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ABSTRACT

Written at pivotal historical points, the five novels examined in this study differ widely in their approaches and in their socio-historical contexts, but they share substantial similarities in their stylistic approaches to certain recurring themes. Franz Kafka’s *Der Verschollene* (published 1925) was begun in 1912, as disputes over colonies and the potential for world war brewed; Anna Seghers’s *Transit* (1944) was composed in exile during the early 1940s; Uwe Johnson’s *Mutmassungen über Jakob* (1959) was written in and about the divided, Cold-War Germany just prior to the construction of the Berlin Wall; Wolfgang Hilbig’s “Ich” (1993) spans the four years preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall, and was published four years after that event; and Marlene Streeruwitz’s *Nachwelt* (1999) reflects on multiple eras from the standpoint of the century’s end. By considering each work within its distinct socio-historical context, this study traces trends as well as divergences in metaphorical language throughout the century.

Close readings of these novels reveal that spatialized and materialized representations of temporal events and abstract concepts were a mainstay for novels in the twentieth century. As writers created figures who attempted to gain or regain control over their personal time and space, they turned ever more frequently to metaphor and its capacity to turn the intangible into the conceptually tangible. This was a means of both creating narrative space and time, and of connecting to the natural workings of human cognition, with its tendency to spatialize and materialize the abstract.
Metaphorical representations of temporality and spatiality are significant to the three major themes that this study considers in depth: first, the temporally and spatially disorienting labyrinth; second, the theme of passing the time while waiting for a known or unknown event to occur; and third, storytelling as an activity carried out through narration itself as well as by characters within a narrative. An examination of these three themes, in relation to the metaphors which both convey and reinforce them, exposes the underlying political, social, and linguistic power structures that many literary figures of the twentieth century confronted within the setting of an increasingly complex world.
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I like to think that my approach to most things was shaped in great part by the exemplary determination and relentless good humor of my father, Don Marston. Today more than ever, he is missed.
VITA

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION


On the topics of time and space, and their treatment in twentieth-century German literature, one work probably comes to mind before any other. Thomas Mann's Der Zauberberg (1924) discusses the dynamics of change, paradoxically, in the context of utter stagnation. The author declared in his introductory comments to Der Zauberberg, presented to Princeton students in 1939, that the novel attempts to produce "ein magisches 'nunc stans'' (xiv), a "space" of the timeless present which characterizes the idleness of the wealthy sanatorium patients on the mountain. Zauberberg masterfully paints an encapsulated moment in time—a "moment" consisting of three weeks turned into seven dream-like years for the protagonist Hans Castorp. Yet as consequential as Mann's novel has been in respect to its considerations of time and space, its story is hardly representative of twentieth-century circumstances.

As in the opening citation above, Mann's novel grapples with the meaning of time on a philosophical level through its narrator, reflecting the profound impact of new scientific paradigms such as the theory of relativity on art in the early part of the century. But the timelessness of the Sanatorium Berghof constitutes a quarantine from reality. As
Mann noted in his comments to the class at Princeton, “Luxuriös ist oder war alles dort oben, auch der Begriff der Zeit” (viii). The privileged figures on the Berghof take their personal time and space for granted in a way that the protagonists in other acclaimed works of the same century, generally speaking, could not. The twentieth-century literary figure commonly demonstrated a sharp awareness of an increasing impotence caused by the individual’s confrontation with more and more temporal and spatial restraints in everyday life. On the other hand, the lifting of some established boundaries governing time and space, through advances in technology and transportation, often elicited alienation and confusion. Above all, as this study proposes throughout, twentieth-century figures longed for control over their own time and space—for the right of entry into their own constantly shifting environments. As others encroached upon and tried to regulate their personal spaces, protagonists’ plights revolved around maintaining or regaining autonomy over their own surroundings; they were without the advantage of the literal and figurative Überblick of the Berghof’s residents from their position on the mountain.

