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At the Border: Examining Identity in Peter Schneider's *The Wall Jumper* and Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*

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At the Border:
Examining Identity in Peter Schneider's *The Wall Jumper* and Eva Hoffman's *Lost*
in Translation

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

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Annandale-On-Hudon, New York

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Introduction

The most famous images of the fall of the Berlin Wall all have one thing in common: people are on it. They are standing on it, sitting on it, chipping away at the concrete or marking it with graffiti. They are striking pictures, especially given the fact that the very purpose of the Wall was to keep people away from it. The Berlin Wall was so heavily fortified that it was almost impossible to cross. The "Grenzstreifen" [border strip] or "Todesstreifen" [death strip] was usually about seventy meters, but in the middle of the city was as wide as 500 meters, not including the buffer zone on the eastern side (*Aufbau und Entwicklung*).¹ Despite blocking in significant parts of Berlin—national monuments, houses (sometimes only partially) and streets—it was what Peter Schneider refers to as a "Niemandland" ["No-man's land"]. The only people who could occupy the "Grenzstreifen" where the Wall and its various defenses sat were guards and people passing through checkpoints. This speaks to a broader idea: the Wall was a way to separate West Berlin from East Berlin, which in turn was a way to ensure the separation of the two countries and the ideologies that made up the foundation of each. It helped enforce a rigid dichotomy—one could belong to one or the other, but it was impossible to exist in-between for longer than a few moments. Either one was in the process of crossing, or they were dead.

The Wall is a physical manifestation of a question that is increasingly pertinent in

¹ <https://www.berlin.de/landesdenkmalamt/denkmale/berliner-mauer/aufbau-und-entwicklung/>. Accessed May 4, 2020.

a world where ethnic, cultural, and linguistic lines are increasingly blurred even as the world is divided into distinct nation-states, many of which are subject to a growing rise of nationalist political movements that seek to further entrench national and cultural divides. Any immigrant, dual citizen or person of mixed heritage has had to grapple, in some form, with the question of how to exist in the borderland between two (or more) identities.

The question of what it means to have an "identity" is so often discussed that it has become one of those words that is almost devoid of meaning. The first entry in the OED currently defines it as "the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness" ("Identity", n. 1.a).² This is based on Friedrich Schelling's concept of "absolute identity," which is noted in the same sub-definition and posits that "mind and matter" are one and the same. Identity is further defined as "the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition of being a single individual; the fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality" ("Identity", n. 2.a). Both of these definitions rely on older conceptions of identity borrowed from French, where "identité" meant "individuality, personality" and later also the presentation or perception of something as singular. This in turn came from the Latin (which was in turn a translation of an ancient Greek word) "identitat-, identitas," meaning "quality of being the same" and "continual sameness, lack of variety, monotony." The etymology reveals a consistent conceptualization of identity as denoting

² <https://www-oed-com.ezprox.bard.edu/view/Entry/91004?redirectedFrom=identity&>. Accessed 4 May, 2020.

unity, wholeness, and consistency. While this understanding of the word still makes sense, it does not account for all the ways that the term is used today.

In his essay devoted to finding an accurate modern definition, “What is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)?” (1999) James Fearon argues that “identity” is presently used in two linked senses, which may be termed “social” and “personal.” In the former sense, an 'identity' refers simply to a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features of attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable (2). According to Fearon a social category is both externally and internally confirmed, but the defining characteristic is that it links someone to a community of people with shared attributes and behaviors. In contrast, personal identity is how someone defines themselves—an internal, often fixed (or perceived as being fixed) state of being, made up of attributes that (usually) help one form a positive perception of oneself. The impetus for Fearon's essay is his sense that the dictionary definition no longer reflects the way that the term is used. While the OED does contain a definition that could be understood as analogous to the idea of personal identity, there is no mention of social identity at all.

While Fearon maintains a separation between these two kinds of identities, he also thinks that there are situations in which they interact (2). Social identity often informs personal identity (and when it does not, it is often because the person is actively rebelling against it). Fearon notes that the social constructionist phrase "identity is a

social construct" plays with this dual definition by implicitly pointing to the way that "personal" identity is corrupted by "social" identity (16). Similar concepts exist in psychology, where identity theory posits that one's identity is constructed around the fulfillment of a role, while social identity theory argues that identity is primarily derived from one's understanding of their place in social groups (Stets and Burke, 225).

National identity, the understanding of oneself as belonging to a nation, is an example of a social category, though various definitions of the nation suggest it is much more than that. Renan, in an essay entitled "What is a Nation?" (1882) believes that "a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle" made up of "past"—the historical events that led to a sense of unity—and "present consent"—the belief in the continued value of the nation (Renan, 10). This language is reminiscent of social contract theory, but where thinkers like Hobbes and Locke treat society as merely a contract, Renan imbues it with a spirit. It also reads as a precursor to thinkers like Benedict Anderson, who, in his 1983 book of the same name, describes the nation as an "imagined community." By this he means that it encompasses such a large group that the relationship between the vast majority of people relies on assumed similarities and kinship. He argues that everyone now belongs to a nation and feels a degree of nationalism—the belief that the nation to which one belongs is eternal, unique, and intrinsic to one's being. Anderson places more emphasis on the role of language in creating the nation than Renan: he sees the growing legitimacy of vernaculars over Latin and the written dissemination of works in the common languages of different burgeoning nations to be essential to people's sense that they are part of a "deep horizontal comradeship" that includes all citizens (Anderson, 7). What these

different but related theories suggest is that nationalism is a mixture of social and personal identity (using Fearon's language). Though these texts do not always fully engage with the question of nationalism, preferring to focus on culture or language, the concept of a kinship between people belonging to various regions underlies the modern conception of nationalism and supports the idea that identities are rooted in a social framework.

Assuming that societal forces influence identity, the questions that drive this paper are what it means to come up against the border between two cultures. What does it mean to cross over? How malleable is the self, and how much is intrinsic? The question of how to juggle multiple or hybrid identities is ever more relevant in a world where the nation is the foundational sorting tool even as globalization makes it increasingly hard for people to neatly fit into a singular national or cultural identity. In *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (1996), Madan Sarup decides that "we do not have a homogenous identity but that instead we have several contradictory selves... In a sense, identity is a process; it is heterogeneous" (xvi). He places this in opposition to the older conception of a "fixed identity" (14). This essay does not attempt to come to a definitive conclusion about which of these models is "true," but instead seeks to look at how each text deals with the open question of identity.

Briefly, it seems important to give some kind of basic definition of the "border" as it functions in this paper. According to the OED it is "a side, edge, brink, or margin; a limit, or boundary; the part of anything lying along its boundary or outline" ("Border,

n.”).³ The border marks difference. Returning to Anderson, one of his criteria for a nation is that it is "*limited*, because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” (7). Part of the way that nations define themselves is through the understanding of what they are not, and the definite borders that outline every nation are a clear-cut way of categorizing where—and who—belongs or does not. So this is one way of understanding the border: as something definitive that facilitates the opposition of two forces. While the border is usually understood as a sharp delineation, there are other ways to conceptualize it. In Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* she expands the border from a line into a space, writing that "the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (19). Anzaldúa sees the border as a space of transformation in which elements of each side are able to co-mingle and re-form. These contradictory understandings of the border mimic the dichotomy Sarup identifies between a "static" and "fixed" identity. The border can be a way to enforce existing divisions, or it can be a way to break them down.

This project is about the intersection of borders and identity. I'm interested in the way that borders—both physical and otherwise—in texts affect the characters, with a particular focus on the central narrator and their understanding (or lack thereof) of their identity. I am working with two primary texts, Peter Schneider's novel *The Wall Jumper*

³ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/21617>. Accessed 4 May, 2020.

[Der Mauerspringer] (1982) and Eva Hoffman's memoir *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1990). Schneider was a prominent figure in the '68 student protests and a long-time resident of the city. ("Peter Schneider Zum 80. Geburtstag - 'Denken Mit Dem Eigenen Kopf'") *The Wall Jumper* was written in the midst of the Cold War, when a divided Berlin was a microcosm of the ideological divide between capitalism and communism. Schneider focuses on the dual enforcer and representation of this divide, the Berlin Wall, and in particular the people who cross it. Eva Hoffman is a Literature professor and non-fiction writer who emigrated from Poland to Canada at the age of thirteen. In *Lost in Translation* (1990), Hoffman examines her childhood in Poland and her adolescence and adulthood as an immigrant in North America. The memoir is about her experience with language and identity as she struggles to reconcile her past and present. There is not, at first glance, much connecting them. The subject matter and issues that the books deal with are very different; what unites them are the underlying themes: identity, language, the state, and the borders that delineate them. The narrators of each grapple with these forces and are forced to deal with what it means to exist at the intersection of two cultures. Both texts are driven by the questions of what it means to have an identity, whether and how identity changes in different cultural contexts, and whether it is possible to escape the social framework in which identity is formed.

Chapter I: Another Brick in The Wall

Near the beginning of Peter Schneider's *The Wall Jumper*, the narrator explains his vision for a story that he wants to write. He describes a protagonist who, in repeatedly crossing the Berlin Wall, loses his sense of identity and belonging.

In dem Gespräch mit Robert ist klarer geworden, was ich suche: die Geschichte eines Mannes, der sein Ich verliert und anfängt, niemand zu werden. Aus einer Verkettung von Umständen, die mir noch unbekannt sind, wird er zum Grenzgänger zwischen beiden deutschen Staaten. Zunächst ohne Absicht beginnt er, einen Vergleich anzustellen, und wird dabei unmerklich von einer Krankheit erfaßt, vor der die Bewohner mit festem Wohnsitz durch die Mauer geschützt sind. Am eigenen Leib und wie im Zeitraffertempo erlebt er den Teilungsprozeß, bis er glaubt, nachträglich eine Entscheidung treffen zu müssen, die ihm bisher durch Geburt und Sozialisation abgenommen war. Je öfter er aber zwischen beiden Hälften der Stadt hin-und hergeht, desto absurder erscheint ihm die Wahl. Mißtrauisch geworden gegen die hastig ergriffene Identität, die ihm die beiden Staaten anbieten, findet er seinen Ort nur noch auf der Grenze. Und wenn der Philosoph recht hat mit der Behauptung, ein Witz immer der Epitaph auf den Tod eines Gefühles [sei], so kann die Geschichte eigentlich nur eine Komödie werden. (22-23)⁴

[In conversations with Robert, it has become clearer what I'm looking for: the story of a man who loses himself and starts turning into nobody. By a chain of circumstances still unknown to me, he becomes a boundary-walker between the two German states. Casually at first, he begins making comparisons; as he does so, he imperceptibly contracts a sickness from which inhabitants with a fixed place of residence are shielded by the Wall. In his own person and as though at split-second speed, he lives through the partition process and comes to believe that he has to make a decision, one he had previously been spared by birth and socialization. But the more he crosses from one half of the city to the other, the more absurd the choice seems. Having come to distrust the hastily adopted identity that both states offer him, he feels at home only on the border. And if the philosopher is right when he says a joke is always an epitaph for a feeling that has died, the story must turn out to be a comedy.] (Hafrey 22-23, transl. modified)⁵

⁴ Schneider, 22-23. All subsequent quotations are cited with page numbers in text.

⁵ I will exclusively be using Hafrey's translation with a mixture of personal modifications/translations where necessary. Page numbers next to the English translation of quotes from *The Wall Jumper* are always in reference to Hafrey's text.

This quote seems to be a hypothesis for the entire text. It drives the way the reader understands the sub-narratives that the narrator collects, and it also sets up an expectation for the development of the narrator's relationship to the border in the course of the novel. The book sets out to answer the question of whether this is in fact an accurate synopsis of the narrator's (or any of the other characters') trajectory. The stories that the narrator goes on to hear, his friends, and his own journey in the novel all invoke some iteration of the "Grenzgänger" figure, even as the ideal narrative the narrator describes here remains unrealized. Integral to Schneider's narrative is the notion of what happens to one's identity when it encounters a border—specifically pertaining to the concept of the nation and the borders, both physical and symbolic, that maintain it.

The first thing that is striking about this passage is the notion that the protagonist of the narrator's story, in encountering the wall, "sein Ich verliert und anfängt, niemand zu werden" [loses himself and starts turning into nobody]. The concept of the self is ambiguous, and the narrator does not give any clarification as to what aspect of the man constitutes his "Ich." It could mean that the man's consciousness or sense of self is altered or destroyed in this process, or it might refer to an externalized self that is influenced by society. This latter reading is supported by the narrator's theories about who the man becomes. He is described by the narrator first as becoming "niemand" [nobody] and then, a line later, a "Grenzgänger" [border-walker]. How is it possible for the man in the story to become both? The very idea that someone can *become* nobody, or that it can be a state of being, is oxymoronic, and in conjunction with the rest of the narrator's vision for his story suggests that both "Ich" and "niemand" are two sides of a

narrow, state-imposed identity. The narrator predicts that the man will feel constrained by the perceived necessity to adopt a state identity and eventually decide that the identities available on either side of the Wall are “*hastig ergriffene*” [hastily formed]. This implies that in losing his “*Ich*,” the protagonist of the story is really unravelling himself from the state, rather than losing himself altogether.

With this in mind it is not contradictory for the man to become both “*niemand*” and a “*Grenzgänger*.” The word “*Grenzgänger*” usually refers either to someone who works on a border or commutes across it frequently, and so for this to be a definitive identity the man would have to be continuously in the motion of crossing between the two states. If he is between, and therefore outside of, either state structure, he would in the eyes of the state become nobody. It is notable that throughout this passage the narrator characterizes the states on either side of the wall as the “*beiden deutschen Staaten*” [two German states], and refers to the two cities or to the “*beiden Hälften der Stadt*” [two halves of the city], leaving no room for a third option. The man in the story flits between these two options with increasing dissatisfaction, until his “*Ort nur noch auf der Grenze [ist]*” [home [is] only on the border]. However, the border is not a place that one can reside in, but rather a barrier between two places. The protagonist of this story finds himself torn. He cannot pick between the two possible identities with which he has been provided, but he also cannot permanently reside in-between. In this way he becomes trapped in a state of perpetual motion in order to avoid making a choice, and in the eyes of both states ceases to exist—in other words, he becomes “*niemand*.”

I.1 Wall Jumpers: The Myth of the Grenzgänger

The narrator embarks on a journey to discover a narrative that fits into his vision of the "Grenzgänger" by collecting stories about various "Mauerspringer:" people who have in some way jumped (though not necessarily physically) over the Berlin Wall. The stories are all distinct but build on each other, becoming increasingly fantastical in the course of the novel. The first story, the only one that comes straight from the narrator's memory, is about his former landlord Gerhard Schalter—whose name, in a foreshadowing of the story, translates to “switch.” He is the perfect picture of success under capitalism: not only is he a landlord, which puts him in a position of privilege in society, but he also enjoys his day job, telling the narrator that "ich [kann] es kaum erwarten, bis wieder der Wecker klingelt" (23) [I can hardly wait until the alarm goes off again] (23). But his life unravels when he falls in love with the wife of an East German reporter living in Africa, who constantly promises that she will escape and meet him at Schönefeld airport. This is the first surreal twist in the story—the entire novel is a degree away from reality, with the unnamed narrator who is not quite Peter Schneider himself, but it is the collected stories that toe the line between plausible and ridiculous. The story becomes increasingly allegorical as Schalter begins to immerse himself more fully in East Germany and, losing sight of the initial draw of his lover, becomes disheveled and poorly dressed. The narrator comments that “die billigeren Lebenskosten im Osten, die Schalter den Unterhalt der teuren Westwohnung erleichterten, brachten ihn wie von selbst zu einer Einsicht in die Vorteile des Gesellschaftssystems im anderen Teil der Stadt” (25) [The lower cost of living in the East made it easier for him to maintain his expensive West

German apartment, and brought him to an understanding of the advantages of the social system in the other part of the city] (26, modified). It is the beginning of an incongruence between Schalter's lifestyle and his values. Eventually, Schalter's former sense of fulfillment through work and material items unravels and he begins to see the East German system as the superior system. He becomes critical of capitalism, individualism, urbanization and Nazi apologists—all representative of an East German perception of the West. "Allmählich gewann ich den Eindruck, daß Schalter sein äußeres, schließlich sein inneres Leben immer mehr in den anderen Teil der Stadt verlegte" (26) [My sense grew that Schalter was shifting his exterior and, ultimately, his interior life to the other part of the city] (26). Schalter transforms from a symbol of success in West Germany who is "saving" his lover by bringing her into his life, to a devotee of East German ideology. The way that this story fails to fit the narrator's initial vision of the *Grenzgänger* is obvious: Schalter does not lose his identity, he just gains a new one. He is the perfect example of someone whose entire identity is contingent on a devotion to state ideology; the only thing that changes is which state he is loyal to. However, he is the only character in the novel who manages to fully cross over from one state to another. The malleability of Schalter's identity is something that the other characters in the novel never seem to be able to attain, whether or not they want to.

