indeed, the qualitatively unparalleled “uncertainty” that is proclaimed by social theorists such as Beck and Giddens and said to arise in the current phase of accelerated globalization is in the novel the outcome of continual efforts to force an order or aesthetic model on the flux of everyday life. Humboldt’s adventurous travel, his “Aufbrechen”, was a tactical decision to invite incalculable risk and uncertainty into his oppressively ordered, affluent life and thereby in conquering the risks, gain a place in the collective global memory via the mediatization and publicity of his activities. And based on the popularity of the novel, it is still highly desirable to indirectly be a part of such adventure and risk.44

Moreover, the postmodern or reflexively modern moment of Kehlmann’s novel is the deconstruction of the search for universal truth by means of a spatial imagination and its corresponding practices whereby all spheres of life are quantified and abstracted. The search for truth is declared complete by Humboldt, but Gauss counters this entirely, casting the scientific

44 Incidentally, such risk and uncertainty is sought frequently in contemporary society and in part feeds an industry of what Graham Huggan identifies as “extreme travel writing.” Huggans argues that tourism and travel writing are now carried out under the sign of disaster and driven by an ethical awareness that the world is socially divided but ecologically connected (6). Extreme travel pursuits courting the sublime as well as travel to disaster areas to witness the suffering of others indicate a desire on the part of the privileged tourist to counter a perceived mundane comfort of everyday life and act on a consciousness of humanitarian concerns (Huggan 6). Such experiences are then rendered into travel writing readily consumed by audiences back home. Moreover, readers are able to more “directly” participate in such travels as the travelogue is adapted to newer media such as blogs and tweets. Kehlmann taps into the current Zeitgeist that craves encounters with the sublime and seeks fame by reaching new heights, depths, and speeds, etc. One such adventure in the spring of 2010 uncannily parallels the fictional Humboldt’s spatial practice of racing to find the canal connecting the two rivers in Amazonia. A British man, Ed Stafford, became “the first man to walk the length of the Amazon River in South America from the source to the sea” (Ducatel). His trek was documented more or less in real time in a blog (www.walkingtheamazon.com). Tellingly, he now tells of his experiences as a motivational speaker.
models of absolute knowledge into doubt, and by extension the German history of thought that is connected to those models and practices which persist in knowledge construction today. In addition, in the German context as enunciatively focalized by the figures, the modern spatial imagination and mode of operating is, first of all, detrimental to living in ethical relationships with one another. Secondly, it prescribes that the body be merely a medium of cognition, in turn leaving no appropriate or adequate outlet for feeling or emotions. On this basis, the protagonists’ alienation from others and their own physicality in the pursuit of knowledge is not only the outcome of exceptional genius status and the conformity to scientific praxis, but is also the consequence of their “German” stiffness or “uprightness” which manifests itself in their respective quasi-pathological conditions of debilitating melancholy and nomadic restlessness.

The novel suggests that as the world becomes increasingly interconnected theoretically, politically and economically, the individual suffers from the loss of communal ties. And although Gauss’ and Humboldt’s experiences of being in the world invoke the advent of the modern condition, this condition correlates with the recurring cycles of transformation and crisis that have accompanied phases of modernization and globalization. Precisely this is the importance of Kehlmann’s poetic tactic of relationality, which must be understood as an appeal to a relationality on a global level. A crucial moment that transforms the meaning of German place and the meaning of spatial practices occurs when Humboldt articulates a realization in a letter to his brother: “Beide meinten wir, das unsere sei die ganze Welt. Nach und nach wurden die Kreise kleiner, und wir mußten begreifen, daß das eigentliche Ziel unserer Bemühungen nicht der Kosmos, sondern bloß der andere war. … und nur die Dummköpfen, die nicht verstehen, was ein Leben in Verdoppelung bedeutet, würde dafür das Wort Rivalität einfallen
...” (Vermessung 266). The real significance of life is therefore not rivalry and competition, but living in double, in relation to others.

The central opposition or parallelism of Gauss and Humboldt is likewise resolved in a meaningful intersection whereby living for the other is staged in the recognition of the plight of the other. This is performed on the aesthetic and content level as the two protagonists’ thoughts flow together while Humboldt is traveling in Russia and Gauss is at home in Germany. As Humboldt is unable to pursue any of his real interests because of his lack of freedom in Russia, he and Gauss share a moment of mutual empathy:

Gerede und Geschwätz, flüsterte Humboldt …. Er müsse Gauß unbedingt sagen, daß er jetzt besser verstehe. Ich weiß, daß Sie verstehen, antwortete Gauß. Sie haben immer mehr verstanden, armer Freund, mehr als Sie wußten (290).

Although Humboldt’s comment is arrogant and misanthropic and reinforces Gauss’ disregard for social interaction and antisocial behavior, the moment is also a gesture toward correcting the Enlightenment attachment disorder, that is the alienation and antisocial way of interacting that have defined the two protagonists’ everyday lives.

In conclusion, the novel counters the dominant paradigm of modernity by aesthetically and thematically exploring the implications of Humboldt’s and Gauss’ models of space in terms of ethical intersubjectivity of everyday life. For this reason, the representation of the figural social interactions and practices of place are so vital with regards to ethics. Insofar as the protagonists’ work and practices are articulated as efforts to forward the Enlightenment goal of bringing well-being to the world and this is shown to be quite limited or selective despite the declaration that the world was indeed measured, I contend that this is a direct affront to one of the currents of the present-day globalization discourse, namely that of the proponents who see globalization as a linear process of bringing Wohlstand to all regions of the world and which is
problematized by Balint Balla (20). For this reason, *Vermessung* is an intervention in the current notions of globalization that embrace an abstract aesthetic image of interconnectedness of flows and networks, in a way that does not consider the experience or subjectivity of being caught up in the pulsating network of these flows. Unlike the modernist responses to the crisis experience of the third phase of globalization at the turn of the twentieth century, Kehlmann’s novel does not articulate the acute angst of apocalyptic fears (Zima 25). Rather he parodies the quantifying neuroses of modernity, in order to uproot the notion of the world as quantifiable by drawing on postmodernist practices of bringing the irrational, the chaotic, and fantasy back into the overly rationalized modern world. It is a cultural critique that operates with laughter and yet seriously appeals for a recognition of the limits of human control and that which is not measureable.
Chapter III: Cleaning the Glocal House: Breaking Cycles of German Domestic Practices in the East(ern) German Province

In *Heimsuchung* (2008) and *Im Spinnhaus* (2003), East German writers Jenny Erpenbeck and Kerstin Hensel employ strikingly similar literary techniques in response to the “new world order” of the post-unification era as well as dominant perceptions of unification according to which the “neue Bundesländer” are helpless victims of the buffeting forces of neo-liberal globalization. An epigraph from Erpenbeck’s novel is programmatic for both *Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus*: “Die weil der Tag lang und die Welt alt ist, können viel Menschen an einem Platz stehn, einer nach dem andern.” In this quote, an important time-space dynamic is established by reference to the lengthy day and the aged world in comparison to the fleeting presence of humans, who briefly inhabit the same place, not simultaneously, but one after another, thereby evoking a sense of a flow of humans that echoes the image of flows (of people, capital, goods and information) associated with globalization. Importantly, this quote further draws on the relationship between the global and the local, wherein the individual on the local level is imbued with a sense of insignificance compared to the longevity of the world. In *Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus*, Erpenbeck and Hensel ground these abstract flows of globalization, whereby Germany has become interconnected with places near and far – Australia, Berlin, Brazil, Poland, South Africa, New York – in over a century of often involuntary movements of people in and out of the eastern German provinces.

By zooming in on particular eastern German provincial locales to narrate the stories of their consecutive inhabitants, Erpenbeck and Hensel explore precisely the meaning of existence in this dynamic history of human stopovers in a single place. In both novels, the single house features as the center of the imagined world and mediates the inhabitants’ experiences and activities in relation to major historical events and social transformations of the twentieth
century, including World War I and II, the divided nation, reunification and continual modernization. In this way, the microcosm instates a multidirectional exchange between the local and the transregional, which I see as significant inasmuch as the authors understand such dynamics as long-occurring processes, rather than the novelty of the current global age.

*Heimsuchung* takes place in the Brandenburg countryside and tells the stories of numerous figures that come to inhabit a plot of land and its bourgeois summer house alongside the *Märkisches Meer* from the late eighteenth century until the post-unification era. The history of possession of the property depicts hierarchies of intersubjectivity, whereby uneven social relations based on gender, class and ethnicity are spatialized on the plot of land. Originally owned by a powerful *Großbauer* and intended as the dowry for his daughter, when the daughter is unable to marry, the father divides and sells off the property to a coffee and tea importer, an architect, and a Jewish textile manufacturer for whom the land will provide a summer retreat. The storylines of the architect and his wife and the Jewish family depict the rise of the Third Reich and address actions that ultimately end in the architect opportunistically gaining possession of the Jewish neighbor’s plot when the Jewish family faces increasingly threatening conditions in the Nazi period. When the architect and his wife are eventually forced by the East German government to leave for consorting with the state enemy, a woman writer with status among East German officials gains possession of the house, a young male doctor secures a portion of the property through a betrayal of the writer, and a couple, the husband of which was caught trying to flee the GDR, are allowed to rent a small shed on the shoreline. Lastly, in the post-unification era, the writer’s granddaughter loses the house when heirs of the architect reclaim possession and she cannot afford to purchase it from them. In all of these involuntary dislocations, a paradoxical fixity of certain subject positions manifests.
Im Spinnhaus covers roughly the same time span and tells of a small, notoriously poor industrial community in the Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains) of Saxony, where a communal dwelling houses a weaving factory and a laundry facility in the basement and the working poor in its upper levels. The fragmented narrative initially tells of several generations of an outcast family that inhabits or works in the Spinnhaus, the women remaining to scrape by and raise the children while their husbands leave for war. The novel does not have a conventional plot, but rather creates a mosaic-like picture of regional and national history. Several episodes shift from the house to give contours to the community of Neuwelt, where the house is located. For instance, struggles of an injured soldier returning from war; the son of a Jewish family who changes his identity, becomes a Nazi soldier to survive the holocaust, and returns from war to reassume his previous place with his father; a school teacher from Berlin who becomes confined in an oppressive marriage to both her husband and the GDR state and eventually returns to Berlin; a group of locals who gather in the pub immediately after the fall of the GDR to plan a new Germany, which is shown to not be realized in unification – these are a few of the disparate episodes that convey a sense of provincial Erzgebirge life and address how local inhabitants find ways to maneuver in the confinement of social conditions.

Central to the imagined worlds in these novels is a tension that arises between the fleetingness of the individual’s presence in a particular place and a simultaneous fixity, which the authors show is culturally and historically ascribed to subject positions defined by gender, ethnicity, class and political affiliation. Therefore, the significance of the house must also be located in its history as a highly codified, gendered place, in Certeau’s sense.⁴⁵ Although

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⁴⁵ To reiterate, de Certeau’s notion of place signifies an established, fixed order that is held in check by social and legal norms. “A place (lieu) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. … The law of the “proper” rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own “proper” and distinct location, a location it defines” (117). In the second
Erpenbeck and Hensel focus on gendered relationships and gendered practices of the domestic sphere, they do not carry out a straightforward critique of patriarchy along gender lines; rather, their notions of gender are differentiated by other cultural dimensions such as class, ethnicity and social status. These multiple dimensions account for the paradoxical fixity in a world of flows. I argue that Erpenbeck and Hensel investigate and seek to unsettle this history of limited agency and exclusion in the provincial microcosm.

What is unique about these novels is the increased significance they give to everyday interactions and behaviors associated with the provincial home. This makes clear how the individual comes to be in a particular place and whether or not they can or must remain in that place. The emphasis on everyday activities is achieved by the authors’ use of multiple, distanced, third-person narrators rather than the first-person proximity often associated with women’s writing. In *Heimsuchung*, there is little dialogue or direct speech, so the shifting figural perspectives in the novels’ twelve episodes convey the sense of an almost claustrophobic interiority, hermetically sealed off from other figures. In *Im Spinnhaus*, Hensel rarely uses dialogue and the myriad perspectives in the thirty-three episodes of her novel are even more distanced due to her ironic tone, grotesque depictions, and minimal access to character’s thoughts or emotions. In the absence of dialogue and verbal interaction, everyday practices take

volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau, Giard, and Mayol emphasize the production and productive energy of the house as a center of orientation. Problematically and ironically given de Certeau’s agenda, they valorize “domestic space” as the source of freedom and creativity to invent ways of operating in a refuge from the exterior, uniform, public space defined by authoritative obligations. For de Certeau et al, domestic space is a liberating space where everyday practices can be invented and creatively performed to define a secure and personalized private territory belonging to the individual or family (*Practice: Volume 2* 147). Although de Certeau et al acknowledge that domestic space is defined by its location, layout, architecture, and condition, they primarily associate these aspects with class and socio-economic status while other dimensions that limit the freedom to creatively act within or “possess” domestic space are dismissed or unacknowledged (*Practice: Volume 2* 146). Their notion of separation between the interiority of domestic space from the exteriority of public space assumes an unrealistic, utopian division and indicates de Certeau’s general inattention to gendered inequalities of place and everyday practices.
on a prominent communicative function.\textsuperscript{46} That is to say, as figures move about and act in the imagined world, they perform and therefore communicate what it means to live and function in particular places and in relation to others. Given that the micro-level of human activities and trajectories is consistently connected to larger-scale occurrences and projects of the nation, the heightened focus on behaviors in connection to the home reveals the duality of the individual as both victim of and participant in such large-scale events by means of their seemingly banal activities in the domestic sphere.

By showing how social relations and everyday activities historically define and are defined by the setting, Erpenbeck and Hensel contribute to the spatial turn and forward a critique of the “whole business” as cultural geographer Doreen Massey called for in her seminal work \textit{Space, Place and Gender}. Massey urges for the awareness of the interrelatedness of gender, space and place as culturally specific ideas on both the substantive and conceptual level. In efforts to eliminate the connotations and characteristics of the terms that function according to binaries by which the “feminized” terms have traditionally been on the weaker side of the dualism, she explains that “The aim, however, is not to substitute a ‘feminine’ view for a ‘masculine’ one (though it may be to substitute a particular variant of a feminist one), but rather to problematize the whole business” (\textit{Gender} 13; emphasis original). This appears to be Erpenbeck and Hensel’s approach to provincial home life, insofar as they create characters whose relationship to particular places is determined by intersecting dimensions of class and gender.

\textsuperscript{46} Katharina Granzin finds a similar heightened meaning in the portrayal of everyday activities in Erpenbeck’s novel and ascribes to them an epistemological function, “die kleinsten ihrer alltäglichen Handlungen haben in dem Moment, da sie geschehen, ihr Gewicht, werden durch sorgfältig detaillierte Beschreibungen zu beziehungs- und bedeutungsreicher Aktivität.”
Moreover, the significance of such daily practices is further heightened by the texts’ approach to narrating the past. Although both authors rely on realism (which Hensel often undermines through fairy tale imagery or fantastical elements), they cast aside the notion of an intact provincial world of continuous stability by resisting an epic narrative of linear progression. The nonlinear storylines interrupt the continuity of time, whereby the consistent focus on the specific place heightens the reader’s awareness of the setting. In fragmented, episodic narratives that oscillate between time periods, the authors nevertheless create a sense of historical continuity as the repetitive behaviors and subjectivities that coproduce the successive social orders in which they are confined become a recurring cycle. In this way, the political significance of intersubjectivity and the power relations of the private realm are laid bare in a critique of repeating German cultural patterns, which the authors are invested in breaking.

Central to Erpenbeck’s critique are acts of individualistic, opportunistic territorialism by which possession of the summer home is gained. For Hensel, the focus is primarily on the work habits of the poor, whose marginalized position is exploited in a social order that values productivity over the individual.

Erpenbeck and Hensel show that the world set into motion by Humboldt and Gauss, that is to say a world of mobility, flows and intersecting paths, has not realized the promises heralded by modernity nor the present-day supposedly unbound world of neo-liberal globalization. These novels fit in well with Die Vermessung der Welt precisely because they offer a diachronic look at

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47 Interestingly, an undercurrent in the reception of these two novels bemoans the consequences their non-linear narrative strategy has on the epic character of narrative prose. For instance, Hensel’s text is criticized as a “zerhacktes Buch” that does not merit the label novel claimed by Hensel, because it does not come together or make any sense (Müller). Similarly, Kristina Maidt-Zincke identifies the weakness of Erpenbeck’s novel as its lack of “epische Breite.” Such responses reveal much about literary norms from which Hensel and Erpenbeck deviate and further registers the shaken and competing forms and modes of meaning-making in the current era of reflexive modernity. Namely, certain critics expect or desire for literature to compensate for a sense of a chaotic, fragmented world and alienation from the past by means of a conventional, chronological story that ties all its loose ends and offers a coherent world.
large-scale events and ongoing processes of modernization since the second half of the nineteenth century, which is often regarded as the phase of globalization after that of Humboldt’s era. The texts complement Kehlmann’s project of deconstructing the abstract world of flows, in that they explore and unsettle the power relations of places left untouched by Die Vermessung der Welt, namely the codified domestic sphere that comprises a paradoxical world of fixity. By unveiling patterns of detrimental interaction and limited subjectivity in the supposed idyllic space of the provincial home, Heimsuchung and Im Spinnhaus continue a corrective to the modern abstract spatial imagination begun by Kehlmann’s model of intersubjectivity which calls for an ethical and emotional, empathetic relation to others.

In light of the fact that German-language literature has a history of turning to landscapes and regional locales as a refuge from modern, urban settings and for a source of “authentic” traditions as well as the “Überschaubarkeit” (manageability) provided by the smaller scale of village or provincial life, it is noteworthy that Hensel and Erpenbeck create provincial worlds of constant instability and crisis. These novels are counter-responses to nostalgic longing for a secure, knowable provincial community and home under conditions of social transformation. Therefore, I seek to answer in which ways and why the novels deconstruct the eastern German provincial home. Given the focus on an individual home, I ask what the significance of the trope of the house is in the age of globalization, which is often imagined in abstract notions of unbound flows or a global village. How do the novels through the depictions of the domestic sphere reveal and unsettle gendered and classed dimensions of everyday existence that have

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48 Ottmar Ette considers the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century to be the third phase of accelerated globalization defined by the U.S. being the first non-European power to participate in a still primarily European-lead modernization and neocolonial division of the planet’s regions and resources (42-43). For Peter Fäßler, the period from 1840-1914 marks the first phase of accelerated globalization whose dynamic and character he attributes to innovations in production, transport and communication; the introduction of international standards regarding rights, currency and technology; the existence of a global hegemony, namely Great Britain; and the emergence of a common political-economic notion – liberalism (74-6).
resulted in recurring patterns of fixity, of being stuck in certain subject positions? Which ways of being are complicit in reproducing such cultural patterns despite transformations to socio-political orders? What does the focus on gender and class unveil about everyday existence and subjectivity in the globalized province?

A. Anxiety in a Post-Unification Gendered Risk Environment

These novels are a continuation of narrative projects since unification that interrogate the past and reinvent society. To this end, Hensel and Erpenbeck, in Paul Cooke’s terms, “write back” against the perception of former East Germany as merely a victim of unification as “double colonization,” first by West German norms and then by the forces of neo-liberal capitalism that supposedly pounced on the freshly exposed body of the GDR state. The novels are informed by their authors’ ambivalent, critical relationships to their respective East German pasts.

Jenny Erpenbeck was born in 1967 in East Berlin, where she studied dance and theater, which included mentorship under Heiner Müller. She is the granddaughter of Hedda Zinner and Fritz Erpenbeck, who were among some of the first communist authors and intellectuals to return from exile in Moscow to the Soviet occupation zone of Germany at the end of World War II (Schildmann 92). The couple was heavily involved in establishing the socialist order and laying the cultural foundations for East Germany in line with Moscow’s ideology (Schildmann 93).

49 Drawing on Said, Cooke uses the idea of ‘writing back’ to refer to responses by East German authors to the type of orientalist instrumentalization of the GDR found in many public representations of history (Representing East Germany 15).
They enjoyed privileged positions on account of their loyalty to the Soviet military administration and then membership in the SED (Schildmann 92).\textsuperscript{50}

In \textit{Heimsuchung}, Jenny Erpenbeck grapples with this familial heritage. The house in the novel is modeled after the lakeside retreat where she enjoyed the summers of her childhood, namely at the summer home of her grandmother Hedda Zinner, who is recognizable in the character of \textit{die Schriftstellerin}. Upon her return from exile after World War II, \textit{die Schriftstellerin} gains possession of the summer home by cashing in on her privileged status and connections in the GDR government. In that the title “Heimsuchung” can be construed as a search for home but also a threat of invasion or being overcome by misfortune, the polyvalence of the title mirrors not only the plot, but also Erpenbeck’s biographical relationship to the house. Like in the novel, after the collapse of the GDR, the house was reclaimed by heirs to earlier owners who had fled to the West. Erpenbeck has said that her documentation of this place and its stories is not about the loss of the property but rather the loss of memories (Döbler). This is an important clarification, in that the author’s memory work in not merely for her own benefit or needs.

The list of archives and institutions thanked at the end of the novel indicate the lengths to which the author went to uncover the stories connected to the summer home and lend the text an aura of both personal and historical authenticity. Particularly significant is the graphically depicted storyline of the Jewish family, which ends up torn apart as some members meet death in Nazi ghettos or concentration camps while others escape to exile in South Africa. Erpenbeck

\textsuperscript{50} As the head of the \textit{Hauptabteilung Darstellende Kunst und Musik} in the GDR government and director of the \textit{Berliner Volksbühne} from 1959-1962, Fritz Erpenbeck’s influence in theater was pivotal, in particular his intense opposition to Bertolt Brecht’s epic theater (Stillmark 336). Hedda Zinner’s career as a writer loyal to the socialist state was underscored by numerous prizes from the East German government, such as the \textit{Nationalpreis der DDR} (1954), the \textit{Goethepreis} (1958), the \textit{Lessingpreis} (1961), and the \textit{Staatspreis der DDR} on the occasion of the 40\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the GDR in October of 1989, shortly before the collapse of the country.
explains that this story remained unknown or untold until she dug up and put together the pieces (Döbler). It is clear that the work of remembering is not merely a personal endeavor for the author, insofar as the raw material of the personal past is shaped to take on contours for carrying out larger cultural processes of dealing with the past.\textsuperscript{51} Although individual characters mourn the loss of the summer house in \textit{Heimsuchung}, Erpenbeck herself laments the destruction and unethical interpersonal relationships that she sees as inherent in the desire and efforts to remain attached to a particular physical place. She forwards an alternative, cosmopolitan mode of existence that urges for more than a territory-bound sense of belonging. This is a corrective in line with Bruce Robbins’ claim that cosmopolitanism would be better understood as “… an ethos of macro-interdependencies and particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories, and fates” (Rabinow in Robbins 1).

Hensel’s writing is similarly a project of remembering that combines her individual past with the larger social scale. When asked by Germanist Brigit Dahlke in an interview in 2000 how travel and other new experiences since the fall of the Wall have affected her writing, Hensel insists on the connection between writing and an author’s past, “Niemand kann leugnen, woher er kommt. Du schreibst immer aus deiner Herkunft heraus, auch wenn du dich noch so weltläufig gibst. Worüber du am besten Bescheid weißt, darüber hast du am meisten zu sagen, und nur das wird dir wirklich überzeugend gelingen” (43). Even as Hensel insists that literature needs to be a work of the imagination,\textsuperscript{52} she underscores that her literary use of personal experiences is a

\textsuperscript{51} In most of her works, Erpenbeck archives the collective pasts by means of personal experiences. For instance, \textit{Dinge die Verschwinden} (2009) catalogues objects, places, people, and practices that have disappeared from everyday life in the recent past. One example is the first short narrative, which captures the narrator’s memories of the “Palast der Republik” as an everyday social milieu of her childhood and youth.

\textsuperscript{52} The author emphatically rejects the documentary intentions of protocols that proliferated in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the GDR and insists on the effectiveness of the work of the imagination to better plumb the meaning of reality: “Ich bin gegen Postulat-, Tabubrecher- und bestimmte Protokoll-Literatur als ästhetische Kategorie. Sie geht gegen meine Vorstellung von Literatur als Werk der Fantasie. Fantasie wiederum ist ja ein

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The author’s engagement with the past is informative inasmuch as her own experiences in the GDR embodied the East German state’s definition of women as “working mothers” (Kolinsky and Nickel 1). Born in 1961 in Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz), notably in the same federal state as her setting for the Spinnhaus, Hensel began her professional career as a nurse and worked while raising a child on her own. She eventually studied at the Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig and became an established writer in the GDR.

According to Germanist Eva Kolinsky and sociologist Hildagard Maria Nickel in their introduction to the volume Reinventing Gender: Women in Eastern Germany since Unification (2003), in the course of unification, the West German gender regime of more traditional bourgeois gender roles without the same state support of employment equality and childcare was transferred to former East German society, which was seen as backwards and in need of modernization. In reality, East German women were in many ways more modernized than West German women to the extent that in the GDR women had achieved employment integration and held higher professional qualifications and training. Consequently they suffered setbacks in adopting the West German model (Kolinsky and Nickel 2). Even as East German women found themselves disadvantaged and were painted as “‘victims of modernization’ and ‘losers of unification,’” Kolinsky and Nickel show that these images of passivity have been untrue and that East German women have adapted and outperformed West German women in the work force (13). Despite the achievements of East German women since unification, Kolinsky and Nickel...
caution that the picture is still not too rosy, insofar as the new Bundesländer continue to lag behind economically, have higher unemployment rates, and have high migration losses (14).

This past of East German women’s role in relation to work before and after unification is particularly salient, inasmuch as Hensel’s engagement with historical processes is directly tied to working women, who are the primary focus in Im Spinnhaus. In the novel, she tells a regional history of impoverished spinsters, laundresses, and uranium miners that are stuck performing physically debilitating, low-paying work that is often exploited for political purposes or someone else’s financial gain and continues up to contemporary times. In light of the post-unification context, Hensel’s novel conveys a sense of insecurity and anxiety that echoes the position in which East German women have found themselves in the ongoing transformation of globalized, post-unification society, despite certain advantages and achievements. This rings true with Kolinsky and Nickel’s assertion that “The stability of the GDR has not been replaced by stability of another, more affluent kind, but by a risk environment that requires unfamiliar flexibility and personal risk management strategies” (2). This sense of risk environment informs Hensel’s narrative form of continuing cycles of transformation and crisis, whereby everyday work habits are interwoven with the rise and fall of society. The author not only draws on the gender regime of the GDR, but connects the working mother to a longer literary and social history of gender roles to which women have been confined, especially in the image of the spinster. Erpenbeck’s novel has a similar aesthetic of continuous cycles of crisis and transformation; however, her depiction of rise and fall is anchored primarily in the bourgeois cultural order of individual ownership, wherein bourgeois gender norms play a pivotal role.