Chronologically, this study starts somewhat before Zauberberg and moves well beyond it, but Mann’s novel serves as an apt starting point of both divergence and convergence. For instance, the five novels discussed in this study conceivably fit into the category of Zeitroman as Mann outlines it in respect to his own epic, a “Zeitroman in doppeltem Sinn: einmal historisch, indem er das innere Bild einer Epoche, der europäischen Vorkriegszeit, zu entwerfen versucht, dann aber, weil die reine Zeit selbst sein Gegenstand ist, den er nicht nur als die Erfahrung seines Helden, sondern auch in und durch sich selbst behandelt” (xiii-xiv). The works examined here all attempt to depict the essence of a particular time and place, in ways both similar to and differing from Mann’s novel. Each text deals with “the times” of its respective era, but also with the
notion of time itself, quite often—as Mann does as well—by featuring spatial and material configurations to communicate the abstraction of temporality. These similarities notwithstanding, the novels in this study depart from Mann’s novel most significantly in their approaches to situating their characters’ struggles with the mysteries and frustrations of time and space. Moving away from Hans Castorp’s tranquil setting on the mountain, they locate their protagonists in the heart of twentieth-century commotion and automation. The novels all take place, at least in part, in the setting of modern cities (New York, Paris/Marseilles, Berlin, Vienna/Los Angeles), the spaces where altered perceptions of time were measured, saluted, and lamented in the twentieth century. The city is presented in its dual role as a place of refuge and as a constricting environment from which some need to escape.

Franz Kafka’s Der Verschollene (begun in 1912) is set primarily in a location far removed from the idyll of the Berghof, namely in the hectic metropolis of New York and its suburbs. The protagonist, Karl Roßmann, aspires toward social advancement in the land of seemingly endless opportunity, while he leaves his tarnished European past behind him. Kafka’s America-novel is often considered a parody of the traditional Bildungsroman, the modern form of which Mann’s Zauberberg has been said to exemplify.1 Without making any real progress, Karl is thrust from one confounding, obstacle-laden station to the next in the mechanized, high-speed, turn-of-the-century America. At the same time, Der Verschollene embraces some conventions of the Bildungsroman. Namely, Karl Roßmann is forced to learn at least something about how to reign over his own time and space within these unfamiliar surroundings.

1 Cf. for example Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature (1995) which claims that Der Zauberberg “is considered a towering example of the bildungsroman” (713).
Anna Seghers started the novel *Transit* (published in 1944) while in exile during the early 1940s, after fleeing Nazi Germany. Seidler, the novel’s protagonist, has fled from a German concentration camp himself. Like Seghers, he travels first to Paris and then to Marseilles, in order to obtain the necessary visas for fleeing Europe. To this end he becomes, on paper, a writer named Weidel who has recently committed suicide. In Marseilles Seidler experiences the labyrinth of bureaucracy, which possesses its own brand of sluggish temporality. Seemingly endless time spent waiting for other people to determine the next steps in their flight from Third-Reich terror is contrasted with the refugees’ frantic need to escape before their own time runs out. In the end, Seidler shows his governance over his own environment and life course when, even after beating the system by acquiring the appropriate paperwork for leaving Marseilles, he opts to stay in France with plans to join the resistance movement.

Appearing two years before the construction of the Berlin Wall, Uwe Johnson’s *Mutmassungen über Jakob* (1959) is often described as the first novel of a divided, Cold-War Germany. The GDR train dispatcher Jakob begins to lose control over his domain, a particular stretch of railroad tracks along the Elbe. The changes that have taken place since the establishment of separate rail systems in East and West have resulted in an increasing number of delays and in the diminishing of Jakob’s previous “Aufsicht über die Zeit” (65). Despite any doubts he might have about the current system, his sense of responsibility for not only his own time, but for that of his fellow citizens, remains solid: in October of 1956, the normally even-keeled Jakob becomes livid when a dispatcher up the line delays the Warsaw Pact trains which are to move troops through his station, on their way to suppress the Hungarian Revolution. Jakob’s loss of control in the workplace culminates in his unexplained death on the very tracks over which he once reigned.
sovereign. Employing several different narrators to tell Jakob's story, Johnson's novel suggests that while any "truths" beyond the temporal and spatial coordinates of an individual's life can remain only speculative, retrospective attempts to comprehend result in a rich, multi-dimensional—if by no means definitive—picture of that person.