The first story that the narrator collects (from his friend Robert, a defector from the GDR) stars Kabe, a man who repeatedly jumps from West to East. The tale is a comedy: nothing bad happens to Kabe or to anyone else, the austere and impenetrable border is transformed through his actions into something benign and permeable, and the

members of both governments who try to understand and correct his behavior are rendered inert. Kabe subverts both systems by choosing to engage with them only in ways that serve him, playing both systems for personal gain.

The notion of welfare in the two German states is integral to the story. Kabe is unemployed in the West and subsists on welfare checks. This comes with a host of connotations in both the FRG and the GDR. In the former, welfare implies laziness, lack of focus and work ethic, as well as a criminal bent. Kabe exists on the fringes of acceptable society, but he is also very much a subject of the state—he literally relies on the system in order to live. In the GDR, where both welfare and employment are built into the system, Kabe is characterized in East German newspapers as an example of a „verzweifelter Arbeitsloser” (31) [unemployed and desperate] (32), someone suffering under the capitalist system. While Kabe’s motivation for jumping the wall is presented as being purely about the act of surmounting it, he uses the consequences of jumping to utilize the welfare systems of both countries. In the West he subsists on welfare checks, and when he returns from his three-month quarantine in the East he uses the money he has been accumulating in the West to travel to Paris. While a clear misuse of the FRG’s welfare system, it highlights both the fact that the FRG is a free society and therefore has to tolerate this kind of behavior, and that there is a lack of care accompanying the distribution of welfare. In the East the welfare system, at least as it pertains to Kabe, takes the form of acts of service and direct care. Kabe is essentially imprisoned for three months at a time, but rather than view it this way, he appears to actually seek this result from his jumps. He returns to the FRG „well fed” (31), indicating that his containment in

East Berlin was actually, at least in some respects, more comfortable than his daily life in West Berlin. The consequences of this use of government assistance are also the catalyst for more sustained action on the part of the FRG to stop Kabe. They engage the legal process against Kabe only when they receive a bill from the East for his care (32).

At the end of the story Kabe claims that boredom is his primary motive: “Wenn es so still in der Wohnung ist und draußen so grau und so neblig und gar nichts ist los, da denke ich: Ach springste wieder mal über die Mauer” (33) [Sometimes it’s so quiet in the apartment and so grey and cloudy outside and nothing’s happening and I think to myself: Hey, let’s go jump the wall again] (34). The language he uses is interesting because it mirrors the language often used to describe the GDR—when the narrator visits his friend Pommerer in East Germany a few pages later he complains about there being nothing to do at night, for example. While the general consensus seems to be that life on the East side is constricting and boring, Kabe inverts this idea. For him, the monotony of daily life in the West is a trap that he is able to escape by jumping the wall. It is noted in the story that part of the problem for the West German authorities was that they could not retrieve Kabe because they do not recognize the border. By jumping, he is breaking free of the political realities that make up West German society. He does not do this out of a desire to enter into East German society—if that were his goal, he could defect to the East. But it is not exclusively the joy of the jump that drives Kabe, it is the excitement—even in some regards luxury—that the fallout from the jump gives him. Kabe pits the two states against each other as a form of entertainment.

Kabe is eventually removed to the countryside so he “seine Sprünge an alten

Burgmauern fortsetzen mochte...löste am dritten Tag eine Fahrkarte nach Berlin und sprang” (33) [might continue to jump over castle walls... on the third day, he bought a train ticket to Berlin and jumped] (34). This makes it clear that Kabe is exclusively interested in jumping in Berlin, that there is something unique about the Berlin Wall that makes it different. As mentioned earlier, the jumps over the Berlin Wall lead to a change of pace and a level of care in the East that Kabe is not used to, which suggests that his jumps have less to do with the act and more to do with the outcome—the ability to straddle the two systems, while pledging loyalty to neither. It is a way of existing in-between, and it makes Kabe a Grenzgänger. However, Kabe’s system relies on pitting the two states against each other, as well as his continued status as a West German who cannot be punished. He is not disentangling himself from the state, but rather pinning himself between the two opposing systems. His lifestyle relies on the Wall carrying out its function and maintaining the divide between the two states.

The next story, about the “drei Kinogänger” [three moviegoers] (44), marks an important turn in the narrative of *Der Mauerspringer* as the narrator directs his attention towards jumpers from the East. The narrator, now in East Berlin, hears the story from his friend Pommerer, a writer slowly losing his privileges and privacy to state surveillance but who, despite his frustrations, remains ultimately loyal to the GDR. This context is important, because like Kabe, the wall jumpers in the story exhibit no political preference towards either state. They are not dissidents and they do not despise their lives in the East. The charm of the story is in the bizarre and naive motivations of the characters, who decide to jump the wall not to escape or even for the joy of the act itself, but in order to

watch Western movies—the genre, but also quite literally movies made in the West.

The “Kinogänger” [moviegoers] are not developed characters, but some of their characteristics and quirks are revealed. The action centers around a house where two of the three boys live and that is quite literally built into the Wall. This is about as close as one can reasonably get to the narrator’s notion of a “Ort nur noch auf der Grenze” (22) [at place only on the border] (23, transl. modified). Granted, the two boys also live within the structure of East German society, but they have the privilege of seeing into the border structure and deciphering how it functions. Their interest in the watchtower and guards seems to rely on their ambivalent relationship to the wall, which is built into their everyday lives to the point where it loses its significance. Their role as Mauerspringer seems to be almost incidental, stemming from nothing more than boredom and incidental access to an easy vantage point. Both are primarily raised by single mothers, have the same name and are almost the same age, and seem to exist as a unit within the house. The narrator notes that “nur, wenn sie sich gegenseitig riefen, konnten sie sicher sein, welcher Willy gemeint war” (45) [they knew for sure which Willy was wanted only when one called for the other"] (49). The boys have an identity that is rooted in the other: from a removed perspective they are perceived as being the same and only gain individual identities through their interactions with each other. It is a relationship that is reminiscent of the way the narrator portrays the city itself—alternately as a two cities of two halves of the same city. They also fit into a “twin” motif that appears throughout the novel. There are the two news reporters who look identical as the narrator flips between the West and East German news. (27-28) In a later story he collects there are two FBI agents whose

only differences were "die Namen der Staatsoberhäupter, die gerahmt über den Köpfen der feindlichen Kollegen hingen... eine Metan- und einer Goldfüllung [und] eine Ruhla- und einer Schweizer Uhr" (79) [the names on the wall behind each of the enemy chiefs, a gold and an amalgam filling, and a Ruhla and a Swiss watch] (86, modified). He expresses the personal fear, in regard to the question of what he would have been like had he grown up in the East, that "Aber der Verdacht, die Individuen in Deutschland seien auf eine schreckliche Weise verwechselbar, läßt sich nicht an der Grenze abfertigen." (15) [the suspicion that individuals in Germany are in a frightening way interchangeable cannot be discarded at the border] (14). The interchangeability of the twins speaks to the narrator's fear that identity is entirely reliant on conditioning. He is at once dismayed by the sharp differences between East and West Germans and unnerved by the suggestion that his identity is not as organic as he perceives it to be. The twins deal with something similar in that they occupy the grey area between being a unit and two singular beings. It seems intentional that the only other facts given about them are that they are generally average. They are flat characters whose only distinguishing feature is the uncertainty of their individuality.

The catalyst for the action is their friend Lutz, a character whose one defining character trait comprises the totality of his identity. Lutz's passion for Westerns (the genre, though his motive for jumping is accessing western-made Westerns) supersedes any imposed identity. He is not concerned with the state or with the Wall. Everything he does in the story is in service of his compulsion to consume Westerns. The other sparse details related are that he comes from Prenzlauer Berg, a notoriously artsy sector of East

Berlin, he rides a motorcycle, and his favorite genre is the "Italo-Western" (47) [Spaghetti Western].⁶ Information about Lutz's life is unnecessary because from these few details the nature of his insubordination to the state is clear. He is introduced as someone who "verbrachte sein arbeitsfreies Leben im Kino" (46) [spent his work-free life at the movies] (translation mine). The emphasis on his lack of occupation is significant because it designates him as an unproductive member of society—similar to Kabe. This impression is furthered by the kind of leisure he chooses to indulge in instead. An interest in films implies that one enjoys the arts and fiction, which are regarded to a certain extent in both capitalist and socialist societies as superfluous and dangerous. The nature of the movie-going experience also comes with the association of laziness, as it is the most passive form of consuming art. Lutz's preferred genre is also—quite literally—western, and so concerned with western conceptions of independence and heroism. Lutz's behavior can be seen as a reflection of this influence. He is forthright, determined, and seemingly unconcerned with the norms around him. He persuades the workers at the West German movie theater to accept their East German money and IDs, and when he finally decides to leave the East over a ripped film roll he exclaims his discontent to the closest person. Even his motorcycle is the modern city-dweller's version of a cowboy's horse, and carries with it the connotations that he is "cool" and free-spirited. While the GDR values conformity and work, Lutz's life is ruled by pleasure and fantasy, and it seems to be this disassociation from the rules of regular life that allows Lutz to become a "Grenzgänger." He becomes the star of his own Western.

⁶ The Spaghetti Western is a style of Western made in Italy that was very popular in Germany (cf. Cox).

Lutz is not made out to be a traditional defector, though the underlying reasons for his defection are part of the larger problems with the GDR. The final straw for Lutz is when a film roll at an East German movie theater rips, and “auch bei ihm etwas riß” (51) [something inside him tears too] (55, modified), an indirect nod to the poor quality of many products in the GDR. There is also the fact that he has to watch most of his films secretly because of censorship and repression of western culture in the East. Lutz coincidentally leaves on the same day the Stasi arrest the two Willys, but he does not have any foreknowledge of this. He does not flee persecution, he flees bad cinema, though for Lutz it appears these things are one and the same. Lutz may have a more specific set of concerns than most defectors, but it is still the oppressive culture of the GDR that causes him to leave. At the same time he shows no loyalty to the West other than his appreciation of the movies.

Lutz does not even seem to acknowledge the state, or the Wall, as real entities, probably because other aspects of life pale in comparison to his singular passion for movies. Though he is the character least engaged with the political reality of the two German states, in his pursuit of the West he manages to undermine the divide. The three boys overcome the Wall with impossible ease, in doing so robbing it of its power as a border between the two countries. It is unwittingly anarchic. Once in the West, Lutz continues to manipulate the situation so they can get what they want, and continues to undermine the distinction between the two systems. He forces the movie theater to accept their East German marks as though they were West German, convincing the cashier to accept the money with the vague threat, “wie [solle] er seinen Freunden im Kiez einen

solchen Empfang klarmachen" (47) [how should he explain this reception to his friends in the neighborhood] (translation mine). Again, Lutz refuses to acknowledge the Wall as a barrier or distinguish between East and West Berlin. The boys also refuse to stay in the West, a decision that confirms that there is no ideological drive underlying the boys' actions. The boys, in particular Lutz, appear to have identities that are unaffected by the dichotomy of the two systems.

From this point on the stories that the narrator collects become more politically minded. Returning to Robert he picks up the story of Walter Bolle, portrayed by Robert as the man, "der auf eigene Faust Krieg gegen die DDR führen wollte" (75) [who wanted to wage war on the DDR single-handed"] (82). The story itself is actually about his increasingly convoluted role as a spy for both countries, and culminates with him setting up a giant transmitter and "predigt... den Krieg gegen die Mauer" (80) [preach[ing] war against the Wall] (87). Bolle is single-mindedly fixated on the destruction of the Wall, though he has no discernable motive or further goal. There is an implication in his name that he could be something of a freedom fighter—the name "Bolle" sounds similar to "Bollwerk;" perhaps Bolle is a "Bollwerk der Freiheit" [bulwark of freedom]. He is initially jailed in the East for attempting to cross the border, and it seems as though he is a generic defector. However, once in the West he crashes into the German-Austrian border, an act that suggests a general contempt for all national boundaries. Soon after he tries to recruit his military friends to tear down the Wall with him (76). Exactly why Bolle wants to destroy the Wall, and what he expects to come of its destruction, is never even guessed at. What is clear is that, like Lutz, he has a single-minded fixation that

leaves no room for any kind of national affiliation. Bolle's ensuing role as a double agent for both countries confirms his lack of loyalty to either. "Walter Bolle war in eine Lage geraten, in der er sich selbst am treuesten blieb, wenn er im Dienst beider deutscher Staaten beide aneinander verriet" (80) [Walter Bolle had got himself into a situation where he stayed truest to himself when he betrayed each German state to the other on orders from both] (87). Bolle does not have the ideological fervor of Schalter or the apolitical anarchic drive of Kabe and the "Kinogänger." However, like Kabe, he pits the two systems against each other, and like Lutz, he does so in the service of a singular goal. Unlike any of the preceding characters, Bolle's identity is entirely wrapped up in his relationship to the Wall.

In response to this story Pommerer presents Gartenschläger, who is also obsessed with dismantling the Wall and actually physically attempts to take it apart. Again, this impulse is implied by his name: "Schläger" translates to racket or bat, and can mean something analogous to "thug" when used to refer to a person—in any case, something destructive and forceful. In particular, he becomes notorious for stealing automatic rifle machines at the border that he calls his "Kameraden" (103) [comrades], language that anthropomorphizes them and suggests an equivalence between him and the border machines. Gartenschläger seems to want to emancipate the "Kameraden" through any and all means, and as he continues to steal them he acquires a sense of invincibility. Similarly to Bolle, the question of motive is unclear. It seems as though Gartenschläger is intent on stealing the machines as a way to undermine the GDR regime, but it is ultimately more of a personal endeavor than a political one. The story ends with Gartenschläger being blown

up after he cannot resist returning to the site of his first heist to steal another machine. The narrator suggests that this act is a bit like a moth flying into a flame: despite knowing the danger, he has a compulsive need to return to the Wall. Gartenschläger's fate is the first time that the stories take a dark turn. The lightness with which the Wall is treated falls away; the lethal defense systems that the narrator notes as a way to emphasize the improbability of the story of the "Kinogänger" finally become tangible to the reader. He appears, finally, to be a character who seeks to inhabit the border; he is not particularly affected by the ideology of either state, instead finding kinship in the inanimate weapons at the border. The fact that the closest thing to beings at the border (other than guards from East Germany, who Gartenschläger detests) are non-human machines hints at the impossibility of existing at the border. Gartenschläger's repeated attempts to retrieve pieces of the Wall are what destroys him, underscoring the impossibility of identification with the Wall. His death cuts through the illusion the narrator is chasing and in doing so essentially brings the story chain to a close. The actual final story in the chain comes from an eavesdropping outsider and feels tangential to the interests of the narrator.

The stories all reflect different aspects of the narrator's journey in the novel. The lightness and frivolity with which the border is treated in the early stories gives way to darker stories with political intrigue and fatal consequences. In the meantime, the narrator's experiences are driving him away from his initial hypothesis and towards an understanding of the Wall as the enforcer of a deeply entrenched ideological divide.

I.2 There's No Place Like Home: In Pursuit of the "Real" Grenzgänger

The final passage of the novel is not the only time that the narrator recounts a dream, nor is it the only time that they revolve around themes of intimacy and reconciliation. His ex-girlfriend, Lena, first appears in the story in a dream the narrator has right before he makes his first extended trip into East Germany. He finds himself on "einer Schiffsfahrt auf einem schlamm-braunen Fluß, dessen Wasser bis zum Horizont reichen" (33) [a boat ride on a mud-brown river whose waters stretch to the horizon. (34)]. He sees a blurry female figure from behind that he recognizes as Lena, which he interprets as "die Einlösung einer alten, zu oft verschobenen Verabredung." [the fulfillment of an old invitation, too often postponed] It seems as though Lena is about to turn around and become a fully fledged character and the two will have a conversation. The narrator wants more than this; he wants Lena to be a companion for him on this uncertain adventure. But here the dream takes a turn.