In their efforts to remember an East(ern) German past which they experienced personally, Hensel and Erpenbeck create distinctly visceral fictional settings. For instance, Hensel’s
language imitates the curt dialect of everyday life in the industrial, working-class community and she incorporates into the story regionally-specific products, such as Christmas Stollen and handmade lace. Erpenbeck also fosters a sense of palpable “thinginess” by repeatedly mentioning German products such as Meissen porcelain or the Zeiss Ikon key that are lost, found or relinquished throughout the course of the novel. It seems to be these minute details that in part anchor the settings in place for the authors and their readership.

Despite the impulse to archive in the autobiographically colored texts, neither novel is overtly nostalgic. They do not qualify as examples of “Ostalgie” rewritings, whereby the East German everyday is remembered fondly in the face of dissatisfaction with the present and often in connection to pop-culture and everyday products.\(^\text{53,54}\) *Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus* differ greatly from other literary attempts to remember everyday life in East Germany, such as the autobiographical and anecdotal works *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* by Claudia Rusch’s or Jana Hensel’s *Zonenkinder.*\(^\text{55}\)

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53 *Ostalgie* is a debated notion that carries with it quite disparate connotations depending upon how it is defined and from which perspective. For instance, as Anna Saunders point out, for some the foregrounding of everyday East German experiences in literature and film is extremely problematic, because they argue it trivializes GDR history in a way that neither recognizes the dictatorial nature of the regime nor allows for accurate historical appraisal (91). By contrast, as Thompson insists, *Ostalgie* represents a search for identity in place rather than ideology (Saunders 101). For a discussion on different theories of Ostalgie in connection to the films *Sonnenallee,* *Good Bye Lenin!* and *Das Leben der Anderen,* see Gareth Dale’s article “Heimat, “Ostalgie” and the German Stasi: The GDR in German Cinema, 1999-2006.” For a more in-depth discussion and analysis of Ostalgie, see Paul Cooke’s *Representing East Germany Since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia.*

54 In contradistinction to my claim, Mary Cosgrove argues that *Heimsuchung* has clear “ostalgic” dimensions and at points expresses a “deep malaise at the passing of the GDR” (78). For instance, she asserts that this is evident when *Heimsuchung* gravitates toward the personal story that was its original motivation, i.e. the storyline of “die unberechtigte Eigenbesitzerin,” the granddaughter of the Schriftstellerin, who loses possession of the house to the Nazi architect couple in a post-reunification property dispute. Cosgrove argues that the lack of boundaries after 1989 is registered as deeply unsettling, “as if the grand finale of twentieth-century German history culminated in the end of the GDR and the permanent dislocation of the East German Heimat” (78). Cosgrove however does concludes that the novel does not assert a desire to return to GDR times, because the razing of the house at the end articulates the destructiveness of the setting that “festers at the heart of every place” (78).

55 While Rusch includes humorous memories of a child’s (mis)understanding of the East German state, she in no way presents East Germany acritically. As a child in a dissident family, many of her memories are attached to the oppression and frightening situations involving the Stasi. By contrast, Hensel’s version of the past is far more saturated with shades of Ostalgie by virtue of her lamenting a lost world, which she often associates primarily with East German pop-culture, food and clothing.
In this context, it is pivotal that the provincial homes in *Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus* slowly disintegrate in the course of the stories. Because this destruction is connected to recurring patterns of behavior in the regional setting, Erpenbeck and Hensel position themselves against what Robbins calls the “romantic localism” of a portion of the left, which he says “feels it must counter globalization with a strongly rooted and exclusive sort of belonging” (3). Why then do the authors focus so intently on the regional setting and the house rather than identifying with, for instance, other more common and densely populated settings for contemporary existence such as a pluralistic translocal metropolitan setting or a notion of postnational, E.U. existence?

**B. (Re)thinking *Heimat* and Home**

*Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus* show that this aesthetic choice is connected to the function of literary regionalism and the trope of the house in the continuing project of understanding existence in an age of shifting frames of reference and new experiences of time.

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56 It is noteworthy that *Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus* are among a number of recent literary works that pivot around a disintegrating house in rural settings in East Germany. For instance, *Regenroman* by Karen Duve, *Landnahme* by Christoph Hein, *Endmoränen* by Monika Maron, and the short stories “Sommerhaus, Später” by Judith Hermann and “Handy” by Ingo Schulze, all feature decaying houses in connection to various tribulations or failures of individuals, relationships, families, and communities, whereby they also address the context of post-socialist, unified and globalized Germany. The diachronic look at life in the provincial microcosm is one aspect that sets Hensel’s and Erpenbeck’s novels apart from these other texts.

57 My suggestion of these alternative settings to the province is informed by Peter Katzenstein’s work on regional identity in which he claims that “Germany has the most Europeanized collective identity. This finding has more to do with the failures of German hypernationalism than with the inherent attraction of European identity” (82). Hensel’s and Erpenbeck’s focus on the province is also noteworthy in light of other recent literature by German women authors whose heightened attention on everyday interactions with little attention to Germany as a setting leads Beth Linklater to declare their work representative of a new “transnational global literature of the future” (68). Based specifically on short stories by Judith Hermann, Julia Franck, Tanja Dückers, and Jenny Erpenbeck (this does not include *Heimsuchung*), Linklater concludes that the stories are shaped by “universal experiences” of childhood, friendships, and relationships rather than conflicts over national boundaries (71). Linklater’s most emphatic point parallels to a certain extent my arguments about the significance of everyday behaviors in the domestic space. Linklater’s bone to pick is that critics who brush aside this literature as not socially engaged (especially Volker Hage with his label *Fräuleinliteratur*) do not recognize the political substance of the private realm and the self that Erpenbeck, along with the other women authors, investigate through their focus on “universal experiences” (72).
and space in the post-unification era. Norbert Mecklenburg contends that the province as a setting accounts for new social experiences of space and is thus a reactionary and mimetic strategy, “ein sensibles Medium historisch neuer sozialer Raumerfahrungen” that registers “neue sozielle Mängel wie die pathologe Überfüllung, Unüberschaubarkeit, und Häßlichkeit der großstädtisch-industrieller Ballungsräume” (33). Although Mecklenberg’s study was published in the 1980s, Stuart Taberner reconfirms Mecklenburg’s claims by maintaining that the function of writing about the province is an important strand of contemporary literature that counters the anxieties of the second age of modernity and harkens back to the sense of uprootedness, disorder and cultural degeneracy of the industrial era combated in the Heimatliteratur of the nineteenth century (“German Province” 89).

Based on Mecklenburg’s and Taberner’s claims, the narrated province is a response to new experiences of space as well as social deficiencies and anxieties of the contemporary moment. However, the way in which Taberner refers to nineteenth century Heimatliteratur summons a certain notion of Heimat, such as that described by Peter Blickle. Blickle explains that Heimat has traditionally been a geographical but imaginary space culturally constructed by men where the subject lives the unreflected unity prior to the modern split between subject and object and is therefore a notion based on unquestioned identification rather than analysis (12). Further, says Blickle, Heimat has functioned to provide a spatial, positive, secure, collective identity free from private responsibility and from war and destruction (15). Neither Erpenbeck nor Hensel portray such a nonreflexive, utopian notion to portray life in the provincial home.

A number of recent scholars, including Blickle, seek to revise conservative and regressive notions of Heimat by showing that it is a multidimensional construct that has addressed the

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58 I disagree with Mecklenburg’s notion of literature as merely mimetic. I appeal for the understanding of literary works and their cultural context as mutually constitutive.
concerns of modernity. This is where Johannes Moltke’s revisions to conventional understandings of *Heimat* are helpful. Moltke argues that *Heimat* was not simply anti-modern but rather the concept has also negotiated the modernization of social, economic and political life (15). For example, in East German versions of *Heimat*, the notion was loaded with socialist content regarding the collectivization of agriculture and increasing productivity by means of technology (Moltke 172). Moltke’s findings are significant not only in regard to Erpenbeck’s and Hensel’s critical analysis of domestic space and subjectivity but also because of the authors’ diachronic approach to assessing the eastern German present whereby they explore modernization’s role in social relations, for instance in Hensel’s text as industrialization brings weaving machines that put hand-weavers out of work or in *Heimsuchung* when the plot of land previously used for agriculture is divided and sold as plots for vacation homes, which changes the class relations in the community.

The trope of the house acquires its significance as a narrative spatial practice for the purpose of critical reflection on *Heimat*, the dynamic relationship between the global and the local, and everyday activities in the eastern German province. The symbolic economy of the house lies in great part in its function as a frame of reference for cognition and memory. This calls to mind Martin Heidegger’s claim that *Bauen* (building), far more than merely an activity from which buildings result, is an inalienable component of human thought and existence.

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59 In addition to Blicke and Moltke, see Alan Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918*, and Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman, *Heimat: A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture, 1890-1990*. See also Friederike Eigler’s article “Critical Approaches to Heimat and the “Spatial Turn”. By means of literary analysis through the lens of the “spatial turn,” Eigler shows how narrative renderings recast *Heimat* as “multidimensional textures of place” in contrast to the regressive, static, and exclusionary manifestations of place that were traditionally associated with Heimat (28).

60 See J.J. van Baak’s *The House in Russian Literature: A Mythopoetic Exploration*, Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*, or Martin Heidegger’s “Bauen Wohnen Denken”.

61 Heidegger argues, “Der Bezug des Menschen zu Orten und durch Orte zu Räumen beruht im Wohnen. Das Verhältnis von Mensch und Raum ist nichts anderes als das wesentlich gedachte Wohnen” (160). It is however
However, Susan Bernstein rejects Heidegger’s static notion of dwelling as instantiated and delimited by “Bauten” (the built environment) by arguing that “the facticity of the house points to a limit of thinking, an undercurrent of the untheorized and excluded materiality that is a condition of possibility of architecture, or writing” (14). I take recourse to Heidegger and Bernstein to extrapolate that narratively building a house is an epistemological occasion and, more importantly, renovating or demolishing that house is an act that symbolically opens up thinking. I therefore ask how the house as a standardized form of locality functions to think through twenty-first century conditions of transformation via the eastern German past and the cultural practices of dwelling in a home and *Heimat*.

The authors’ identification with their regional past correlates with Moltke’s double view of *Heimat* as having a concrete experiential dimension and a more abstract, metaphorical function (9). The house and *Heimat* in these novels function as synecdoches for the globalized German nation. Here I purposefully choose nation, because although the regional setting is central in the novels, the subjective possibilities and social relations in these stories prove to be integrally tied to the national frame of reference. That being said, the novels forward a vision of the nation that supports Massey’s appeal to conceptualize place as open and porous, whereby the particularity of a place is constructed through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections to that beyond (*Gender* 5). The imagined worlds in *Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus* thus represent a spatial imagination of globalization insofar as place seems fluid based on the constant comings and goings, but when inspected more closely, precisely those comings and goings articulate the “stickiness” of subjectivity in the German national writ regional past.

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important to point out that for Heidegger, buildings (“Bauten”) bring forth delimited places that both “zulassen” and “eintrichten” what Heidegger calls “das Geviert” (“die Einfalt von Erde und Himmel, von Göttlichen und von Sterblichen in eine[r] Stätte” (160)). In a wider sense of “Behausungen” and not only “Wohnungen,” a house thus houses “den Aufenthalt der Menschen” when it fulfills the two-fold “Einräumen” of “das Geviert” (160).
As I will show, being forced out of a place can signify being trapped in a certain position as readily as remaining confined to a certain place.

I have elaborated the function of the literary province and the house, because I wished to emphasize that the turn to the regional *Heimat* is not solely tied up with a nostalgic preservation of a lost past or reactionary desire for a stable, knowable world.\(^6\) Furthermore, I see these forms as central to “glocalizing” the national past from the East(ern) German perspective. I draw on Roland Robertson’s much cited notion of “glocalization” because it illustrates precisely the relationship between globalization and the local which I am getting at here. In line with Robbins, Robertson positions himself against “the nostalgic paradigm in Western social science” that “suggests that we—the global we—once lived in and were distributed not so long ago across a multitude of ontologically secure, collective ‘homes’. Now, according to this narrative—or perhaps, a metanarrative—our sense of home is rapidly being destroyed by waves of (Western?) ‘globalization’” (30). In this way, Robertson disputes claims of a generalizable homelessness of modern humans and argues that globalization may have the opposite effect, “… there is in fact much to suggest that it is increasingly global expectations that have produced both routinized and ‘existential’ selves” (35). Robertson further counters the view that globalization is a homogenizing force that obliterates locality and even history (Robertson in Krossa 161) with his emphatic argument that throughout the course of modernity, globalization has constructed and required standardized forms of locality (eg neighborhood, city, country) that have been inevitably both universal and particular (Robertson 36).\(^6\) He therefore addresses the present-day

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\(^6\)Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman make similar claims regarding the notion of *Heimat* in their work *Heimat: A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture, 1890-1990*. In her recent article, “Critical Approaches to Heimat and the “Spatial Turn”,” Friederike Eigler addresses recent literary works, which, she argues, when read through the lens of the “spatial turn” also show *Heimat* to be more complex than a nostalgic preservation of the past.

\(^6\)As an example, Robertson points to the standardization of time-space that occurred in the period of 1880-1918 in which world time was organized in terms of particularistic space (Robertson 36).
complexity of shifting frames with the idea of “glocalization” as a mutually-constitutive relationship between the global and the local, which is simultaneously homogenizing and differentiating and depends upon a standardized form of locality (39-40).

Hensel and Erpenbeck’s narrated provinces are indeed responses to dislocations and new experiences of time and space in the new world order and function as “territory” in the sense defined by Mabel Berezin, as the “political recalibration of geographical space” which embeds relations of social, political, cultural and cognitive power in physical space, gives physical place to iterations of self and arenas that constitute society (10) and requires the consumption of images, words and symbols (14). By offering particular histories in standardized literary forms and tropes whereby the specificity of eastern German pasts is glocalized for a larger audience, Erpenbeck and Hensel problematize the continuation of cultural patterns in the present. It is these patterns that create those “routinized selves” which have been parcel to reproducing destructive orders of place and oppressive subjectivities.64 In this, the novels carry out the paradoxical work of reflexive modernity in that they employ (and rewrite) conventional literary forms of domestic space and the provincial Heimat to actualize (eastern German) pasts and unravel both the forms and the histories for the benefit of the present.

64 Other literary scholars identify a similar function of literary works that employ the East German setting for a critical engagement with distinct pasts and the relationship between the local level and larger scales, which these Germanists connect to the seismic adjustment on all levels of society in the aftermath of the Fall of the GDR. Stuart Taberner finds that the peripherality of East German experience still serves as a vantage point to critique dominant economic, cultural and social paradigms imposed by the “double colonization” of the former GDR by first West German norms and secondly globalized capitalism. He concludes that the literary engagement with local distinctiveness, cultural differences, and historical memory is a means of reworking and reforming colonizing discourses and countering homogenization, which he sees as a way of “glocalizing” individual East German experiences (“Introduction: Globalisation” 13). In Taberner’s own words: “This is an example perhaps, of the phenomenon of ‘glocalisation’: the adaptation of the global to the local in the creation of a new hybridity which more accurately corresponds to the everyday lives of people around the world as they bring their individual biographies to bear on social, economic and cultural realities that have become increasingly universal” (“Introduction: Globalisation” 13). Similarly, Paul Cooke regards the social reality of the east to be that of a microcosm of globalizing trends of the rest of the world that elide the pre-unification experiences of East Germans, and he sees the literary sphere gaining in significance as the space for critical voices against global capitalism (“East German Writing” 26).
C. Home Wrecking: Coping with Cycles of Territorial Patriarchy in Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Heimsuchung*

*Heimsuchung* unfolds the story of the summer house in eleven episodes in each of which space is narrated from the perspective of a different figure. The exception is the storyline of the “Gärtner” which is revisited prior to each episode and functions to create a timeless continuity that mirrors the cycles of nature as he tends to the garden and house for decades in contradistinction to the successive inhabitants whose tenure at the house is temporary. In addition to these storylines, a prologue and an epilogue address from an omniscient perspective the location of the summer house and its demolition, respectively.

The prologue recounts the formation of the “Märkisches Meer” as a result of natural forces and cycles of a global ecological system, whereby the setting is embedded in a context of a globally-connected interplay of geological and climate change. The ephemerality of the setting is represented in the statement that even in the Sahara there was once water and “Erst in der Neuzeit trat dort das ein, was man in der Wissenschaft als Desertifikation bezeichnet, zu deutsch Verwüstung” (Erpenbeck 11). However, both modernity (*die Neuzeit*) and Germany, signified by *Desertifikation*’s translation into the German language, seem to be implicated in the Saharan event of desertification. This constellation implies that what initially appear to be natural cycles of transformation are overridden or even result from modern German ways of being, which have taken on the power of forces of nature.

The transformative force of modern practices as destructive rather than progressive is underscored as the narrative shifts to the originary story of the plot of land where the summer house is eventually built. Gleaned from Erpenbeck’s research on the region, initially the place is
characterized by traditional practices, values, advice, superstitions and idioms regarding weddings, marriage and home life listed without elaboration. The list “interrupts” the story of a Großbauer and his four daughters and dictates the institution of marriage as well as the normative gender roles, particularly for the bride. For instance, the wedding traditions and lore begins as such “Wenn eine heiratet, darf sie sich ihr Brautkleid nicht selbst nähen. Auch in ihrem eigenen Haus darf das Brautkleid nicht hergestellt werden. Auswärts wird es genäht und beim Nähen darf keine Nadel zerbrechen” (Erpenbeck 14). A concluding line in this section condenses the power dynamic of the marriage relationship to one of obligation and/or subordination: “Die zwei Worte, die bei einer Heirat am wichtigsten sind, lauten: darf und muss, und darf, und muss, und darf, und muss” (Erpenbeck16). This traditional order will prove to repeat a pattern of brutal patriarchy whereby the place of women, the lower classes, and ethnic ‘others’ are controlled.

The authority figure of the local Schulze (mayor) embodies the initial patriarchal order and reproduces it with what serves as the primary practice of place in the novel, namely everyday acts of territorialism in the form of ownership and possession. As the widowed Schulze’s possessions, the daughters are pinned in place by the law of the(ir) father, “… sobald der Vater, der Wurrach, mit der Peitsche geknallt hat, springen die vier Schwestern auf ihre Plätze zurück …” (Erpenbeck 17). Across successive social orders imprisonment, confinement, and hiding continue to mark gendered forms of subjectivity, and interior spaces are connected with forms of gender-specific victimization differentiated in relation to specific historical circumstances. Examples of this include the victimization of the young Jewish girl who is found hiding in a closet by Nazi soldiers and executed, the Schulze’s unwed, pregnant daughter who is locked in a Rauchkammer until she miscarries, and the architect’s wife who hides from Russian soldiers invading the summerhouse during WWII. None of these specific victimizations are
equated with one another, but the common theme of confinement in a small space clearly connects them to one another as a gender-specific experience. Erpenbeck draws on conventional literary tropes that have for two centuries of novel writing defined both gender and place in relation to one another, in particular in the confinement of women in the domestic space of the house.

The daughters try to subvert their father’s misogynistic order, but their efforts can hardly be considered liberating. In particular, Klara’s response to escape the confinement of her father’s code epitomizes the general futility of women’s ability to take part in shaping patriarchal space in the story. When her father’s feud with neighboring landowners causes her inheritance, a lakeside plot of wooded land on the Schäferberg, to become an “island,” insofar as the plot can no longer be increased in size by “marrying” the neighboring acres, the land and Klara lose their value for the father. Klara registers this topological isolation by breaking entirely with “normal” behavior. She acts as though she has lost her mind and is thus feared by all for slipping out of the “Welt des Benehmens” (Erpenbeck 23). Her exclusion from the patriarchal spatial order is symbolized in the father’s final act of parceling and selling the lakeside plot “im Namen seiner entmündigten Tochter” (Erpenbeck 25). The father’s act of taking over his daughter’s name strips her of all agency and individuality.

In this constellation, Klara’s final response to the cutting up and loss of her land is a tragic attempt to reclaim a subject position. She literally “writes” her presence on her plot of land, but her choice of medium, snow, represents the futility and ephemeral nature of her efforts: “Emma entdeckt am nächsten Tag Klara’s Spuren im frischgefallenen Schnee, bei der öffentlichen Badestelle führen sie ins graue Wasser hinein … Wenig später wird auch ihr

65 For more on this topic, see Katharina Gerstenberger’s chapter “Fictionalizations: Holocaust Memory and the Generational Construct in the Works of Contemporary Women Writers” in the edited volume Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture.
Leichnam gefunden, am Ufer der Ziegelei hat er sich in den freigespülten Wurzeln einer alten Kiefer verhakt” (Erpenbeck 26). The lack of access to Klara’s thoughts and absence of narratorial commentary on the familial interaction and on Klara’s supposed insanity leaves her tragic measure of suicide to speak for itself. Klara’s traces (*Spuren*) in the snow and suicide are an alternative way of portraying the consequences of the historical, patriarchal order of place with which this depiction of Klara engages. In Klara’s episode, Erpenbeck establishes the dynamics of place in the eastern German province as a paternal, classed order in which land-owning men determine who belongs where. The position of women is determined and controlled by the patriarch, and stepping out of the prescribed role leads either to imprisonment, exclusion or death.

The parceling of Klara’s wooded plot further signifies a transformation to the order of place and ushers in a new era of modernization that echoes the standardization of locality at the root of glocalization: “… zum ersten Mal in seinem Leben mißt er [the father] Grund nicht in Hufen und Hektar, zum ersten Mal in seinem Leben spricht er von Parzellen” (Erpenbeck 25). The traditional order in which the land is used for agricultural purposes shifts to the modern era in which the lakeside plot will be used by the rising bourgeoisie as a leisurely retreat near Berlin. Even as the province is modernized, women’s agency remains circumscribed by ownership and territorialism, which continue to underlie interpersonal relationships on the stringently delineated parcels of land.

Central to the semantic construction of the lakeside house and property as connected to (the plight of) women with nominal recourse to agency, the architect’s fiancé comes to possess the plot of land: “für den Architekten unterschreibt als neue Eigentümerin dessen junge Verlobte” (Erpenbeck 25). Although the plot is purchased in the name of the architect’s fiancé,
the shift to female ownership is calculated so that the architect can buy the plot of land without it potentially falling into the hands of his first wife, whom he intends to divorce. With the transformation to modernity, gendered ownership thus continues to be instrumentalized for masculine gain. However, the wife of the architect assures that the land will remain in the possession of women by bequeathing it only to her female heirs.66

During their courtship, the lakeside plot served as a meeting point or escape for the architect and his fiancé, where they imagined being together after he leaves his wife and young son. The young woman is depicted struggling emotionally while she waits for the architect to leave his family, but it is also implied that her troubles might stem from a guilty conscience for being together with a married man. It is this image of culture conveyed in the fundamental, persistent practice of place as strategic ownership and possession at the cost of others, particularly women, which Heimsuchung seeks to undermine.

The recurring motif of the cuckoo is emblematic for this type of interpersonal relationships. In pushing an egg out of the nest of another bird, the cuckoo makes room for its own egg. Hence, the transformations in the novel become manifest as a continuous cycle of loss and gain, of flip-flopping identities between victimizer and victim. In this cycle, the individual is both participant in and pawn of economic, political, and familial structures of social order and fated to be continually confined, uprooted and alienated in the flow of history, which in turn underscores the inability to cultivate a stable, secure place of one’s own and the migratory, mobile, and ephemeral character of modern society.

66 Henceforth only women are legally entitled to own the lakeside parcel and house because the architect’s wife specifies it as such in her will: “Und in ihrem Testament wird sie das Grundstück am See und das bis in alle Ewigkeit nach Kampfer und Pfefferminz duftende Haus, das, rein rechtlich gesehen, immer noch ihr gehört, wenn es auch in einem Land liegt, das sie, ohne Gefahr, verhaftet zu werden, nicht mehr betreten kann, ihren Nichten vererben, und den Frauen ihrer Neffen. Jedenfalls keinem Mann” (Erpenbeck 76).
The acts of domesticating the land and building a house gain significance in the novel. These practices comprise a self-reflexively depicted transformation that highlights the aesthetic program of the provincial plot of land:

Jede der beiden oberen Wiesen wird durch die natürliche Einfassung zur Bühne, sagt der Gartenarchitekt … Die Vertikale und die Horizontale müssen in einem gesunden Verhältnis zueinander stehen, sagt der Hausherr. … Die Wildnis bändigen und sie dann mit der Kultur zusammenstoßen lassen, das ist die Kunst, sagt der Hausherr. (31-32)

Expressed in terms of landscaping and architecture, this territorial assertion of culture is thematized as a balancing act between competing forces. Here, it is clear that the architect instates what Andrew Thacker, in reference to Henri Lefebvre, call’s the “phallic verticality” of modern space, which for philosopher Henri Lefebvre is the expression of masculine violence associated with bureaucracy and the state (Thacker 21). Hence, this scene inaugurates the dominant mode of male subjectivity faced with the transformations and crises of twentieth-century German culture as a striving to maintain the tenuous balance between the vectors driven by individual, masculine desire as they intersect with the hierarchies of the socio-political order. That is to say, it requires both compliance with and resistance to the state’s agenda.

The territorial act of building the house, notably interchangeable with Heimat in the following quote, confirms that the house also serves the above-mentioned theoretical function as a center of orientation and a source of inventing daily ways of operating for family life:

Heimat planen, das ist sein Beruf. Vier Wände um ein Stück Luft, ein Stück Luft sich mit steinerner Kralle aus allem, was wächst und wabert, herausreißen, und dingfest machen.