The narration of Wolfgang Hilbig's "Ich" (1993) spans the four years preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The protagonist M.W. is a writer who is commissioned to work for the Ministry of State Security as an informant. Maintaining his roles as a supposed "underground" dissident writer and as an "Informeller Mitarbeiter" for the Stasi, he becomes unable to clearly distinguish the two realms. His lack of authority in all domains of his life causes him to fall into lengthy periods of dreamy sleep, prompting both temporal and spatial disorientation. The spaces of Berlin provide physical labyrinths which parallel M.W.'s own mental ones, as the protagonist tries to lose himself in the underground sewer system and catacombs in order to escape his state-induced delusions up above. The novel ends its story shortly before the opening of the Berlin Wall, with M.W.'s uncertain chance to gain his bearings when he retreats from Berlin's big-city labyrinths back to his small-town home in Saxony.

Marlene Streeruwitz's Nachwelt (1999) portrays the female protagonist Margarethe, who travels from Vienna to the disorienting, decentralized megalopolis of Los Angeles for ten days in March of 1990. Margarethe hopes to research the life of Anna Mahler, sculptor and daughter to the composer Gustav Mahler, with the goal of writing a biography about the artist. Along with research, though, she uses the time away from home to reevaluate her deteriorating relationship with partner Helmut in the context of several other miserable past relationships. These efforts take center stage throughout much of the novel, especially as Margarethe realizes the futility of trying to traverse

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spatial and temporal boundaries in pursuit of someone else's story. She eventually gives up on the Mahler-biography project (as did the author Streeruwitz herself), a decision that liberates her to search for new beginnings in her personal and professional life. However, a pervasive sense of confinement, which she attributes in different ways to being a woman and a member of the post-war generation in Austria, threatens to restrain Margarethe further.

* * *

Written at pivotal historical points, the five novels examined here differ widely in their approaches and in their socio-historical contexts. But what they have in common supports the crux of this study’s argument, that is, that spatialized and materialized representations of abstract temporal events and intangible concepts were a mainstay for the novel throughout the twentieth century. As writers created figures who attempted to gain or regain control over their personal time and space, they turned ever more frequently to metaphor and its capacity to turn the intangible into the conceptually tangible. This was a means of both creating narrative space and time, and of connecting to the natural workings of human cognition.

1.1. Metaphorical Spatializations and Materializations

In reference to the golden hand on an ornamental clock in the sanatorium, the narrator of Mann’s *Zauberberg* comments that Hans Castorp kept an eye on it, “um einige Minuten zu hemmen und zu dehnen, die Zeit am Schwanze zu halten” (659). This image of restraining the wild animal by holding its tail marks a recurrent phenomenon of twentieth-century literary figures who try to control their time so it might move at the desired pace. Writers often express this by representing time’s abstract essence as
something tangible and thus conceivably within human grasp and command. As opposed to the scientist, who can remain abstractly concrete through mathematical formulae which symbolically represent the humanly unfathomable, the writer must find a way to be concretely abstract. As such, intangible concepts are commonly made metaphorically material in literature: opposition becomes a wall, sadness is a dark cloud hanging overhead, time becomes an unruly animal that needs taming. Concretizing the abstract assists the writer in approximating the world’s multidimensionality on the two-dimensional page of text. Such endeavors are by no means limited to the twentieth century, as metaphorical concretization and spatialization can be traced back to the very origins of Western literature. But my position in this study is that in twentieth-century German literature, spatializations and materializations secured a position of significance as never before. The reasons for this are manifold and complex, not to be reduced to simplistic causalities, but still they are apparent at least in their broad strokes. The century saw the bustling confusion of modern cities; a boom in convoluted bureaucracy which suddenly ruled many aspects of everyday life; tremendous advances in communications and transportation technology; the devastation of world wars and the tragedy of the Holocaust. The resulting widespread insecurity, uncertainty, and trauma prompted a greater urge than ever before to hang tightly onto that which feels intuitively more certain. In language, this is accomplished far and wide by metaphor.

From Nietzsche to post-structuralism and beyond, philosophical trends throughout the twentieth century faulted language for being devoid of true meaning, and thus inadequate for the representation of both the abstract and the concrete. Language was

2 Language is a spatial form which is produced within time, but it is commonly thought to fall short of capturing spatio-temporal experience. Italo Calvino writes that it is impossible to achieve exactitude linguistically because “in representing the density and
condemned for the emptiness inherent in its metaphor-upon-metaphor structure. Yet the recurrence of spatial and material metaphors, in their many and varied manifestations, marked a constant in literature throughout the century. Thus, representational crises and claims of linguistic futility did not prevail ultimately, as writers were unremitting in their attempts to express the abstract linguistically via analogies with the material. Whether through a conscious effort or not on the part of its creator, the literary text within the Western traditions has maintained the tendency “to spatialize immediate temporal experience for the purpose of securing its readers’ always flagging faith in the logocentric order of that experience” (Spanos 68). In addition to securing this confidence in language’s primacy, spatializations of experience within narratives mesh with cognitive tendencies of placing bounds on the boundless.