Ich will sie ansprechen, meiner Freude darüber Ausdruck geben, daß wir diese Entdeckungsreise gemeinsam machen, aber bevor ich ihren Nacken berühre, wirft mich eine Woge aus dem Gleichgewicht, ich schlittere über Bord. Obwohl mich die plötzlich reißenden Wasser auf gleicher Höhe mit dem Schiffsdeck halten, erreicht meine Hand den Fender nicht mehr. Ich schwimme ans Ufer, Rauch steigt auf zwischen fremdartigen Bäumen, Licht schimmert hinter Fenstern, die Umrisse von Menschen werden erkennbar, ich werde nicht verloren sein. Aber ich werde mich ohne alle Hilfsmittel im Urwald zurechtfinden müssen, alle persönlichen Sachen — Geld, Ausweis, Kleider — sind auf dem Schiff bei Lena geblieben und fahren mit ihr davon. (33)

[I want to speak to her, to express my joy at our taking this voyage of discovery together, but before I can touch the nape of her neck, a wave upsets my balance and I slide overboard. Although the suddenly violent waters keep me level with the stern, my hand can't reach the boat's fender. I swim to shore. Smoke rises among exotic trees, light glows behind windows, human silhouettes become visible; I will not be lost. But I'll have to find my way through the primeval forest

unarmed; all my personal belongings—money, papers, clothes—are still on the boat with Lena, sailing off with her.] (34-35, transl. modified)

As the narrator reaches out to Lena, the muddy waters become violent and throw him overboard. It is made clear that it is almost sentient—certainly closer to sentience than the holographic, faceless image of Lena. That "wasser" [water] is in the plural throughout the passage highlights its (or their) unusual—even mystical—nature. The narrator is not allowed back on the boat and instead is forced to alight to land without any of his belongings. The belongings themselves are all societal necessities: money as a stand-in for essential needs like food and shelter, "Ausweis" [papers] an official confirmation of one's existence and nationality, and clothes at once a form of bodily protection and an expression of cultural identity. This dream occurs right as the narrator is about to pick up his Visa to go to East Germany, and all three of these objects take on a specific meaning in relation to the border and travelling in the East. The "Ausweis" is necessary for crossing the border in either direction. In a similar vein, the Visa the narrator is about to collect is what marks the West German as an outsider, a visitor. Similarly, money is both a general signal of status and one that is intrinsically tied to nationality (especially in a pre-European Union world). As for clothes, the narrator mentions the difference in dress between East and West Germans on multiple occasions. Coming off an airplane at the beginning of the novel he witnesses the splitting of East and West Germans into their respective lines. "Leder trennt sich von Sky, Levis von nachgemachten Jeans, Natur von Kunstfaser, Grell von Grau" (9) [Leather parts company with vinyl, Levis with imitation jeans, natural with synthetic fiber, gaudy with gray] (8, modified). Nationality is inscribed in the clothes available to each group (and to an extent, what money can buy).

The East Germans do not have access to branded items like Levis, nor are their clothes made from high-end materials or bright colors. The relative poverty of East Germany is on full display when set against the bright, expensive clothes of the West Germans.

It is not a stretch to assume that the forced abandonment of these items symbolizes a loss of security and identity for the narrator. (It is interesting that the official English translation of this passage describes him as “unarmed,” as though these things are weapons or guards.) Unlike his actual forays into East Germany, in the dream he has to enter the unknown without evidence of his identity. The settlement on the shore of the river is clearly meant to be strange to him. The language is reminiscent of a work like *Heart of Darkness* (1899), where the main character takes a journey down a jungle-shrouded river and has to confront a culture he does not understand. However, there are moments of familiarity for Schneider’s narrator—he recognizes trees, houses, and people, even if they are different in form to what he is used to. He concedes that he “wird nicht verloren sein” [will not be lost]. These items are aids—“Hilfsmittel”—not necessities. Similarly, Lena appears to be an aid, something he desires as he faces the unknown. It becomes clear that this is because she is a link between the familiar and the alien—between West and East Germany. When the narrator wakes up and immediately calls her, he explains that his desire is “mit dir einen Tag lang das Land besuchen, das du mir als erste gezeigt hast” (34) [to spend a day with you, in the land which you were the first to show me (35)], therein revealing that his memories of East Berlin are intrinsically tied to his relationship with Lena.

Lena is an example of a “real” Grenzgänger. She is a defector from East Germany

who remains in a kind of limbo state, unable to fully adjust to life in the West but unable (and unwilling), to return to the East. The narrator reveals that his first trip to East Berlin was to visit her family for the first time since the wall had been built. The trip gives him some insight into Lena's character.

Die Familie war inzwischen zu verwechseln mit einer Heimat. Als Lena den Kopf in den Schoß ihrer Schwester legte, sah ich ein Ruhebedürfnis erfüllt, durch das ich mich in der gemeinsamen Westberliner Wohnung überfordert fühlte. Lenas Lachen, das mir dort immer nur aus einer Erinnerung hervorzubrechen schien, klang hier gegenwärtig... Es war, als sei Lena in eine Geborgenheit zurückgekehrt, mit der sie sich nie mehr begnügen und die sie immer vermissen würde. (37)

[The family, meanwhile, had become Lena's homeland. When she laid her head in her sister's lap, I saw a need for peace fulfilled which, in the apartment we shared in West Berlin, I felt I couldn't satisfy. Lena's laughter, which in our own apartment always seemed to break out of a memory, rang here with immediacy... it was as though Lena had reclaimed a security which could never content her again, but which she would always miss.] (40)

Lena's lack of stability becomes clear to the narrator as he witnesses this reunion.

Meeting her family again is a homecoming in every sense of the word. It is not just a return to her family but a return to her country, all wrapped into one. The word "Heimat" [homeland] has a complicated history, in part because of misuse by the Nazis, and in part because, unlike many other European countries, the two post-war German states could not point to a definitive "Heimat." The narrator seems to be on a journey to find a unified Germany, or some alternative to the dual system, but here he has to concede that Lena's "Heimat" is East Germany, even as her choice to move to the West leaves her unable to retrieve this part of her identity, keeping her in a permanent state of unease. In West Berlin she will always be missing the link to her homeland, but she can also no longer be satisfied by life in East Berlin.

The narrator then contrasts the two societies based on his impression of Lena's sister's house. "Alles im Haus strahlte Wärme und Dauer aus... Im Vergleich dazu erschien mir der Staat im Westen, der sich als Gesellschaft ausgab, ungleich gewalttätiger und stärker, unsichtbar, aber allgegenwärtig" (38) [Everything in her house radiated warmth and permanence... by comparison, the state to the West, which claimed to be a society, seemed to me far more violent and powerful, invisible but omnipresent] (41m transl. modified). The characterization of the East as cozy and familiar, and the West as corrupted by the state, flies in the face of the traditional Western narrative, and indeed the narrator's own opinion in other parts of the novel. In the old-fashioned, well-worn decor of the sister's house he finds "Gesellschaft" [society] that transcends the power of state ideology. He sees items that have lived through multiple regimes (he notes that "der Staat blieb ohnmächtig vor Kachelöfen" (38) [the state was powerless before the tiled stove] (41), without being affected by them. Meanwhile in the West, capitalism has transformed daily life completely, obliterating the old and familiar in favor of things that are newer or more functional. Paradoxically, a communist surveillance state has less of a foothold in the domestic sphere than a capitalist democracy, though it is noteworthy that the full force of this characterization comes from the assumption that the reader will recognize this as a subversion of expectations—the narrator's bias is once again evident. The conclusion he reaches is that "[Lenas] Bedürfnis, Wurzeln zu schlagen, galt nicht nur einem Mann, sondern einer Gesellschaft" (38) [Lena's need to put down roots involved not only a man but a society] (41, modified). Lena is a product of her society, despite having rejected it. She is a tragic character, trapped between two societies and ultimately

unable to break free from the grip of her upbringing. The implication is that primary socialization is unbreakable. Unlike the narrator's vision of his "Grenzgänger," Lena has not emancipated herself from the influence of the state. She cannot even fully switch her loyalties from one to the other. The remnants of her East German upbringing remain. At the same time Lena is a "Grenzgänger" in that she has rejected the comfort of her East German life in favor of a lifestyle she can only have in the West. It is not just that Lena cannot fit into Western society, she also cannot fit into Eastern society. Her identity lies somewhere between.

The narrator seems to initially be attracted to Lena's "foreignness," but increasingly has the sense that he is an inadequate match for her. He is not, for instance, like her two friends who also defected from the East.

Eine unhörbare Fremdsprache hielt Lena und ihre zwei Freundinnen im Westen zusammen: drei Verschwisterte, die in Trödeläden nach getragenen Jacken und Hemden kramten, immer etwas flachere Schuhe trugen als die eingeborenen Frauen, sich weniger körperbetont kleideten, lauter und selbstbewußter sprachen, öfter Ich sagten, sich weniger schminkten und in ein trotziges Gelächter ausbrachen, wenn eine von ihnen plötzlich lauthals die erste Strophe eines FDJ-Liedes rezitierte (38-39).

[An inaudible foreign language bound Lena and her two woman friends in the West: they were like three siblings, who rummaged for secondhand jackets and shirts in junk shops, always wore lower heels and less provocative clothes than the native women, spoke more loudly and self-consciously, said "I" more often, used less makeup, and broke into defiant laughter when one of them suddenly recited the first stanza of a Free German Youth song at the top of her lungs] (41-42).

The narrator identifies the three as bound by an almost invisible foreignness that reveals itself in small turns of phrase, subtle differences in dress, and the way that the women carry themselves. He positions himself as an anthropologist, picking apart the minutiae of

Lena and her friends' behavior in order to classify them as "Other." The language he uses alienates them from West German culture completely. He sees them as foreigners, albeit ones who can pass as natives to the untrained eye. The details that the narrator catches are subtle. The foreign language that they speak is not actually foreign—they are speaking German, but something in the way they speak and behave separates them from West Germans, and binds them together. There is something voyeuristic in the narrator's characterization of Lena and her friends as foreign objects, but also sympathetic.

As the narrator continues to reminisce in later passages, however, the sympathy transforms into a mixture of pity and scorn. Lena's behavior is always attributed to her East German upbringing, but it is increasingly portrayed as misguided and paranoid. She is overly clingy, suspicious of the narrator's every move, and a liar. The narrator focuses on Lena's inability to trust the world around her, and in particular other people. It is clear that the narrator views Lena's assessment of others as rooted more in her own prejudices than in objective reality. The flaws that she finds all align with her view of West German society as something nefarious.

“Das Bedürfnis nach ununterbrochener Nähe wurde verstärkt durch das Gefühl einer ständigen Zurückweisung im Westen... Der Westen war ihr ein Knäuel von Widersprüchen, Halbheiten, leeren Versprechungen, ein anderer Erdteil, nur von Oberflächenhitze erwärmt, darunter ewiges Eis... Der Westen war falsch und verlogen, und Lena bestand mit dem Wahrheitssinn eines Kindes auf dem Wortlaut (90).

[Her need for uninterrupted closeness was only increased by her sense of constant rejection by life in the West... for her the West was a tangle of contradictions, half-hearted gestures, and empty promises; another continent, eternal ice beneath a superficial warmth... The West was false and deceitful, and Lena, with a child's sense of truth, insisted on the literal meaning of words] (98).

The narrator paints a picture of Lena as someone who cannot adjust to life in the West

because she feels as though she is not accepted. He does not address the ways in which this might be true but instead depicts it as a “Gefühl” [feeling], placing the responsibility for this perception squarely on Lena’s shoulders. He also does not view her version of Western society as something worthy of examination. While clearly representative of a greater cultural clash, it is also a perspective particular to Lena and rooted in her experience. This reveals something about the narrator’s position in the novel.

Throughout, he strives to find a place of reconciliation between the two Germanys, but he is unable to extend his own perspective across the border.

Over time, the narrator and Lena’s relationship deteriorates because of their very different ways of existing in the world, and specifically, at least in his view, because of the trauma of Lena’s East German upbringing. Lena needs people to be direct and transparent with her. She cannot deal with uncertainty or multiplicity. The world has to follow her singular narrative, down to the very way that language is constructed.

“Anspielungen, Metaphern, Zweideutigkeiten in meinen Sätzen erschienen als Versuch, etwas zu verbergen” (93) [Allusions, metaphors, ambiguities in my sentences appeared to her as attempt to hide something] (101, modified). These rhetorical devices that the narrator singles out as unacceptable to Lena are similar in that they are ways of obscuring meaning, something that is deeply anxiety-inducing for Lena because they are an easy way to introduce manipulation into the conversation. As the narrator notes earlier in the passage, Lena needs words to be literal because she does not trust the environment that she lives in. However, the narrator does not see Lena's issues as stemming from maladjustment, but from prior conditioning: “In dieser Sehnsucht nach Klarheit und

Entschlossenheit setzte sich noch bei seinen Gegnern die Erziehung eines Staates zu unverbrüchlicher Treue, kämpferischen Einsatz, eiserner Entschlossenheit durch” (93) [This longing for frankness and resolution revealed the effect, even on dissidents, of a state education in steadfast loyalty, militant commitment, and iron determination] (102). The narrator is hinting here at an internal and largely non-consensual loyalty to one’s homeland. Lena has actively left East Germany, but she cannot undo the effects of her upbringing. In addition, her inability to adapt to a West German mindset traps her further within her East German one, and causes her to be a tyrannical force in the narrator’s life.

Despite her own intolerance for lies and half-truths, the narrator notices that Lena writes her own version of reality. Sometimes this is benign, when she imagines or embellishes former lovers, and sometimes it is a way to control the narrator; she often imagines or fabricates stalkers and attackers, for instance (92). Over time he finds himself pulled into her orbit, and his perception of the world becomes aligned with hers in a way he describes as prison-like. “Allmählich begann ich dann, mir Lenas Sehweise zu eigen zu machen. Ich erlernte sie wie eine fremde Sprache, ohne ihre innere Struktur zu verstehen... Ich war in den Innenraum hinter jenem Zaun gelangt, den Lena um sich herumgezogen hatte, und sah die Welt jenseits des Zauns nur noch als etwas Äußeres, von dem es sich zu reinigen galt” (94) [So I gradually acquired Lena’s point of view, learned it like a foreign language without comprehending its inner structure... I had entered the enclosure that Lena had erected around herself; the world beyond the fence was something extraneous, of which I had to purge myself] (103). The image of the narrator as trapped within a structure surrounded by a “Zaun” [fence] immediately evokes

an image of West Berlin, a city that is itself a fenced-in enclosure within the wider world that it consciously rejects. The narrator paints himself as a victim of Lena's maladjustment to life in the West, but this image also gives a glimpse of her own perspective, free of the narrator's self-centered interpretation. Lena, more so than the natives of West Berlin, must be cognizant of the fact that she lives in an enclave within a society that she rejected but still feels attached to. Based on the narrator's observations about her behavior with him and her friends, it seems as though she is trying to create her own pocket within West Berlin where she is allowed to balance her affinity for West German society and her residual affinity for East German values. Lena's particular way of existing clashes with dominant society, of which the narrator is a perfect example. If Lena is an example of a "Grenzgänger," then her presence in the story suggests that there is no real way to detach oneself from the influence of society. Lena cannot fully adjust to life in the West, and the narrator cannot adjust to the East German-influenced lifestyle that she imposes on him. The best he can do is hollowly mimic the "fremde Sprache" [foreign language] imposed on him, without ever attempting to learn it.

At the end of the novel the narrator is still unable to bridge the gap between them, but there is a sense that his project has brought him slightly closer. He discovers her at a bar with his other friend Robert. Even though the two have only just met, they already seem to be bonded in a way that is inaccessible for the narrator. When she leaves he remarks that there is "ein Einverständnis in [Roberts und Lenas] Blicken [aufeinander], das älter ist als jedes Gespräch" (120-121) [an understanding in [Robert and Lena's] glance [at each other] that is older than words] (131). The narrator is excluded from the

intimate relationship they suddenly share. In fact, upon seeing her he finds himself unable to speak. Instead, there is a long passage in which he fumbles through half-formed thoughts full of ellipses and digressions but loosely focused around the narrator's hypotheses about Lena's character.

Aber, was wollte ich sagen: es stimmt, daß die Menschen dort anders... Vielleicht kann man sich, wenn man dort aufgewachsen ist, im Westen nie ganz zu Hause... Jedenfalls ist mir klargeworden, daß du immer noch, ja, nach zwanzig Jahren noch... Dieses Klare, Reine, Gerade... Ich meine die Vorwurfshaltung, diese Sucht, den Fehler außen zu suchen, unschuldig zu bleiben... Ich wollte nur sagen, ich werde mich nicht mehr entschuldigen, nicht mehr rechtfertigen... Jaja, ich habe es immer besser gehabt, immer die kleinen Sicherheiten, ein Kind des Marshall-Plans [...].] (120)

[But what was it I wanted to say? It's true, people over there are different... Perhaps if you've grown up there, you can't ever be at home in the West... Anyway, I realized that you are still, yes, twenty years later... that clear, pure, frank quality... I mean, the reproachfulness, the need to place the blame outside you, to remain innocent... I only wanted to say, I won't apologize, justify myself anymore... Sure sure, I always had it better, all the comforts, a child of the Marshall Plan [...].] (130)

The exchange that the two actually have is stilted and aggressive, and causes Lena to quickly leave. None of the narrator's musings are conveyed to her, and they remain at odds. However, in his disjointed inner monologue the tensions—between lust and distaste, empathy and alienation—are clear. He oscillates between recognizing the differences in their upbringings and empathizing with Lena's struggle as an immigrant and person in exile, and feeling frustrated by her behavior and perception of him. The narrator cannot quite let go of his own opposing feelings. The main point that he is trying to get to in this unfocused stream-of-consciousness seems to be summarized best by his basic assessment that "Menschen [sind] dort anders" [people over there are different].