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67 This struggle between the vertical and the horizontal reasserts modernity’s notion of abstract space in the form of Bauhaus principles. In Moving through Modernity, Andrew Thacker delineates this direct link between the space of modernity and the modernist avant-garde in three principles, namely the reliance on geometry, the emphasis on the ‘logic of visualization’, and the desire to fill the empty homogenized space with, as I stated, what Lefebvre argues is ‘phallic verticality’ that expresses masculine violence associated with bureaucracy and the state (Thacker 21).
The house and Heimat are clearly products of and articulate the planner and owner’s needs to create stability and direction in his life, whereby it likewise reproduces the patriarchal organization of place by dictating a life for the wife, for whom he builds “his” house. This instates further cultural norms associated with the house, namely that, although built and founded by men, houses represent archetypal, historical, domestic space that is associated with the feminine (Baak 44). However, the imagery writes the endeavor of building a home to be a strenuous, nearly-futile struggle of tearing away with rock-hard claws a piece of air and “arresting” it within four walls, as the phrase “dingfest machen” indicates, but if the components of the word are taken literally would mean turning it into a stable or solid object. That which is confined yet ethereal is then called Heimat, for which the house is a metonym. Moreover, the house is conceptualized as a third layer of skin, in other words a synecdoche for the body. The architect’s need for an extra layer of skin or armor can be related to his experiences as a soldier in World War I and his expectation that it will not be long again before war comes to his home. Like skin and clothing however, its solidness is only temporary as it will be shed on a regular basis. Therefore, the act of possession, “Und das hier war sein Haus,” is revealed to be a paradoxical act doomed to fail.

In sum, on the plot level, “der Architekt” builds his house not only for his new wife, but based on the metonymic relationship between house and Heimat, plans and builds a collective
house. On the metalevel, *Heimsuchung* represents a reversal of these roles as its woman author plans and builds a discursive house and *Heimat*. Portraying the difficulty and futility of home-building and maintenance, Erpenbeck attenuates the foundational practice at the root of seemingly ingrained patriarchal order. She does this with the acute awareness that houses do not merely represent security and shelter, but also symbolize rise and fall, gain and loss, shelter and imprisonment, and they expose their inhabitants to the elements of sociopolitical orders.

Along these lines, the summerhouse in the novel articulates in detail the desire or need for refuge and protection, and the author renders palpable the potential risks that inhere in the relationship between the local and the translocal. The Weimar era design expresses the architect’s whimsical, utopian longing as colored-glass offers alternative ways of seeing and nature-inspired ornamentation hides the banality of the everyday, typified by a broom closet door adorned with images of the Garden of Eden. Drawing on the synecdoche relationship between the house and body, the master bedroom hides a secret closet large enough to harbor a human, therefore expressing an anticipated threat signified by the desire for a womb-like hiding place. When the specter of the Second World War looms over the summer house, anticipated vulnerability is compensated by window grates, an image of protection that simultaneously invokes imprisonment by the historical circumstances of war as well as the husband’s paternalistic treatment of his wife.

The wife’s position in the husband’s playhouse is located closer to the prison end of the protection/prison spectrum. During their courtship, the young woman and the married architect, for whom she worked at that point, would come to the lakeside land, where the architect dreamed of building a house for his new love. The young woman is wracked with sadness when she realizes that the architect will only be with her if she is willing to be confined to this one piece of...
earth, “… von dem Tag an war ihr klar, dass er nur bei ihr ankommen würde, wenn sie bereit wäre, ihn auf diesem ganz bestimmten Stück Erde, das nicht allzu weit von Berlin entfernt lag, zu erwarten” (Erpenbeck 66). Underscored by her name as “die Frau des Architekten,” her decision to marry comes at the cost of leaving her life in Berlin and giving up her dreams of traveling the world as a circus performer. Thus, a desired life in motion, of travel and laughter, comes to a standstill in the domestic space of the home her husband builds for her (Erpenbeck 64). The house is a “dream house” for the alienated wife, in the sense that it is a place in which she can live out alternative life paths only in reverie. This “dream house” is however a thoroughly ambivalent place for the woman, where she copes with or resists the patriarchal order that demarcates her life in the house and the nation.

Literally refusing to reproduce the gender order in which the female body is objectified and exploited for political purposes in the Nazi era, the architect’s wife does not fulfill her duty of bearing children for the fatherland: “... Also ich fand das von Hitler unmöglich, von uns Frauen zu verlangen, dass wir dem Staat Kinder gebären – wir sind doch keine Maschinen. Und ihr Mann sagt: Meine Frau war auf ihre Art praktisch im Widerstand. Der Direktor des Kombinats lacht, und der Architekt selbst, und es lacht auch seine Frau” (Erpenbeck 75). The significance of her nonconformity is however trivialized as they all laugh. By repeating throughout the episode the idiomatic expression, “Humor ist, wenn man trotzdem lacht …” (Erpenbeck 71) as a response to troubling situations, in particular the worsening situation for Jews in the Weimar era and then the Nazi period, Erpenbeck foregrounds the futility of such “resistance.” In these scenes, this resistance appears ingrained in German culture by virtue of the fact that the recurring response is a commonly used idiom. The joke therefore seems to be on all those who claimed to be secret resisters.
Erpenbeck further emphasizes the complex, direct relationship between the body, the local, and the global when the nation’s battles for territory arrive at the summerhouse while the architect’s wife hides in the house, both sheltered and imprisoned, from advancing Russian soldiers. In a graphic blurring of boundaries between victim and victimizer, geo-political enemy lines are grafted onto and violently negotiated by means of the bodies of the woman and the soldier. When *der Rotarmist* finds her in the secret closet in her bedroom, the woman emerges and grotesquely preempts her own rape by raping the young soldier. This is further connoted as a political act that contributes to the war cause. For the woman, the traumatic experience of having a “hole bored in her eternity” does not refer primarily to her body as such, but rather the body of her dream house, the “Garden of Eden” and the *Heimat* it stands for, which lose their eternal value:

Sie will das Wort nicht denken, das Wort, mit dem er sie rief, das undenkbare Wort mit dem er für alle Ewigkeit ein Loch in ihre Ewigkeit bohrte. Ihr zu der Zeit schon unfruchtbare Körper hatte ihn, der das Wort gewußt hatte, das sie entmachtete, mit aller Gewalt an sich gerissen und ungefähr für die Dauer einer Geburt ihr Lachen, das ihm so lange im Weg gestanden hatte, erstickt, in dieser Nacht in dem verborgenen Schrank, den ihr Mann eigens für sie gebaut hatte, weil sie es sich damals, als sie noch eine Zirkusprinzessin war, so wünschte, war sie endlich zum Feind übergelaufen. (74)

During the rape, the *Rotarmist* whimpers the one word that the woman has sought to avoid, which is indicated to be “mother” in a later account of this scene from the *Rotarmist’s* perspective, “Mama, sagt er, ohne zu wissen, was er sagt … (Erpenbeck 100). Although it is unclear whether the young man refers to her as mother or calls out for his own mother whose murder by German soldiers motivates his own involvement in the war, the architect’s wife feels
cast into the role of the child-bearing machine or ‘hole’ that she has willfully resisted for ideological reasons and she is thus forced to become “the enemy.” The meaning of the “hole” in her eternity must also be understood as a loss of subjectivity and the ability to maintain her self-definition as a non-mother, which means she remains trapped in the role that she has tried to resist. Furthermore, the violated, war-ravaged body and home, metonym for Heimat, lose their eternal unity and bear the signs of acceleration and ephemerality – they are a hole out of which time spills, “Und dabei rinnt … die Zeit fortwährend aus” (Erpenbeck 75).

In multiple ways, Erpenbeck shows that territorialism associated with the drive to obtain existential security by possessing a paternal home results in a conundrum, whereby time inevitably runs out and the Heimat turns into a trap. This is true not only for the wife but also for her husband, when his practice of place clashes with the nation’s attempts to control it. Like in the N.S. era, when the architect compromises his own personal values and hides his Jewish ancestry represented by the Bauhaus style of his house, in order to work on Speer’s Project Germania and thereby escape persecution, the continued pattern of balancing the personal and political forces comes to the fore again in the subsequent sociopolitical order, where the architect ironically shifts from building Germania to building the new East Berlin. When building materials run out and he is caught sneaking in screws from West Berlin to continue his work, he is given no choice but to flee or be arrested for contracting with the class enemy. In the face of his displacement, the architect addresses his predicament, “Wären die Scholle, das Haus und der See nicht seine Heimat, hätte es ihn niemals in der Ostzone gehalten. Jetzt wurde ihm die Heimat zur Falle” (Erpenbeck 42).

Erpenbeck implies that a purely individualistic and emotional attachment to a place turns Heimat into a trap. Years later, the architect reflects on his past activities. As he wonders
whether or not the German language has a verb tense that projects the past into the future, the storyline performs precisely this as the past indeed folds forward onto itself when the architect and his wife must themselves flee. This future-anterior brings the figure’s acts and experiences of the future into direct relationship with those of his past. The relationship between the past and future is however not causal. It represents an ironic, poetic justice of being pushed out of his own home, which shows the continuity of a cultural order of unethical territorialism and cuckoo-like ownership. In this way, Erpenbeck employs the spatial history of the provincial home to cast judgment on the architect’s past activities.

The architect’s displacement confirms the novel’s cycle of transformation and crisis tied to the patriarchal order of state control and its performance on the plot level. The figure’s displacement also illustrates the consequent modern mode of existence, which is described by die _Besucherin_, an ethnic German expelled from her home in the Ukraine during the Second World War and visiting her granddaughter at the summer home, “...denn der Gang der Dinge und Menschen war wohl, umgerechnet aufs Leben, im Grunde genommen immer der gleiche wie auf der Flucht” (Erpenbeck 131). Here the temporary character of human existence is underlined as one similar to fleeing. The text shows this to be true, because the logic of territorialism is predicated on possessions which once gained, can always be lost. Notably, _die Besucherin_ ties her individual loss directly to national acts of extreme territorialism, namely war, “Deutschland hat den Krieg begonnen und verloren, hätte es ihn begonnen und gewonnen, hätten andere verloren. Sie hat das Verlieren gelernt, Kapitel eins: das Haben, und Kapitel zwei: das Verlieren, sie hat so lange verloren, bis sie das Verlieren beherrschte” (Erpenbeck 137). In such conditions of cyclical, human-wrought “Verwüstung,” possessing land and a house as a means to achieve stability and security are impossible, insofar as they always lead to loss for someone.
The novel’s tactic of folding time forward and back on itself in relation to the house precludes the possibility of *Heimat* to be a palimpsest wiped clean of its past. Even if the specific details of the past are not available for the next inhabitants of the house, traces of the past remain embedded in the house and in the land, for instance the textile manufacturer’s towel that is noticed in the bathhouse by successive inhabitants. This is significant as the *Schriftstellerin* takes over the provincial “nest” to reconstruct German society via her writing but to the sounds of the cuckoo, “Das Tippen ihrer Schreibmaschine mischt sich mit den Rufen den Kuckucks …” (Erpenbeck 114). The writer’s work is therefore ambivalently intertwined with the behaviors of the cuckoo.

The communist *Schriftstellerin* returns after the war from exile in Eastern Europe with the intention of effecting an ideological shift, “Wollten sich aus den deutschen Trümmern endlich irgendeinen Boden unter die Füße ziehen, der nicht mehr trägerisch wäre” (Erpenbeck 123). Articulated notably in spatial terms, her hope to establish non-illusory or non-treacherous ground entails transforming the culturally dominant practice of place based on “Habgier und Neid” (Erpenbeck 123). However, the *Schriftstellerin*’s alternative approach remains merely utopist longing as the greed and jealousy of the previous cycles of territorialism and private property resurface. In the GDR era, in a political order that is supposedly based on equal access to material things, the law of the father state is reincarnated in a modified form, where neighborly relations again manifest themselves in conflict over property that is allocated based on one’s relationship to higher-ups in the order. The writer, who also benefits from her social position and thus gains permission to use the house, is betrayed by a young doctor whom she helped gain permission to share the lakeside plot of land, “Nun muß es gerade der junge Arzt sein, … der sich des Staates bedient, um die Gründer des Staates zu beerben” (Erpenbeck 123).
This reestablishes patriarchal norms of spatial control and male succession on both the local and national scale at the cost of the woman and reiterates the limited power of female subjectivity.

The possibility at diminishing class and gender disparity is further undermined by a violent reassertion of the law of masculine “greed.” A young local girl is raped in the bathhouse by a young man vacationing near the summer house. The focus of the scene is however not only the rape, but also the writer’s granddaughter and a local boy, her “Kinderfreund,” who witness the rape as they peek through the slats in the bathhouse.68 The Kinderfreund reflects on this scarring, shameful moment of visual “greed” as precisely that which ended the possibility of his budding love with the writer’s granddaughter, “Dass man an einem Ort durch gemeinsame Gier und Scham gründlicher festgeknüpft wird als durch gemeinsame Glück, das hätte er gern niemals gelernt” (Erpenbeck 166). A relationship that may have diminished class differences between the city girl and the country boy is extinguished, and the young man therefore remains trapped in the province, longing for a different life that he might have had with his childhood friend.

The socialist society desired by die Schriftstellerin, which was an alternative notion of socio-spatial order to that of patriarchy, to the continuity of territoriality, therefore resulting in a pessimistic (despairing) state of perpetual homesickness: “Aber ihr, der kein Land mehr, sondern die Menschheit die Heimat sein sollte, blieb der Zweifel für immer als Heimweh” (Erpenbeck 117). Erpenbeck depicts another failed “renovation” of the Heimat, this one rooted in a cosmopolitan conceptualization of dwelling that emphasizes being in relation to others, of being at home in humanity by sharing space.

68 In a symbolic act of egalitarian solidarity, the writer’s son introduces his young daughter, a city child of Berlin who is afforded the luxury of a vacation lake home and thus visits only in the summers, to a local boy who lives year-round in the small provincial community. His working-class, provincial background sets him apart from the summer home inhabitants, for instance, as he is not allowed to dine with them but waits next to the dinner table or in the next room until the little girl is finished with the meal.
The final transformation to the socio-political order and plot of land with the fall of communism and the Wende confirms the cycle of loss resulting from place-based territorialism. When the male heir of the architect and his wife reclaim ownership, the past catches up with the future again and the granddaughter loses possession of the home. Her personal connection to the place is erased in legal proceedings when she is labeled die unberechtigte Eigenbesitzerin and cannot afford to buy the house and property from the new-old owners, for whom the crumbling house has neither material nor sentimental value. When the property is sold and the house slated for demolition, the granddaughter parts with her grandmother’s house by cleaning its “body,” thereby visiting the personal memories contained in the space one last time before it is destroyed. This symbolic act of mourning is a way of coping with transformation, limited (female) agency in a capitalist order of ownership, and the personal crisis of loss, which is also a collective loss based on the metonymic function of the house as Heimat.

In the end, Heimsuchung’s woman author overcomes the impotency of the story’s female subjects by destroying the house to show that German culture has stagnated in a repeating cycle of Heimat renovations adjusted for the respective historical circumstances which nevertheless reassert patriarchy-defined practices associated with ownership, territorialism, and, with the architect’s acquisition of the Jewish family’s plot of land, expansion of property. Therefore, Erpenbeck symbolically demolishes the house, the center of orientation, around which modern German history occured on this micro-scale. The destruction of the house leads to a moment during which the land is renaturalized, “Bevor auf demselben Platz ein anderes Haus gebaut werden wird, gleicht die Landschaft für einen kurzen Moment wieder sich selbst” (Erpenbeck 189). This fleeting moment of isomorphism, of “sich selbst gleichen,” removes all meaning from the place as the referent tautologically refers to itself. It is a pause after the destruction of the
provincial bourgeois house and a narrative act that symbolically opens up thinking. With the impending new house, continuity is signified, implying that the cognitive economy of the narrated house is indispensable as a cultural frame of reference in an age of accelerated change, while the unbuilt house leaves an opening for new ways of practicing place and being in relation to others.

For Germanist Monika Shafi, ownership and loss are central to what she refers to as Erpenbeck’s “house-Heimat” which shows how selfhood is constituted through and dependent on a place and possibilities of return (7). By contrast, I believe the text makes the case in the post-socialist era of increased globalization for new practices of place that break with the mentality of territoriality or the dependence on physical place and possibilities of return, according to which German culture has been organized on the basis of ownership and spurious interpersonal interaction.

Not only does the architect’s admission that his emotional connection to a physical place causes his Heimat to become a trap, the neighboring Jewish family’s story provides a further example of the need to let go of property and embrace alternative affiliations to place via memory. Several members of the Jewish family members hesitate to leave their home in Germany, the attachment to which Erpenbeck implicitly associates with their valuable material belongings that she logs by price (presumably for shipping purposes) as disruptive interjections without commentary throughout the episode. While all of the family members who stayed in Germany tragically perish at the hands of the Nazis, the eldest son Ludwig forfeits his inheritance, the textile manufacturer’s parcel of lakeside land, to emigrate to South Africa.

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69 Here I refer to a conference paper delivered at the 2009 Canadian Association of University Teachers of German annual meeting, which Monika Shafi kindly shared with me. Schafi’s work on Heimsuchung will appear in her forthcoming book Housebound: Domestic Space and Selfhood in Contemporary German Narratives, available in October of 2012.
Because he is willing to abandon his “Erbe,” that is to say relinquish his hold on property, he survives and consequently also disrupts the patriarchal order of place. (Notably, he relocates to Cape Town which it is said is also called “Mother City,” thereby implying an alternative matriarchal order of place, “Mutterstadt wird die Stadt auch genannt, moederstadt, mother city” (Erpenbeck 62).) Erpenbeck does not diminish the emotional impact of loss; rather, she emphasizes other types of attachment to place, above all in the image of the quasi-birth canal connection between Germany and Cape Town, which is suggested by the connection between Ludwig’s daughter and his sister, who is murdered by the Nazis and said to be buried so deeply that she emerges on the other side of the earth in the form of Ludwig’s daughter who is given her name.70 In this way, the attachment to Erbe is severed from property to become an attachment to family, even if sadly only in memory, which is kept alive through the daughter, who has been given life outside the order of place that killed her namesake.

In light of such depictions, Erpenbeck forwards a mode of cosmopolitan existence that correlates with Robbins’ argument that cosmopolitanism, often seen as a notion of a freedom and detachment from bonds and affiliations of typical nation-bound life, can actually be understood as “… an ethos of macro-interdependencies, with an acute consciousness (often forced upon people) of their inescapabilities and particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories, and fates” (Rabinow in Robbins 1). This observation sheds light on how the author uses the literary house in the eastern German province to provide precisely those alternative affiliations. It serves as a collective mnemonic device to store the regional specificity that has disappeared into the past, enabling the author and reader to move on. At the same time, because the literary house is a standard form, the author carries out a larger project of glocalizing the work of unsettling the

70 “Elisabeth hat Ludwig die Kleine genannt, nach seiner eigenen Schwester. Als sei seine Schwester so tief in die Erde gerutscht, dass sie auf der anderen Seite wieder herausgekommen ist, durch die Erde gerutscht und im selben Jahr auf der andern Seite der Welt von seiner Frau wieder geboren” (Erpenbeck 51-52).
past and its successive orders of place and everyday practices that have been coterminal with the patriarchal architecture of domestic space.

It is by means of recasting some of the same literary conventions that Hensel also addresses the conditions of accelerated globalization, the relationship between the global and the local, and the practices of place that correlate with the cycle of transformation and crisis in the course of modern regional German history.

**D. Im Spinnhaus: Working on the Maddening Margins of Gender and Class**

In contrast to *Heimsuchung*, *Im Spinnhaus* does not focus on bourgeois norms of private ownership and dwelling in a single-family home, rather the text investigates everyday practices in a multi-purpose, collective home that houses the working poor, most of whom are women. In *Im Spinnhaus*, Robertson’s claims ring true that there has never been such a thing as an ontologically secure collective ‘home’ (30). Hensel’s retrospective look at the past century and a half portrays a continuous cycle of deep structural shifts on all levels of culture as they play out in the province. In this way, like *Heimsuchung*, *Im Spinnhaus* forwards a spatial imagination of transformation and crisis in which the house symbolizes the organization of larger scales of space. Modernization, industrialization and intensifying globalization repeatedly transform society to the detriment of the *Spinnhaus* inhabitants and the small, notoriously poor Erzgebirge village in which it is located. In this constellation, conditions of accelerated globalization correlate with those of modernity and therefore found the basic dynamics of the imagined world. Specifically, the microcosm of the *Spinnhaus* community instantiates the distanciated relations, alienation, marginalization, and the increased mobility and flows of people, capital, images and goods associated with modernity. Therefore, the text investigates the intertwined consequences
of modernity and globalization in the specific provincial German context of the *Erzgebirge* region of Saxony.

The region’s history of industrialization, in particular mining and textile manufacturing, and subjugation of local workers comprises the fabric of Hensel’s *Spinnhaus* community. In her imagined world, subjective possibilities are determined primarily by the cultural dimensions of gender and class or social position, while ethnicity, religion and political inclinations factor in to a lesser degree.

Through the use of the trope of the house as well as irony and the grotesque, Hensel unsettles the everyday practices of place and literary conventions that have accompanied successive cultural orders of modern German history and paradoxically amount to a state of stagnation. Therefore, the author recalibrates the frames of reference of provincial life by unsettling conventional images and practices, which suggests an anxiety about the place of the provincially marginalized, particularly women, in the post-socialist global order.

The location of the *Spinnhaus* is specified as “hinter dem Geringsberg” in the village of *Neuwelt* in the county (*Landkreis*) of Schwarzenberg in the Ore Mountains (*Erzgebirge*) of Saxony. Both “hinter” and “gering” in the place description “hinter dem Geringsberg” lend a sense of remoteness, backwardness, and inferiority to the location of the *Spinnhaus*.

Signifying the subjugation of its inhabitants, the *Spinnhaus* is not actively built in the story. It is instead a product of the passive voice, “Es wurde um 1860 herum erbaut: ein

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71 The *Erzgebirge* is a particularly auspicious setting for depicting conditions of alienation, exploitation and marginalization. Rich in ores and uranium, mining has been a pivotal industry in the region and has had significant effects on the people and environment, especially in the GDR era, causing serious pollution, destroying villages, and leaving behind craters and exposed radiation (Buse 195). In addition to the natural resources, textile factories established in the late nineteenth century provided another pillar of the regional economy. A history of authoritarian political culture goes hand in hand with the region’s history of industrialization, so that peasants and workers were long underrepresented despite waves of labor movements and modernizations to the political system (Buse 199).
dreistöckiges Gebäude mit schiefergedecktem Spitzdach” (Im Spinnhaus 9). It is thus foisted onto the community as a business enterprise, insofar as it is initially built to house a modern weaving factory in the basement and its workers’ families in the upper floors. Hence, the “Spinnhaus” is a communal dwelling tied to industrialization and the desire for wealth that is out of place: its modern machines “versprachen dem Besitzer Reichtum, etwas, was dem Leben im Erzgebirge nie zugedacht war” (IS 9).

The implied economic struggle is bound to the larger context of the eastern German provinces and the Erzgebirge region in particular, which, economically speaking, today still lags behind the federal states of former West Germany. The imagery of the house also draws on the history of labor struggles, particularly the weavers’ uprisings of the mid-nineteenth century come to mind, “Seit jener Zeit war das Haus hinter dem Geringsberg verschrien als Hort der Ausbeutung, Armut und Krankheit, der größte Elendspunkt des westlichen Erzgebirges. Der Profit sächsischer Textilindustrie ließ die Städte stark werden” (IS 9). The house and its dwellers are associated with exploitation, poverty, and disease brought about in the shift from traditional, local forms of work to mechanized production.

Furthermore, this spatial constellation stages the dynamic between the local and the translocal in the rise of urban centers at the cost of the rural community. The relationship between the province and the cities sets into motion consequences of modernity, namely, alienation and, in Anthony Gidden’s terms, time-space distanciation, which the sociologist explicates as relations between “absent” others who have no face-to-face interaction with those in a certain place but who shape the form of that place by means of their social influence (Consequences 18-19). In such a distanciated relationship, the workers of the Spinnhaus labor for

72 All further parenthetical references to Im Spinnhaus will be abbreviated as IS.
an absent wealthy owner and live in poverty while the urban centers benefit from their productivity. The province is by no means a *Heimat* refuge from industrialized urban life.

Beyond the literal sense of weaving and textile production, the story draws on figurative meanings and literary tropes to connect “spinnen” to the act of “spinning tales” or storytelling and further draws on idiomatic expressions that associate “spinnen” with insanity. Moreover, the prepositional phrase in the title “*Im Spinnhaus*” points to the interior of the house, to being located or dwelling within it. Therefore, while the concept “Haus” evokes standard (or glocalized) ideas associated with the house as a place for shelter, stability, and private life, the novel capitalizes on the always already ambivalent character of the house in light of the fact that a “Spinnhaus” is by definition a type of prison.\(^7^3\) Based on this accumulation of meaning, weaving, story-telling, madness and imprisonment are all interwoven in the symbol of the “Spinnhaus,” and those who dwell in this place are aligned with its alterity. The engagement with this alterity is programmatic for the work of the novel.

“Man sagte dem Spinnhaus Unheimliches nach. Eine Sammelstelle wurde es für wilde Tiere, Anlaufpunkt für Leute, die dem normalen Leben entsagen wollten” (IS 10). Signifying its reputation in the local community, the uncanny identity of the house is posited as a product of local legends (“man sagte”). Its inhabitants are literally eccentrics, located outside “normal life” and are implicitly conflated with wild animals, an attribute that hints at the author’s narrative tactic of hybridity, of a play with *Zwischennatur*. Ascribed to the dwellers are further abnormalities that are frequently related to illnesses and/or female sexuality and reproduction. The inhabitants are associated with excessive fertility and frequent miscarriages and many of the seemingly undesirable women of the *Spinnhaus* exhibit a voracious, uncontrollable sex drive and

\(^7^3\) In the Grimms’ dictionary, Spinnhaus is defined as “haus, in dem gesponnen wird, weiterhin arbeitshaus für landstreicher, besonders weiblichen geschlechtes, dann allgemein zuchthaus” (2542).
act upon it. Unusual physical deformities and abilities, which also function at times as quasi-magical features reminiscent of fairy tale imagery, such as Trulla’s ability to wash silver out of her hair, which could also refer to the ore that she is forced to mine, further write the figures onto the margins of the community.

As a novel with autobiographical interest, Hensel’s Spinnhaus and the grotesque dwellers socially “trapped” within it give credence to the position of women writers vis à vis literary traditions that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar address in their classic work toward a feminist poetics The Madwoman in the Attic. Their central argument is that women writers and by extension literary depictions of women are “penned up” by the literary imagination developed by the paternal order and its texts, both of which have subordinated and imprisoned women (13). Thus, women writers have had to position themselves in relation to the male-dominated literary culture from which they inherit the male-established images, genres, and styles (Gilbert and Gubar 50).