As Henri Bergson and others in the twentieth century observed, the intellect deals with time through a process of spatialization. The boundaries of space are physically perceptible, often visible, assessable, and seemingly finite, as opposed to the apparent endless progression of time. The dynamic mental process of perception “imposes order on, as much as it discerns order in a domain” (Goodman/Elgin 7); the act of spatialization, or of applying imaginary spatial boundaries to the non-spatial notion of time or other abstracts, is a typical assertion of order by individuals onto both their

continuity of the world around us, language is revealed as defective and fragmentary, always saying something less with respect to the sum of what can be experienced” (75). The increasingly backwards regression of the state of language is metaphoricized in Roland Barthes’s concept that we are ever approaching a communicative “degree zero.”

8

3 In her introduction to Eugène Minkowski’s consequential work Lived Time, Nancy Metzel touches on the approximate nature of spatial representations for phenomenological time: “Spatialization of time occurs when the elements of time are seen to be contained within […] space. They can thus be considered as discrete. They are, in this state, measurable. However, the notion of succession has been rendered incomprehensible. Time as represented in spatial terms does not recapitulate lived time” (xxiii-xxiv).
physical surroundings and metaphysical mysteries. Natural time is securely harnessed by 
human-made timepieces in our day-to-day experience, although rationally we know that 
these only serve to generate an artificial temporal structure. This is reflected in spatially-
based expressions in everyday language, such as “twenty past the hour” or “throughout 
the centuries” (Goatly 30, 57). Space is perceived to be controllable and containable, and 
therefore is commonly considered somehow cognitively less complex than time. By 
thinking of and then representing time—and consequently consciousness and other 
abstract concepts—in terms of space, individuals impose order onto the experiential 
world. Spatialization makes the unknown and the unfamiliar a little less so. Gaston 
Bachelard argues in his Poetics of Space (1958) that notions of space have familiar 
connotations, namely, of the home. Based on this reasoning, it follows that human 
cognition tends to spatialize the abstract in order to relate it, at least remotely, to 
something inherently safe.

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4 The concept of the “state” illustrates such concretization of the abstract as a means of 
imposing order, in this case enforcing political stability within artificially material 
geographical borders. Cf. David Harvey’s discussion of Marx, who “had restored 
historical time (and class relations) to primacy of place in social theory, in part as a 
reaction to Hegel’s spatialized conception of the ‘ethical state’ as the end-point of a 
teleological history” (273). I discuss this further in Chapter 2 in relation to 
Mutmassungen über Jakob.

5 In the hard sciences, though, time has been considered much simpler because of its 

6 In regard to spatialization in literary language, this premise fits with Igor Stravinsky’s 
notion of a “reflective system” between the aesthetic and the experiential worlds; the 
former can reveal but also organize structures of the latter (cf. Schleifer 20). This 
discussion also calls to mind the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which states that our reality is 
shaped by the linguistic categories at our disposal; Whorf asserted that “the spatial 
metaphors provided by one’s language determine how one will normally conceptualize 
abstract domains” (Hobbs 53). The hypothesis has gained attention again recently among 
cognitive scientists, enjoying a “Whorfian Revival” after being dismissed by most in the 
2002).
Gerard Steen details the cognitive process involved in analogizing, such as in conceiving of a non-material abstract via spatial dimensions (11). Concrete structure is projected onto abstract ideas, such that the latter is then imagined, envisioned, or articulated in terms of the former. As Steen and others before him have pointed out, however, many of these analogies are so ingrained in everyday speech that understanding them occurs immediately and does not necessarily require complex mapping (16). In literary language, analogies are often constructed more consciously and with specific intentions, thus some distinction might need to be made: certain literary metaphors reflect entrenched linguistic convention, while others are deliberately implemented to convey a certain atmosphere, to reinforce a leitmotif, and so forth. In some cases, as this study examines in part, the writer may even be commenting with awareness on the cultural-linguistic prevalence and significance of metaphor by pushing a common idiom to extremes in order to magnify its spatial implications.