The narrator has finally realized that Lena cannot adjust to life in the West because her

life in the East was too profoundly different. The narrator does not seem to consider himself as a West German who could experience this in the inverse, because he does not have to. Throughout the novel—even when he travels to the East—he retains his West German identity and the ideological baggage that comes along with it.

The narrator draws parallels between Lena and Robert, his other friend who has emigrated from East Germany. Robert has many of the same characteristics as Lena, but they are not presented in the same way. Like Lena he is guarded and distrustful of West German society. Both characters have an aversion to questions, though the narrator reacts very differently to each: when Lena pretends to know the answer he finds it alluring if not pitiful, whereas when Robert sees questions “eine Schwäche” (74) [a weakness] (82). It is something that the narrator grows to admire and even envy. Robert’s general approach to life seems to be to avoid being caught off guard.

Wo immer [er] ist, Robert steckt sofort seinen Raum ab und bildet ein festes Gerüst von Gewohnheiten aus: Zeitungskiosk, Frühstückscafé, Telefon, Post, Buchladen, Kneipe. Einigen, nicht vielen, die neue Nummer durchsagen, beim gleichen Kellner das gleiche Getränk bestellen, mit dem Wirt, nicht mit dem Kellner ein Gespräch beginnen, nicht drei, sondern einen Flipper ausprobieren und den richtig kennenlernen. Ich kann die letzten drei Monate bei den Indianern am Amazonas verbracht haben: Robert wird ein Zweimarkstück in den Automaten einwerfen, mir den Vortritt beim ersten Spiel lassen und zuhören, nachdem ich verloren habe (75).

No matter where he is, Robert stakes out his territory right away and works up a firm routine: newsstand, breakfast café, telephone, post office, bookstore, bar. Give a few people, not too many, your phone number; order the same drink from the same waiter; strike up a conversation with the owner, not the waiter; try out one pinball machine, not three, and get to know that one well. I might have spent the last three months with the Indians along the Amazon—Robert will put a two-mark piece in the machine, let me go first, and then listen once I’ve lost] (82).

Robert’s reaction to displacement is to establish a set of customs that place him at an

advantage. His system puts him in a position of power, even in a situation where he is a foreigner or interloper. He makes sure he has all the fundamental elements needed to feel secure in a community, and he manipulates them so that he consistently succeeds. Robert and the narrator always meet at the same bar, by the same pinball machine that Robert has worked out how to beat. The pinball machine is itself a metaphor for the way that Robert operates in the West. It is a decidedly Western invention—the narrator notes that they do not exist in the East—but the machine he chooses to conquer is old, it "piepst noch nicht elektronisch... Der ganze Automat reagiert so langsam, daß man nie den Verdacht los wird, er funktioniert nach dem Prinzip des Flaschenzugs" (19) [doesn't chirp electronically yet... The machine reacts as slowly as if it worked by pulleys] (19). Robert has found something representative of West German culture and has put on a show of mastering it, but he can only beat this one machine, which is old-fashioned and slow. Robert does not attempt to play any other pinball machine, and certainly not quicker, newer models. He has also systematically broken down the way that the machine works, down to the exact point at which the ball needs to hit the flippers. At the same time there is something intuitive about Robert's playing style, as illustrated when the narrator explains that "ich [spiele] mit den Händen... und Robert mit dem Körper, und meistens verliere ich" (20) [I play with my hands and Robert with his body, and I usually lose] (19). Robert seems to embody the game more than the narrator, who plays the game without full-body conviction. However, his total immersion is not really intuitive, but in fact the consequence of a careful study of the machine. There is also an underlying sense of apathy on the narrator's part. Robert usually wins because he is trying much harder.

This applies on a macro scale. Robert has worked out how to appear powerful and well-adjusted, but the artifice lies in the small, tightly controlled world he has constructed in order to feel this way. If he were truly comfortable in the West he would not need to put on a show of mastering the environment he is in. The narrator's joking comment about returning from a trip with the "Indianern am Amazonas" [Indians along the Amazon] calls back to his dream about Lena; but while she floats along the river with the narrator's things, Robert is all the while safely back in West Berlin, waiting until he is completely in control of their reunion (through first winning a pinball game) before even asking about it.

What really ties Lena and Robert together as characters is the way that both are engaged by the same questions as the narrator. Robert is a poet and something of a public figure. The narrator notes that he refuses to endorse or reject the way of life on either side of the border, despite constantly coming under pressure to do so. "Da die Erkundigung nach seinen Eindrücken im Westen meist mit der Hoffnung auf ein Bekenntnis zur westlichen Lebensform verknüpft war, zog er es vor, sich einen Ort im Niemandsland zwischen den Grenzen zu suchen"(21) [Since queries about his impressions of the West were usually tied to the hope that he would pledge allegiance to a Western life-style, he preferred instead to hunt for a no-man's-land between the borders] (21). It seems important that Robert does not actually occupy a "Niemandsland," but like the narrator is looking for it. At the same time it is true that, like Lena, he is a kind of "Grenzgänger," and like Lena, he is trapped between the two systems but ultimately loyal in his very thought processes to the East.

The ideological split between the two characters causes frequent disagreements. The narrator describes a phenomenon between them where they appear to each take on the identity of their respective state systems. “Robert und ich reden normalerweise in der ersten Person Singular miteinander. Aber es gibt Situationen, in denen einer von beiden in den Ihr-Ton verfällt” (20) [Robert and I usually talk to each other in the singular. But situations arise in which one or the other lapses into the you-we vein] (20). To the narrator this is an indication that the two men can never detach themselves entirely from the state. They subconsciously understand themselves as representatives of opposing systems. Furthermore, the narrator frames it as something that they give way to, as though each man’s understanding of the other as individuals separate from the state system is artificial, rather than the other way around. The times that this dynamic takes precedent usually foreshadows an argument between the two, something that happens several times throughout the novel but comes to a head when the two disagree over whether a protest they both witness was staged or not. Upon witnessing it, Robert is initially excited because he thinks it marks the downfall of society, an opinion that he quickly reveals is tied to his own experiences of state control. “Das ist der Verfall der Staatsmacht», sagt Robert, ein uraltes Leuchten in den Augen. ‘Die Ruhe, mit der sie das machen! Das gibt es ja gar nicht!... In der DDR, da wären in drei Minuten die Bullen da. Alle Seitenstraßen gesperrt, die U-Bahn-Eingänge besetzt, in fünf Minuten alle festgenommen, und dann ab in die Produktion’”(83) [‘They’re so cool about it! It’s unbelievable!’ says Robert, with an atavistic gleam in his eyes. ‘It’s the collapse of state power... In the DDR, the cops would be here in three minutes flat. All the side streets

blocked off, the U-Bahn entrances occupied, everyone rounded up in five minutes and off to the factory'] (90-91). Robert expects the West German police to be as well-organized and controlling as the East German Stasi. Because of his experiences he can only understand an uninterrupted protest as part of a larger failing of the state. Moments later he changes his mind, but continues to overemphasize (at least in the eyes of the narrator) the role of the state. He decides the entire protest must be a set-up, something that infuriates the narrator, who strikes back.

‘Unsinn! Das war eine spontane Aktion. Und weil sie spontan war, hat die Polizei nicht rechtzeitig reagieren können.’

Du hast eine rührend naive Meinung vom Staat. Du schaust ihn an mit deinen Kinderaugen und glaubst, was du siehst.»

‘Und du hältst den Staat für allmächtig. Alles, was geschieht, ist vorausprogrammiert, kontrolliert, von unsichtbaren Dirigenten gelenkt. Dir fehlt die Erfahrung der Studentenbewegung.’

‘Hör bloß mit deiner Studentenbewegung auf! Die war doch genauso von oben eingefädelt. Wer hat denn die ersten Bomben in die Studentenbewegung gebracht?’ (84-85)

[‘That’s crazy! That was a spontaneous demonstration. And the police didn’t come in time precisely because it was spontaneous.’

‘Your notion of the state is touchingly naïve. You look at it with your child’s eyes and believe what you see.’

‘And you think everything is omnipotent. Everything that happens is preprogrammed, monitored, controlled by invisible hands. You didn’t live through the student movement.’

‘Lay off with your student movement! It was manipulated from above, just like everything else. Who brought the first bombs into that movement?’] (92)

The fight that ensues becomes more about each character’s conditioning than about the protest itself. The initial assumptions each makes are rooted in experience. For the narrator, a spontaneous protest is possible because he expects that any protest movement—and society at large—is not under constant surveillance. For Robert it is

inconceivable that there would not be some form of consistent surveillance on every corner of society. The argument extends beyond the immediate moment, back to the student protests of 1968. What the narrator remembers as an organic, uncontrolled movement, Robert suspects was state-controlled. Robert is infuriated by the narrator because he thinks he is unable to grasp the full picture of society. He has “Kinderaugen” [child’s eyes], an accusation that bears some resemblance to the narrator’s own perception of Lena’s need for honesty and directness. In both cases, one party views the other as having a simplistic outlook because an integral part of their worldview is either unrecognized or devalued. The specific way that the GDR functioned—through a facade of democracy and freedom—leads both to Robert’s belief in underlying state machinations and Lena’s aversion to obscured meaning. They both stem from the same experience with deception and obfuscation. While the narrator does not seem to perceive Robert as naive in the way he does Lena, he thinks that both are paranoid. He cannot understand the reality in which Lena and Robert grew up, so he discounts it entirely.

There are moments where the narrator becomes aware of his own biases. As the fight with Robert ends he manages to dissociate himself from the argument and look at it from a bird’s eye view: “[Ich] sehe... uns mit müden, schweren Bewegungen aufeinander einschlagen, zornig unsere Lektionen lallend, gehorsam den Staaten, die nicht mehr in Sicht sind” (86) [I see us striking out at each other with weary, weighted blows, angrily babbling our lessons, true to the states whose influence we no longer recognize] (93). His description is disturbing because it sucks all humanity out of the interaction. What appeared moments before to be a clash of opinion transforms into a mechanical

regurgitation of state ideology. This suggests a fundamental absence of free will, something ironically much more in line with Robert's worldview than the narrator's. Robert already expects some level of state control over the external world. What the narrator sees in this moment, however, is a state colonization of the inner world. In this light the "allmächtig" [omnipotent] state takes on a much darker meaning. Like something out of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), the state has influence over the minds of its citizens, an influence that is so pervasive that it lingers even after one renounces the state, and even when one can see the process in action.

The question of self-determination becomes increasingly important to the narrator, who becomes aware of the mechanisms underlying his fights with Robert. At first he analyzes Robert's worldview:

Für Robert stellt sich die westliche Gesellschaft im Prinzip als ein gut organisiertes, von einigen Eingeweihten absichtlich in Unordnung gehaltenes Syndikat dar, in dem die Rechnung der Bosse aufgeht... Der Vorteil dieses Wahns ist, daß an allem, was geschieht, etwas Äußeres Schuld hat. Robert ist, im guten wie im bösen, immer noch aufgehoben in einem Staat, der für alles die Verantwortung trägt, Robert ist niemals selber schuld (86).

[As Robert sees it, Western society is essentially a well-organized syndicate deliberately kept in a state of disorder by a few people in the know... The advantage of his delusion is that the blame always falls on something outside him. For good or for bad, Robert is sheltered by a state that takes responsibility for everything; Robert himself is never to blame] (94).

The narrator initially sees Robert as something of a conspiracy theorist. He distrusts the very fundamentals of society and sees the visible world as something manipulated by unseen forces. The narrator is unambiguous in his criticism of this viewpoint: not only has Robert constructed a fantasy, but it is one that benefits Robert by placing the state as

a shield between his actions and any consequences. The narrator does not necessarily argue that Robert's assessment is untrue when it comes to communist or "eastern" countries, but he does not grapple with what it would mean for Robert to be correct, even if only about his country of origin. Implicit in the narrator's disdain is an endorsement of Western society and a deep-rooted belief in the way that it functions. Yet again, Robert's understanding of the world proves to have some merit when the narrator realizes that perhaps the state *is* responsible for the way he behaves and his conviction otherwise is its own form of state control. "Was würde ich anfangen, wenn ich aufhören würde, die Schuld im Prinzip eher bei mir als beim Staat zu suchen, wie ich es gelernt habe? Wo hört ein Staat auf und fängt ein Ich an?" (87) [What would happen to me if I stopped finding fault with myself, as I've been taught to do, and blamed everything on the state? Where does a state end and a self begin?] (94-95). In collecting stories the narrator seems to approach an answer to this question. Even as the narrator operates in a matrix of people inescapably influenced by the state, he collects stories that are linked together—more so than merely through their interactions with the Berlin Wall—by the characters' emancipation from the influence of the state.

On the other end of the spectrum from Robert and Lena lies Pommerer, the narrator's friend who stubbornly remains in East Germany despite being censored, under Stasi surveillance, and generally frustrated with the limitations that come with life in the East. A recurring motif in the novel is Pommerer's problems with his phone, along with other small inconveniences that seem increasingly likely to have been orchestrated rather than just bad luck. First his bell doesn't work, then his phone doesn't work. On one

occasion the narrator calls the number and finds himself a spy on another phone call—a nod to the lack of privacy inherent to a surveillance state, even on supposedly closed communication lines. Despite this, and despite his critiques of the system, Pommerer is ultimately loyal to the regime. He sometimes rattles off propaganda lines, like “nach Westen wird geschaut, im Osten wird gebaut” (52) [to the West they gild, in the East we build] (56), with an unclear ratio of sarcasm to conviction. Like Robert, he slips into an accusatory plural “you” when discussing the West with the narrator. When talking about the tall post-war buildings in the city he explains, “damals wohnte *euer* Zeitungszar noch in einsamer Höhe und ließ seine Botschaften um den Dachfirst seines Hochhauses laufen. Bis zum Alexanderplatz konnte man die Leuchtschriften erkennen. Mit den Wohntürmen haben *unsere* Planer dann zwar die Sicht auf den Westen, aber auch das Viertel verbaut” (42-43, emphasis mine) [In those days your newspaper king still ruled the sky and ran headlines around the cornice of his building. You could read Springer’s electric news as far away as Alexanderplatz. Our planners did manage to block the view to the West with their apartment towers, but they also wrecked the neighborhood] (46). Again in this passage the influence of state propaganda is clear, and Pommerer appears to be completely sincere as he parrots the official narrative about the buildings. This is perhaps a moment where the demographic of the intended audience is clear. The narrator does not say anything to contradict Pommerer or give his own view of the story, but part of the effect of Pommerer’s explanation is the implicit shock-value of his characterization of the state as heroically sheltering East Berlin residents from a kind of West Berlin imperialism, when the narrative the average reader—presumably a citizen of the

FRG—would consider it censorship. Pommerer, even more so than Robert and Lena, represents the perspective of the DDR and stands in opposition to the narrator and his West German outlook. Unlike the narrator's other friends, with whom he disagrees but whose defection supports a western-centric view of West Germany as the superior country, Pommerer complicates the western-centric narrative by refusing to conflate his criticisms of the state with a repudiation of the DDR.

Despite this, Pommerer is not an obedient East German citizen, and he does not pretend to be fully satisfied with life in East Berlin. When the narrator visits and walks with him around the quiet city at night, Pommerer makes it clear that he feels stifled. “Die Linie 6, die geht direkt unter meiner früheren Wohnung durch. Kennst du die verplombten Bahnhöfe da unten? Ich wollte ja nie in den Westen. Aber manchmal, wenn in der Küche die Teelöffel zu klingeln anfangen, da hab ich gedacht: Einmal wenigstens möchte ich in diesem Zug sitzen und unter mir durchfahren” (52) [Line 6—it runs right under my former apartment. You know those sealed-off stations down there? I never wanted to go to the West. But sometimes, when the teaspoons in the kitchen start vibrating, I’d think: Just once I’d like to be sitting in that train and riding on through] (56). He bemoans his lack of access to the nightlife in Kreuzberg as the two try and find a bar in Mitte, which is deserted because of its proximity to the border. The unnatural separation that the Wall creates is brought into focus by Pommerer’s frustrations. It is not that he wants to defect from East Germany—he makes this very clear throughout the novel, even though by the end he has begun to accept that he will have to leave—but the lack of choice leaves him with a sense of longing. The ghost train that runs underneath

the city encapsulates the paradox of the two Berlins: the Wall helps enforce the difference between them, but despite it they continue to exist in concert with each other. The original joint foundations of the city cannot be undone by the current political reality. Pommerer seems to be attuned to the artificial barrier that the Wall represents, especially when he admits to the narrator that he has spent a considerable amount of time observing it through a telescope to try and find the flaws in surveillance. He is adamant that this has nothing to do with wanting to leave, "aber wenn du so ein Ding vor der Nase hast, wird es ein Zwang, den Fehler zu finden" (55) [But when you've got a thing like that staring you in the face, finding the flaw becomes an obsession] (60). Pommerer does not view the West favorably, and unlike the narrator he does not seem to think that the separation of East and West Germany is a problem, but the authority that the Wall represents begs to be subverted. Implicit in this desire, and in Pommerer's other wistful comments about West Berlin, is an entitlement to the other half of the city.