Focusing on canonical literary works of the nineteenth century but also drawing on the German tradition of Grimm’s fairy tales and Goethe’s eternal feminine, Gilbert and Gubar identify two archetypical images of women that have ordained subsequent depictions in literature, namely the self-surrendering, subservient angel in the house and her counterpart the monster, who “threaten[s] to replace her angelic sister, embodies intransigent female autonomy and thus represents both the author’s power to allay “his” anxieties by calling their source bad names (witch, bitch, fiend, monster) and, simultaneously, the mysterious power of the character who refuses to stay in her textually ordained “place” …” (28). In addition to confining subservient angel women to the domestic sphere, nineteenth century society and literature admonished women to be fragile and ill (Gilbert and Gubar 57). Gilbert and Gubar show that in
response, women writers developed a crucial tradition of depicting uncontrollable madness and disease to overcome the reified subjectivities necessary in “proper” literature and their own lives (57).

Although Gilbert and Gubar published their ground-breaking study in the late seventies, a decidedly different socio-historical context than the twenty-first century, their contributions are nevertheless compelling in regard to Hensel’s grotesque depictions of monstrous, diseased and mad women figures confined to the Spinnhaus on the margins of Neuwelt.74 Notably, Gilbert and Gubar emphasize that myths and fairy tales “both state and enforce culture’s sentences with greater accuracy than more sophisticated literary texts” (36). By means of Hensel’s play with the polyvalence of the “Spinnhaus” and fairy tale-like, sexualized “abnormalities” of especially the female characters, the novel appropriates the monster image of the woman to take issue with literary clichés and the social norms with which they correspond. In this way, the author criticizes discursive conventions that have constructed reified and absurd notions of gender for eliding the social and political issues of gender subjectivity.

Importantly, Hensel’s characters are not only trapped in the architecture of patriarchy, but also that of the socio-economic order. Therefore, “imprisonment” in domestic space is doubled by alienation and confinement in the socio-economic order and includes an engagement with male subjectivity as well, albeit to a lesser extent. Inasmuch as Gilbert and Gubar associate an anxiety with the woman writer’s position vis a vis literary conventions, Hensel’s subversive depictions articulate a sense of anxiety about the position of primarily women but also men dwelling on the periphery of globalization in the eastern German province, which has

74 For a recent retrospective on the influence and shortcomings of Gilbert’s and Gubar’s study and a re-contextualization of their work with regard to contemporary feminist literary scholarship, see Annette Federico’s 2009 edited volume, Gilbert and Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic After Thirty Years.
experienced a continuous cycle of marginalization and exploitation in successive socio-political orders.

Despite the Spinnhaus’ physical location on the margins of the community, as a literary device it fulfills the aforementioned claims about domestic space serving as the center of orientation and as a place where everyday ways of operating are invented. From this hybridized center of domestic space plus workplace, subjective positions are tied to daily work and tasks, presenting an image of German culture in which productivity defines the individual. Drawing on the grotesque and carnevaiesque, the text seeks to upend the “proper place” (Certeau) ascribed to abject subjects in German political economic orders that have sullied the everyday work and interactions of the regional community.75

A series of early episodes creates a genealogy of Spinnhäusler that tell of the Uhlig family, which is known for an inherited “Stummsein der Seele” (IS 10) and the inability to communicate with anyone but its own members. With the birth of Trulla, the family’s literal and figural voicelessness in the community is broken as the child enters the world screaming “gegen die Familientradition” (IS 12). The floodgates open for “Sperrgusche Trulla” as she weaves her observations and intuitions into her work, “Sie fädelt kuriose Geschichten in ihre Arbeit hinein” (IS 12). Here the play on the meaning of “fädeln” signifies that Trulla’s work could be both weaving and story-telling. She thus tells stories or addresses truths that others do not feel are appropriate for polite conversation, in particular speaking of the fallen of World War I and warning against the impending Second World War. The descriptor “kuriose” hints at the tenuous position that her work and truths, as she insists they are (“Wenn ich wos darzähl, is das fei immer wahr”), hold in the community (IS 22). She is generally not believed and the local children are

75 To reiterate, for Certeau, place refers to a stable set of relations and prescribed positions (117).
76 In Sachsen dialect, “Sperrgusch” refers to a “sehr neugierige Person” (Lasch and Schraps).
warned to avoid the danger of listening to her (IS 21). This may be so because the stories convey undesired truths but also because the information is “spun” into Märchen, which, confirming a continuation of the tactic of the madwoman in the attic, are often dismissed as the ramblings of a deranged Spinnhäusler.

The power of Trulla’s tales lies less in their content and more in the subversive threat of her improper “Zügellosigkeit,” that is to say of not adhering to the bounds of “appropriate” behavior. This perceived threat to the established order is made clear as Trulla is punished for telling a visiting Nazi Gauleiter a disturbing tale about his family. Consequently, she is forced to work in hellish conditions in a nearby mine, where her body is exposed to a “pechglänzendes Mineral” (IS 16). The toll that the work takes on her body is articulated in fairy tale imagery that turns her into a “monster” as she develops “den Buckel einer Hexe und Hände wie Krallen” (IS 16) and eventually breaks out in black, bleeding spots and growths. Therefore, when the sixty-year-old Trulla becomes pregnant, which for the locals in the community further confirms her improper, uncontrollable decorum but is more likely a tumor from radiation exposure, the “Sperrgusche Trulla” is left no choice but to take her place in the Spinnhaus, “Nur das Spinnhaus war für sie offen” (IS 14). Insofar as the physical outcome of back-breaking, dangerous work is directly linked to the risks of practicing place as a “zügellose” woman and the radiation-induced disease is articulated in fairy tale imagery of a decrepit witch, reified notions of monstrous femininity as mediated by fairy tales are problematized. They function as normative frames of reference that lead directly to the collective identification and ostracism of Trulla as an outcast and punitive work in the quarry, in other words, of being put back into her place.

77 Lyn Marven regards Hensel’s use of fairy tales quite differently. She argues that by means of such depictions, Hensel questions the effectuality of fairy tales as a means of social critique. Marven concludes that Hensel’s use of fairy tales challenges the genre’s role as a substitute for social dialogue (143).
Further gendered practices of work carried out in the imagined weaver/nut house more explicitly convey notions of Germanness. In charge of the laundry facility in the basement of the Spinnhaus, Berta recognizes and abhors in herself traits that she associates with specifically German values and practices:


Deutscher Schrankgeruch: Treueduft des Lebens.

Schmutzigsein begann für Berta Zschiedrich, wenn die Mädchen nur noch selten mit ihren Müttern in der Waschanstalt erschienen. Wenn sie sich zu Weibsn entwickelten und mit Bändern und Borten schmückten, schön, viel schöner als Berta je gewesen war. Denn als Wäschereibesitzerin zeigte sie die finsteren Züge einer Herrscherin. Sie wollte diese Züge nicht an sich entdecken. Sah sie aber in den Spiegel, sprangen sie ihr entgegen: der ungeduldige Blick, die Verachtung, die sie für die Dorfleute, vor allen für die Spinnhäusler empfand, der Haß, den die schwere Arbeit mit sich brachte. (IS 24)

Here the power and burden of responsibility that go hand-in-hand with ownership and hard labor result in the characteristics of a ruler, a controller, and poison her relationships with others in the village, particularly young women, who escape the work of the laundry facility to enact an awakening sexuality or “dirtiness,” which Berta represses and seeks to repress in others. Her practice of place informed by her interpretation of her role keeps her alienated and isolated in the Spinnhaus basement. Moreover, this quote draws on a semantic field of nationalism as it developed in the German context, whereby the drive to conquer (herrschen), the repression (sich beherrschen) of femininity through work is colored with contours of impending National Socialism’s deadly obsession with purity and cleansing, with “die Lust zu säubern.”
This correlation between femininity, everyday work, and the nation is further exemplified as everyday women’s work takes on semantic weight against the backdrop of the nation at war. Referring to the emotional response of having lost four brothers in battles of World War I, Trulla turns the German woman’s handiwork of “kläppeln” into a coping mechanism and outlet for grief and anger, “Klöppeln Deutsches Frauenwerk. Trulla verkläppelte ihren Haß” (IS 14). Then in World War II, the Spinnhaus women’s regionally-specific textile skills are instrumentalized for the German nation,


At the same time that Hensel seems to imply that the women’s participation in the nation’s quest for dominance is directly tied to a German work ethic, the notion of culturally-specific work habits is likewise shown to be generally connected to subjugation, persecution, or of simply carrying on in whichever way is required to get by. The text critically dissects everyday behaviors and activities that lead the marginalized women in the Spinnhaus to wage war for the nation and therefore reproduce the very same authoritarian order of place in which they are forced to struggle for existence and comply to avoid punishment or death.

The kitchen table of the Spinnhaus becomes a theater of war as the speech-impaired, gray-haired child Uhlig-Marie, whose mother sends her away to an SS Bräuteschule to escape the Spinnhaus existence and learn her proper place in society – “’Die Welt der Frau ist der Mann,
und an anderes denkt sie nur ab und zu. Sagt unser Führer”’ (IS 50)\textsuperscript{78} – is visited at home in 1943 by the “Delegation der Deutschen Arbeitsfront” and therefore complies with the delegation’s demands by assembling on her kitchen table (“ihre Schicksal, ihre Werkbank” (IS 52)) knives touting the phrase “Blut und Ehre” on the blade. However, the work of knife assembly becomes merely a means to see the young uniformed man who picks up the knives once a week. Therefore, the novel illustrates how distanced national politics and ideology invade the private sphere, manipulate individual desire to carry out the projects of the nation, and exploit and perpetuate the young woman’s confinement in the domestic space.

Despite a new social order instated in the post-war era, the law of place proves to be cyclical and continues to alienate and confine to the attic of the Spinnhaus women made monstrous from physical labor. However, modernization brings with it technology that temporarily changes the quality of relationships in the Spinnhaus and alters the spatial imagination. The figure Annalie spends her life savings on the community’s first television, which provides her “ein körperloses Glück” that transcends the debilitating pain caused by fifty years of work in a local factory (IS 160). The TV initially draws neighboring children, thereby mitigating Annalie’s solitude, “Es war das neue Gefühl und ganz und gar wunderbar, in Gesellschaft zu sein”(IS 161) and opening a closed and oppressive society to another “world” beyond that of the Spinnhaus and the GDR with “Nachrichten aus einer Welt, vor der sie sehnsüchtig hockten” (IS 162). Once televisions become more common in the community, relationships revert to the previous status quo as Annelie’s visitors retreat to their own televisions and she is abandoned to her abject isolation in the Spinnhaus attic, showing that the interaction

\textsuperscript{78} Here Hensel directly quotes Hitler from his “Tischgesprächen” from March 10, 1942 in which he pontificates on the nature of woman, whereby she obviously ties gender subjectivity to fascism. For the full text see Picker’s Hitler’s Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier. The spatial metaphor in the quote is noteworthy to the extent that it is performative – it functioned to literally delineate the frontiers of a woman’s existence.
was self-serving rather than motivated by a genuine interest in community. When the antenna stops functioning, Annalie is cut off from the world and dumps her TV out the window, which is said to shake the foundation of the *Spinnhaus*. This character’s act of Ersatz-suicide immediately prior to her own death serves as a desperate, nonverbal commentary on the place in which she lived in isolation in the attic, longing for another world.

The *Spinnhaus* registers further shakings of its foundation in relation to larger-scale social transformations, thereby performing the tie between the local and translocal. Signaling the novel’s efforts to exorcise the pasts associated with the collective house, the foundation of the *Spinnhaus* partially crumbles with the fall of the Berlin Wall, “In der Nacht, da alles gekippt war, hatten sich mehrere Felssteine aus dem Fundament des Spinnhauses gelöst” (IS199). The dislodged foundation does not however break the patterns of the past in the post-GDR era, I maintain.

The exploitation of the Sachsen *Spinnhaus* community by distant forces, which was first associated with industrialization and bankruptcy at the turn of the twentieth century, reshapes the practices of place again under the conditions of the post-1989 phase of globalization. In the episode titled “Apfelkrieg,” the dynamics of globalization put small-scale local apple farmers Dora and Urosch out of business as the local community chooses to buy apples imported from the “New World” over the fruits of Dora’s family’s generations of loving labor:

Die Neuwelter kauften Äpfel aus der Neuen Welt: grün- oder rotglänzende, gespritzte, gewachste, alle gleich groß, so glatthäutig und weißfleischig, dass es keine Made, keine Laus überlebt hätte, diese Reinheit zu zerstören. Zwar schmeckten die neuen Äpfel nach nichts und waren zudem saftlos, aber da sie keine Seele besaßen, verdarben sie nur
Here, everyday local consumer practices bring “soulless” products to the local context and depict global capitalism as a threat that homogenizes, or rather Europeanizes, the local flavor because it does not correspond to “der europäischen Norm” now desired by the consumer of Neuwelt, which eventually leads the couple to bankruptcy and unemployment. This episode further addresses intersubjectivity after the Wende, specifically in terms of property rights, insofar as the couple is displaced by an aristocrat who previously owned their land and returns to reclaim it after unification. Victims of globalization and the German past resurfacing in the present, Dora and Urosch, who have long been perceived as “abnormal” because they love each other excessively, experience the crisis of the new order and are left with no choice but to move to the margins and count themselves among the abject dwellers in the Spinnhaus.

Hinted at above in the critical posture toward new European norms, the text articulates a further dimension of the eastern German province’s struggle to survive and locate itself vis a vis shifting frames of reference in the post-socialist order. Bypassing the German nation in hopes of establishing a place on the European stage is an entrepreneurial strategy for economic recovery, albeit Hensel critically instates this order as merely another that exploits regional specificity and continues the cycles of the past in modified forms. The local arts of textile production are commoditized in the sale of the Spinnhaus to an international tourism company, “Mountains Future Schwarzenberg, kurz MFS genannt,” which turns the building into a museum, an “historisch-authentischen Attraktion” (IS 107) and promotes the regional work of the past as a “Stück europäischer Urgeschichte” (IS 109). Work is thus resemanticized, or for the worker desemanticized, in that it is no longer connected to the actual product, but rather to its
significance as an historical act. The impact of this new economic order of nostalgic tourism on subjectivity is emphasized in the character Fiedler’s reaction to the changed meaning of her work, which places her back in the position of the spinning “madwoman in the attic.” Even though spinning yarn on a 300-year old spinning wheel for international tourists relieves her from the region’s high unemployment, the meaninglessness of producing a product that does not sell and is thus thrown away, leads Fiedler to complain to the Arbeitsamt (the office of employment services) for the first time in her life, implying that the working conditions are worse than those in the GDR. The civil servant responds with a shrug of his shoulders, “jaja, im Alter, da werd ma halt narrisch, aber arbeiten muss der Mensch, und Gesetz ist Gesetz!” (IS 110). A satirical image of the complacent, obedient German driven by an unquestioning but maddening sense of duty continues to draw on stereotypical notions of Germanness, showing the continued subjugation of the provincial working class by labor laws and the entrepreneurial schemes of the “MFS,” the abbreviation of which clearly ties the post-socialist subject position to that of the oppressive past of the GDR’s Stasi or Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (aka MfS). The company’s marketing ploy to make the eastern German province representative of the origins of European history fails and the Spinnhaus museum is closed. The Spinnhaus’ abject identity and the region’s position on the provincial periphery are thus rearticulated in the post-socialist place of international flows of money and tourism.

Hensel also appears to be skeptical about the ability of those East Germans who do make their way out of the province to succeed on the global stage. The storyline of the local photographer Wolzack, who is hired by the MFS to document the Erzgebirge in pictures and yearns for world-wide fame, tells an implicitly cautionary tale about leaving the eastern German home for the “greener grass” on the other side of the Atlantic: “Schon sah er sich selbst als
Sponsored by the Goethe Institute, Wolzack’s work is shown in the “Deutsches Haus” in New York as an exhibition entitled “Europe’s Mysteries – The Mountains of Ore in the Change of Time. Photographer & Artist: Roland Wolzack. East-Germany” (IS 247). The exhibit’s title implies that the Goethe Institute endeavors to preserve not the past, but the fleeting present. The specific region of the “Mountains of Ore,” is again marketed not as German but as European, while the artist, in 2003, is labeled “East-German.” This title further implies that Hensel’s Goethe Institute, whose agenda is to promote German language and culture throughout the world, bypasses the historical complexity of the signifier “German” in favor of “European” and anticipates the appeal of the socialist “other” to an international audience in a global city by propagating the Cold War division of Germany more than a decade after unification.

Wolzack however encounters a harsh reality that dispels the chimera of an (East) German’s place on the world stage in New York City. Rather than a “Weltstadtgebäude,” the “German House” in New York resembles an “Erzgebirghäusel,” and rather than a diverse group of people from all over the globe such as that with which he had flown to the United States, a disappointing thirty people come to the opening of the exhibit – two of which are American, the rest German. Wolzack eventually strolls through the overwhelming and oppressive city to the top of the “American Telephone & Telegraph Company Building” attaining the modern, abstract spatial imagination’s god-like gaze over space. However, in this pivotal moment of looking down over the city and boldly and intentionally withstanding the violent winds, Wolzack overcomes his fear and decides simply, but confidently to leave this city that “wollte nichts von
ihm wissen” (IS 251). This is a clear rejection of the twentieth century’s unparalleled modern, global city and its corresponding lonely, alienated existence of anonymity.

In this way, the text that has so far critiqued the confinement, fixity and marginalization of life in the province asserts that abandoning and exploiting the embedded community of the province to attain the imperialistic view from above provides precisely the perspective that enables Wolzack to reject the disembedded and distanced intersubjectivity of modern global life, symbolized by the telephone and telegraph in the building’s name. In that the novel ends with this scene, it is unclear if Wolzack returns to the province. Nevertheless, the last image of the Spinnhaus seems to indicate that the potential for the future slumbers in the provincial community.

The ramshackle Spinnhaus is uninhabited and disintegrating, which is significant in that the marginalized, exploited inhabitants are no longer confined to the positions associated with the edifice’s history. The author offers little indication of what subjective possibilities exist for the working class of the eastern German “New World” (Neuwelt) in the current order of globalized space. However, the dilapidated, slumbering Spinnhaus is said to be provoking the future, “Das Spinnhaus blieb ruhig. Als ob es schliefe, unbewohnt Zukunft provoziere. Als ob es in seinem Dasein erstarrt wäre” (IS 244). Drawing on Heidegger for whom “unbewohnt” might also imply “ungedacht” or not thought of, the future possibilities of the Spinnhaus have not yet been imagined. Instead, the house and all that it stands for remain in a state of standstill, which correlates to the state of stagnation that manifests itself in the repeating cycles of spatial orders that have imprisoned and marginalized the working poor, especially the women. In this way, the
eastern German province resembles the “polar inertia” of a simultaneously accelerating and decelerating phase of globalization.⁷⁹

Hensel’s extremely fragmented and at times incoherent text utilizes the symbolic power of the house to perform the work of reflexive modernity by narratively reflecting on a regional history of everyday practices and subjectivity in relation to distanciated socio-political and economic orders that shape the place of the Spinnhaus community. The cyclical transformation and crisis makes evident the failures of modern German social and cultural forms in which the working poor are exploited and marginalized in their struggle to survive waves of modernization and globalization. Hensel undermines nostalgic notions of “returning” to a time and place represented by the provincial home to combat the disorientation, alienation and insecurity of contemporary life. Insofar as typical everyday practices are double-coded as practices of insane or outcast women, certain regional ways of operating are cast as abject and convey a notion of cultural identity based on a German work ethic, according to which working women reproduce the same social orders that subjugate, alienate and manipulate them in order to survive.

As the momentum of the current phase of globalization picks up, signified by increased mobility and flows of images, capital, tourism, and the attempted Europeanization of the regional province, Hensel’s imagined world expresses skepticism, even anxiety, about subjective possibilities and the place of the eastern German province in the order of neoliberal capitalism. The figures who remain in the province in the post-unification era, specifically Dora, Urosch and Fiedler, are relocated to the Spinnhaus and even male figures are therefore confined to the margins in the positions of “madwomen.” As the museumification and Europeanization of the

⁷⁹ “Polar inertia” is a notion developed by Paul Virilio in his 2000 work of the same name in which he assesses the relationship between space, time and technology. Virilio’s theory informs Hartmut Rosa’s work on forms of times and the perception and experience of acceleration in the current phase of globalization in his study called Beschleunigungen (2005).
rural community fails and the history of economic struggles persists, what is then left is a crumbling, uninhabited collective house in the eastern German province frozen in stasis but harboring new, potentially not yet thought of possibilities for community. For this reason, Hensel’s text implicitly appeals for an innovative alternative to the ways of being and orders of place that have been made available in the spatial imagination of modernization and globalization.

E. Conclusion: Practicing a Glocal Spatial Imagination in the Post-socialist Provincial Microcosm

*Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus* reflect a spatial imagination that locates the local micro-level in relation to larger regional, national, and transnational frames of reference. I therefore argue that the narrative focus on a single house in remote eastern German provincial settings is an epistemological undertaking by which the authors grapple with alienating conditions of globalization that appear accelerated from the eastern/East German perspective on account of recurring cultural orders and corresponding subjectivities that have led to what the authors depict as a state of inertia. The stories amount to symbolic acts of territorialism that seek to make sense of globalized existence, insofar as they recalibrate the meaning of a particular geographical place in the current era of shifting and multiple frames of reference. The authors discursively restore and archive specific localities that were “lost” in the plot of their novels and in the social reality of reunification and intensifying globalization. In this way, they counter the supposed threat of homogenization of eastern/East German experiences, and thus a part of their personal past. At the same time, insofar as the particular stories are glocalized by means of the standard forms of
the house and the regional microcosm, these novels take on a larger scale project of rethinking the social relations of domestic space.

Although the literary houses serve as collective mnemonic devices to store the regional specificity that has disappeared into the past, the novels in no means resurrect notions of Heimat that assert an ontologically secure, knowable place free from the tribulations of global modernity. On the contrary, Erpenbeck and Hensel tell spatial histories focused on a particular space over a long period of fragmented time, in order to dissect everyday behaviors that have propagated successive detrimental orders of place in the provincial community. This is precisely the contribution that I see these two novels making to the “spatial turn.” Because of the distinct focus on everyday activities and actions in lieu of dialogue and verbal communication, the novels foreground the ways in which the practices of everyday life produce space, in other words, imbue it with meaning that determines how one inhabits particular places, in this case the space of the collective past writ provincial microcosm. By stripping down the fast-paced flows of people, images, information, transportation, capital, etc. to the scale of a few people in a country house, the power relations and subject positions of German culture are brought into relief.

In this context, Foucault’s claims about architecture or the materiality of space in general are informative. He argues in his essay “Space, Power, and Knowledge” that architects cannot guarantee that their designs will secure liberty or nationality, because liberty is a practice and the self-institution of a society is determined entirely by reciprocal relations (137). It is the relationship between the material organization of space, life-practices, values and discourse that determine subjective possibilities in a given society (Foucault “Space Power Knowledge” 137). Therefore, the novels’ intentional performance of this multi-faceted relationship by means of everyday practices enables the reader to understand the coterminous provincial houses, values,
discourse and subjectivities by which German society has been self-instituted. The cyclical pattern of transformation and crisis that has been propagated by the repetition of everyday practices highlighted in Erpenbeck’s and Hensel’s stories is noteworthy, insofar as I understand their diachronic look back as an intervention to break the cycle of habitual practices that go hand in hand with Germany’s successive organizations of space. In this way, the authors carry out the work of reflexive modernity, that is to say they reflect on the forms of the past to make sense of the present.

The authors carry out this work from a position connected to their respective socialist pasts. Both authors are decidedly interested in class and gender relations as they have developed in relation to the values and norms of successive socio-economic orders. For Erpenbeck, territorial and possessive practices of patriarchal orders must finally be corrected in the current age. Therefore, the author advocates a new mode of locating the self in the face of alienating conditions, namely in cultivating alternative forms of attachment and the possibility of unmoored, nonmaterial(istic) dwelling that uproots traditional notions of Heimat as place-based and male-determined. In her depictions of everyday practices, Hensel inculcates a notion of cultural identity based on an instrumentalization of work. In her polyvalent images of work, Hensel not only takes aim at the ways in which the working poor, in particular women, are exploited, marginalized, and confined in the socio-economic order, she also unsettles literary conventions that have constructed reified and absurd notions of gender, whereby women have been imprisoned in the “madhouse”/Spinnhaus for numerous generations. This is of course ironic with regard to the gender regime of the GDR, where women were assigned the role of “working mothers” and therefore had to be a part of the labor force outside of the home (Kolinsky and Nickel 1). Although Hensel unravels the doubled alienation of gender and class in the socio-
economic orders that have defined subjectivity in relation to the *Spinnhaus* community, she also implicitly expresses anxiety about the position of the working class and the Erzgebirge region in the post-Cold War global order. It is however unclear which spatial relationships, everyday practices, and communal forms should or could shape the eastern German province in the twenty-first century to correct the past patterns. Neither a Europeanized nor a transatlantic constellation seems to hold much promise for Hensel; rather, those relationships signify new forms of exploitation and alienation.

By means of their narrative destruction of the houses (which in Hensel’s case is not entirely destroyed), the authors draw on the cognitive power of the house as a symbol and signify a desire to open up thinking in the German context. In light of this, it is significant that both novels end in a state of inertia. This state of inertia corroborates Hartmut Rosa’s observations of a paradoxical counterdiscourse of deceleration in an age of globalization defined by acceleration (*Beschleunigung* 86-87). Therefore, Hensel and Erpenbeck’s literary focus on the provincial microcosm shows itself to be a narrative tactic that grapples with simultaneous acceleration, deceleration and consequent desychronization, because, as Rosa asserts, it is by means of cultural and individual narrative patterns that the past, present and future are evaluated and brought into meaningful relationships and thus the relevance of tradition and transformation are negotiated (*Beschleunigung* 35). The authors seek to bring the past and present into synch and evaluate the traditions and transformations to the eastern German province in post-unification, globalized conditions of multiple and shifting frames.
Chapter IV: Seeking Proximity: Spatial Malaise in Postmigrant Novels

Two recent novels, *Land* (2007) and *Liebesbrand* (2008), by authors Perikles Monioudis and Feridun Zaimoglu, respectively, tell the stories of highly mobile protagonists who live in and travel between translocal, metropolitan settings. Importantly, the protagonists enjoy the financial, professional, and political freedom to travel or voluntarily relocate to new cities in search of a more fulfilling existence. They travel freely through post-Cold War Europe after the eastern expansion of the E.U. and into neighboring Mediterranean countries including cities of the Middle East and Northern Africa, conveying the impression of a borderless world in a geopolitical sense. In that the characters search for meaning in their lives, the texts primarily stage personal journeys to the self and grapple with developing meaningful relationships and finding grounding in such a mobile existence.