In any case, metaphors reflect dominant cognitive patterns within cultures. The propensity of many modern Western cultures to conceptualize the world in spatial terms results in a variety of metaphors. The philosophy behind the considerations of metaphors

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7 This structural viewpoint is a relatively recent turn in metaphor studies. Before George Lakoff and others in the 1980s promoted the idea of “conceptual” metaphors and their direct connection to cognition, metaphors were seen predominantly as “figures of speech” (rather than as figures of thought).

8 Metaphors are contingent on language and culture, and therefore cannot be completely generalized. Cf. Edward Hall’s remarks on a learned monochronic time which shapes views of reality in the northern European and American cultures in particular, as opposed to polychronic peoples such as the Hopi and the Sioux, who have no word for time. The spatial way in which people of monochronic cultures schedule and segment their lives is accepted subconsciously as “the” logical order, and this becomes evident in verbal expression as well (Beyond Culture 14 ff.). Cultures in which polychronic time is dominant (Latin America, the Middle East, etc.) do not necessarily understand time as tangible, or as linear and segmented “like a road or a ribbon extending forward into the future and backward to the past” (ibid. 16); therefore it would be interesting to consider

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in this study stems in some measure from the influential work *Metaphors We Live By*, in which George Lakoff and Mark Johnson assert that “the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor” (3). While they focus their research on everyday language, I look at how some of these same metaphors help to develop or intensify various themes in literature. Based on the prevalence of mental spatialization processes as discussed above, my deliberations on metaphors will center around the general terms of spatiality and materiality, by which I am referring to the various manifestations of figurative concreteness bestowed on abstract concepts through language. These types of metaphors involve the representation of something intangible as if it took up space or as I will address shortly, as if it wrapped itself around empty space like a container. Through spatial and material metaphors, inexpressible ambiguities and the uncertainties of temporal events are smoothed out within the more quantifiable and fathomable parameters of space.

Among the categories of metaphor set forth by Lakoff and Johnson are orientational metaphors, which “arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment” (14) and which lend spatial or directional orientation to a concept: for instance, “having control or force is up; being subject to control or force is down” (15)—as in, to have control “over” a person, whether the spatialization of time would function for these cultures too in such a consolatory way. Further, cultural norms regarding personal space are another variable in its literary presentation. Hall has asserted for instance that Germans “sense their own space as an extension of the ego,” perhaps explaining in part their common preference for closed office doors (*The Hidden Dimension* 134 ff.). Such generalizations are not always very fruitful in studies of an individual’s articulations of temporality and spatiality, and if not incorporated carefully can lead to stereotyping. In any case though, cultural and historical influences on cognition undoubtedly materialize in written form conspicuously or subtly, as intentional or subconscious moves, and they may be thematically and/or stylistically apparent.

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versus to be “under” someone’s control. In literature, this type of conceptualization becomes extended to a visual image in the hierarchical distinctions of “Wir hier oben” uttered by the figures at the Berghof in Mann’s Zauberberg and in a completely different context by the Stasi officers in Hilbig’s “Ich”; or in the bergauf / bergab metaphors of the Magic Mountain and, much later, in a work such as Streeruwitz’s Nachwelt.

A second classification relevant to this study is that of ontological metaphors: “ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances” (Lakoff/Johnson 25). This includes the hypostatization of conceptualizing abstracts as objects, as well as personification. The widely used container metaphor also belongs under the heading “ontological”:

Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation. We project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces. Thus we also view them as containers with an inside and an outside. (Lakoff/Johnson 29)

Not only quantifiable territory is conceptualized as a container, Lakoff and Johnson continue, but also visual fields and abstracts with no physical boundaries, such as events, actions, activities, and states (30 ff.). As the following chapters will demonstrate, time in particular is portrayed often in literature as a container that needs to be filled in some way. Mann begins the seventh chapter of Zauberberg with reflections on time that exemplify the container metaphor; he understands the ability of an Erzählung, like that of

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9 Lakoff and Johnson explain how ontological metaphors differ from orientational metaphors: “Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them—and, by this means, reason about them” (25).

10 Anthony Giddens uses container-metaphor terminology in describing the phenomenon referred to as the “emptying” of time and space: “Modernity globalizes insofar as space is separated from place and reintegrated with the empty dimension of time” (NowHere xii).
music, “daß sie die Zeit *erfüllt*, sie ‘anständig ausfüllt,’ sie ‘einteilt’” (654).