I.3 A Nobody in a No-Man's Land

The similarity between the two halves of Berlin is something the narrator points out at the very beginning of the novel when he flies over the city. "Aus der Luft betrachtet, bietet die Stadt einen durchaus einheitlichen Anblick... Vorherrschend ist der Eindruck einer linearen, auf dem Rechteck aufbauenden Ordnung, aus der alles Krumme verbannt ist" (5) [Seen from the air, the city appears perfectly homogenous... The overriding impression is of a linear order, one which derives from the rectangle and rules

out any bending... At most, the duplication of public landmarks—television tower, convention hall, zoo, city hall, and sports stadium—prefigures a city in which the same taste has brought forth the same things twice (3-4)]. The exception to the order is the Wall. The status of Berlin is unclear throughout. Is it a city or two cities? And if it is two cities, are they fundamentally the same or irrevocably different? Is the Wall an artificial rip through the city, or is it the emblem of a deeper rift? The narrator certainly believes that the Wall is artificial, but the actions of the characters suggests that the difference between the systems on either side of the Wall are imprinted on the minds of each country's citizens on an almost primal level. Perhaps this is why, when the narrator looks out of Pommerer's telescope, he sees the wall as "hinfällig wie die wieder ausgegrabene Grundmauer eines längst verschwundenen Gebäudes" (41) [decrepit like the re-excavated foundation of a building long gone] (44, modified). and why at the beginning of the novel he describes the plane he lands in as "eines jener von Einstein erträumten Verkehrsmittel, aus dem lächerlich jung und ahnungslos Reisende steigen und eine Stadt besuchen, in der seit gestern tausend Jahre vergangen sind" (6) [a vehicle like those Einstein dreamed of, from which laughably young and unsuspecting travelers emerge to tour a city where, since yesterday, a thousand years have passed] (5). The Wall is in many ways a structure out of time and place. It does not naturally fit into the structure or style of the cityscape; it awkwardly cuts through streets and buildings. Much of the inherent strangeness of the Wall is a consequence of the fact that it quite literally was erected overnight. It is also far from a static object. By the late 80s the Wall had been rebuilt and was constantly being improved so that it could perform its function better. And yet despite its recent origins the

Wall enforces the deep ideological rift between the GDR and the DDR that strikes the narrator as impenetrable. It has accelerated the process of alienation between the two countries so that it is as though they have traveled through time or even space to create the magnitude of difference. The experiences of the narrator's East German friends in West Germany mimic those of immigrants from countries that have been separated by a much larger span of space or time than a mere thirty years and a border wall.

The impetus for the narrator's project is his confused sense of his own identity as "Deutscher" in a time where the identifier, rather than clarifying where he is from, only creates more questions.

Falls mein Vaterland existiert, so ist es kein Staat, und der Staat, dessen Bürger ich bin, ist kein Vaterland. Wenn ich auf die Frage nach meiner Nationalität ohne Zögern antworte, ich bin Deutscher, so optiere ich damit offensichtlich nicht für eine Staat, sondern für meine Zugehörigkeit zu einem Volk, das keine staatliche Identität mehr besitzt. Damit behaupte ich aber gleichzeitig, daß meine nationale Identität nicht an meine Zugehörigkeit zu einem der beiden deutschen Staaten gebunden ist.

Dasselbe gilt für die Behauptung «Ich komme aus Deutschland». Entweder hat der Begriff keinen Sinn, oder ich spreche von einem Land, das auf keiner politischen Landkarte verzeichnet ist. Solange ich von einem Land namens Deutschland spreche, spreche ich weder von der DDR noch von der BRD, sondern von einem Land, das nur in meiner Erinnerung oder Vorstellung existiert. Gefragt, wo es liegt, wüßte ich keinen anderen Aufenthaltsort zu nennen als seine Geschichte und die Sprache, die ich spreche. (117)

[In the case that my fatherland exists, it isn't a state, and the state of which I am a citizen is not a fatherland. If I respond to queries about my nationality by saying without hesitation that I'm German, I am clearly opting not for a state, but for my belonging to a people that no longer has a state identity. At the same time, however, I assert that my national identity is not bound by my belonging to either of the German states.

The same applies for the claim: 'I come from Germany.' Either the saying has no meaning, or I am speaking of a country that appears on no political map. By Germany I am referring neither to the DDR nor to the BRD but to a country which exists only in my memory or my imagination. Asked where it lies, I would know no other place to name but my history and the language that I speak.]

(126-127, modified)

The narrator reveals a lack of perceived affiliation with the state he grew up in. He knows he was born into a unified Germany and he does not feel comfortable claiming the FRG as his own. He is not ambivalent or unpatriotic; he has a sense of belonging, it just does not correlate to the current geopolitical reality in which he lives. He sees himself as a member of the German state that existed prior to the end of the Second World War, something he expresses with loaded terms like "Vaterland" and "Volk" that bring to mind Nazi sentiments about German nationhood and the people who can claim it. The uncomfortable legacy of the Nazi regime underlies much of the novel but especially the narrator's musings about identity: Germany was split as a direct result of Nazi rule, and much of the tension between the two countries stems from anxieties about the legacy of the regime (both Robert (21) and Pommerer represent the GDR's stance that the FRG is a haven for former Nazis, as does the narrator's former landlord who defects to the East (26)). These terms are invoked as a way to acknowledge the anxieties underlying German patriotism and the narrator's inclination to claim a German nationality that aligns with a country that was destroyed as a direct result of the horrors of the Nazi regime. When trying to articulate where his sense of nationhood comes from, he can only point to the collective history that the people on both sides of the Wall have shared—one that led to a unified language, culture, and political consolidation. In saying that his national identity comes from "meiner Erinnerung oder Vorstellung" [my memory or my imagination] he (perhaps unintentionally) points out the relationship between fiction and fact that is integral to every nation. He has real childhood memories of the nation he feels aligned

with, but that nation itself is as much the product of political machinations as an organic union of one "people."

The narrator may acknowledge that his understanding of his nationality does not correspond with the political reality, but he *is* convinced it corresponds to an innate "Germanness" that bonds East and West Germans together. There is an underlying assumption throughout the book that the Wall is unnatural precisely because it is dividing a single people, a perspective that is never challenged. It is also presented in the text as an entirely West German preoccupation, beginning with the first mention of the "deutsche Frage" [German question] when the reader is introduced to Robert (20). As the narrator notes a few pages later, the question is constitutionally embedded in the West German psyche, even as most West Germans have accepted the division. "In ihrem Trennungsschmerz gleichen sie einem Liebhaber, der nicht so sehr der Geliebten, sondern dem starken Gefühl nachtrauert, das er einmal hatte" (29) [In their separation pangs they resemble a lover grieving not so much for his loved one as for the strong emotion he once felt] (30). It speaks to the narrator's own biases that he only considers the question, and the emotions that accompany it, from a West German perspective. The reader gets a sense of how East Germans approach the issue—with resentment and a heightened suspicion of Western motives, if Robert's reaction is to be understood as representative of all East Germans—but the narrator does not attempt to empathize with the "Geliebte." The West German perspective is centered, and in doing so the narrator centers himself within a West German identity. At the same time he distances himself by using the third person, which adds to the growing sense in the novel that the narrator feels

estranged from his national identity. He rewords almost the exact same idea with which he closes out his hypothesis for his own project a few pages earlier—which, as discussed, appears to be a blueprint for his own journey through the narrative: "Und wenn... ein Witz sei immer der Epitaph auf den Tod eines Gefühls, so kann die Geschichte eigentlich nur eine Komödie werden (23) [And if... a joke is always an epitaph for a feeling that has died, the boundary-walker's story must turn out to be a comedy] (23). The similarity lies in the notion of a feeling that has passed. It seems likely that these two "Gefühle" are in fact one and the same, that the ambiguous "Gefühl" that has died by the end of the narrator's hypothetical story is in fact the West German attachment to the idea of reunification. With this context, it seems to be the narrator who is not at ease with the "deutsche Frage," and that his project is a way to accept the political reality that the wall represents and enforces. He outright states this in response to Robert's initial accusation that his project is evidence of a preoccupation with the issue: "Nicht die Empfindung einer unerträglichen Situation hat mich dazu gebracht, sondern das Mißtrauen in die Abwesenheit einer solchen Empfindung" (20) [It isn't the sense of an unbearable situation that has pushed me to the project; rather, my mistrust at the absence of that sense] (20, modified). The narrator is out of step with other West Germans; he still yearns for a united Germany. Ironically, however, the East German disinterest in the issue highlights the narrator's West German conditioning. Had he, like Robert, grown up in the GDR, would he have ever become preoccupied with the question at all? The narrator is the product of West German society and this seems to torment him.

Nowhere is the narrator's uneasy affiliation with the West more clear than when

he tries to imagine what his life would have been like had he grown up in East Germany.

Hätte ich etwa nicht Geige geübt, während die anderen Fußball spielten? Nicht lieber Spinoza gelesen als Karl May? Nicht zu hören bekommen, daß Onanie die Augen verdirbt? Nicht das Schweigen bei Tisch als schlimmer empfunden denn die Bomben im Weltkrieg? Nicht «Rock around the clock» als die wichtigste Botschaft seit der Bergpredigt gehört? Nicht Bob Dylan auswendig gelernt?

Derselbe wäre ich nicht. Aber wäre ich ein so anderer geworden, daß ich nicht mehr wiederzuerkennen wäre? Wo hört ein Staat auf und fängt ein Ich an (116)?

[Would I still have practiced my violin while the others were playing soccer? Have preferred Spinoza to Karl May? Have heard that masturbation ruins your eyes? Have felt that silence at the table was worse than the bombs of World War II? Have heard in 'Rock Around the Clock' the most important lesson since the Sermon on the Mount? Have learned Bob Dylan songs by heart? If not, then I wouldn't be the same person. But would I have turned out so differently that no one could recognize me? Where does the state end and a self begin] (125)?

This passage bears a striking resemblance to some of the passages in Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* (analyzed in Chapter II). In both cases, the narrators (in Hoffman's case a younger version of herself) try to understand the magnitude of difference between the two places they are comparing. The impact of pop culture on their adolescence is a particular point of focus, and serves in both to emphasize the influence of Western, and specifically American, cultural artifacts. For the narrator of *The Wall Jumper* the impact of religion is significant: he wonders what his life would have been like without a Christian-influenced morality and the role of pop music in his development—music that was part of the counterculture of the 60s in the West. The ways that he rebelled against the dominant culture are also important to him. His affinity for music over sports and Spinoza, a writer favored in Marxist circles (Read),⁷ over Karl May, whose work was not

⁷ <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/labor-human-bondage-spinoza-marx-willing-slaves-capitalism/>. Accessed 4 May, 2020.

printed in the GDR due to his fascist leanings (Brey)⁸, were ways to assert his independence from the expectations of his society. Here he considers whether his rebellion even makes sense outside of the cultural context of the FRG, or whether it was a confirmation of the regime's effectiveness in feeding him a particular vision of reality. In the GDR he never would have had the opportunity to pick between Karl May and Spinoza. But while Hoffman's conjectures about her lost adolescence in Poland serve to illustrate her unique position straddling two cultures, the narrator only emphasizes how limited his perspective is. Hoffman experiences two different cultures, and throughout her memoir struggles to reconcile the dueling cultural and linguistic forces within her. The narrator can only guess at what might have changed had he grown up on the other side of the Wall.

It is tempting to read the narrator's own development throughout the novel as the fulfillment of his vision of the "Mauerspringer." The narrator develops a fixation with the wall that culminates in repeated crossings and a self-awareness of his own conditioning as a citizen of West Germany, as well as a sense of the ways that his East German friends have been conditioned by their very different regime. However, there never appears to be a point where the narrator breaks away from his upbringing. Maybe it is because he never gets the chance. At the end of the novel the narrator is banned, without explanation, from crossing the border from West to East. Throughout, the Wall has barely functioned as a barrier. As a visitor from the West, the narrator has the freedom to travel in the East. He is a kind of "Grenzgänger" in that he repeatedly crosses back and forth across the Wall,

⁸ <https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/karl-may-in-der-ddr-der-ritt-durch-die-zensur-a-947978.html>. Accessed 4 May, 2020.

but unlike the stories of the various “Mauerspringer” that he collects, he always does so through the legal apparatus set up by the two states: he applies for extended Visas, he crosses at official checkpoints. When his legal right to travel is revoked, so is his status as a “Grenzgänger.” This is a jarring moment in the book, and if the narrator has in fact undergone some kind of re-orientation of his identity so that it is reliant on a proximity to the Wall, then this should lead to some kind of unravelling. But the moment that the narrator is informed by the border agent that he can no longer enter East Germany, the passage ends.

The next, and final, fragment in the novel appears to take place much later, back in the narrator’s room. There is a sense in this final passage that the events of the novel and the narrator’s journey were inconsequential. There is no tragic end; the narrator’s initial assertion that the story would be an “Epitaph auf den Tod eines Gefühls” [epitaph for a feeling that has died] seems to have come to pass. Following the events of the novel the narrator finds himself haunted by the experience, but even these hauntings are subtle: the memories of dreams and visions in his periphery.

In der Zeit, da der kürzeste Tag bevorsteht und das Geäst der Kastanien den Fernsehantennen ähnlich wird, wache ich manchmal inmitten der Schwärze auf. Die Traumbilder, an die ich mich erinnere, handeln von unvermuteten Bekanntschaften, erwiderten Blicken, Berührungen ohne Vorbereitung und Ziel. Ein Firnis von Harmonie liegt darüber wie auf den Bildern einer Zigarettenreklame; das Gefühl, das sich im Augenblick des Erwachens durchsetzt, spricht von einer gewaltsamen, noch frischen Trennung, als sei ein immer nur gefürchteter Abschied jetzt wahr und nur im ersten Schlaf vergessen worden. (127)

[In the season when the shortest day of the year approaches and the branches of the chestnut trees begin to look like television antennae, I sometimes wake surrounded by blackness. The dream images I remember are about unexpected meetings, reciprocated glances, caresses without preparation or purpose. A gloss of harmony lies on them as it does on the pictures in a cigarette ad. At the moment

of waking, I have a feeling of separation, violent, recent, as if a parting I always feared were now a fact, merely forgotten in the first hours of sleep.] (138)

The description the narrator gives of his room feels immaterial. It clearly takes place sometime after the rest of the events of the novel, but it also gives the impression of timelessness. The only hint the reader is given is that it is winter, and it is implied that the feeling the narrator gets during this time of year is cyclical, and so in a sense eternal.

There is a sense that the narrator is not quite in the real world—he actually talks about remembering “Traumbilder” [dream images], and the scene has surreal elements. The branches of the tree outside his window have transformed for the narrator into radio antennae, an image that holds symbolic significance given the role of radio and television in the ideological war between the two nations. For instance, when the narrator visits a group of artists in East Germany they joke amongst themselves about the East German government’s struggle to censor West German media (63). Radio and television frequencies cannot be governed by physical or legal barriers. It feels, too, like a nod to the ambiguous connection that he dreams about. When he wakes up from this dream it is into darkness. The unreliability of sight in particular seems to be being emphasized, as is that feeling of disorientation in time and place that one feels when on the edge of sleep.

The narrator describes his dreams as being about “Bekanntschaften” [acquaintances], which implies a strained or distant relationship rather than a close or intimate one (like a “Freundschaft” [friendship]). Despite this, the relationship is not depicted as hostile. Rather, it is “unvermutet” [unexpected] and “erwidert” [reciprocated]—the glances are not one-sided, but between the two people. The contact between the parties is also spontaneous, and more importantly, without ulterior motives.

All of this coalesces for the narrator into a sense of “Harmonie,” which in waking he suddenly loses. He describes the jolt of waking up as a “Trennung” [separation], a sentiment that immediately brings to mind the narrator’s description of the “Teilungsprozeß” [partition process] that the “Grenzgänger” experiences. Whatever kind of relationship the narrator is imagining, it is one that feels unattainable in the real world. The relationship in the dream could represent the narrator’s feelings about the relationship between the two German states. Closeness, freedom, spontaneity, and harmony are all things that the actual state separation and in particular the presence of the Wall make impossible.