This is a clear departure from the novels of the previous chapter, in which the figures remain confined to certain positions in the domestic space of the Eastern German province while they are simultaneously left vulnerable to the possibility of being pushed out of one’s home as a result of the historical and political events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Moreover, the freedom to cross borders at will marks a departure from the migration history of the male protagonists’ own familial backgrounds in *Liebesbrand* and *Land* and reflects certain dynamics of increased flows of people in the post-'89 world.

As one of the primary hallmarks of globalization, intensified migration does not merely signify opportunity.\(^8^0\) Mobility in many cases has become a habit or opportunity of the

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\(^8^0\) In his “theory of rupture” in *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai identifies migration and the electronic exchange of information and images as the pivotal “cultural flows” that make the current era entirely unique (3). The unevenness of mobility is one of Zygmunt Bauman’s heaviest criticisms of the current global order of neoliberal capitalism. For his discussion on how flows of people are in many cases the “human waste” of global capitalism, see the chapter “Humanity on the Move” in his book *Liquid Times*. 

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privileged. As Graham Huggan maintains in *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/writing in an Age of Globalization* while quoting Kaur and Hutnyk, “the cosmopolitan and the refugee are the reverse figures for today’s conspicuously uneven global culture, a culture that provides abundant opportunities for the articulation of ‘privilege through movement’ . . . , but also abundant evidence that movement is needed for survival, and is cruelly coerced” (3). The often celebrated “borderless world” also functions with hierarchies and exclusions. 81 Along these lines, the supposedly cosmopolitan success of integrated, multicultural Europe of the post-Cold War era proves to be “Fortress Europe” with stubborn borders and divisions for those who are not granted permission to belong or those who are perceived as “other” in comparison to ethnonational norms. 82 From their perspective as second generation migrants who do not have personal experience with migration, Zaimoglu and Monioudis explore the existence of privileged mobility. In particular, they grapple with the challenges of feeling close to others and finding a fulfilling way of life under conditions of mobile existence. Thereby, they investigate certain cultural “borders” based on ethnicity, nationality, gender and religion that remain intact or are asserted anew in transnational Europe.

In Zaimoglu’s story of a young man who pursues a nearly unknown woman with whom he has fallen in love, the main character David, emphatically rejects his immigrant background and distances himself from his Turkish heritage, “… ich war im Westen verdorben, ich war ein

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81 Already in the mid-1990s, Masao Miyoshi argued convincingly in “A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State” how in the global configuration of the Post-1945 era deregulation and transnational corporatism have made colonialism even more active than prior to decolonization, insofar as transnational companies are not beholden to any nation-state and thus relocate to “wherever there were lower taxes and greater profits,” which has often been poor countries (88). With a focus on European expansion and the resurgence of Orientalist discourse, Manuela Boatca offers an update to Miyoshi’s arguments in “No Race to the Swift,” in which she lays out how the relationship between Western European countries and Eastern European countries entails hierarchies that function like colonial relationships.

82 For a discussion of the notion of “fortress continents,” see Naomi Klein’s article from *The Guardian* “Fortress Continents: The US and Europe are both Creating Multi-tiered Regional Strongholds.”
durch und durch degenerierter Mann des Abendlandes … ” (31). He identifies himself as emphatically German, even if other Germans often do not regard him as such. Few details are given about his background, other than while in the hospital in Turkey he explains that he has spent almost his whole life “im Ausland,” and thus struggles with the Turkish language. Notably, there is a disjuncture here, in that he refers to the home with which he identifies, Germany, as a foreign country. This might imply that his typical rejection of Turkey, which here appears to be his homeland, has become a way to be accepted in Germany but belies unspoken affiliations with the country of his family’s background. He distances himself from his relatives in Ankara and his cousin who lives in the same city in Germany. Nevertheless, David also clearly feels a certain loyalty to his family in that he travels to Turkey to financially help his aunt and attends a celebration at his cousin’s house in honor of his nephew’s circumcision. With David’s rejection of his past and “oriental” ways, the figure appears to pay lip service that allows him to “belong” to the ethnonationalist community of the German majority. Unlike the previous generation of Turkish migrants, the so-called Gastarbeiter generation, David indicates that he is thoroughly settled in German society and can skillfully subvert the system, “Seltsam, wenn ich mich an Floskeln und alltagsübliche Wendungen hielt, schwand der Widerstand der Menschen, ich konnte sie belügen, ich mußte nur die Form wahren” (86). The figure knowingly plays with his identity and the expectations of his local interlocutors, in order to achieve what he desires. Notably, David, who “made it” as a stockbroker and has retired early to live off of his sizeable gains, is not content in his “new” home, “Ich wünschte mich weit weg, dieses Leben, das ich mit solchen Menschen teilte, und das sie gezwungen waren, mit mir zu teilen, war kein Leben” (78). As I will argue below, his discontent stems from ways of interacting with others that do not allow him to foster close and meaningful personal relationships in a transnational existence.
In contrast to *Liebesbrand*, the male protagonist of *Land* sets out on a journey to find a lost book of family recipes and investigate his family’s migrant past. While traveling from port to port on the Mediterranean, he reflects on the ways he has come to live his life as a child of nonintegrated immigrants in Switzerland, who has kept ties to the places of his family’s past. In Monioudis’ novel, the previous two generations of the figure’s family were forced to flee repeatedly from several Mediterranean cities (Alexandria, Athens, Chios, Izmir, and Nicosia). Prior to the Six Days War of 1967, his parents fled the international bustle of Alexandria, Egypt for a small Alpine city in German-speaking Switzerland, where the figure, referred to in the novel as “der Reisende,” was born and raised. A pivotal moment in the Traveler’s childhood occurs when his mother gives up teaching him her native language, Greek, so he can focus on his schoolwork, because “sie sah es bloß als wichtiger, nützlicher an, dass er hier wurde, was sie selbst nirgendwo mehr werden konnte: heimisch” (187). Like David, the Traveler learns the forms and norms of his home; he becomes “heimisch.” Differently, less cynically than Zaimoglu’s figure though, the Traveler desires to be at home in both the places of his past and his Alpine community, “Er faßte den Vorsatz, sich beide Welten zugänglich zu machen” (48). As a sign of the doors open to a second generation “immigrant” who is “heimisch,” the Traveler eventually gains a law degree in Zurich and becomes a diplomat for his homeland of Switzerland. The Traveler sees his mother’s insistence upon his integration as his “Beschleunigung” out of the valley of the mountains into a desired life of motion and uprootedness. Although the Traveler appreciates his home in the Swiss Alps, he nevertheless suffers from a malaise that seems to be common among the transient figures of both novels: “War ich nicht immer schon, dachte ich, in jener absoluten Bewegung, die Stillstand hieß?” (130).
I point to this shift in migrant generations and the second generations’ explicit mastering of the norms and habits of the “new” home, because it resonates with the term “postmigrant,” which has gained currency in the last couple of years in German-speaking regions in reference to the second and third generation of migrants in Germany, who themselves have no first-hand experience of migration.\(^3\) In a study he conducted by interviewing young postmigrants in Cologne, sociologist Erol Yildiz concludes that through the engagement with their parents’ migration experiences and the social conditions in which they live, postmigrants create by means of performative acts (“postmigrantische Art von Bewegung”) new spaces into which diverse meanings are integrated as well as new forms of belonging and ways of living (“Lebensentwürfe”) (319).\(^4\) Yildiz argues that in this way, local places become multi-centers for various traditions, cultures, memories, events and experiences (336). He points to the “Doppelmoral” in public discourse in which mobility, individuality, and plurality among the indigenous population are praised as signs of globality, while the same traits among migrants or refugees are seen as problematic or disadvantageous (327). For Yildiz, this double moral means that the creative potential of postmigrant lifestyles and their performative acts, which function as cultural learning processes, is ignored or misrecognized (328), which is a potential he sees as particularly relevant in that contemporary society in general is characterized by the individual’s need to incorporate the contradictory elements of a world-wide communication network into his or her daily life (321). Significantly, Yildiz points to Fatih Akin’s film Auf der anderen Seite

\(^3\) For definitions of “postmigrant” see Erol Yildiz, “Die Öffnung der Orte zur Welt und postmigrantische Lebensentwürfe” and Faroutan’s discussion “Neue Deutsche, Postmigranten und Bindungs-Identitäten. Wer gehört zum neuen Deutschland?” on the website for the Bundezentrale für politische Bildung. In German Studies, the term gained initial currency and significance through artistic director Shermin Langhoff’s consistent use in her “postmigrant theater” at the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse in Kreuzberg. Yasemin Yildiz points out that Tom Cheesman in Novels of Turkish-German Settlement was one of the first German Studies scholars to adopt the term (251).

\(^4\) Examples of particular youth strategies of self-localization (“Selbstverortung”) in the face of hegemonic relations include creative and ironic reframing of ascribed characteristics as a politically subversive act, self-ethnicization as a reaction to a discriminatory environment, engagement with parents’ migration stories, and intentional identification with stigmatized neighborhoods of the city (E. Yildiz 336).
(2007) as exemplary for its appeal for “bewegte Zugehörigkeiten” (mobile belonging) and human relationships that span across borders (330).

I have chosen Land and Liebesbrand because they distinctly engage with questions and issues of postmigrant and “new migrant” existence.85 The protagonists thematize an awareness of Yildiz’ performative acts, in that they imagine strategic ways of going about their daily life within and against social and cultural norms and incorporate into their daily activities references from the multiple places that have comprised their pasts. These postmigrant and new migrant acts parallel Certeau’s notion of “tactics.” To recall, tactics refer to everyday activities that manipulate momentarily the prescribed norms of a particular place. Moreover, the engagement with the space of the transnational everyday is carried out not only on the plot level in the depiction of postmigrant stories, but also on the formal level by means of spatial metaphors. A taste of this surfaces in David’s statement above when he wishes to be “weit weg” and in the Traveler’s comments about being catapulted out of the valley and existing in a state of absolute motion that is tantamount to inertia. The conceptualization of intersubjectivity in spatial terms and the attention paid to the figures’ relationships to multiple places make the texts valuable for investigating spatial relationships and notions of living in relation to others. Therefore, I seek to answer how their depictions of voluntarily uprooted, privileged postmigrants and new migrants recalibrate the cognitive map of European space and engage with discourses of cosmopolitanism and migration that have been central to German and European integration in the post-communist era. As I have indicated above, the novels evidence a project of postmigrant detachment from the new home. This distancing is an intentional uprooting that drives a search for the self in

85 Borrowing the term “new migrant” from Dina Iordanova, I mean to designate migrants of the post-Cold War era, whom Iordanova distinguishes from past migrants, inasmuch as they do not represent “permanent” migrations like those of now stable diaspora groups (i.e. Turks in Germany), they are dispersed in multicultural urban margins, and, as she discusses regarding current European filmmakers from former Soviet bloc countries, many new migrants migrate on a “per project” basis (65).
transnational existence. I therefore ask, what do the respective depictions of postmigrant malaise indicate about such ways of life? In that the novels grapple with questions of intersubjective proximity and forms of affinity in an existence across borders and comprised of multiple attachments, I further ask what forms of affiliation, belonging or proximity are posited in the postmigrants’ imagined world. Lastly, I seek to determine how the figures’ engagement with such an existence is echoed on the aesthetic level as the novels explore forms that aid in understanding the plurality and fragmented nature of postmigrant and transnational existence.

A. A Paradigm Shift in Spatial Metaphors

The novels I have selected for this chapter may be called postmigrant literature not only because they feature postmigrant protagonists, but also because they are the works of postmigrant authors. Feridun Zaimoglu was born in 1964 in Bolu, Turkey and emigrated as an infant with his parents from Turkey to Germany. He grew up and was educated in Germany, and he began but did not finish studies in medicine and art in Kiel, where he now lives. At age 36 he acquired German citizenship, and although he acknowledges his Turkish heritage, Zaimoglu is adamant about the fact that he is German. Zaimoglu writes in German for a German-speaking audience, and emphatically rejects the labels of migrant author and migrant literature.86

Despite outrage by some for his provocative and often vulgar, profane style in representing and depicting second and third generation migrants in Germany, especially in his

86 Zaimoglu’s rejection of the label migrant author is however somewhat dubious, in that he has frequently taken on the role of ‘native informant’ explicitly speaking for Turkish-Germans and Turkish migrants in Germany. Zaimoglu’s debut work, Kanak-Sprak: 24 Misstöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft (1995), is prototypical for this documentary endeavor as a literary project. For an excellent discussion of Zaimoglu’s problematic and paradoxical rejection of and simultaneous claim to being an authentic and unique representative of Turkish-Germans, see B. Venkat Mani’s chapter “Authentic Hybrid?” in Cosmopolitical Claims or the prelude and first chapter of Tom Cheesman’s Novels of Turkish German Settlement.
first two books _Kanak Sprak_ (1995) and _Koppstoff_ (1998), in which he supposedly documents testimonies from Turkish-German youth in a stylized literary language that incorporates street slang and rap influences, Zaimoglu’s work is well received and has been awarded prestigious literary prizes (e.g. the Adalbert von Chamisso Prize in 2005).\(^{87}\) When it comes to talking about issues related to integration, migration, and Islam and often talking for migrants and postmigrants, the author, journalist and installation artist has become a staple on prominent talk shows and contributes regularly to a number of main newspapers in Germany, including _Die Zeit_ and the _Frankfurter Allgemeine._

Perikles Monioudis was born in 1966 in German-speaking Switzerland to Greek parents who fled Alexandria, Egypt in the early 1960s. Monioudis lived for a number of years in Berlin and returned to Switzerland in 2007. Although the author has a narrower reception than Zaimoglu, he has a notable international presence as readings and projects have taken him among other places to Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Iran, Korea, Turkey, the United States and throughout Europe (www.monioudis.ch).\(^{88}\) His texts have been translated into numerous foreign languages, and he has won established Swiss literary awards (Preis der Schweizerischen Schriftstellerverbandes and the Conrad-Ferdinand-Meyer-Preis) (Monioudis *New York 2*). Like Zaimoglu, Monioudis distances himself from the label of migration literature, emphasizing that

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\(^{87}\) For the most noteworthy recent scholarship on Zaimoglu’s literature, see Tom Cheesman’s _Novels of Turkish German Settlement_, B. Venkat Mani’s chapter “Authentic Hybrid? Feridun Zaimoglu’s Abschaum” in _Cosmopolitical Claims_, and “Inventing a Motherless Tongue: Mixed Language and Masculinity in Feridun Zaimoglu” in Yasemin Yildiz’s _Beyond the Mother Tongue_.

\(^{88}\) Although Monioudis is ensconced in the Swiss literary scene, for instance as the founder of the group of authors called “Netz,” and has had a presence in Berlin, there has been little scholarly engagement with his literature. He gains brief mention in Katharina Gerstenberger’s article “Writing by Ethnic Minorities in the Age of Globalisation” to illustrate in reference to his novel *Das Palladium* (2000) that minority writers in Germany do not all explore ethnic difference nor diaspora communities in their works (212). I would maintain that because of his Swiss background, he goes undetected in Germany and Anglo-American contexts, where literary scholars tend to focus more heavily on German and Austrian writers.
his parents, not he, immigrated. He is critical of writers who grew up bilingual and whose works are thus undiscerningly embraced under the category of migration literature.\footnote{It is worth considering that bilingualism has a slightly different connotation in the multilingual country of Switzerland. Beyond the four official languages, the spoken form of Swiss-German differs greatly from the High German used in schools and official contexts, therefore what one speaks as a child might be considered a nearly separate language from the formal version that one writes. In his study on literature by second generation immigrants ("Literatur der zweiten Generation von Einwanderern") in German-speaking Switzerland, Daniel Rothenbühler argues that post-colonial perspectives, in particular Bhabha’s and Said’s notions of hybridity, could or should be applied to all Swiss-German authors, whose language situation he says is comparable to that of “Secondos” (second generation immigrants) (56). Rothenbühler argues further that this recognition of the complexity of the language situation in Switzerland would reflect an understanding of culture in transition in contrast to notions of a homogenous, autochthonous national culture (56).}

Although both Monioudis and Zaimoglu reject for themselves the label ‘migrant’author, their works address related topics. Land and Liebesbrand fit into a growing trend of contemporary literature and film by authors with migration background and postmigrant authors, who intertwine literary traditions and languages from supposedly distinct cultures and whose protagonists live highly mobile lives of multiple attachments to various locations, maintain or seek ways to foster relationships across borders, and address familial pasts in ways that manipulate the reading public’s expectations of “authentic” migration experiences and question reified, exclusionary notions of ethnicity, culture, and belonging. Examples of such works include Fatih Akin’s film Auf der anderen Seite (2007), Yade Kara’s novel Selam Berlin (2003), Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s story Der Hof im Spiegel (2001), Yasemin Samdereli’s film Almanya: Willkommen in Deutschland (2011), and Zafer Senocak’s novels Die Prärie (1997) and Gefährliche Verwandtschaft (1998). These works go beyond the themes and tropes of the exploited Gastarbeiter, of victimization of Turkish women by Turkish men or of complete isolation from ethnic Germans in a diaspora community that were common in earlier works by authors of migration background.

Because the term carries baggage for being arbitrarily applied and disregarding literary aspects as well as from tendencies to read fictional texts as documentations of social conditions
for migrants or regard the authors as ‘native informants’ speaking on behalf of certain demographics, I will decline from using “migrant author.” I nevertheless find the signifier “postmigrant” to be promising in that it reflects aspects of daily life as put forward by Erol Yildiz above, counters the sense of immigrants and the subsequent generations of their offspring as still in the process of migrating or not a part of the majority or “national” populations in which they live, and recognizes the transnational character of many peoples’ lives nowadays. With the term “postmigrant” I wish to emphasize the rootedness/staying presence of people with migration background in Germany and, in Monioudis’ case, Switzerland and acknowledge their literature and work as integral contributions to culture and society. My use of postmigrant differs from how Yasemin Yildiz conceives of the term. She takes the stance that the prefix post implies the continuation of socially unequal situations faced by the children of immigrants, who after two or three generations are still conceived under the sign of migration in countries like Germany that “lack inclusive categories for all their residents and citizens” (170). Her critical accent is on the migrant, “Yet the category “postmigrant” might be analytically useful in any context in which subjects and communities are considered under the sign of migration rather than arrival and settlement” (Y. Yildiz 170). I however accent the post- in an effort to support Germany’s long-delayed mentality shift of accepting its past and present as a country of immigration and to more accurately evoke the reality of German society today, which Mark

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90 As of 2010, nearly 20% of the German population had a migration background (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung). In Switzerland, over 30% of the population has a migration background as of 2008 (Swiss Federal Statistic Office).

91 Only in 1998, under the Red-Green coalition government of Schröder, did Germany officially acknowledge being an “Einwanderungsland” (a country of immigration) (Terkessidis 7). Consequently, citizenship laws began to address this reality. In 2000 citizenship laws in Germany shift from the 1913 law based on ethnicity (“jus sanguinis”) to include foreign migrants who had lived legally for eight years in the country and children born in Germany of foreign migrant parents (provided at least one parent resides in Germany legally) (Cobbs 16-17). In 2004, the previous “Ausländergesetz” (foreigner’s law) was replaced by a “Zuwanderunggesetz” (immigration law) that instated a new residency law, reducing the required number of years of legal residency before one can apply for citizenship to five (Cheesman 16). Cheesman sees the name change as a significant sign that Germany is finally
Terkissidis aptly captures in *Interkultur* as a notion of “Kultur-im-Zwischen.” Terkissidis forwards “Interkultur” to get away from the legacy of the Red-Green agenda of “multiculturalism” of the 1990s of which he sees a revival in recently renewed calls for integration that imply immigrants should conform to “German Leitkultur” and from which stem the public perceptions and fears of “Parallelgesellschaften” (12-13). Terkissidis appeals for getting away from merely identifying and respecting cultural differences and calls for a forward-looking vision of culture that would account for life under unclear conditions and novel relationships.  

Furthermore, the term *postmigrant* reflects an overall shift in the critical engagement with literature by authors with migration backgrounds. Leslie Adelson’s insistent appeal already in 2001 to revise the previously dominant analytical paradigm of ‘between two worlds’ whereby migrants and the cultures they produce were connoted by static relations among discreet elements has changed the way Germanists, especially in Anglo-American contexts, approach migrant and postmigrant literature and film (Adelson 3). In *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature* (2005), Adelson urges scholars to recognize the innovative figurations, forms acknowledging the reality that it is a land of immigration and many with migration background want to remain in the country in which they have settled (Cheesman 16).  

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92 He states: “Nicht die Unterschiedlichkeit der Kulturen oder der gegenseitige Respekt stehen im Vordergrund … Es geht um das Leben in einem uneindeutigen Zustand und die Gestaltung einer noch unklaren Zukunft. In diesem Sinne geht es bei dem Programm der Interkultur … nicht darum, bestehende oder unterstellte Unterschiede einfach zu respektieren. Es geht vielmehr um das Knüpfen neuer Beziehungen” (Terkissidis 10).  

93 Although long shifted from the early monikers such as *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, *Literatur der Betroffenheit*, or *Ausländerliteratur* describing autobiographical texts by primarily Turkish migrant workers who were invited by the German government during the *Wirtschaftswunder* in the 1950s, the diversity of terms have proliferated in the ongoing interest of finding the most appropriate way to refer to literature not written by “normal” Germans, by which I mean to say those Germans who were deemed so based on ethnicity or bloodlines as citizenship laws specified until their reform in 2000. *“Interkulturelle Literatur,”* hyphenated labels (Turkish-German or German-Turkish literature), “writing by ethnic minorities,” “literature of migration,” and “transnational literature” are all currently used as appropriate labels.  

94 See her essay “Against Between: A Manifesto” in *Unpacking Europe* (2001). In addition to Adelson, Azade Seyhan (*Writing Outside the Nation*, 2000), Tom Cheesman (*Novels of Turkish German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions*, 2007), and B. Venkat Mani (*Cosmopolitical Claims: Turkish-German Literatures from Nadolny to Pamuk*, 2007) have contributed significantly to re-envisioning how cultures are intertwined in literature rather than distinct entities that are isomorphic with nation-states.
and techniques by which authors with a migration background unsettle the reified image of the
(Turkish) immigrant in Germany and create multiple connections between seemingly disparate
cultures and histories, thereby signifying the buddings of post-national sentiments and
community in an age of accelerated movement and transformation. Notably, Adelson reads the
narrative practices in the literature of Turkish migration as a “technology of localization”
whereby this literature “incorporates itself into the historical culture of Germany” beyond
simplistic appeals for inclusion (Adelson 9). It is this idea of localizing, of staking a claim that
motivates B. Venkat Mani’s and Tom Cheesman’s approaches to the literature of migration as
well. Mani focuses on “cosmopolitical claims” made by authors of “Turkish-German literatures,”
whose force he says lies in their “cosmopolitical moorings” of multiple attachments, constant
and conscious problematization of immediately identifiable national, linguistic, ethnic, and
cultural affiliations (6).95 Mani argues that, in their literary works, these authors make
cosmopolitical claims by recasting the *demos* and *ethnos* of national cultures and participate in
processes of democratization.96 The emphasis on rootedness is already asserted in Cheesman’s
rejection of the label ‘literature of migration’ for the ‘literature of Turkish German settlement.’
Cheesman’s focus is thus on the cosmopolitan modes of being and consciousness expressed in
literary texts by means of which authors of settlement show “on the ground” cosmopolitanism to
be a function of the awareness of difference, alternatives, and ensuing ambivalence of individual
experiences rather than an unquestioning belonging to a certain place and society (43).

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95 Notably, Mani broadens the category of authors of “Turkish-German literatures” to include non-Turkish authors
such as Sten Nadolny and the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk, who does not write in German, so the widespread
presence of his works for German-speaking audiences comes primarily via translations.
96 Mani founds his concept of cosmopolitical claims on Seyla Benhabib’s notion of “democratic iterations,” which
she defines as “complex processes of public argumentation, deliberation, and exchange through which universalist
rights claims and principles are contested and contextualized, invoked and revoked, posited and positioned
throughout legal and political institutions” (Benhabib in Mani 10). Cosmopolitical claims are thus the ways in which
authors revise the relationship between “demos” (“the authors and subjects of laws”) and “ethnos” (“a community of
memory, fate and belonging”) which he says do not simply overlap in democratic iterations (Mani 10).
What becomes apparent in the brief sketch of this critical literature is the prevalence of spatial concepts and spatial metaphors. The focus on affinity, proximity, affiliations, localization, settlement, and concretizing the abstract notion of cosmopolitanism are simultaneously shaped by contemporary understandings of existence under conditions of globalization and efforts to critically grapple with and re-envision the global- and multi- that have “prefixed our imagination of varied cultures and communities peacefully existing” (Mani 2). The projects of scholars to unveil the realities and emotions of transnational existence are echoed in the novels by postmigrant authors, as I indicated above and will address in more depth. I point to this paradigm shift in both scholarly and literary approaches for three reasons. First, the shift speaks to the failings of existing frames of reference to comprehend the diverse experiences of belonging and being in relation to others in the age of globalization. Not coincidently, the approaches share a kindred spirit with the ‘spatial turn,’ so, secondly, the shift demonstrates the need for an approach focused on spatial configurations, relationships and subjectivity as a means to understand how literary texts engage with conditions of globalization and reconfigure living in relation to others. Lastly, the shift suggests that texts by postmigrant authors offer innovative and insightful views on the spatial imagination and practices of place. By means of theoretical tools offered by the literary scholars mentioned above, I seek to discover how Monioudis and Zaimoglu narrate the “epochal sense of disorientation” (Adelson 15) and “forms (not representations) that act as media in the rupture event that imagining a postnational world would be” (Adelson 72).