The *Wall Jumper* ultimately disproves the narrator’s original optimism about the capabilities—or even the existence—of the Grenzgänger. His experiences in the novel all point to the persistence of one’s conditioning, precluding the possibility of crossing over, let alone finding a place outside of the ideological pull of either state. The “Niemandland” that the Grenzgänger, upon becoming “niemand,” would theoretically occupy, remains uninhabitable. Though the narrator undergoes a crisis of identity in the course of the novel, in which he becomes aware of the mechanisms underlying the division of the two Germanys, he is unable to break out of his existing identity. In her essay, “Walls and Other Obstacles: Peter Schneider's Critique of Unity in *Der Mauerspringer*” (1993), Susan C. Anderson argues that *The Wall Jumper* is one of many examples of Schneider’s pessimistic view of unity (362). Schneider’s model of identity makes reconciliation impossible. The people of East and West Germany have identities defined by the opposing ideologies of each system, and according to Schneider there is

no cure.

Chapter II: The Space Between

While Schneider's text uses the figure of the "Grenzgänger" [border-walker] to argue against the notion of a malleable identity, it is Eva Hoffman who truly wrestles with the act of crossing over from one culture to another. *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989) is not a book about borders, or at least not in a way that is instantly recognizable. It is a memoir of the author's experience migrating from Poland to North America at the age of thirteen, and her subsequent decades-long struggle to adjust and come to terms with the effect of this transition on her life. Hoffman's text focuses on the way that migration leads to a splitting of the self—linguistically and culturally—but it also tracks her journey towards reconciling the pieces, or at the very least accepting the existence of this internal rift. The book is split into three sections: "Paradise," in which Hoffman recounts an idyllic childhood in Cracow that becomes increasingly plagued by the spectre of antisemitism; "Exile," in which she details her early experiences in North America and her feeling of alienation; and "The New World," in which she attempts to finally adjust and "assimilate" into American culture. While there is no distinct border, there is a sense that Poland and North America are diametrically opposed—in much the same way that the two Berlins (and by extension the two Germanys) are in Schneider's novel. Additionally, there is a recurring theme throughout the memoir of two Hoffmans, each one operating within a different cultural and linguistic reality. In this way the border

is implicit. It has no corporeal form—Hoffman never confronts a physical barrier—but it marks the line of difference between Hoffman’s life in Poland and her life in America.

This chapter is primarily concerned with the way that Hoffman articulates the notion of a borderland, as well as her attempts to negotiate a place for herself as an immigrant straddling two different “worlds.” It will first look at the ways that a “border” appears in the memoir, despite the lack of a physical wall or barrier, before transitioning to an analysis of the way that “translation” works in the text. Hoffman finds herself trapped between the wish to remain alienated from American culture and the pull of full assimilation. In the face of these dual desires the act of “translating” oneself, and in doing so preserving one’s sense of identity, becomes increasingly important. Finally, it will explore Hoffman’s perception of language as central to “reality,” and how this informs her theory of translation.

Even in works like *The Wall Jumper* (discussed in Chapter 1), in which the physical presence of the border is central to the narrative, it still primarily functions as a representation of the abstract notion of a borderland. In *Lost in Translation* there is no possibility for a concrete structure, because Poland and North America are separated by all of western Europe and the Atlantic Ocean. This completely changes the experience of a border crossing. When Hoffman’s family leave Poland, they do not go through a single barrier or checkpoint, but instead embark on a series of journeys across land and sea. There is no sense of peril or excitement; the trip takes weeks, and the primary emotions that the author feels during this time are “dullness” (89), uncertainty, and disorientation. While there is no border in the traditional sense, the migratory journey that the Hoffman

family takes to get from Poland to North America can be understood as a border crossing. The nature of the journey stretches the crossing of a border out into a process, and in doing so offers insight into the nature of the borderland.

The journey includes multiple long train rides and a twelve-day boat trip across the Atlantic that Hoffman describes variously as a: “transitory tempest” (87), “sparkling, complete fictional world” (89), and an experience “out of time, out of space” (91). The feeling of being on the boat, and the events that transpire on it, do not correspond to Hoffman’s sense of reality, feeling instead like a fantasy realm complete with characters and events that she could only relate to those in stories. The most obvious example of this is the romance between two of the fellow passengers, Irena and the Dane. They hardly interact with Hoffman and do not appear again in the book, but they dominate Hoffman’s recollection of her trip. The relationship between the two of them, and the very public displays that accompany it, are the stuff of fiction—Hoffman specifically references *Anna Karenina*, stating that Irena “could be Anna herself” (89). For Hoffman, the experience cements her sense that the trip was not quite aligned with reality, and her focus on it creates a similar effect for the reader, who can easily identify how out of place they are. Far more than Hoffman’s constant reassurances that the boat trip is out of place, these two characters signal to the reader that Hoffman is displaced, and the way that their story ends also marks the beginning of the end of Hoffman's journey. Irena initially refuses to leave the ship and join her Canadian lover, the Dane breaks a chair, and when she finally acquiesces and accepts the impossibility of her romance with the Dane continuing, the fantasy is broken.

The displacement she feels on the ship is very different to the kind that she is about to encounter in the Americas, but gives a clue as to how different her new life will be from her old one. It emphasizes the distance between the two—both physically, as the trip takes a significant period of time, and mentally, because in order to travel from one to the other one must pass through the otherworldly realm of the ship. It is significant that Hoffman can not merely step from one place to the other. While the ocean is a very real, physical barrier, it is also a fantastic metaphor. Hoffman begins the story of her actual migration with a description of the water: “I am standing at the prow of the ship, watching the water tear away in a diagonal, forever repeating, forever receding line” (87). Movement and paralysis seem to be in conflict throughout this passage. Hoffman is on a moving boat, but she is standing. The water below her not only moves but “tears” itself, an active and transformative motion; at the same time the repetitive and unending motion helps to give the impression of the boat as out-of-time. The juxtaposition of “repeating” and “receding” convey the paradox of simultaneous movement and stillness. Though the boat is its own self-contained world, stirring within Hoffman is the knowledge that this journey is part of her real life—and that it signals a loss.

The train rides that bookend Hoffman’s time on the boat act as their own kind of “transitory tempests” into and then back out of the world of the ship. Hoffman describes parting from her classmates and friends at the train station in Cracow. The moment that they all leave, she “sto[s] crying, as if the fluid current of life had suddenly stopped flowing.” She is then “overcome by dullness that is like Lethe” (89). The point at which her friends leave is one of the signs that her life in Poland is ending. She attempts to

understand this transitional moment with a water-based image reminiscent of the waves of the ocean she will use a few pages later. Her life is one river, which stops flowing when she says goodbye to everyone she knows. The river that replaces it is the river of death in Greek mythology. This initial train ride can then be seen as representing the death of Hoffman's Polish self. In Greek mythology those who drink from the river also experience "forgetfulness of the past" ("Lete, n."),⁹ an interesting detail given the detachment from both past and future that characterizes Hoffman's time on the ship. Of course, once Hoffman is in Canada, she does not forget about her life in Poland. She does, however, describe an overwhelming sense of loss and mourning that is consistent with the metaphor of migration as a kind of death.

The second train that Hoffman finds herself on reconnects her to the world after her experience on the ship, and it is this final leg of the journey that Hoffman regards as the actual border between her old life and her new one. The train "is like scissors cutting a three-thousand-mile rip through [Hoffman's] life." She clarifies, "from now on, my life will be divided into two parts, with the line drawn by that train" (100). There is no longer any sense of stillness. Instead, this part of the journey moves forward relentlessly and violently. It is strange that, despite the train journey also being a process rather than a moment, the effect is the creation of a distinct border separating Hoffman's life into two halves. The description of the rip as three-thousand miles, followed by Hoffman's depiction of the dividing line that the train represents transfigures the entire migration process into a kind of wall. This feels paradoxical given the amount of time that the

⁹ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/107522>. Accessed May 4, 2020.

migration takes. The journey does not fit into the timeline of Hoffman's life. All three-thousand-miles are condensed into a line that runs perpendicular.

There is an exchange on this final train ride that subtly enforces the role that language has in fostering a sense of belonging, a theme that only becomes more prominent in the text as Hoffman tries to settle into her new life.

On the second day, we briefly meet a passenger who speaks Yiddish. My father enters into an animated conversation with him and learns some thrilling tales. For example, there's the story of a Polish Jew who came to Canada and made a fortune—he's now a millionaire!—on producing Polish pickles. Pickles! If one can make a fortune on that, well—it shouldn't be hard to get rich in this country. My father is energized, excited by this story, but I subside into an even more determined sullenness. (100)

Yiddish is not a language familiar to Hoffman, but it is a native language for her parents, both of whom appear to identify as Jewish before they identify as Polish. Hoffman notes that her parents actually disapprove of her attachment to Cracow: their own parting sentiment is “what is there to miss?” (88) In Cracow her parents often speak Yiddish to their friends, though when they do so it is with “their voices lowering” (40)—a reminder of the daily stigmatization that her parents are so cognizant of prior to their emigration. While Hoffman has a strong sense of herself as Jewish, she understands it as something that exists in addition to her Polish identity. The fact that there is a barrier between the two is something she has to learn. She plays with non-Jewish children and even occasionally goes to church; she has to be told by older members of her community that this is wrong. She explains that the hallah bread her mother makes is “one of the markers of our difference. But until I'm seven years old, I cross such markers regularly” (29). The first border in the book is the one between Catholics and Jews, but for Hoffman it does

not have the sharpness of the border between Poland and North America. She also struggles to understand the horrors of the Holocaust, despite its heavy weight on her family. In response to the story of her aunt's death, a young Hoffman notes that "it doesn't have the same palpable reality as the Cracow tramway" (7). Unlike her parents, who lived through a time of intense persecution predicated on their Jewish identity, Hoffman's comparative freedom as a child in Poland strengthens her understanding of herself as Polish—a luxury her parents did not have.

Hoffman's weaker identification as Jewish (compared to her parents) is not the only reason that this exchange fails to engage her. She notes a couple lines later that she has no real comprehension of what a millionaire is; it "is one of those fairy-tale words that has no meaning to me whatsoever—a word like 'emigration' or 'Canada'" (100). She is less engaged by the promise of future riches than by the comfort of familiarity. If anything, this exchange serves to make her more anxious, because it hints at a potentially even more alien future. The way she relates the story of the pickle seller further detaches her from it. The style is very different to the one Hoffman narrates with. It jumps around. It exclaims. It emphasizes words like "millionaire" and "rich," which, as Hoffman reveals, mean very little to her. The sudden lapse into peppy enthusiasm in the midst of Hoffman's despondency feels almost mocking, but it is easy to understand how this was a genuinely comforting exchange for Hoffman's father. For him it is, in fact, the height of familiarity. The man is speaking in a language he knows, about someone who he considers to be of the same group as himself who becomes rich (something that is very desirable for a new immigrant with very little) selling something that is a regular (and

cheap) part of Jewish life. The shared language cedes to shared cultural touchstones and values, which in turn give Hoffman's father a feeling of confidence about the future.

Hoffman is deeply aware of the interrelationship between language, culture, and identity—her parsing of the relationship between these elements is really the core of the memoir—and the fundamental linguistic and cultural differences in North America are the basis for her sense of alienation throughout the rest of the book. Despite the fact that Hoffman is primarily concerned with assimilating into the dominant culture once she arrives in North America, she nevertheless clings stubbornly to what she perceives as key Polish values. Chief among these are romanticism, “*polot*,” and “craftiness.” These form a national sensibility and set of values. The appreciation for romanticism is part of the larger sense among Poles that they are a people of culture and feeling. Hoffman sums up this influence on the populace in her recollection of the parting gift she receives from her Polish classmates. “Most of them choose melancholy verses in which life is figured as a vale of tears or a river of suffering, or a journey of pain on which we are embarking. This tone of sadness is something we all enjoy. It makes us feel the gravity of life, and it is gratifying to have a truly tragic event—a parting forever—to give vent to such romantic feelings” (78). Hoffman compares these goodbyes with those of some American peers a couple years later, and notes the superficiality and emphasis on cheerfulness in the latter. Her point is that Canadian and American teenagers do not indulge in these deep and often painful emotions. It is hard not to read a note of disdain into her description of the American letters. In a similar vein, “*polot*” is described by Hoffman as “flair and panache, and sparks of inspiration,” and again as “dash, inspiration, and flying” (71).

This way of expressing oneself feels consistent with the national preoccupation with romanticism. Hoffman explains that successful school work must include “*polot*” to be successful—in fact it is “the best compliment that a school exercise can receive” (71). It is not enough to merely state information; the way in which one conveys a point is as important as the point itself. Again, there is an emphasis on feeling and beauty.

Hoffman’s conceptualization of the Polish as “crafty” seems to come from her understanding of Poland’s history as a place often occupied, including during Hoffman’s childhood. “Craftiness” could be understood as the pragmatic execution of “*polot*,” as it involves a similar kind of daring applied to one’s actions and countenance. Hoffman’s father’s decidedly anti-communist black market dealings fall under this category (14).

The cumulative effect of these values on Hoffman is the persistence of her Polish identity, even as she strives to adopt the sensibilities of her new surroundings:

I don’t like the blue eye shadow on Cindy’s eyelids, or the grease on Chuck’s hair, or the way the car zooms off with a screech and then slows down as everyone plays we’re-afraid-of-the-policeman. I don’t like the way they laugh. I don’t care for their “ugly” jokes, or their five-hundred-pound canary jokes, or their pickle jokes, or their elephant jokes either. And most of all, I hate having to pretend. (118-119)

The scene Hoffman paints here is one of complete alienation. She is affronted by the unfamiliar colors and sounds, and also by the way that her classmates use language. By this time she can comprehend what people around her are saying, but there is still a piece of fluency missing in that she cannot understand the culture that surrounds her. Without understanding it, she cannot fit into it. The impression she gives of herself in these early years is of someone stifled, sidelined and unable to communicate—initially linguistically, then emotionally. Her understanding of the world is still decidedly rooted in her Polish

upbringing. Hoffman does not profess to be a patriot—quite the opposite. In response to another immigrant’s description of national pride, she informs the reader that, “no, I’m no patriot, nor was I ever allowed to be. And yet, the country of my childhood lives within me with a primacy that is a form of love” (74). It is notable that Hoffman understands patriotism as something given, and that it is something that, as a Jew in an anti-Semitic country, she has been denied. Yet a lack of patriotism does not diminish the “love” that she feels for Poland, or its enduring influence on her psyche.

The experiences Hoffman describes in the “Exile” section of the memoir are of someone whose perception of the world no longer correlates with the external reality. In “The New World,” Hoffman begins to develop a new, parallel identity, which is depicted in the book through internal dialogues between a Polish Hoffman and an American one—though Hoffman only delineates them through the language that each speaks in. Polish Hoffman retains her native tongue and pre-immigration worldview while American Hoffman speaks English and ascribes to generic American values. The two are always in conflict, with the American Hoffman trying to pledge independence from the Polish Hoffman. In one fight she asks: “Why should I listen to you? You don’t necessarily know the truth about me just because you speak in that language. Just because you seem to come from deeper within” (199). Hoffman is beginning to question her assumption that her Polish sensibilities have precedence over her emerging American ones. She is no longer certain that her Polish self, and the Polish language, are the more authentic parts of herself. The fights give way to a grudging alliance. When Hoffman decides to give up the

piano, a childhood passion that no longer feels viable in America, the two selves argue but eventually find comfort and resilience in each other.

[Polish Hoffman] But it's going to hurt, giving it up.

[American Hoffman] Yes, it's going to hurt.

[PH] But we'll get along somehow.

[AH] Yes, we'll get along. (200)

The oppositional language that characterizes most of the two Hoffmans' exchanges morphs into a united front as the two pledge to face the challenge of Hoffman's new life together. This is the first time that the two acknowledge that they can be a "we," maintaining their separate identities but operating as a united front. In doing so, Hoffman's Polish self does not disappear, but she surrenders to the desires of her American self. It is a sign that Hoffman's alienation from American life is beginning to fade. In a final confrontation between the two selves, later in the third section of the novel when Hoffman is much more confident in her new life, her American self professes that "I don't have to listen to you any longer. I am as real as you now. I'm the real one" (231). By this she does not mean that her Polish self is no longer important, but that, as the other arguments illustrate, she has cultivated American sensibilities that allow her to live freely in her new country.

As the fights between the two Hoffmans illustrate, when she finally comes to terms with remaining in the United States she has to work out how to reconcile her Polish identity with her American one. The difficulty of the process centers around the problem of assimilation and Hoffman's new sense, now that she has ventured this far into the culture, that she has to strike a balance between the preservation of her old self and values, and the embracing of new ones that will bring her fully into the world in which

she now lives. Hoffman perceives the stakes as rather high; the failure to assimilate has ramifications for the soul:

The soul can shrivel from an excess of critical distance, and if I don't want to remain in arid internal exile for the rest of my life, I have to find a way to lose my alienation without losing my self. But how does one bend toward another culture without falling over, how does one strike an elastic balance between rigidity and self-effacement? How does one stop reading the exterior signs of a foreign tribe and step into the inwardness, the viscera of their meanings. Every anthropologist understands the difficulty of such a feat; and so does every immigrant. (209)

Two things are striking about this dilemma. The first is Hoffman's assumption that there is a definitive cultural split between Poland and the United States/Canada. It is not that Hoffman completely conflates the two countries, or that she even sees the US as culturally homogenous, but it is clear that her move from Canada to the US does not result in a similar rift in Hoffman's identity. There is a moment when she first moves to Houston for university where she states, "I am in a new country, and it is as different from Vancouver as Lagado is from Lilliput. This is the real America" (171). This is a definitive differentiation of Canada and the US along national lines, with a suggestion of cultural difference, but as Hoffman notes in the same passage, she does not yet have a sense of the multitudes of subcultures in the country. There is no sense in the book that Vancouver is more different to Houston than New York is. This gives a clue as to how Hoffman perceives cultural difference. It is not rooted in nationalism—though she is not blind to national distinctions—but in language. The cultural ties between Canada and the United States are informed by their shared language, which in turn is a product of their shared colonial history. While simplistic, the conflation makes sense when one considers how similar Canadian and American English sound to each other.

The second takeaway is Hoffman's conviction that she can go too far, that there is something sacred and noble about her Polish identity, that her "self" is in fact Polish and can somehow be erased by embracing American culture. It is notable that Hoffman does not write about losing "herself" but rather "her self." In isolating the two halves of the reflexive pronoun she makes the "self" something that she possesses. Hoffman's uneasy relationship to patriotism has once again reared its head. By pitting these two cultural identities against each other, Hoffman assumes that there is no common ground—no grounds for integration or a harmonious coexistence.

The distinction between integration and assimilation is important in order to understand Hoffman's perspective as she struggles to find her place in American society. Integration is defined as the "the making up or composition of a whole by adding together or combining the separate parts or elements" ("Integration, n."),¹⁰ while assimilation is "the action of making or becoming like; the state of being like; similarity, resemblance, likeness" ("Assimilation, n.").¹¹ The important distinction between the two is that one describes the combining of disparate things—in this case cultural identities and languages—while the other describes the attempt to become something one is not—for Hoffman, this is the attempt to become "American" and, most importantly, to master English. The action that the word "assimilation" describes, however, is mimetic in nature, with roots in the Latin word for "to liken" (*assimilāre*). It does not allow for the actual transformation into something else, but merely the imitation of it. What actually separates the two, then, is that assimilation is a never-ending striving *towards* a state of

¹⁰ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/97356>. Accessed 4 May, 2020.

¹¹ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11934>. Accessed 4 May, 2020.

being, while integration is the creation of something new from the previously separate pieces. Applied to the experience of an immigrant, assimilation is the act of trying to mimic the foreign culture in which one lives, while integration is the combining of the old and the new culture(s) to create a nuanced sense of oneself as a cultural being. Integration also allows for the possibility of genuinely adopting new cultural traits, rather than assuming that any part of one's identity that is not derived from their primary culture is merely imitation.

Why is integration not an option for Hoffman? It is such an alien concept that the word never even makes an appearance in the text. The struggle of her family and the other immigrants that she meets is invariably described as being about "assimilation." Hoffman describes the behavior of the older Polish immigrants as imitative of American behaviors, whether in small actions like trying to make Hoffman look more American—for instance when a family friend shaves Hoffman's armpits without even asking her (109)—or in their own imitations of American life—Hoffman recalls getting lost with her sister and, upon returning to the Rosenberg's house (where the family initially stay) being given glasses of milk. Hoffman theorizes that this is "a ritual she has probably learned from television" (106). None of these characters attempt to reconcile their Polish identities with their new surroundings. The goal appears to be to become as Canadian as possible. When Hoffman's parents are unable to comprehend certain behaviors or beliefs it is presented as a failure on their part. The same family friend that shaves Hoffman's underarms informs her that she would look like "a princess" if she was her daughter, "thus implying an added deficiency in my mother" (109). Hoffman

describes a group of Polish women in the community “who have been in Canada long enough to consider themselves well versed in native ways” (109). At no point is it suggested that there could be a middle ground between the two identities.

This is all made even more confusing by Hoffman’s definition of assimilation, which varies in an important way from the dictionary definition. To assimilate, she explains in the second part of the book, is to “take [the external world] in, love it, make it our own.” (108) Here, she is not using the word in direct reference to the immigrant experience, but to describe the way language acts as a bridge between the “external” world and one’s experience of the world. In other words, she sees language as a translation tool, something she makes clear when she bemoans her inability, as a new immigrant in Canada, to “translate” the world around her “into [her] mind’s eye.” (108) The definition of assimilation as imitation does not encompass Hoffman’s use of the word as a way to describe the way that understanding and experience are created.

The verb “assimilate” offers a far more open interpretation of the word’s meaning that is better aligned with Hoffman’s own definition. While it can mean “to make or be like” it can also mean “to absorb and incorporate” (“Assimilate, v.”).¹² This definition still differs from integration because there is no sense of a union between two (or more) parts. Instead, there is an existing schema into which one has to fit. What remains unique about Hoffman’s use of the word is that, while she uses assimilation to describe her fears about absorbing American culture, she also uses it in a positive sense when describing language. According to Hoffman, language imbues one with the ability to understand the

¹² <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11928#eid36634050>. Accessed May 4, 2020.

world—to *absorb* it, to *assimilate* it, and to “make it our own.” If Hoffman’s definition of assimilation is to be taken at face value, then it is actually a form of creation, an idea that is backed up by the hollowness that Hoffman feels when she loses the ability to subconsciously link language to the world around her. “I’m not filled with language anymore, and I have only a memory of fullness to anguish me with the knowledge that, in this dark and empty state, I don’t really exist” (108). “Absorbing”, the most obvious synonym for “assimilate” in the sense that Hoffman uses it, is itself a synonym for “filling.” Assimilation is the means by which the world can be taken in, understood, and given meaning. Without it, Hoffman feels that she cannot connect herself to the world around her, that she is actually lacking a “reality.”

This assimilation, this taking in of the outside world, can also be detrimental. In the third part of the book, “The New World,” Hoffman deals with the puzzle of finding a balance between her old “world”—that is, her old language, cultural sensibilities, and identity—and her new one. She emphasizes her specific definition of assimilation as absorption, but here it is an undesirable outcome.

To remain outside such common agreements is to remain outside reality itself—and if I’m not to risk a mild cultural schizophrenia, I have to make a shift in the innermost ways. I have to translate myself. But if I’m to achieve this without becoming assimilated—that is, absorbed—by my new world, the translation has to be careful, the turns of the psyche unforced. To mouth foreign terms without incorporating their meanings is to risk becoming bowdlerized. A true translation proceeds by the motions of understanding and sympathy; it happens by slow increments, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase. (211)

Unlike earlier, where absorption was a way to access the world, here it is an invasion. Hoffman is terrified that American culture will displace her identity and replace it with something “bowdlerized,” a word that is so obscure and archaic sounding that it

immediately jumps off the page. It is more negative than a word like “abridge,” which also describes something that has been stripped down but suggests a preservation of meaning. Bowdlerize looks and sounds uglier, and comes with the connotations of loss and sanitation (“Bowdlerize, v.”).¹³ Hoffman’s fear is that she will be scrubbed of the pieces of herself that do not fit into American society, and that this will lead to a more permanent loss. This fear is evident in the very title of the book, *Lost in Translation*, which speaks to the experience of having something misinterpreted or destroyed in the act of translation. The title also hints at the alternative to assimilation that Hoffman identifies: rather than assimilate, and without regard to the idea of integrating, Hoffman has decided to “translate” herself.

Hoffman’s fear of assimilation comes into focus in the third part of the book, when she finds herself suddenly enraged by the ideological differences between her American friends and herself. This newfound anger coincides with her decision to remain in the US and let go of her childhood dream (cultivated in Poland) to become a pianist. She poignantly uses the metaphor of a border wall to illustrate the divide she feels:

It’s odd that these conflicts have become sharper just as I’ve gotten closer to the people around me, as if illuminated by the merciless headlights of a border patrol, which show the choices in stark relief—there’s one side, there the other—to a person trying to get across. But of course, that’s the moment when the stakes become high... Of course, one of the shards sticking in my ribs suggests that maybe I’ll never belong comfortably anyplace, that my sensibilities and opinions will always be stuck in some betwixt and between space... Perhaps these skirmishes are border engagements, a sign that a crossing has begun. (216)

This entire passage is concerned with the idea of sharpness, as something that divides and something that wounds. Hoffman uses a number of words—all, perhaps intentionally,

¹³ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/22199>. Accessed 4 May, 2020.

beginning with the letter s—that speak to this multiplicity of meaning. “Stark,” “side,” and “stakes” all convey the idea of a border—”stark” describing the nature of the divide as something sharp, “side” describing what is on either side of the “stark” divide; meanwhile “stakes” can be placed in the ground in order to claim it or divide land up. Hoffman engages in a very clever kind of wordplay with the phrase “stakes become high,” managing to reference both the image of a border growing in height and the idiomatic saying “high stakes,” meaning a dangerous activity. There is both the increasing physical size of the border as Hoffman approaches, and the risk of crossing, as characterized by the border agents. The word “stakes” itself has a double meaning—it is also a weapon that can be used to stab someone or something. In folklore a wooden stake is often the only way to kill a vampire—in other words a non-human, malevolent other. These two seemingly disparate meanings can be combined. The driving of a stake into the ground is, in essence, a stabbing into the ground, and could be understood as wounding the earth in order to mark territory. Hoffman’s own injuries that she obtains at the border reflect the shape and function of a stake. She has a “shard sticking in [her] ribs” that represents the fear of remaining in the ambiguous “space” of the borderland. These shards are in relation to one of her fights with her friends, which she soon after describes as “skirmishes,” another word that adds to the sense of the border as a place of violence.

There is also an underlying frustration in Hoffman’s characterization of the “choice” she has to make. She is desperate to get across the border, but she also acknowledges that it is an imposed desire. In this fictional borderscape there are only two

options, and a choice has to be made. At the same time, Hoffman's fear of existing in-between the two places opens up a third possibility, albeit one that is undesirable and exists outside of the schema Hoffman has laid out. Perhaps this is why the concept of integration never appears in Hoffman's text. Combining and synthesizing the two sides is impossible. There is no in-between space, and there is no third space. The only choice Hoffman is able to make is whether and *how* she crosses. This is where the difference between assimilation and translation comes into play. In the first instance, the crossing over destroys one's identity. In the second instance, the old identity is preserved but re-constructed so that it makes sense in the new context. There is a kind of parallel self that is constructed, and the distinction between the two sides and selves remain.

As Hoffman grapples with the question of how to cross over, she finds her situation reflected in a character from Schneider's text. When Hoffman reads *The Wall Jumper* it is Lena with whom she most identifies, even though she astutely notes that this was probably not Schneider's intention. "I know what I'm supposed to think of Lena, but I identify with her. I think she's in the right. I want more severe standards of seriousness to obtain. In other words, I'm a scourge" (204). Lena is not supposed to be a relatable character, especially as she is only described through the narrow lens of the narrator's perspective—a narrator who is representative of the dominant culture. Schneider portrays Lena as unstable; the behaviors he ties to her upbringing are also depicted as signs of a disturbed mental state. She imagines that she is being pursued, or that small changes in the narrator's behavior mean he is suddenly unfaithful. These behaviors go far beyond "standards of seriousness;" they are paranoid and manipulative. The narrator feels

trapped into her narrow worldview. However Hoffman, herself an outsider in the culture she lives in and the product of a socialist upbringing, sees something admirable in Lena's austerity and hostility towards the West. She reads between the lines of the narrator's Western-influenced understanding of Lena's worldview, and finds some of her own frustrations there. In Hoffman's view, Lena is not unwell or maladjusted, but misunderstood: "her version of things is automatically under suspicion and at a discount" (204). Like Hoffman, who goes on to contextualize her understanding of Lena within her own experiences trying to be understood by her American friends, Lena is in a state of perpetual alienation from the culture that she lives in. She (quite literally) views the world from a different place than those around her, and her attempts to communicate her viewpoint are misinterpreted or ignored. If the narrator of *The Wall Jumper* is to be believed, however, then Lena never manages to cross over. She fails to fully embody Schneider's ideal of the "Grenzgänger," someone whose identity is tied to the crossing of a border. Hoffman comes much closer to realizing this role by repeatedly crossing and recrossing the border between her Polish and American identities. Lena is a model for Hoffman's alienation, but not for the act of translation that she is trying to perform.

The very existence of the memoir is a testament to the distinction between assimilation and translation, as Hoffman understands it, and it is the best way to understand exactly what this process is for Hoffman. In writing it she has to reconstruct her life with the English language, for an English-speaking audience. There is a very small amount of Polish in the book; a word here or there goes untranslated where the meaning is easily discerned (for instance "Pani" when referring to older women), and in a

few places Hoffman pauses to translate a word that she cannot find an English equivalent for. These include words like "polot" (discussed earlier) and "tęsknota," which she defines as "a word that adds to nostalgia the tonalities of sadness and longing" (4). These are words Hoffman has decided need to appear in their original form in order to understand their meaning. It is not enough to approximate them with a similar word or even a longer description; the reader has to know that these words exist before Hoffman explains what they mean. She always does explain, because the point is not to arbitrarily mark difference, but to make herself understood. Mary Besemeres argues that "the title *Lost in Translation* presents Hoffman as engaged in a double effort of translation: firstly of herself from Polish into English, and then of the reality of her English-speaking peers into the Polish reality she first internalized. This figure of ongoing two-way translation ingeniously characterizes her immigrant life as she looks back on it, and the act of writing it, as she conceives it" (332). In other words, the memoir is Hoffman's best attempt to make her Polish life comprehensible in the language of her American life. The articulation is both personal and public, a way to convey her experience and the act of translation to an American audience. Besmeres' idea of a two-pronged translation captures the complexity of the process, and how it differs from assimilation. She is not just transferring herself over; she is crossing over and then pulling others back with her. It seems to be a process, rather than a destination, and one that requires constant motion.

"The New World," the third section of Hoffman's narrative, begins with a party scene that gives the reader a sense of Hoffman's adult life. She appears to be completely in her comfort zone. The party is described as one amongst many that all follow the same

archetype, and Hoffman fits into the established pattern of the New York intellectual with ease. However, even at this party there are flashes of difference. A visual cue (the host's daughter running around) transports her back to one of her parent's parties back in Poland (168). A culturally inappropriate opinion from a Hungarian acquaintance leads to an uncomfortable moment between them—she describes his comment as being “*as if* he'd just made a glaringly obvious faux pas” (168, emphasis mine), and the two “avoid looking at each other,” simultaneously confirming Hoffman's status as an insider who cannot condone his words, and as an outsider who understands. She knows better than to show any signs of allegiance, but the combination of distancing the other guests' opinion from her own and the concerted effort the two make not to look at each other, reveals a subtle difference between her and her peers. Perhaps this delicate balance is best summarized by Hoffman's accent, which “gives [her] away as somebody not born here, but [her] friends soon stop noticing it” (170). Hoffman has not stripped herself of all vestiges of her Polish upbringing, but those around her are able to filter out what remains so that she fits into their world. She continues: “They think of me as one of them, even if my opinions are sometimes slightly askew in relation to the general consensus” (170). It feels significant that Hoffman is able to maintain a degree of distance from the community that she belongs to without that translating to rejection or othering by her peers. This appears to be neither true assimilation—which would require Hoffman to fully forfeit her Polish sensibilities—or integration—as Hoffman makes no effort to draw attention to her difference or combine her old and new selves—but rather a third solution

to the issue of belonging. It seems to be the closest approximation to Hoffman's idea of translation.