What is particularly interesting about Monioudis’ and Zaimoglu’s novels are the ways in which they implicitly take aim at foundational narratives of the recent phase of globalization, specifically cosmopolitanism and the supposedly borderless world of neoliberal capitalism,
respectively. These narratives of universalism are central to their explorations of postnational existence and seem to be at the root of challenges to meaningful interpersonal relationships. The texts can be understood as a reply to Kehlmann’s *Die Vermessung der Welt*, inasmuch as they also critique modernity’s disenchantment and distanced, objectifying approach. In distinct and innovative ways, the novels address the alienated detachment that accompanies the habit of imposing a totalizing view on social reality and behaving in accordance therewith. The novels however ultimately articulate a post- and new migrant malaise. In *Liebesbrand*, this stems from dissatisfaction with the current home country, and in *Land*, the malaise is associated with a sense of rootlessness resulting from an estranged relationship to the past with which travel and mobility provide a means of grappling. The malaise with which these figures struggle, particularly the disjointed experience of a state of stagnation despite a highly mobile lifestyle, correlates with conditions of accelerated globalization as they affect individual perception and experience of time and space.

**B. Existence by Comparison: Overcoming Distance in Perikles Monioudis’ *Land***

For *Land*, Monioudis chooses the form of a travel story from the highly interiorized perspectives of the two main figures, who are trapped in their thoughts to the extent that what minimal interaction they have with others is rarely conveyed as dialogue but rather as personal observations and interpretations. Dialogue as a significant feature of interaction does however play a fundamental role in the novel, namely as an abstract form. The storyline of the Traveler is juxtaposed to the storyline of his former fiancé, “die Botanikerin,” a young woman who moves to Barcelona to get away from her unsatisfying life in Berlin and for soul-searching after her relationship unravels with “meinem Diplomaten,” as she refers to the Traveler. By oscillating
between these two gendered and ethnicized perspectives and juxtaposing their respective experiences as they live and travel in translocal metropolitan settings, the novel enacts the semblance of a dialogue. Crucially, there is never direct communication between the two figures, not even when they meet up in Barcelona, which the reader learns about only by means of their respective thoughts on the encounter narrated when they are apart from one another. The turn-taking that comprises a dialogue is therefore performed in the shifting between perspectives and depicts for the reader the individual’s reflections on the other. This resembles one of the “structures of affinity” that Adelson uncovers in her analysis of Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s short narrative “Der Hof im Spiegel,” whereby the form rather than the communicative content mediates the nascent forms that postnational intimacy takes (60). A distinction to be made here though is the fact that in Land the couple’s relationship failed. In other words, where there once was actual physical presence and interaction, there now remains distant affiliation, which indicates that some aspects of their shared lifeworld need to be reassessed.

This is where their respective ways of being and relationships to the world are informative and serve as the means by which Monioudis challenges prevailing notions of cosmopolitanism. As I pointed out above, the Traveler/Diplomat has made it his life strategy to live in “both worlds” of his Alpine present and his family’s Mediterranean past. He functions with a cognitive map based on a two-world model that simultaneously separates and fuses disparate regions separated by his present and past, “die eine Welt [schloß] die andere nicht aus” (Land 48). His desire to live in both time-spaces translates to a mode of being that entails intentionally learning to perform the habits and norms of the local population so as to not be seen as “other.”
In einer Umgebung, die nur das von ihm wußte, was er selbst von sich zeigte, würde er in Bedrängnis geraten, das ahnte er schon damals. Unterschiedslos würde man ihn zu Selbstbezichtigungen des Fremden drängen, bis er seine fremde Herkunft hasste. Er beglückwünschte sich, hier, am Mittelmeer, zum großen Erfolg, mit dem er noch als Jugendlicher den einheimischen Habitus nachgeahmt hatte. Er kaute Pistazien, schaute sich um. (12)

Living in both worlds is therefore a mimetic performance that depends on the context of the moment and requires a meticulous observation of culture that also draws on his knowledge of the locations based on his family’s transnational background of fleeing to or from the various places he now visits. Putting this into practice during his travels as he searches for a lost collection of pastry recipes from his grandfather’s bakery in Izmir, the Traveler always gauges his interlocutor and the situation, shifting accordingly between Arabic, Turkish, Greek or French. In addition, he performs seemingly banal local behaviors to blend in, such as chewing on pistachios in the quote above. By means of this practice of the local order, he aims to claim a place for himself and self-defensively diminish his own otherness in cultures that are simultaneously foreign yet familiar. It is an intentional act of self-localization that he developed in the Swiss Kantonshauptstadt as a way “auf Schritt und Tritt Rechenschaft darüber abzulegen, dass es ihn gab, dass es ihn hier gab” (Land 101).

His observation of local behaviors enables him to move about unhindered and harmoniously in various Mediterranean cities. In this way, the Traveler performs what Ulrich

97 Bachmann Plinio comes to a parallel conclusion in regard to the language in Monioudis’ texts, which he describes as a “Sicherheit versprechende Sprache” because it imitates a “herrschen[de] Verwaltungsmentalität” as his figures describe everything in their paths (259). He goes on to argue that through the stringing together of observations, “die Welt stellt sich in ihrer durch den Blick auf das Detail atomisierten Form überall gleich dar (261).” In this way, says Plinio, the narrator overcomes feelings of foreignness in an environment that does not make sense to him or her (260). I point this out because I believe it gets to the crux of Monioudis’ narrative strategy, namely that his protagonists
Beck calls the “dialogic imagination” of the cosmopolitan perspective. Beck explicates this as such: “By this I mean the clash of cultures and rationalities within one’s own life, the ‘internalized other’. The dialogic imagination corresponds to the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience, which makes it a matter of fate to compare, reflect, criticize, understand, combine contradictory entities” (“Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies” 18). In making this claim, Beck refers to Nietzsche’s notion of ‘the Age of Comparison’ in which not only individuals would pick and choose among competing traditions and heritages but also that cultures of the world were beginning to interpenetrate each other (Beck (“Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies” 18). For Beck, living by the cosmopolitan perspective of thinking in terms of “inclusive oppositions” is the solution to the pluralization of borders and society that causes the “legitimation crisis of the national morality of exclusion” (“Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies” 19) and to the “transnational place polygamy” or the belonging in different worlds that is the globality of individual lives (“Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies” 24). Now a hundred years after Nietzsche, Monioudis sets into motion a spatial imagination of cosmopolitan perspective as he interweaves cultures by means of his traveler’s comparative approach that results in temporary assimilation. As if in response to critics of Beck’s celebratory cosmopolitanism, Monioudis fleshes out the nuances and difficulties of the Traveler’s attempt to foster a sense of security by imposing their view on their surroundings, but they therefore remain distanced from others in their strategic attempt at feeling at ease in foreign settings.

For instance, Roland Axtmann argues that Beck’s cosmopolitanism as a “social reality” fails to convince as an extension of a long philosophical tradition, in particular based on Immanuel Kant’s and Hannah Arendt’s respective beliefs that incommensurable differences could be valued and respected through intersubjective communication (Kant) and that all truths are intelligible through “limitless communication” (the goodwill to reveal and listen) (Arendt) (Axtmann 23-25). Axtmann faults Beck for relying too heavily on a causal significance of global risks for the formation of a cosmopolitan awareness of unicity and encounter with the “Other” which would lead to self-reflective changes of self-understanding (28). Axtmann counters with the point that economic changes and technological advances have likely brought about the globalized world and therefore Beck’s globalization perspective much be complemented by an analysis of individuals and the everyday, rather than a macrostructural analysis that does not identify any political subject (29, 32). Monioudis’ depiction of the Traveler and as I will discuss shortly, the Botanist, provide precisely the opportunity to investigate the role of individual actors on the
cosmopolitan perspective as an answer to the complexly intertwined histories and geographies that found the figure’s “transnational place polygamy.”

Through his comparative view, as the male narrator travels to various Mediterranean stations on his itinerary and connects them to his own past, it is the “otherness” or divisions that are both foregrounded and undermined. Similarities between supposedly distinct places and the interpenetration of cultures become clear as the protagonist exclaims that “Wenn der Reisende an seine ihm unbekannte Großtante, die Äbtissin, dachte, an ihre Brüder und die Vertreibungen, fühlte er, dass es grober Unfug war, von Kulturen zu sprechen, da es doch nur eine einzige, gemeinsame Kultur gab” (Land 206). Based on the example of his family history, his particular conceptualization of a universal culture speaks to the reality of exchange and intermingling between cultures caused by exile in the face of rising nationalism and territorial conflicts, particularly between Turkey and Greece and in the Middle East (Israel and Egypt). In the 1920s (presumably during the Turkish War of Independence), his paternal grandfather fled from Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey) via Chios to Alexandria, whereby he became separated from his siblings who ended up dispersed in various Mediterranean lands through which they passed. The maternal grandparents fled from Athens to Alexandria and left behind a piece of property on Cyprus. Rather than fight over it, the traveler eventually cedes this land to a family clan that had laid claim to it with the justification that they had defended it against the Turks during the 1974 invasion of northern Cyprus, which lead to the country’s partition and consequently the segregation of the Turkish minority from the Greek majority on the island. In Alexandria, the traveler’s parents grew up in a pluralistic society marked by colonialism and the Mediterranean history of commerce. The mother was educated in a British business school, worked for an
American insurance company and enjoyed French luxury products, while her husband listened to
Glenn Miller, played in a band and learned to bake Greek, Turkish and Egyptian pastries with his
father. In the upheaval prior to the Six Days War, the father’s multilingualism and baking skills
landed the family in Switzerland.

The texture of place in the Mediterranean basin is thus woven from the history of forced
migrations in the face of territorial, ethnic and religious conflicts. Thinking of this past, the
protagonist laments the continuous conflicts over land as well as linguistic and religious
differences leading to persecution and migration:

Er stellte sich jetzt wieder den Mittelmeerraum als eine Karte vor, mit Pfeilen
übersät, mit kurzen und langen, mit ausgefransten, stumpfen, mit weitverzweigten, vom
Balkangebirge zur Küste hin, vom Maghreb in die Wüsten, wo die Menschen noch
immer wanderten, vom Kaukasus nach Anatolien, von der Schwarzmeerküste in
neugeschaffene Staaten oder aus diesen hinaus: Abermillionen von Menschen auf der
Flucht vor Katastrophen, Kriegen, versprengt, abgetan an einem beliebigen Ort,
unterwegs während des Ersten Weltkriegs oder aus dem zaristischen Rußland, die
Armenier, die Mazedonier, Jordanier, Syrer, Palästinenser, Hungernde, Verzweifelte,
Juden, Christen, Muslime, die Vertriebenen des Zweiten Weltkriegs, auf der Stelle oder
fern ihrer Häuser vernichtet, in größer Zahl ausgelöscht, die Weggescheuchten jeder
Herkunft und jeden Alters, ohne Ziel, ohne wirkliches Ziel. Ein Gewimmel von Pfeilen,
dicht wie ein tragfähiges Geflecht, das nie eines, dass immer dessen Gegenteil war. (53)

Although the Traveler observes, embodies, and imagines commonalities between places,
it is clear that the reality of the past is one of stubborn geopolitical, ethnic and religious divides
that impede his sense of a single, common culture which he has experienced in his family. In
fact, the advantage or perhaps cause of the Traveler’s efforts toward being at home (heimisch) anywhere is revealed by his skepticism that such a thing as rootedness in a territorial sense is possible, “In diesem Moment war er von der Unmöglichkeit überzeugt, einen Pflock in die Erde zu rammen und sich daran festhalten zu können. Die Zeit würde ihn und die Seinen nach spätestens zwei Generationen von hier, dort, von jedem Ort wegfegen, die Zeit und ihre Ereignisse, die ihm unbekannt waren wie die Menschen hier” (Land 54). The weakness of his applied cosmopolitan perspective reveals itself in estrangement, as he admits that he does not know the people here despite being able to fit in. The travels to the cities of his past have thus resulted in closer relationships to places than people, which in turn he sees as a way of getting to know himself, “Der Abstand … zwischen mir und den Städten und mir in der anderen, ähnlichen oder gänzlich verschiedenen Stadt: in diesem wiederkehrenden Abstand wurde ich mir deutlicher” (Land 125-6). Therefore, his cosmopolitanism, despite allowing him to feel connected on the surface to various places and people, comprises an individualistic process that leads him to a perplexing state of successive detachments, which he addresses when he arrives in Barcelona to visit his ex-fiancé: “Wie vielen Orten hatte ich den Rücken gekehrt, um nun hier, an diesem Punkt, in dieser Stadt zu sein, in der mich wenig hielt?” (Land 123). The state of absolute momentum that he perceives as inertia, which I mentioned at the outset of the chapter, is a condition the figure associates with an almost obsessive-compulsive need to travel, “Ich handelte, als ob ich kein Ende erreichen könnte…” (Land 125). The initial embrace of his mobile life between worlds eventually unravels into a state of exhaustion, disorientation and “rasender Stillstand,” “War ich nicht immer schon, dachte ich, in jener absoluten Bewegung, die Stillstand hieß?” (Land 130).
A transient existence per se is however not the source of the figure’s detachment disorder and his perpetual motion. It is important to point out that the Traveler’s subjective possibilities are associated with a privilege that was not afforded his parents or grandparents. “Er wußte, dass es unter Umständen, die vielleicht seine Umstände waren, nur eine Generation dauerte, bis der Flüchtling zum Flaneur wird” (Land 44). On account of conditions of relative peace and stability in the Mediterranean region, the Traveler enjoys the luxury of leisurely strolling through the cities of his family’s past, observing the local habits, colors, sounds, smells, and tastes. Notably, Monioudis has made certain to address this particular line about the flaneur to avoid biographical readings of the character. He distances himself from the figure, because, he explains, the flaneur imposes his own perspectives on that which he observes (Karagiozis’ Exile). Monioudis clearly does not entirely trust his figure’s imposing perspective, or at least he wants to foreground the subjective colorings of this particular figure’s focalization of his surroundings. The Traveler’s distanced, analytical approach allows him to observe affiliations between the places of his familial past, but this detachment is also precisely what keeps him from developing meaningful interpersonal relationships. His engagement with the world of his past has been only on a surface level and has not lead to productive self-reflexivity. He admits that he is unable to be introspective, “In mich hineinzublicken, gelang mir nicht” (Land 123). His way of sorting out the above-mentioned dispute over family property on Cyprus on behalf of his mother and siblings, namely simply forgetting and giving up the rights to the land, is indicative of his level of engagement with his past thus far, “Dieses Vergessen war dem Reisenden möglich” (Land 161).

Drawing on the motif of the family tradition of baking, the Traveler reaches a point on his journey when he recognizes the difficulty of locating and connecting with his family and their past, which is dispersed all over the world, “Wie folgt man einer Zerstäubung?” (Land 84).
He struggles with the difficulty of reconciling his relationship to places in which he “fühlts so viel Trennendes wie Vertrautes” (Land 82). It is when he finds a more tangible way to identify with the places of his familial past that he begins to overcome the alienation and “rasender Stillstand” that plagues him. Once the Traveler locates the hand-written collection of family recipes, he translates the entire multilingual album into his native language, German, “internalizes” (memorizes) them, and finally, tests the proof of his international, transhistorical pudding by baking them from memory for locals in Izmir, “Ob seine Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen, Arabischen, Türkischen, Französischen, Englischen richtig waren, konnte er: schmecken” (Land 246). Successfully creating the pastries symbolizes a transformative act that allows the figure to overcome his linguistic weaknesses in foreign languages that often make him feel vulnerable because he can only speak them at a basic level and thus he is perceived as a foreigner. Relying not on intellect but rather on a more basic sense, taste becomes a common language that allows the figure to feel affiliated with the local people whose “language” he can produce adequately in the form of their traditional baked goods. Similar to the Proustian madeleine but in a more intentional way, the pastries summon the past and enable him to feel more deeply connected to the previous bakers in his family, his grandfather and father. It is therefore by emerging from his analytical isolation to participate in local, everyday traditions that the Traveler overcomes his estrangement from his past and those around him. Albeit a seemingly insignificant food item, the baked goods are nevertheless a unifying entity between peoples and places that have much in common but historically have been divided. It is the simple shared experience of food that allows for a shared postnational existence and the connectedness of cultures that the Traveler/Diplomat has experienced in his family and imagines for the larger Mediterranean to emerge. (Indeed, the extensive unifying power of baked goods as a motor of globalization is conveyed in the
description of the father’s workplace upon his immigration to Switzerland as an “in allen Erdteile liefernden Süßwarenfabrik” (Land 24).)

Tellingly, the Traveler finds an encoded note next to a familiar recipe. Once he deciphers the code, he discovers the message, “Er ist es selbst” (Land 247). This arrival at the self marks the symbolic end of his restless journeys and the end of the novel. By finding a way to connect with his past and other people, in other words finding a sense of rootedness not associated with land, the Traveler comes to understand himself better. This rootedness frees him to be at peace with his transient mode of existence, which is signified by his contentment as he travels across the previously unsettling sea with the security of looking back both literally and figuratively at where he came from. “Konnte er es bisher kaum erwarten, an Land zu gehen, focht ihn die lange Passage jetzt nicht mehr an. Er sah aufs Meer hinaus, dorthin wo er hergekommen war” (Land 248).

In confirmation of Erol Yildiz’s findings, it is the postmigrant’s active engagement with his migrant past and the social conditions under which he lives that provides him with strategies for living in a globalized world (319). It is however also by means of mitigating modernity’s detached view of analytical comparison by interacting on the everyday level that enables the Traveler to feel bound to others. This correlates with Amanda Anderson’s findings in her book The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment. Granted her findings are based on Victorian literature, I find that some of her claims are particularly relevant in light of the present-day grappling with cosmopolitanism (represented in Axtmann’s critique of Beck) and especially because Monioudis so evidently tackles consequences of a detached approach that draws on the tradition of the 19th century traveler or 20th century flaneur. Monioudis’s work parallels a skeptical view forwarded by Victorian authors (particularly George
Eliot), who Anderson says expressed “skepticism about any abstract theory that remains unchecked by lived experience and direct knowledge. Direct acquaintance is most needed in the representation of social life, where abstractions, distortions, and idealizations plague both theory and art” (10). Monioudis’ skeptical view of a theoretical cosmopolitanism perspective and appeal for direct acquaintance is furthered but differentiated in his depiction of die Botanikerin, who functions as the female counterpart to the Traveler.

With the figure of the Botanist in Barcelona, Monioudis addresses a different type of migration experience of the post-’89 era. The figure is not a postmigrant, in that she has no familial migration background. Rather her move to Barcelona signifies a new migrant type of postnational relocation afforded by European integration and the opportunity to work in other countries. It is a means to escape and confront aspects of her life in Germany in a heterogeneous metropolis that affords her new subjective possibilities. Her move is ultimately a project of self-development riddled by the ambivalent desire to reconnect with “her Diplomat” or find closure with their relationship. By means of this figure, Monioudis furthers his critique of the detached view of modernity’s objective analysis and cosmopolitan perspectives, and he forwards forms of nascent postnational proximity for overcoming the distance of analytical detachment.

Like the Traveler, the Botanist’s approach to her surroundings is for purposes of self-articulation, “Sie begriff Barcelona als Kulisse, als flächigen Hintergrund für sich, für sich ganz allein, auf ihm konnte sie sich abzeichnen” (Land 181). However, in contrast to the Traveler/Diplomat who focuses on commonalities, the Botanist is attuned to perceiving differences between herself and local others, specifically regarding German compared to Spanish cultural identity. She desires to free herself from the German order of place and corresponding proper behaviors that have comprised the frames of reference within which she conducts her life.
She rejects her unfulfilling life in the affluent Berlin neighborhood of Zehlendorf. “Hier in Barcelona durfte es nicht so wie in Berlin werden, wo sie sich nur noch gelangweilt, an sich selbst nicht genug und an den anderen zu wenig hatte …” (Land 32). The Botanist longs for excitement, a satisfied sense of self, and more fulfilling relationships to others.99

While gender is not thematized in relation to the Traveler/Diplomat, Monioudis casts his female protagonist as stifled mainly because of “Prussian” gender norms, which are connoted as conservative, repressive, and Protestant (Land 40). The Botanist seeks to escape or undermine these social strictures. In Barcelona, she welcomes the chance to try out new, everyday practices informed largely by preconceived notions of Mediterranean culture. A clichéd and exoticized image of Catalanian femininity – a pride and sense of self-worth, which she associates with dressing fashionably, wearing high-heels to work, dark colors in the summer and having meticulously styled hair (Land 41) – appeared to the Botanist as liberating and to be a factor for having chosen Barcelona as a place to refashion herself. But after some time experiencing Catalanian culture first hand, she regards southern femininity as merely the “Umkehrbild dessen, was die Frauen zu Hause, in ihren Familien, ganz allgemein an Kontrolle durch ihren katholischen Gatten, an willkürlichen Einschränkungen erfuhren. … Die Frauen schickten sich in das Bild von einer würdigen Frau, das nicht das eigene sein konnte” (Land 40). With this comment the Botanist concludes that the cause of debilitating gender norms is that women choose to live by and therefore reproduce reified cultural images that in actuality inaccurately fit their individual sense of self. Consequently, she feels that women do not necessarily live how

99 This calls to mind what Yasmin El-Sharif of the Spiegel calls the “Wohlgefühl-Migranten,” which refers to the large number of Germans who relocated to the “Trendhauptstadt Europas” (Barcelona) “um sich selbst zu verwirklichen” during the boom after it was transformed for the 1992 Olympics and regional funding continued to shape the city into a center of hip creativity and opportunity. The film “L’Auberge Espagnol” also recounts a tale of self-discovery in a Barcelona for a group of Erasmus students from various E.U. countries, who share a flat and perform the trials and tribulations of European integration in terms of everyday life, in particular romantic relationships. For a discussion of the film’s story of European integration in terms of gendered international relationships, see Katrin Sieg’s chapter “Desiring the Global” in her book Choreographing the Global.
they truly want to, because they try to live out a stereotypical image. Unlike the Traveler/Diplomat, the Botanist feels ill at ease performing the behaviors of the locals, so she experiences the disjointedness of trying to live according to her own modified but still ill-fitting image and is in turn plagued by a self-doubt that she tried to leave behind in Berlin, “Nun hatte es sie doch eingeholt, das elende Gefühl, nicht mehr bei sich zu sein, sich nicht mehr selbst zu gehören” (*Land* 35).

The woman’s disjointed relationship to herself because of her rejection of the images that she feels pressured to live up to makes it difficult for her to relate to others and create a sense of belonging. Implicitly throwing into question her overall interpretation of the local culture, she wonders whether those commonalities that she perceives and celebrates between herself and those around her are merely projections, “Ist es die fremde Stadt, die mich dazu zwingt, im geheimen Gemeinsamkeiten zu feiern, die keine sind?” (*Land* 34). As she nevertheless adapts to the local habitus, her practice of place does not lead to a way of being that she desires, so she explicitly rejects assimilating, “Sie reist in die Fremde, sie arbeitet dort, aus den ersten Handlungen werden Gewohnheiten, daraus ein geregelter Tagesablauf, sie übernimmt die Sitten. Doch wie die Menschen hier wollte sie nicht werden” (*Land* 43). Specifically, she disdains a simplicity, immaturity, and lack of self-awareness that she associates with people of the southern, Mediterranean urban culture based on a failed relationship with a Barcelonan doctor, “Sie ahnte, dass sie hier bloß wie der Arzt werden würde, der einfältig und ein Junge geblieben war, verstrickt in seine kompromittierenden Marotten, die er nicht einmal als solche erkannte” (*Land* 43). Importantly, it is not only that she does not want to take on the everyday practices of Barcelonans; she wants to mold the culture after her own ways, “… [sie] empörte sich, dass nicht umgekehrt die südliche, die Mittelmeerstadt so werden könnte, wie sie” (*Land* 43).
Similar to the trope of the Traveler as flaneur, Monioudis’ choice of the botanist addresses perspectives that intentionally impose an official order on space. This is directly related to the historical significance of the botanical garden, which in the eighteenth century became the dominant topographical image of classificatory knowledge (Weigel 155). In the novel, the depiction of the Botanist foregrounds how her scientific work of classifying, ordering and controlling space likewise informs her approach to culture and others. Notably, the depiction of the female protagonist feminizes the Enlightenment practices of classifying and representing knowledge. Her stay in Barcelona therefore might be read as a feminist project of Enlightenment. The figure seeks to overcome a child-like state in which she feels stuck by rejecting and revising the patriarchal gender roles that have framed her existence in Berlin.100

Ironically, however, her feminist appropriation of traditional masculine Enlightenment practices puts her in a disembodied position of analytical abstraction. She has become stuck “im Gedankenspiel” (Land 175) informed by her fixation on the surface reality of the visual, which she senses might be diminishing her judgment, “In der Botanik hat mich stets nur das Sichtbare beschäftigt – der Geschmack, den die Flora erzeugte, wenig. Ab und zu überlegte ich, … ob sich meine Urteilsfähigkeit nicht ohnehin auf das beschränke, was ich sehe” (Land 112). Because the city has no depth for her, that is to say it is merely a “flächiger Hintergrund” and the sea a mirror for her reflection(s), she lives in a state of underdevelopment, of unfulfilling contours, caught in an endless cycle of self-analysis without being able to understand herself, “Sie begriff Barcelona als Kulisse, als flächigen Hintergrund für sich ganz allein, auf ihm konnte sie sich abzeichnen.

100 This is further clarified by her relationship with her mother, who spent much of her time in a greenhouse in the family’s yard. Although she was not forbidden to enter, the girl did not let herself enter the mother’s nursery. Instead, she recalls often seeing her mother, while among her plants, reflected in a mirror in the daughter’s room, “Ich schaute bloß in den Spiegel, Mutter aber lebte darin” (93). Her mother is symbolically trapped in a gendered image, while the daughter refuses to enter into the same order but nevertheless sees herself reflected. Furthermore, the Botanist holds a hatred for her father, who she explains expects nothing more from her life than grandchildren (94).
Doch was war noch nötig, damit sie sich nun auch von ihren eigenen Umrissen lösen konnte und tatsächlich jemand wurde? Was genau musste sie noch erleben, um sich selbst zu verstehen?” (Land 181).