However, Hoffman has not found complete tranquility. In the midst of the party she experiences a sudden dissociation:

I lift off a little too high, to a point from which the room becomes only a place in which I happen to be, where I've found myself by some odd accident. A voice, almost unconscious, keeps performing an inaudible, perpetual triangulation—that process by which ancient Greeks tried to extrapolate, from two points of a triangle drawn in the sand, the moon's distance from the earth. From my removed, abstract promontory, this Upper West Side apartment looks as surreal as a large foreground object in a Magritte painting. Weightlessness is upon me; I am here, feeling the currents of conflict and warmth, but from that other point in the triangle, this is just one arbitrary version of reality. (170)

Whether this is an inevitable part of Hoffman's experience as an immigrant or a sign that her journey to translate herself is not yet complete is unclear. Perhaps both are simultaneously true. Hoffman's experience of triangulation appears to be rooted in simultaneity. While Hoffman's description of being above herself and weightless sound very like the experience of dissociation from one's body, she then seems to say that she is still in the room and experiencing the same feelings as before. The only difference is that, at the same time, she is also now in another "place" above and outside of her body. She is able to feel the familiarity of the party at the same time that she sees it as something alien and abstract. The voice that mediates this experience does not seem to be a recognizable part of Hoffman's self. She describes it as deeply rooted in her psyche to the point where it is "almost unconscious," but it is not *her* voice. As Hoffman briefly explains, this secondary vantage point allows her to see the first as something arbitrary, and together the two points reveal a third. Hoffman explains that "the other place in my mind no

longer has any particularity. It's just an awareness that there is another place—another point at the base of the triangle, which renders this place relative, which locates me within that relativity itself" (170). It seems strange that the third point of the triangle remains obscure. Instead of offering the solution of the third point, the process leaves Hoffman adrift, with nothing but the indefinite knowledge that there is *a* place. There is also Hoffman's indirect confession that there once was a definite place, presumably Cracow, and now there is not. What does it mean that Hoffman can no longer calculate her way back to the place she came from? A tentative answer is that when Hoffman enters this removed vantage point she becomes aware that the world she is experiencing is not the definitive version of reality, a realization that stems from her experience as an immigrant and, at this point in her life, leads her not back to a time in her life where she had an unfractured sense of reality, but to the knowledge that there are multitudes of realities beyond her comprehension. This is not translation though; rather, it is an evolved sense of the alienation she experiences earlier in the book.

Hoffman eventually leaves the party and is able to snap back into herself through a song on the radio:

A Madonna song. Suddenly, I'm *in* this taxi, *in* this funky rhythm, *in* this town... This is not a place where I happen to be, this happens to be the place where I am; this is the only place. How could there be anywhere more real?... How strange, I think, how strange what I've become, and then words cease and, in my drowsiness, I become an animal thing I've always known, only myself" (171, emphasis mine).

This passage clarifies several things. First, that Hoffman is a Madonna fan. This is actually less trivial than it first appears. It is something that is simultaneously of the *Zeitgeist* and that Hoffman really enjoys that snaps her back into a definite place. She

uses the word “in,” as emphasized above, to explain the firm way she is suddenly situated in her reality. There is the physical place where her body is situated, the cultural sensibilities that the music she hears represents, and the culture and community of New York City. To be within these things is to cease to question her sense of belonging, which she accomplishes by inverting the phrase that initially represents the anxiety of relativity she feels when she triangulates: “This is not a place where I happen to be...” The structure of the sentence, if read slightly differently, actually seems to mimic the process of triangulation that Hoffman lays out. She identifies a first point, where she discovers she is not, and from there discovers a second point, where she is. The clause after the semicolon is the third point, or solution: “this is the only place.”

Though Hoffman's journey is about locating herself within a culture, what she really seems to be seeking is the innocence of existing in the world without having to translate herself at all. She describes lying in her bed as a child in Poland and feeling an overwhelming sense of fullness and bliss:

It is Cracow, 1949, I'm four years old, and I don't know that this happiness is taking place in a country recently destroyed by war, a place where my father has to hustle to get us a bit more than our meager ration of meat and sugar. I only know that I'm in my room, which to me is an everywhere, and that the patterns on the ceiling are enough to fill me with a feeling of sufficiency because... Well, just because I'm conscious, because the world exists and it flows so gently into my head. (5)

Hoffman's adult life is full of constant shifts in perception and a self-consciousness about the way the spaces she occupies function. But as a child she is unaware of the social framework in which she lives. She only knows the familiar sights and sounds and sensations of the space around her. While the adult Hoffman can fill in the contextual

gaps—the year, the social climate, the difficulties of her family's life in Cracow—the younger Hoffman is only aware of her immediate perceptions. She exists fully in the moment, passively taking in the outside world like a sponge. It is a similar sensation to the one that Hoffman describes at the end of the party, where she re-affixes herself to the external world. The distinction between Hoffman and her environment erodes, creating a sense of unity and tranquility.

In the book *Identity, Culture, and the Postmodern World, Lost in Translation* is used to forward the idea of a fluid identity. "At the end of the book, Eva acknowledges that she is being remade fragment by fragment, like a patchwork quilt... She is becoming a hybrid creature, a sort of resident alien... Eva Hoffman's book makes it clear that identity is changed by the journey; our subjectivity is recomposed... What I am trying to say is that identity is to do not with being but with becoming" (Sarup, 6). While this interpretation is largely correct, it underplays the way that Hoffman understands her own "becoming." Translation allows her to envision a future for herself instead of staying stuck in the past, "but once time uncoils and regains its forward dimension, the present moment becomes a fulcrum on which I can stand more lightly, balanced between the past and the future, balanced in time" (280). In other words, the act of "becoming" is a way for her to experience "being." It is not merely about the forward trajectory, but about the relationship between a past that is honored and a future that is imagined. When these two things are in balance—when Hoffman is neither looking back with longing nor abandoning her past—that is when she is finally able to be present. The book ends with

Hoffman returning to the "only place" that she inhabits on the way home from the party and in her bed as a child:

I breathe in the fresh spring air. Right now, this is the place where I'm alive. How could there be any other place? Be here now, I think to myself, in the faintly ironic tones in which the phrase is uttered by the likes of me. Then the phrase dissolves. The brilliant colors are refracted by the sun. The small space of the garden expands into the dimensions of peace. Time pulses through my blood like a river. The language of this is sufficient. I am here now. (280)

As Hoffman takes in the world around her, any self-consciousness vanishes. She lets go of her cultural sensibilities and rediscovers the "language" of pure observation and visceral experience. She is not caught in the act of triangulation, or thinking about the past or the future; instead space and time become bodily sensations that are rooted in her sensory perceptions of the world around her. The feeling Hoffman conveys is of a perfect harmony between herself and the world around her. It is the epitome of living in the moment.

Conclusion

Schneider and Hoffman present two very different models for how identity functions. *Der Mauerspringer* concludes with the notion that identity is static, conditioning is unchangeable, and the border constitutes an uninhabitable "Niemandland." Hoffman, on the other hand, proposes a vision of identity that is fluid and subject to change. What unifies the texts are a recognition of the effect of culture on identity. For Schneider this takes the form of both the state-systems of the GDR and the FRG, and a deeper belief in a German people united by language and sensibility. What Schneider perceives as a cultural tragedy—the artificial turned entrenched division of the German people—is also a personal one. For Hoffman this takes the form of a sense of obligation to one's primary socialization. The abandonment of the language and values of her Polish past is a betrayal of the self, and her solution involves balancing them with those of the American culture she goes on to live in.

Hoffman in many ways embodies the figure of the Grenzgänger that Schneider presents at the beginning of *The Wall Jumper*. Though Hoffman believes that one should honor one's upbringing, she sees identity as something that is subject to change. The danger of "crossing over" fully and losing her Polish identity follows Hoffman through the third part of the book, and her solution—to "translate" rather than "assimilate"—means that she is constantly in motion, negotiating with the two halves of herself. Hoffman could be interpreted as the realization of Schneider's Grenzgänger:

someone who slips in and out of the cultural mores that have been impressed upon her, and is always, to some degree, “auf der Grenze” [on the border].

Of course, Schneider and Hoffman only present two possible models of identity, neither of which should be treated as definitive. A third model, that was formative for this project, can be found in Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s short stories “Mutterzunge” [“Mother Tongue”] and “Großvaterzunge” [“Grandfather Tongue”], from the collection *Mutterzunge* (1990). They tell the story of a Turkish woman living in Berlin who becomes estranged from her native language. In this text Hoffmann’s fears come to pass: identity is so fluid that previously fundamental elements can slip away. In the first story she uses a mixture of memories and dream-like images to access her past and understand how her identity changed, resolving at the end to reconnect to her Turkish roots by learning Arabic, the language out of which Turkish developed.

The title of the story, “Mutterzunge,” is a direct translation because the term does not actually exist in German. Özdamar immediately explains that “Zunge: Sprache” (9) [Tongue: Language].¹⁴ This is the first hint at the role that senses and the body will play throughout the story. Language is bound up in the text with physical sensation and movement. The narrator’s initial description of her condition is through the metaphor of the tongue: “Zunge hat keine Knochen, wohin man sie dreht, dreht sie sich dorthin. / Ich saß mit meiner gedrehten Zunge” (9) [Tongues have no bones, whichever way you bend it, it bends that way. / I sat with my twisted tongue]. Paradoxically, by using something tangible and integral to the act of speaking, Özdamar is able to convey a spiritual

¹⁴ Translations are my own but at various points in the course of this project I have referenced an English translation by Craig Thomas.

struggle. The malleability of a tongue mirrors the malleability of the narrator's identity, and specifically her ability to literally change the language with which she, through the movements of her tongue, expresses herself. However, she also uses the flexibility of the tongue to convey her struggle with this malleability. Her tongue is "gedrehte," which implies an undesired twisting, perhaps even an overabundance of movement that has locked or knotted it up.

To the native German speaker these phrases sound strange. In the essay "Surviving the Mother Tongue" (2012), Yasamin Yildiz describes the technique Özdamar uses as "literal translation" (143), meaning that she takes Turkish phrases and attempts to preserve the images they originally convey. "Mutterzunge" [mother tongue], for example, is a literal translation of a Turkish (and incidentally, also an English) expression. While a German audience can infer that this is a variant on "Muttersprache" [mother language], Yildiz argues that it makes them instantly aware of a foreign element in the language (143). Similarly, "gedrehte Zunge" [twisted tongue] "invokes the Turkish phrase *çevrilmiş dil*, meaning "translated tongue" (144). Özdamar's narrator is in a peculiar position: her German is infused with Turkish, but she cannot translate backwards anymore. All of her interactions in the story are translated, including conversations with her mother. The conversations clearly happened in the past, but not before the narrator left her homeland, because the mother has already become aware of the changes her time in Germany has caused. She tells her, for instance, that "du hast die Hälfte deiner Haare in Alamania gelassen" (9) [You have left half your hair in Germany]. She also tells her, "weißt du, du sprichst so, du denkst, daß du alles erzählst, aber plötzlich springst du über

nichtgesagte Wörter, dann erzählst du wieder ruhig, ich springe mit dir mit, dann atme ich ruhig” (9) [You know, you speak so, you think, that you explain everything, but suddenly you jump over unsaid words, then you go on again peacefully, I jump with you, then I breathe calmly]. There is a sense in their encounter that a rift is growing between them; the narrator is changing in ways her mother can no longer understand, and appear to her as losses. There is a potential double meaning in the phrase “nichtgesagte Wörter” [unsaid words]; it is unclear whether the narrator is skipping words because she is losing them, or whether she is concealing words. In either case, the narrator is communicating in a way that is increasingly estranged from her mother. At the time of this conversation, the mother is still able to keep up with her, something that seems to tie her to life. She is only able to breathe calmly once she works out what the narrator is saying. The use of the past tense when describing this exchange suggests that the connection has now permanently been severed, with the narrator’s loss of her mother mirroring the loss of her mother tongue.

The role of the state as an arbiter of identity crops up throughout the story. As part of her journey back towards her mother tongue, the narrator begins to collect words and phrases. The acronym “ISCI” (12) comes to the narrator in a dream where she tries to evade state police on a train. “Meinen Paß, in dem Beruf ISCI (Arbeiter) steht, will ich verstecken, ich denke, wenn ich mich als Studentin oder als Künstlerin ausweisen kann, komme ich durch die Kontrolle durch, da ist eine Fotokopiermaschine groß wie ein Zimmer, sie druckt ein sehr großes Selbstporträt von mir als ISCI raus” (12) [I want to conceal my passport that says ISCI (Worker), I think, if I can prove I am a student or an

artist, I can get through the check, there is a photocopying machine as big as a room, it prints a giant self portrait of me as an ISCI]. “ISCI” is the third word that the narrator recalls, and it is an interesting choice. Not only does it show that the narrator has a very fluid conceptualization of what constitutes a word, but it also reveals the significance role that politics has played in the narrator’s life—“ISCI” was the name of a socialist Turkish political party in the 60s that was quickly outlawed. This is not fully explained by the narrator—she defines it only with the bracketed explanation, “Arbeiter” [worker], which perhaps signifies her personal relationship to this identifier. In the dream the narrator wants desperately to separate herself from the word in order to protect herself. She longs for another identity marker and seems stripped of any control over her status, though she must have at some point identified herself as a member of the ISCI. Her description of the giant printer copying her image further implies this sense of detachment that the narrator has from her official status, a feeling she puts in words when she describes the print as a picture of her “als ISCI” [as an ISCI]. The picture printed is not of her, but rather of her *as* something. It is also significant that this identity that the narrator feels so detached from is in her passport, a state-issues object that defines a person by their national identity. This notion of identity as something defined by one’s relation to the state is a central part of the narrator’s crisis, as an immigrant immersed in the culture of another country.

Her interaction with the Kölner Dom [Cologne cathedral] is a moment in which a state symbol has the power to cut into and fundamentally alter the narrator. One of the narrator’s guesses as to how her mother tongue was lost involves an interaction with the

cathedral. Initially, something about it is terrifying to her, but eventually she looks at it and undergoes some kind of transformation.

Ich konnte am Anfang hier den Kölner Dom nicht angucken. Wenn der Zug in Köln ankam, ich machte immer Augen zu, einmal aber machte ich ein Auge auf, in dem Moment sah ich ihn, der Dom schaute auf mich, da kam eine Rasierklinge in meinem Körper rein und lief auch drinnen, dann war kein Schmerz mehr da, ich machte mein zweites Auge auch auf. Vielleicht habe ich dort meine Mutterzunge verloren. (13)

[I could not look at the Cologne cathedral in the beginning. When the train arrived in Cologne I always closed my eyes, but one time I opened one eye, the moment I saw it, the cathedral looked down at me, right then a razor blade came and ran inside my body, then there was no more pain, I opened my second eye too. Maybe I lost my mother tongue there.]

This part of the story is striking because of the sudden personification of the state. The cathedral, at least as perceived by the narrator, has agency over her. It has the ability to see, and in seeing it can invade and alter the narrator's body. It is interesting that, while the narrator has to give it permission by first looking at it, once they can see each other it is the cathedral that is in control. In looking at it—in letting it slice into her—the narrator stops resisting what the cathedral represents—specifically, Christianity and German nationalism.

However, there are just as many moments where the authority of the state, or even its authenticity, are questioned. The narrator's reaction to the printing of her passport is one example; another is her trip across the Berlin Wall, which includes another "Fotomaschine" (13) [photo machine] in the "Korridor" [corridor] between the two Berlins. The presence of this second machine feels referential to the first one. In both cases they are objects utilized by the state to record and identify people. The narrator also does not immediately make clear which Berlin she is coming from or going to, referring

to her trip merely as “zum anderen Berlin” (13) [to the other Berlin]. The tension between the border as an arbitrary and even malleable object, and as something powerful and alienating, is explored more in *Großvaterzunge*. The narrator crosses between the two Berlins without resistance, as do many other characters, but there are also moments where she presents the two sides of the city as worlds apart. In “Großvaterzunge” she crosses the border and remarks that “es [hier] auch geregnet [hat]” (19) [here it also rains]. The suggestion here is that, despite the fact that the two cities are side-by-side, the difference between them makes the distance feel much farther. Both sides seem to be the “andere Berlin” depending on where she is, and this simultaneously enforces the narrator’s ambivalence about her relationship to either side—that is, she does not take ownership of either side, and even implies that they are fundamentally the same—and the notion that the two sides of the city are separate realms.

The narrator’s time with Ibni Abdullah, the Arabic tutor, involves a similar attitude of passivity, if not surrender. What begins as intense language instruction transforms when the narrator becomes a captive in Abdullah’s home, eventually culminating in a romance between them. As the narrator begins to learn, she enters into a figurative world. Metaphor bleeds into reality as the narrator transforms through the experience. When she finally breaks free of Abdullah—by absorbing him—she has mastered Arabic and in doing so presumably regained a sense of her former identity. However, just as important as her roots is her ability to move forward, something the narrator does by taking on a new identity as a “Wörtersammlerin” (51) [word collector].

Though this examination of these stories is only preliminary, they bring out important elements in both Schneider and Hoffman and offer a slightly different conceptualization of identity. Özdamar's portrayal of identity as fluid defies the main points of Schneider's novel, and takes Hoffman's vision of a fluid identity a step further by suggesting that it is possible to create a new identity entirely. Özdamar's narrator is influenced by culture and language, and like Hoffman believes in the value of her past (in this case an ancestral, linguistic past). As a "Wörtersammlerin," translation seems to be part of her trade. At the end of "Großvaterzunge" she facilitates a cultural-linguistic exchange using a Turkish and German homonym: "Ruh— 'Ruh heißt Seele,' sagte ich zu dem Mädchen. 'Seele heißt Ruh,' sagte sie" (51) [Ruh— 'peace means soul,' I say to the girl. 'Soul means peace,' she says]. There is a suggestion here that, rather than allowing her to blend in and find comfort in her adopted country, the narrator has taken on a transformative role.

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