In this case again, a feminist new migrant project of self-searching and the pursuit of a career opportunity dissolves into painful side effects of displacement, alienation, restlessness, and de-synchronization, albeit in different ways than in the case of the Traveler/Diplomat. The Botanist suffers from loneliness and longs for companionship, which she has not been able to find in the city in which she has transplanted herself. Only in her mid-thirties, she perceives that her life is out of synch with the cultural norms of someone her age. Sitting alone in a cafeteria on her lunch break, the Botanist fears she has come to function like two old men whom she observes, “Ich fürchtete, ich gehörte zu den beiden Alten, die sich bereits aus der Welt genommen hatten, denen alles, was geschach, nur mehr zustieß” (Land 134). The previous enjoyment of being in a new culture, notably portrayed as a distanced relationship of observing those around her, turns to paralyzing stagnation, “Wenn es stets ein Vergnügen für sie war, im Bus zu fahren und die Menschen zu betrachten, … dann kam es ihr heute als bloße Möglichkeit vor, die Zeit, die sie lähmte, hinter sich zu bringen” (Land 241).

The Botanist tellingly reevaluates in nuance the nothingness that she often senses in her life:

In dieser Litanei, die sie stets nur sich selbst vortrug, verachtete und verspottete sie ihr Leben, alles darin kam ihr nichtig vor. Kaum etwas deswegen, weil es vergänglich war, nichtig mehr noch als solches, also im Bedürfnis nach Erdung, sei sie körperlich und geschlechtlich, im Bedürfnis nach Geltung, nichtig in der Konsequenz all dessen, in der Suche nach Schutz, in der ewigen Vatersuche, der Suche nach dem eigenen Körper und dessen, was man damit tun oder lassen konnte, der Suche nach Geltung, nichtig in der Art
The character’s malaise is pervasive and concretely rooted. All of her longing and searching, for grounding — whether physical or gendered — for the need to matter, for security, for a father, for her own body, for how she has gone about searching for that for which she has sought, the decisions she has made and acted upon, the set-backs, all of this appears insignificant to her now, even the insistence on this meaningless seems pointless. Despite the litany of self-annihilation, she determines that her path has brought her somewhere where she can counteract the emotional atrophy that she experienced in Berlin. She locates the corrective to overcoming the condition of atrophy in her need for Gemeinsamkeit, for kinship, affiliation and grounding (Erdung). This represents a budding shift in her perspective from one focused on differences to one focused on commonalities. It is a shift that marks a desire to bridge the gap between herself and those around her, which her habit of analytical abstraction has created. Moreover, I read her acceptance of responsibility for her own situation in the last line as an admission that she cannot continue to blame her dissatisfaction on her past or rely on “her diplomat” to negotiate the world for her.

A subtle yet pivotal moment late in the Botanist’s story hints at a solution to finding proximity to others. Rather than returning to her apartment where she often looks down on the city from her balcony, she explicitly decides to remain in the city among people, in other words
literally *grounded*, “Hier aber war sie selbst noch in der Stadt” (*Land* 173). Her further train of thought in this setting reveals much about her understanding of intersubjectivity and the narrator’s critical assessment of cosmopolitan perspectives. What appears in the Botanist’s story as an implicit imperative to respond to and internalize the needs of others is called directly into question, “Mit welchem Ziel sollte sie die Nöte, Wünsche, die Hoffnungen anderer in die eigene Aufstellung einpassen, damit es eigene Nöte, eigene Wünsche würden? War ihr nicht gerade das immer nur lächerlich vorgekommen? Sie ärgerte sich darüber, dass sie auf diese Frage bis zum heutigen Tag nichts zu erwidern wußte” (*Land* 174).

Rather than incorporating the desires and needs of others into one’s own relationship to the world, what the novel upholds as more important for the Botanist is an individualistic, gendered project of understanding oneself, of not constantly rehashing the past and thereby gaining a sense of rootedness through independence or self-acceptance. The Botanist’s story thus ends with her acceptance that she and the Traveler will not be together and that she perhaps moved to Barcelona in pursuit of her diplomat rather than for her own goals. In this case, the cornerstone of postnational existence might be identified as honest self-awareness, rather than living out the perceived needs and desires of others. However, the risk of excessive detached analysis precludes living in emotional proximity to others. The desired proximity is therefore to the self, which then allows the individual to connect with others in everyday settings.

In *Land*, postmigrant and new migrant lifestyles are profoundly personal projects of self-actualization. The perception and experience of cultural differences are not simplistically embraced and celebrated; rather, the engagement with difference is part of the project of the self. Monioudis depicts the difficulty of his migratory protagonists to bring into a meaningful relationship the disparate places and experiences of their respective pasts and presents, which is
shown to be essential to overcoming an existence of distanced, detached and isolating observation connected to modern approaches to space and by extension human relationships as practiced by the flaneur and botanist.

A central motif of the novel, namely the Grecian urn, exemplifies an aesthetic form that seeks to piece together fragmentary experiences of a mobile transnational existence into a coherent narrative. The style of artwork on the vase is described as developed by migrants, “die eine Geschichte nur in Teilen begriffen und sie mit Gegenständen aus anderen Geschichten ausgeschmückt hatten” (Land 64). The classical vase represents an aesthetic form that synthesizes the migrant’s fragmented experiences: “Eine ganze Geschichte in einem einzigen Bild zu erzählen, entsprach der Denkweise der attischen Maler” (Land 64). Monioudis indicates that this way of thinking birthed from ancient Greek culture more successfully accounts for the fragmented “Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen” of a globalized way of life defined by rapid mobility and migration in contrast to the logic of the photographic image, which can only represent one fragment, one moment in time and space. The vase creates a synoptic image that eliminates the tie between time, place and plot inherent to the photograph. The author incorporates the style of Grecian painters, the “scheinbar durcheinander,” (Land 64) in his novel to place side by side disparate yet intertwined pasts and locations in dialogic travel stories, and thereby creates a shared lifeworld centered around the Mediterranean, which functions notably as a common reflecting surface for the Traveler and the Botanist. The aesthetic form is however only an epistemological tool, as the owner of a vase gallery explains to the Botanist who frequently stops by to admire the urns, “Man soll sich in Vasen nicht erkennen.” The solution to overcoming the stagnating, unsettling rootlessness of the protagonists’ lives is to construct a meaningful synopsis out of one’s own life. The grounding or rootedness that both protagonists
seek seems achieved in being able to find ways to connect with others on the level of the everyday.

In Land, Monioudis posits merely contours of a postnational world. There is no reconciliation or proximity between the former lovers, but rather they find “grounding” in reaching a peace with their respective pasts and finding ways to interact with others in basic, everyday ways. The Traveler’s storyline is more conclusive and triumphant than that of the Botanist’s in the sense that the Traveler finds himself and feels satisfied and fulfilled in the end. The Botanist on the other hand is left in the end with her own admission that her move to Barcelona was less for changing her life and herself and more a veiled excuse to be closer to the Traveler. Land therefore implies that these gendered trajectories entail disparate challenges.  

C. Desiring Proximity in Zaimoglu’s Liebesbrand

Although Zaimoglu’s novel shares with Monioudis’ novel similar postmigrant and new migrant protagonists as well as spatial tropes, Liebesbrand stages a journey of a different sort. The narratorial perspective remains almost exclusively bound to the main character, David; however, his journey of self-discovery is less consumed with the past. Rather, the postmigrant protagonist’s destination is a woman, who is the object of his seemingly irrational desire. The story begins with David narrowly surviving a fiery bus wreck on his way to the Aegean coast of Turkey after visiting his aunt in Ankara, where he came to her aid by reluctantly paying off her stepson’s debts. At the scene of the accident, a German woman wearing a ring with a “hellblaues Emaillemedaillon” offers the injured David first-aid. She leaves the scene before he can learn of

101 This correlates loosely with Iordanova’s findings on recent films by postmigrant filmmakers in which their often postmigrant or new migrant protagonists make “periphery-to-periphery” exchanges as they relocate to new metropolitan settings. She explains that these are not trajectories of liberating escape, but they are depicted as an acceptable progression that gets them in the right direction, closer to their aspirations (60).
her identity beyond the two letters of her German license plate, which connects her to the town Nienburg in Lower Saxony. After his release from a hospital in Turkey, the protagonist returns to his hometown of Kiel where his disintegrating relationship with his girlfriend comes to an end. Suffering from disorientation and a lack of purpose, David starts longing for the German woman who helped him at the accident scene. He eventually gives in to the “Liebesbrand” that this woman named Tyra sparked and thus decides to pursue the object of his longing. He follows her from Germany to the Czech Republic and on to Austria in hopes of convincing her to accept his love.

Zaimoglu fuses conventions of German Romanticism and Empfindsamkeit with “oriental” traditions of courtship and mysticism to reformulate a formulaic quest story.\(^\text{102}\) Drawing on a clear Romantic motif, the (unattainable) woman with the blue ring represents the Blaue Blume, as others have pointed out.\(^\text{103}\) However, the blue ring could also be identified in association with another tradition, that of the blue glass amulets widely present in Turkish culture (among other Mediterranean cultures) and in David’s apartment, and which are intended to ward off the evil eye. The polyvalence of this motif is indicative of Zaimoglu’s interweaving of cultural traditions, whereby he unsettles the stubbornly enduring dichotomy between supposedly distinct civilizations of the “Orient” and the “Occident.” Along these lines, the main character’s quest is indebted to the traditions of Eastern mysticism and “orientalische Frauenanbetung” (Liebesbrand 31). Diverse traditions are further intertwined in the novel’s religious themes and imagery, as Muslim practices and rites are performed in Germany and Austria, as figures move through the manifestations of Christian history embodied in the

\(^{102}\) By “formulaic” quest stories I mean to indicate the literary tradition of Romantic Bildungsreisen such as Novalis’ Heinrich von Ofterdingen or Hölderlin’s Hyperion, whose protagonists’ developmental journeys of self-discovery are carried out in the pursuit of unattainable or idealized women.  
\(^{103}\) See Matthes 88 or Ryneveld 172
cityscapes of Prague and Vienna (e.g. the statues on the Charles Bridge or the churches, cemeteries, and Pestsäulen scattered throughout Vienna), and as figures articulate their respective paths in terms of religious conversions. The fusing of diverse cultural and religious traditions that entail deeply emotional intersubjectivity and relationships to the world and God underscores an affiliation between what are often purported in public discourse to be incompatible religious traditions. Zaimoglu’s text performs the pluralistic reality of life in Germany today.

Zaimoglu draws on such religious traditions to counter the unfulfilling sensibility of neoliberal capitalism that founds the German cultural order of his literary world. Similar to the Traveler and the Botanist, Zaimoglu’s protagonist suffers from a (post)migrant malaise; however, it is not as explicitly associated with the protagonist’s relationship to himself or his past. In general, his symptoms are an alienation and stagnation that can be connected to his perceived position in his overly rational home in northern Germany and as a player in a capitalistic cultural order. Therefore, neoliberal globalization ignites longing for human companionship across various boundaries, including geographic, religious, ethnic, and national. What is particularly salient about Liebesbrand is how the novel formally enacts the figure’s longing. Human relationships are expressed in spatial figurations of directions, paths, proximity and destinations, which account for forms of an imagined nascent postnational community.

104 The cultural dimension of religion corroborates what Tom Cheesman has identified in Zaimoglu’s most recent works as “interreligious cosmopolitanism.” Cheesman describes this mode of cosmopolitan consciousness as “an ecumenism of those who turn their backs on organized power, as well as on organized counterpower and on all promises of progress” (81). He continues, “For better or worse, Zaimoglu suggests that their quietly humane resistance to all kinds of worldly ideology – including ideologies dressed in the false garb of religion – is humanity’s best defense against domination (81). It is important to note that Cheesman does not base this claim on Liebesbrand but I see that novel as congruent with the shift Cheesman sees in Zaimoglu’s texts starting with slightly earlier works such as Zwölf Gramm Glück (2004) and an essay that appeared in the Stuttgart Zeitung in 2005, “Der verfemte Gläubige – starker doch als alle! Warum die Religion unausrottbar ist.”
Importantly, David is an “ex-Börsenmakler.” He describes his profession, “Ich hatte das Nichts gemehrt und war zu viel Geld gekommen” (165). Pointing out the ironic and arbitrary significance of money, David explains his success as having multiplied nothing to amass much. He has in fact amassed enough that he has the financial freedom to retire in his mid-30s and live off of his profits, which he notably does not continue to invest in the stock market. Instead, he asserts that he has stepped out of a system of mutual exploitation and away from practices that risk loss of both money and life:

Jetzt musterten sie mich, ich erzählte keine Anekdoten aus der Zeit
damals, ich pumpte mich nicht auf, weil ich es “geschafft” hatte, es hätte keinen
Sinn gehabt, den beiden geldgeilen Türken auseinanderzusetzen, dass ich dem
Kapitalismus nach den Jahren der Abnutzung gerne aus der Ferne zusah, wie er
funktionierte, ich war drin gewesen, und kurz bevor ich als Kadaver ausgespuckt
wurde, war ich freiwillig gegangen. Ich hatte es nicht geschafft, ich war ein
Krüppel. (123, emphasis mine)

The character’s claims serve as postmigrant strategies for belonging to but also subverting the normative order of capitalism. David iterates his eccentric position on the privileged periphery of capitalist society by means of a language of spatial metaphors. He disputes society’s basic measure of success, of having “made it,” which he directly ties to the image of money-hungry Turks whom he meets at his cousin’s house in Hannover, thereby drawing a connection between migration and materialism yet distinguishing himself from the Turkish men. David is therefore portrayed as one who operates tactically by exiting or escaping and watching from the distance; he is a “Davongelaufener,” as he believes his cousin perceives him (Liebesbrand 116). He articulates his own position under the sign of “eccentricity” in two
ways, first as having run away from the capitalism associated with Germany and secondly as having more or less cut himself off from his family, notably in what could be construed as business terms, “Die waren für mich nicht mehr von Intresse,” (*Liebesbrand* 119) and his “oriental” heritage, “ich war im Westen verdorben, ich war ein durch und durch degenerierter Mann des Abendlands …” (*Liebesbrand* 31). In this way, the alleged removal of risk from his life is doubly connoted, first in connection to a quintessential practice of capitalism - playing the stock market – and, secondly, to being perceived as other in Germany because of his Turkish background. He has thus developed a mode of subjectivity that seeks the path of least resistance, “es ging schließlich darum, komplizierte Menschen zu meiden und Komplikationen zu vermeiden” (*Liebesbrand* 30).

Despite being an ex-stock broker, the figure is notably not a risk-taker. As I pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, the figure plays with his identity and the expectation of the ethnonational majority in order to fit in and navigate the system. In this way, Zaimoglu unsettles the normative German expectations of the good, assimilated Turk as one who seems to reject his Turkish past and appears to embrace typical “German” ways, although the figure’s performance of “Germaness” is self-reflexively utilitarian and exploitative. This strategy falls in line with sociologist Manuela Boatca’s findings in her article “No Race to the Swift” in which she addresses how Eastern Europeans (she also includes Turks in this constellation) negotiate their ascribed identity vis a vis a resurgence of Orientalist discourse in post-communist Europe:

> For them, the race’s enduring stake—access to Western markets, employment opportunities, and financial aid—amounts to an exercise in “moral geopolitics” ... that involves discarding—or at least downplaying—their “Easternness” while professing a will to Westernization. Thus, negotiations of cultural and racial identities framed in terms
of repudiating an Oriental past, stressing one’s contribution to European civilization, and mapping one’s integration into the European Union as a “return to Europe”—and therefore as an act of historical reparation—once again dominate the identity rhetoric across Eastern Europe. (98)

In *Liebesbrand*, the figure’s financial security, rejection of his “Easternness,” and his adeptness at navigating the cultural order purchase him freedom from work and to travel at will. However, he experiences this freedom as a void, “Ich war frei, … mir selber überlassen, und ich kam mir klein vor, ich war klein gemacht worden …” (*Liebesbrand* 65). The void in his life is directly linked to his home in Kiel. His relationship to his northern German home negatively semanticizes the space as disorienting, although for different reasons than the northern German gender norms that confounded the Botanist in *Land*. He feels disconnected from those around him and lives in a state of unsatisfying flux when he returns to Kiel from his near-death experience in Turkey, “Ich war also wieder zurück. War ich froh über den Unrat, der mich umgab? Ich kam mir vor wie ein Hund, der an den Rockschoßen fremder Menschen herumschnüffelt. Auch mein Schlafzimmer war nichts weiter als ein Aufenthaltsort für die Stunden des Schlafes …” (*Liebesbrand* 56). He disdains the rational, utilitarian approach to life in Kiel “am Rande der Zivilisation,” “hier lief alles auf Lebenserhaltung hinaus…” (*Liebesbrand* 96). The figure’s privilege and the perception of what correlates with Hartmut Rosa’s claims of desynchronization ignite his desire for proximity, which manifests in longing, “Ich hatte angefangen, mich zu sehnen” (*Liebesbrand* 85).

To find a new sense of meaning in life, David decides to pursue the beautiful woman who helped him at the accident scene. His decision is cast as a rejection of the overly rational,

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105 For an explanation of Rosa’s notion of desynchronization, see page 88 in chapter two.
disenchanted order of the northern German setting to search for a miracle, “Ich glaubte an ein kleines Wunder…” (Liebesbrand 88). Extending the spatial metaphor of human relations, the woman with the blue ring literally becomes the new direction in his life:

Etwas Neues hatte angefangen, was tat ich hier, was tat ich, was war ich und was gab ich vor zu sein, was war mit mir los, wieso tat ich nichts, weshalb verwarf ich es, was sollte dieses Spiel, dieses verdammtes Spiel, … ich schlief in den letzten Tagen mit jeder Frau, die mich wollte, … ich liebte sie nicht, diese netten Frauen, die Erbarmen mit mir hatten, was war ich, ein mieser kleiner Geschäftemacher, wieso machte ich Liebe wie Geschäfte, was tat ich, worin versank ich, dieses Leben, nichts als mein Leben um mich herum, und es war ein Wall, was waren das für kleine Schritte, die ich machte, falschfalschfalsch, alles ging in die falsche Richtung, ich war das nicht, dieser miese kleine Mann im Anzug … Ich liebte sie. Schluß. (175, emphasis mine)

This gushing declaration of alienation signifies that David can no longer withstand his purposeless life in which he goes about love like business, so Tyra becomes his new direction and destination. This further marks a shift in the story with an explicit return to antiquated Romantic notions of love and courtship. David refers to himself as “altmodisch” (70) and a “Romantiker,” and his submission to his “Liebesbrand” represents a turn to the practices of “orientalische Frauenanbetung” which he previously insisted to his Turkish hospital roommates he was incapable of as a “degenerierter Mann des Abendlandes” (31).

106 For a more in-depth discussion on the way in which Zaimoglu connects male desire with his perceptions of German Romanticism and Islam see Frauke Matthes “Männliche Sehnsucht in (türkisch)-deutscher Gegenwart in Feridun Zaimoglус Liebesbrand.”
The figure’s application of capitalist logic to interpersonal relationships hinders his ability to foster close relationships and find romantic love. David’s few interactions with his family entail monetary transactions, such as paying off his cousin’s debt or stopping by his nephew’s celebration in Kiel to give him a gift of money. Prostitutes function as quick outlets for (sexual) frustration or substitutes for intimacy; however when a prostitute in Hamburg misleads him about the price of their encounter, David storms out of the brothel, standing up for the principles of business rather than giving in to his sexual desire and longing for proximity. When he travels to Prague, he hires a local woman to be his personal tour guide. With the intention of maintaining emotional distance from each other, both insist that the relationship is merely for business purposes. David’s relationship with his best friend also takes the form of a business deal, inasmuch as he agrees to pay Gabriel a daily retainer to provide relationship advice and help him find Tyra in Vienna. Therefore, even as David claims that he exited the capitalist order and wants to change his ways from approaching love like a businessman (“ein mieser kleiner Geschäftemacher”), in his pursuit of his new direction he simply shifts his sights from accumulating capital to investing in a burning desire. As a methodical extension of business practices, David’s pursuit of his elemental desire, or perhaps more accurately obsession with the idea of possessing Tyra, only ever achieves a purely sexual form of closeness rather than the emotional affinity that he seeks. Zaimoglu plays with the concept of fetishization by conflating consumer fetishism with sexual fetishism, and the novel asserts that emotional affinity must be achieved in other ways than merely gaining possession of something or someone.

The poetic of spatialized longing functions according to a heteronormative gender dynamic. Tyra is objectified as an outlet of longing and as something to be conquered and submit to the male protagonist’s desire and will. From a male perspective, love is a game of roulette in
which women possess all control but are undiscerning and fickle in the sense that they love those who happen to coincidentally cross their paths, “sie lieben in alle Richtungen, und wenn wir zufällig in der Richtung anzutreffen sind, in die sie sich bewegen, werden wir ein wenig glücklich” (26-7). Zaimoglu seems to lament a power differential where hapless, professionally unambitious men long for love while women are driven by professional and intellectual goals. Drawing on the stereotype of the emotionless, rational northerner, Tyra remains cold, distant and associated with the intellect (she is a history scholar working on a doctoral thesis on

*Marktenderin* in the Thirty Years War) in contrast to the lovesick, burning “Liebesidiot” who yearns for her companionship and nearness. The reader has little access to Tyra’s perspective and she remains “unnahbar” (107), an elusive and fleeting force field for both the reader and the male protagonist. When David finds her in Nienburg, Tyra thwarts his naïve plans of courtship, or in spatial terms, literally growing close to each other. She orchestrates a brutal sexual encounter with him and leaves him with a decisive note that precludes becoming closer: “Ich will dich nicht näher kennenlernen. Es bleibt bei dieser Nacht. Werben ist zwecklos. Lebwohl” (108). Willing to sleep with a stranger but not become emotionally close to him, she is depicted as hard and driven, continuing undeterred by her self-conscious stalker on her own journey of intellectual and spiritual self-discovery and appearing only a few brief times until the final two chapters of the story. In a noteworthy parallel to the Botanist, Tyra eschews the traditional gender role of bourgeois married life and leaves her husband to travel to Prague and Vienna to work on her thesis, although it is also implied that she is having an affair with her professor.

As David longs for and methodically chases Tyra, Zaimoglu plays with conventional binaries that affect whether or not individuals are able to foster emotional affinity. Even if the conventional binary of the intellectual man and emotional woman is turned on its head, at the
same time another dyad is instated along ethnic lines, namely the rational, driven German and the emotional, romantic Turk. There is however a significant caveat to this last binary constellation, insofar as David unequivocally identifies himself as German to Tyra who sees him as “other,” “Du bist doch kein Deutscher, sagte sie. Doch, ich bin eben etwas später dazugekommen…” (94). In that she does not accept him as he identifies himself, Tyra’s narrow notion of Germanness marks an exclusionary perception and a barrier to affinity.

The shift of setting to Prague and the encounter with the Czech tour guide Jarmila function as a corrective to the distanced, unattainable relationship between David and Tyra and further the narrator’s engagement with cultural identity as a means of cultivating affinity. As I mentioned, David and Jarmila’s relationship extends the habit of conducting interpersonal relationships as business. David hires Jarmila to be his translator and private tour guide while he searches and waits for Tyra, “Es war mein Geld und es waren ihre Tschechischkenntnisse, die uns zusammengeführt hatten, nur wegen dieses Geschäftsverhältnisses spazierten wir gemeinsam durch die Straßen Prags” (*Liebesbrand* 178). He refers to her as his “Gesellschaftsdame” (*Liebesbrand* 184), so their relationship parallels the relationship of Jarmila’s friend, who is an escort, and the businessman whom the escort accompanies. In a different way, Jarmila also insists on a distanced relationship. She bases this on reason, that is to say on a reasonable approach since they will only be together for a few days and it thus makes sense not to become emotionally attached (*Liebesbrand* 182). The aesthetic form of spatialized longing is therefore further embodied in the avowal of distance between David and Jarmila. Nevertheless, this distance is gradually diminished by the intimate nature of their everyday interactions of exploring the city together. Jarmila is literally a “Gesellschaftsdame” in the sense of one who provides company. She therefore functions as the anti-Tyra in the sense that Tyra represents
absence, Jarmila presence. Through the contractual and temporary shared daily life, David and Jarmila nevertheless grow closer.

Their conversations amount to a metareflection on transcultural relations in the post-communist era, in which European history bound with the histories of Germany and the Czech Republic surfaces in the multi-layered history of Prague. Whereas David explicitly effaces his own migration background or no longer feels defined by it, he fixates on Jarmila’s, who grew up in Germany and returned to Prague after the collapse of communism. When he detects slippages in her German and enquires into her background, she tells him, “Ich bin in Ihrem Land aufgewachsen, sagte sie, ich kam kurz nach dem Zusammenbruch des alten Systems hierher” (Liebesbrand 180). In contrast to Tyra, Jarmila unquestioningly sees David as German and therefore validates his own sense of self. Moreover, she sees him as stereotypically German and takes issue with his German approach to the Czech culture, specifically for his essentialist mentality of asking her to define the “tschechische Seele” (Liebesbrand 203).

In contrast to Germany, Prague is shown to be a city in flux, still struggling with the Nazi, communist and post-communist pasts, a playground overrun by international tourists, and exploited and held in submission by German “Besatzer” through the power of European money, which is understood to be controlled (“coined”) by the German economy:

Mein deutsches Geld schloß die Türen auf, brach jedes Schloß auf, fast immer. Die Menschen, die sich auf ein Gespräch mit mir einließen, glaubten, die europäische Münze wäre deutsch geprägt, und dass sie ihre alte Währung hatten behalten können, brachte für sie keine Erleichterung, sie waren wieder einmal entzweigebrochen worden, ihre Stadt war eine abendländischen Bastion, und man traute ihnen aber keine Vollständigkeit zu. (186)
Notably, the hierarchy created between Germany and the Czech Republic is cast in monetary terms, thereby underscoring the disparity created between E.U. countries on the basis of uneven economic power. In this self-conscious remark based on his experiences and interaction with Czechs, David observes that the Czech Republic, an “occidental bastion,” remains marginalized within integrated Europe, its people still considered “underdeveloped.” Here David identifies an economic hierarchy that perpetuates a long-standing mental map of cultural superiority among Western Europeans toward Central and Eastern Europeans. Sociologist Manuela Boatca identifies this dynamic in the post-communist era as a continuation of an Orientalist othering that founds a colonial relationship of “contiguous empire,” a term she borrows from József Böröcz. (98-99). Citing Böröcz, Boatca explains that in territorially detached colonial rule, colonial subjects were defined by qualitative hierarchies of difference based on essentialized othering through exoticization, feminization, puerilization and racialization (99). In contrast, in a situation of geographic contiguity between colonizer and colonized, othering relies on a “‘quantitative pattern of inferiorization: this type of other is seen as being perhaps of the same substance but offering an inexcusably inferior level of performance’” (99). Boatca shows that both qualitative and quantitative hierarchies define Central and Eastern Europeans in the current discourse of Europeanization:

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107 By investigating intellectual discourse in 19th century Romania in light of the country’s independence from the Ottoman Empire and increasing orientation toward Western Europe, Boatca shows that “the terms of the Western European discourse were appropriated such as to make the “Oriental barbarism” in which Romanian society had been “steeped” until acquiring independence from the Ottoman Empire the point of departure for the development of a European (civilized, Christian, modern) identity” (91). Then in a discussion of the continuation of systems of representations based on Orientalist discourse in the context of the European Union’s Eastern enlargement, Boatca further illuminates how “the degree of connection to the Ottoman, and therefore Islamic legacy of Eastern European candidates to the European Union has been reinstrumentalized as a legitimating strategy for discursive practices of inferiorization, exoticization, and racial othering that parallel the region's economic peripheralization” (91).
On the one hand, it reinstrumentalizes the Orientalist imagery to imply that distance from the Orient represents the underlying yardstick by which standards of modernity and civilization are measured. On the other hand, it employs the mechanism of quantitative inferiorization in order to mobilize the inferiority complexes thus incurred for its own geopolitical projects . . . (99-100)

David’s acknowledgement of these economic and racial power differentials from his postmigrant position is intriguing. His commentary is not merely a recognition of the hierarchies between supposedly unified countries and peoples in the neoliberal economic order of post-communist Europe, but expresses his postmigrant sense of insecurity, insofar as he reproduces the power relations he identifies by asserting his Germanness to secure his Westernness as well as his non-oriental masculinity. With the phrase “mein deutsches Geld” he locates himself on the empowered side of the hierarchy as a “colonizer” rather than an orientalized, feminized, backward ‘other.’ His insecurity is further evident in his revised and failed attempts to explain to Jarmila what he meant by calling her a “Gesellschaftsdame,” who he says a man employs to be accepted (aufgenommen) in society, which he then revises to say rather she offers him company in a foreign environment, or in his final attempt to explain, she accompanies him so he is respected by other men (*Liebesbrand* 185). Her company is therefore a means to make sure that he is accepted and seen as manly in a “bastion of the west.”

Jarmila sees the situation in the Czech Republic quite differently, namely that the Czechs who sit around drinking and lamenting the break with the old are merely performing for international tourists, “Auch die anderen, diese lauten Tschechen, haben den Bruch ohne Schaden überlebt. Das Alte verging, es verging wie ein Leben. Sie saufen, als müßten sie einen schlimmen Kummer vergessen. Sie tun es für die Fremden” (*Liebesbrand* 189). For Jarmila, the
situation in Prague is one of mutually-beneficial exploitation. The locals perform the “tschechische Seele” for financial compensation and the tourists gladly pay for exactly that which they came to see. Jarmila identifies the situation of global tourism as a vicious cycle of cultural prostitution. She too cashes in on this relationship, first as a tour guide, and secondly as an actress who performs a monologue for tourists and locals in which she recounts Prague and Czech history.

Her assertion that there is no “Czech soul” suggests that collective identity is an ongoing collective performance, much in the same way that she insists to David that there is no Czech soul, essential being, or, when he asks, core meaning to her name: “Jarmila heisst Jarmila. In diesem Name steckt keine innere Macht” (Liebesbrand 204). Based on this understanding, Jarmila has a processual relationship with herself, the city and the culture, the meanings of which she continually recreates in the monologue and tours that she performs. Although she tells her stories for tourists, she simultaneously reflects on her own relationship to the culture, so her work is a way to come to terms with the conditions of the post-communist context to which she migrated. However, under conditions of mutual exploitation and rational, affective distanciation that lead Jarmila to cautiously keep her clients at arm’s length, she suffers from alienation and longs for closeness. In the end, Jarmila goes against her “reasonable” approach and falls in love with David. Her earlier resistance to “metanarratives,” such as the “Czech soul” or the traditional meaning of her name, dissipates as she returns to such frames of reference by eventually explaining to David the “innere Macht” of her name, which means “die Frühlingsliebende, aber auch die vom Frühling geliebte” (Liebesbrand 342). David however disregards Jarmila’s feelings and remains distanced because of his continued fixation on Tyra. He ups his ante by following Tyra to Vienna and paying his friend Gabriel to help him locate her and act as a love consultant.
Ultimately, David does not obtain the nearness to Tyra that he so irrationally desires but systematically pursues. He locates his failure in part for believing in forms of transcendental love stemming from the cultural heritage of fairy tales, “… ich lief und blieb doch in der Wolke aus schlechtem Träumen und einem schönen Kindertraum, dass es nur Buntstifte bedurfte, um Zwerge, Froschkönige und Erbsenprinzessinnen blind und lahm vor Liebe werden zu lassen…” (Liebesbrand 361). By contrast, in her search for meaning, Tyra turns to a different form of metaphysical relationship, namely one of emotional and spiritual closeness offered by the Catholicism embedded in Vienna’s history and cityscape. She converts to Catholic religious practices, hinting at becoming a nun, as a liberating path of peace and comfort. Tyra’s uncertainty about her beliefs and her admission that the stories of saints, whom she has started worshipping, are constructed by people who need to have a higher power give meaning to their lives suggests that she embraces religion as a consolation for not finding what she needs in other life paths.

Zaimoglu represents both Tyra’s conversion and Vienna as metaphorical dead ends. For this reason, I would argue that the author criticizes organized religion as an obstacle to postnational proximity. Her choice is depicted as a form of inertia as she takes “eine Pause” (360) from her thesis work, her doctoral advisor, her husband, and her unwanted lover. Moreover, in David’s eyes, she substitutes her relationships with men for relationships with dead, stone figures, “Die Männer, die du liebst, sind tot und in Stein gehauen” (Liebesbrand 361). David objects to the Catholic obsession with the dead and the opulence of the bastions of Catholocism present in Vienna. He states, “Gold und Prunk und unheilige Höhe, das alles hatte mit mir nichts zu tun…” (Liebesbrand 373). David instead practices a personal form of religion, notably Islam, by saying a prayer privately and spontaneously every now and then. The setting of
Vienna suggests that David’s rejection of Tyra’s form of religion is rooted in a history of divisiveness, inasmuch as Vienna served as the threshold between the “East” and “West” when the Ottoman Empire laid siege to the city and was defeated by the Habsburgs in 1529 and then again in 1683. Wishing to exorcise from her “den bösen Geist der Totenverehrung” (*Liebesbrand* 361), David is repulsed and recognizes that her new existence is not for him, “ich fand keinen Halt im Himmel” (*Liebesbrand* 320). He bitterly accepts his position in the spatial poetic as “der Idiot an der Peripherie ihres neuen Glaubens” (*Liebesbrand* 371).

David’s futile quest for companionship leaves him feeling burned, so he disparages the pursuit of proximity (*Liebesbrand* 373). The novel ends with the indication that the nearness and love he sought might be found in the more realistic relationship with Jarmila, symbolized by the shift in weather from unbearable heat to a cold wind. The final lines of the novel are a phone conversation between the two that promises their continued interaction. David ends the conversation with “Bis bald” and she with “Bis ganz bald” (*Liebesbrand* 375). Notably, even as the mobile phone fosters affiliation, it stands for a mediated form of interaction carried out in absence and marked by distance. Nevertheless, the indication that David and Jarmila will see each other again implies the promise of presence and affinity in their relationship.

This corroborates Adelson’s findings that it is the imagined postnational forms of intimacy rather than the emotional content that symbolize the beginnings of a shared life world that in this case only starts to fulfill the “‘community of sentiment’” envisioned by Arjun

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108 I would argue that the defeat of the Turks at the walls of Vienna is still ingrained in European memory and indirectly propagates the mental map that leaves Turkey outside of the European Union. In an installation that Zaimoglu created at the Kunsthalle Wien in 2005, he directly addressed the supposed unbridgeable divide between Muslims and Christians that courses through public debates on multiculturalism, immigrant “others,” integration and citizenship rights in Europe. Playing with the notion of immigrants and postmigrants as a threat or invasion, he placed over three hundred Turkish flags in front of the museum and called it “Die dritte Türkenbelagerung?” referring to the present day context of Austria’s Turkish/Turkish-Austrian population in terms of the battles between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Empire. The art installation caused an uproar among the right-wing FPÖ in the Austrian press.
Appadurai as “‘a group that begins to imagine and feel things together’” (Adelson 60). Furthermore, this correlates with Iordanova’s findings that postmigrant and new migrant protagonists do not live out trajectories of liberating escape but rather form new affiliations with different migrants to come to terms with their own social exclusion and find an acceptable progression that moves them closer to their aspirations (60).

I suggest however that Zaimoglu does more than merely posit forms devoid of emotional content and settle for an acceptable progression in the face of social exclusion, even if his ending points in that direction to a certain extent. He seems to respond to such claims by criticizing how despite the increased focus on spatial forms and spatial relations, the organization of globalized space continues to function on the basis of modern paradigms that cause alienation and exclusion. Having “made it” in the eyes of the ethnonational majority and asserting an image that he perceives would make him belong are still not enough to overcome postmigrant exclusion from the ethnonational majority. David’s identitarian contortions of rejecting all traces of “Easternness” and of securing the image of “western masculinity” by purchasing the presence of a local woman indicate that the figure is not accepted in his home (Germany) or for that matter in “bastions of the occident.” He navigates social situations in ways that he has developed from his position on the privileged periphery but which in the end merely reproduce the social relations that lead to his marginalization.

Zaimoglu’s depictions of David, Tyra and Jarmila do not celebrate nascent forms of transnational community, rather the figures express an alienation and longing that stem from precisely those forms that are still ingrained and cause social exclusion or indicate a lack of alternative ways of life. It is telling that all three main figures ultimately choose traditional or metaphysical frames of reference in their search for alternate subjectivities. David turns to
antiquated gender relations and hybridized old-fashioned romantic-oriental traditions of *Frauenanbetung*; Tyra chooses organized religion and a mystical relationship with saints; and Jarmila reverts to the essentialized meaning of her name and ends up heart-broken and pining for David.

Zaimoglu’s novel grapples with the challenges of cultivating emotional bonds under conditions that provide for freedom of mobility and opportunities to refashion one’s life but which continue to be limited by prescribed social roles and values. Both postmigrant and new migrant protagonists search to develop strategies to overcome the social strictures, whereby postnational existence is shown to be limited by resurgent grand narratives of neoliberal capitalism and transcendental notions of love and religion. In such a world, interpersonal bonds based on an economic logic of gains, indebtedness and risky investing do not make for emotionally fulfilling affiliations.

D. Conclusion

Monioudis and Zaimoglu imagine worlds of transnational existence, lived in multiple, translocal settings and comprised of attachments to various cultures, places and diverse others. Their texts thematize international encounters as a means to grapple with the challenges of creating meaningful interpersonal relationships in a life lived in transit(ion). The restless rootlessness that is depicted in the two novels does not signal an experience of “homelessness” for either the postmigrant or new migrant characters. They all have a place that they call home, generally located in northern Germany, with the exception of the Traveler who is at home in Switzerland, but also lived in Berlin. Rather, travel and relocation represent a subjective choice and freedom to detach oneself from a particular cultural context and/or state of being with which
one is not satisfied and explore new ways of life. In particular, Zaimoglu addresses the challenges to interpersonal relationships when the logic of capitalism informs interaction even on the level of romantic pursuits. Monioudis addresses the comparative, analytical approaches to culture and intersubjectivity that impede his protagonists’ ability to relate meaningfully to and find closeness to others.

The authors grapple with these inadequate approaches to transnational, mobile existence as efforts toward understanding transformations to everyday life under conditions of globalization. Both authors evoke conditions of an existential crisis that I have called postmigrant or new migrant malaise. The everyday lives of educated, financially comfortable mid- to late-thirtysomethings are riddled with dissatisfaction, restlessness, alienation, isolation, and personal stagnation in the face of larger-scale socio-cultural conditions. Their travels in fact result from the reaction to these conditions and an ensuing search for an alternative existence to that which they have known in Germany, in the case of David, Tyra, Jarmila, and the Botanist, or a desire to reconnect more deeply with his family’s past, in the case of the Traveler/Diplomat.

The figures’ experiences confirm what Hartmut Rosa refers to as the “detemporalization of life,” which he attributes to the paradoxical conditions of unprecedented acceleration and simultaneous deceleration that define late modernity. Rosa associates the detemporalization of life that results from the acceleration and desynchronization of modern society with precluding the possibility to plan a career or life for a lifetime. Consequently, he claims that time spans and the duration of activities and commitments are no longer planned ahead but are left to evolve (“Social Acceleration” 100). This results in a mode of existence defined by unlimited complexity and contingency (“Social Acceleration” 97) or “situationalism” (“Social Acceleration” 100). Of course, the obvious contradiction of Rosa’s argument would be the flexibility and countless
possibilities of such an existence. However, I find Rosa’s claims particularly compelling with regard to Monioudis’ and Zaimoglu’s novels. Both novels express unsettling effects in the face of detemporalized life and the freedom/burden of situationalism. In particular, David and the Traveler/Diplomat both struggle with aimlessness, which in part drives their restless compulsion to travel.

It is also pivotal, that many of the characters in these novels eschew what Certeau calls the “proper” order of place, which in these texts is defined by bourgeois gender roles, by capitalism, or by being unable to develop meaningful relationships with others. In this context, the rejection of northern Germany is a notable parallel between the novels. With their choice of destinations, the protagonists articulate an interest in pluralistic cities of southern and central Europe as preferred alternatives to what are depicted as the overly rational, bourgeois smaller communities of Kiel and Nienburg and a Berlin defined by repressive gender subjectivities. Notably, the individual journeys depicted in the novels enact a doubled dichotomy in relation to gender and ethnicity, according to which postmigrant men pursue something specific, in David’s case a woman and in the Traveler’s case the family recipe album, in contradistinction to the female characters, who relocate to escape traditional gender roles and, despite continuing their professions in a new location, search for greater fulfillment. This suggests that cultural norms based on ethnicity and perhaps to an even greater extent gender hinder the ability for women and postmigrants, who see themselves as fitting in with the ethnonationalist majority community but are still occasionally perceived as “other”, to lead fulfilling lives within the ethnicized and gendered strictures of Germany. In this way, the novels account for hierarchies and unevenness that is the reality of many in a supposedly borderless world of neoliberal globalization. The novels thus stage complex relationships between individuals of these minoritarian groups to
investigate new identities, solidarities and possibilities, while at the same time they highlight the
duplicity of their protagonists as they participate and thereby sustain the status quo even in their
desire to find new ways. I would argue that this made particularly clear in the way the Traveler
and David subversively appropriate social norms to gain agency, the participation of both Jarmila
and David in mutually exploitative capitalist relations, or the Botanist’s desire to change the
culture and people to be more like her.

The more prominent parallel between the novels is the consequence of the figures’
malaise, namely that they seek and long for physical and emotional nearness to others. Thus, the
forms of affinity and affiliation that the novels depict serve as nascent solutions to overcoming
the alienation and stagnation that the figures experience. Baking and sharing “local” delights that
have traveled across regions and cultures to become internationally known provides the Traveler
with the opportunity to interact and connect with people in semi-foreign places in satisfying
ways that his work as a diplomat or his chameleon strategy of blending in have not allowed for.
For the Botanist, simply sitting on a bench in a busy park rather than returning to her apartment
to look down on the same park from her balcony signals a shift in her ways of thinking and
acting that might enable her to enjoy more fulfilling interaction and relationships. By means of
experiencing a place together and carrying on substantive discussions about life, history,
worldviews, etc., David and Jarmila overcome the distance they initially planted in their business
relationship and portray the beginnings of emotional closeness, especially when David gets over
his fantasy of transcendent, fairy-tale romance.

Such forms of proximity on the plot level are quite mundane, but therein lies their
potential as possibly realistic projects toward birthing postnational affinity. Moreover, this type
of affinity parallels Kehlmann’s resolution of empathetic relationality, of descending from the
heights of intellectual abstraction and recognizing and acknowledging the situations of others. I do not read these texts as idealistically celebratory, but rather, they bring the abstract rhetoric of cosmopolitanism, transnationalism and globalization down to very basic levels of everyday life. In this way they are significant contributions to the work of the spatial turn, insofar as they investigate individual strategies for making place livable. These texts do not address the issues of postnational existence that need to be dealt with at the macrolevel of policy and law with regard to citizenship rights, for instance. The stories do however posit models of the human condition “on the ground.” These two novels attempt to unsettle the quasi-metanarratives now implanted as the way of the world in the age of globalization (i.e. capitalism and cosmopolitanism), which are at the root of the figures’ difficulties in finding proximity.

Both authors draw on the migration backgrounds of their postmigrant protagonists to inform the form of their novels. The central function of travel and introspection in the texts suggests their epistemological importance as a means of understanding the self and a mobile existence of situationalism or, as Iordanova refers to it, migration on a “per-project basis” (65) as a prerequisite for developing functional relationships to both the self and others. In Land, on the aesthetic level the form of the “dialogue” as the back and forth between narratorial perspectives that reflect on each other further underscores the nascent semblance of a shared, transnational existence. The leitmotif of the Grecian urn symbolizes the importance of being able to synthesize and synchronize into a comprehensible form the fragmentary experiences, disparate histories and multiple places of transitory life. The author however emphasizes that it is essential to not get trapped in a cycle of aesthetic reflexivity; rather, the construction of a synoptic narrative should function as a tool to gain an overview of one’s life, to connect the dots and synthesize the past and present as well as the frames of reference of one’s existence to overcome the experience of
disjointedness from the self in order to live in physical proximity to others. In *Liebesbrand*, Zaimoglu’s form fuses conventions of chivalric love (*Minnedienst*), German Romanticism and *Empfindsamkeit* with eastern traditions of courtship and mysticism and enacts his male protagonist’s longing by means of spatial metaphor. Driven more by an imagined love than the reality of his relationship with the object of his desire, David’s longing for Tyra cultivates no emotional depth. However, with Jarmila he creates a “vector of relationality”¹⁰⁹ and a more promising affiliation by developing a relationship through day to day interaction and substantive conversation. The novels *Land* and *Liebesbrand* give voice to a heightened awareness of the spatial aspects of everyday life and the need for finding new ways to imagine living in relationship with others and creating meaningful affiliations in particularly mobile forms of life.

¹⁰⁹ In Adelson’s analysis, a vector of relationality is based on an emotion (shame) felt by two neighbors in their respective apartments, which she argues marks them as conjoined by an affect of reciprocal interest (Adelson 63).
Conclusion: Relating to Others in an Age of Globalization

How do contemporary German-language novels respond to changes in the ways in which people imagine living in relationship to others under conditions of globalization? In particular, which alternative frames of belonging and modes of living in conditions of social transformation are evoked in twenty-first century novels? Taken together, this group of novels creates a composite notion of the experiences and understandings of globalization on various scales of space. In general, contemporary authors seem intent on unsettling what they depict as deeply ingrained worldviews and behaviors that have coproduced the order of German culture since the late Enlightenment era and continue to preclude interpersonal relationships of empathy and emotional proximity. Recurring themes of alienation, stagnation in the face of acceleration, and difficulty in creating emotional bonds with others run through all five novels. By investigating the everyday interactions and behaviors that occur in the respective imagined worlds, I sought to unveil those ways of being and cultural conditions that the authors associate with the contemporary malaise depicted in their novels.

Die Vermessung der Welt locates this ‘attachment disorder’ in an overly rational, masculine rigidity associated with the “proper” ways of creating knowledge and representing reality. Expunging the experiences of the body and that which does not fit into a world of (scientific) realism fixed by numerical measurements cultivates the inability for the male protagonists to be empathetic and recognize the needs of others. In his depiction of Gauss’ and Humboldt’s detachment and alienation, Kehlmann further implicates a transnational spatial order based on competition, according to which the freedom to pursue one’s own interests requires going to extremes to accumulate enough social capital to “purchase” autonomy, which in the end is still yoked to the goals of the fatherland in Humboldt and Gauss’ era. Moreover, social capital
proves to devalue rapidly—and with it the value of the individual life—once the individual is eclipsed by his image circulating in the virtual space of information flows in a (Eurocentric) global culture of one-upmanship and consequent rapid obsolescence. Kehlmann satirically depicts world-renown geniuses Gauss and Humboldt to critique a discourse that secures and normalizes Germany’s present-day reputation as a good globalizer by means of certain intellectual traditions. By positioning Gauss and Humboldt in a lagging culture at the end of their lives, Die Vermessung der Welt playfully cautions that the intellect and abstraction alone are not adequate, but rather the body and emotions, in particular empathy, also have to play a role in comprehending the irrational dynamics of a global age and in founding ethical interpersonal relations in order to recognize and respond to the needs and pain of others.

The Enlightenment “attachment disorder” depicted in Kehlmann’s novel takes an inverse form in Heimsuchung and Im Spinnhaus, namely that of affixation. From the perspective in the eastern German province, social transformation appears accelerated when one is stuck in the patterns of the domestic sphere in patriarchal orders. Even as Erpenbeck illustrates how generations of women have remained confined to the domestic sphere, the author complicates the critique of patriarchy by drawing on other cultural dimensions such as class and ethnicity and by blurring the line between perpetrator and victim. Through a close reading of everyday practices, it becomes clear that Heimsuchung makes the case for notions of dwelling that break with the mentality of territoriality and possession as well as the dependence on physical places, whereby culture has been organized on the basis of ownership and spurious interpersonal interaction. Rather than defining the East German province as a victim of the forces of the current phase of globalization, Erpenbeck urges to recognize that a long history of “global flows” of fleeting presence and involuntary migration in the German home call for the need to rethink the
organization of social relations in Western culture. While *Im Spinnhaus* likewise critiques social relations in recurring cycles of gendered and classed confinement and alienation in the eastern German province, the novel also expresses an anxiety about the place of East(ern) Germans in the post-unification global order. Her storylines emphasize the decades of exploitation of the working poor, especially women, in the Erzgebirge region which the author correlates with the confinement of women to abject positions in literary history. At the same time, *Im Spinnhaus* desires a new revival of eastern German provincial life in the face of globalization as exploitative economic forces of Europeanization and transatlantic relations.

In *Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus* the literary houses serve not only as the authors’ personal but also as collective mnemonic devices to reflect on the regional specificity that has transformed with the course of reunification and globalization. Because the literary house is a standardized form, the authors carry out a larger project of “glocalizing” the work of unsettling the past and its successive orders of place and everyday practices that have been coterminous with the patriarchal architecture of domestic space. Parallel to Kehlmann’s novel, in *Heimsuchung* and *Im Spinnhaus*, German history ends in a state of inertia amidst the acceleration of the twenty-first century. This inertia is symbolized by the destruction or disintegration of the houses. Therefore, both Erpenbeck and Hensel open up German space for an innovative rethinking of the social order. The provincial milieu contains no ready-made solutions to the alienation and uncertainty of the current age. Rather, in contrast to Kehlmann, their investigation of subjectivity and interpersonal relations reads as a call for analytical distance to break the repeating cycles of detrimental social relations and fixity.

The imagined worlds of Zaimoglu and Monioudis continue to grapple with issues of distance and detachment as obstacles to relating to others and cultivating emotional bonds in
transnational lifestyles. The characters in these two novels intentionally distance themselves from their homes to gain insight into their own lives. In Land, alienation and stagnation are symptoms of postmigrant and new migrant malaise associated with excessive reflexivity and notions of cosmopolitan approaches to the foreign. The tropes of the flaneur and the botanist signify the text’s interest in exploring ways of being that impose an order on space and interpersonal relations from the heights of abstraction. The text resolves to find “grounding” in a transitory existence by balancing the comparative analysis between self and other through cultivating elemental connections to others in everyday contexts. This is shown to be a project that entails reconciling the fragments of one’s past with his or her present. Notably, this project of self-grounding proves to be less successful for the female protagonist, who attempts to feminize Enlightenment pursuits in her struggles to overcome the strictures of German gender norms.

While Monioudis addresses one of the foundational narratives of globalization, cosmopolitanism, Zaimoglu addresses another, namely the “new world order” of neoliberal capitalism. Zaimoglu’s male protagonist suffers from alienation in part because he approaches all relationships as though they were business deals. This way of being is shown to be a strategy by which the postmigrant protagonist creates a place for himself among the ethnonational majority in Germany. Despite being an acculturated citizen, the figure remains socially insecure as he rejects his heritage and instrumentalizes geographical, ethnic and gender hierarchies to navigate successfully in the “Western” social order.

In the end, Zaimoglu questions whether metaphysical frames of reference can be the basis for cultivating emotional proximity in a postnational Europe. While his male protagonist abandons the notion of transcendental love, his female protagonists seem at a loss to find others
ways to make sense of and find meaning in their lives, as they turn to organized religion (Tyra) or traditional meanings (Johanna). Zaimoglu therefore grapples with the ways in which contemporary transnational lifestyles challenge modern “metanarratives” and consequently lead to the need to seek alternative frames of reference for fashioning fulfilling lives and relationships of emotional proximity.

Inasmuch as I have argued that insight into the spatial imagination of globalization can be gained by a reading of the co-production of space and social relations in literary works, it is noteworthy that each novel in its own way reflects an awareness of and contributes to the increased attention to the organization and production of anthropological space. Kehlmann explicitly explores competing theories of space and their relation to subjectivity and human interaction. He further draws on his thematic investigations of space to create a literary form that performs the meaning of relativistic space. Hensel and Erpenbeck rely on narrative techniques whereby everyday behaviors and interactions communicate the significance of spatial relations rather than communicating this meaning through dialogue or narratorial exposition. Monioudis directly addresses the production of space by means of his highly introspective characters’ approaches to foreign places and thereby addresses notions of cosmopolitanism and conventional literary tropes associated with modern paradigms of abstract space. Lastly, Zaimoglu creates a world of spatialized longing by expressing his protagonists’ emotional experiences through spatial metaphors. These contemporary authors offer aesthetic models for addressing the challenges posed by an increasingly intertwined world of rapid transformation.

In these ways, contemporary German-language novels practice the spatial imagination of accelerated globalization. They render concrete in subtle, nuanced ways the abstract, diffuse notions of uncertainty and risk associated with the contemporary moment of global
transformation and therefore provide an opportunity to gain insight into ways of re-envisioning more ethical ways of living and interacting with others in an interconnected world.


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