Conceptually, time can be filled and also segmented through activities such as storytelling and music, leading to the illusion that the rate of an individual’s time can be deliberately manipulated.11

A subclass of the container metaphor, the conduit metaphor, leads us beyond time to “the bizarre assertion that words have ‘insides’ and ‘outsides.’ After all, if thoughts can be ‘inserted,’ there must be a space ‘inside’ wherein the meaning can reside”—e.g. “That thought is in practically every other word”; “Your words are hollow”; or, “The sentence was filled with emotion” (Ortony 288; cf. also Lakoff/Johnson 10 ff.). The conduit metaphor coincides with Foucault’s theory that space “transports language—and in space the very being of language is ‘metaphorised’” (“Language of Space” 52).12

Ontological metaphors point to common conceptualizations of time, such as time as a moving object and the (seemingly contradictory) notion of stationary time through which we move (Lakoff and Johnson 42-43; also “time=(movement through) space,” Goatly 61,71). In a narrative, the former type of spatialization is inherent in concise statements such as, “Die Zeit schlich” (Zauberberg 202), or “Der Nachmittag schritt vor” (Transit 121). The use of such verbs of motion presents time as crawling or trudging onward. To this category I will add the spatial-linear metaphor of “life as a path.” Hans

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11 At the same time, according to Mann, boredom and monotony actually mean that “große Zeiträume schrumpfen” as every day begins to feel the same through lack of new activity—leading to the sensation of timeless at the Berghof (123); however, the literary figures in this study generally do not experience this “Kurzweiligkeit” (ibid.) because for them, time is usually of the essence rather than a luxury (although they do experience boredom, cf. Chapter 3 of this study).
12 Foucault offers his reasoning for the prevalence of spatial metaphor: “And if space is the most obsessing of metaphors in today’s languages, it is not because henceforth it offers the only possible solution; but it is in space that language, right from the start, unfurls, passes over itself, determines its choices and draws its figures and translations” (“Language of Space” 51-52).
Castorp, for instance, delineates the “zwei Wege” of life (the usual and direct one versus the path of brilliance). The path metaphor continues to play a substantial role in twentieth-century literature beyond Thomas Mann. As will be demonstrated, the particular significance of this type of conceptualization lies in its role of upholding the belief that the past can be left behind (for better or for worse), but possibly can be revisited by retracing one’s steps on the path.

1.2. Narrative Pace

Kann man die Zeit erzählen, diese selbst, als solche, an und für sich? Wahrhaftig, nein, das wäre ein närrisches Unterfangen! Eine Erzählung, die ginge: “Die Zeit verfloss, sie verrann, es strömte die Zeit” und so immer fort, —das könnte gesunden Sinnes wohl niemand eine Erzählung nennen. (Zauberberg 654)

The reflections by Mann’s narrator on the “telling” of time are noteworthy not only in their materialization of time as a fluid substance which flows or trickles depending on individual perspective, but also in their implication that the passage of time does not make a story in and of itself. Rather, a story emerges as an attempt to capture experiences occurring within a particular time frame. One challenge is to present the passage of this fictional time, as experienced by a work’s characters, in a way which demonstrates its relative variability. This aspect signified an increasingly striking distinction in the literature of the twentieth century from that of the previous one.

Einstein’s theory of relativity had at least an indirect influence on twentieth-century novelists, who, “in delving the individual consciousness, aligned themselves with relativist theories” (Kestner 16). The early twentieth-century shift in focus by Bergson, Freud, and others away from Newtonian notions of absolute time, in favor of a focus on subjectively perceived time and on memory, soon became apparent in modernist
literature (cf. Mendilow 5 ff.), as documented by the prevalence of stylistic characteristics such as stream of consciousness, erlebte Rede, and multiperspectivism. This study will consider these significant narrative aspects when appropriate, but more often it will focus specifically on how and why writers effect a seemingly variable pace in particular scenes (e.g. via syntax and word choice).

The creation of an irregular narrative pace was part and parcel of the various forms of realism which emerged in the twentieth century. This began to take shape with Hermann Bahr and the naturalists, who saw themselves as a product of modernity and therefore of a society in which time was increasingly fragmented, and with the Italian and Russian futurists (and working under different motivations, the Dadaists), who sought a new artistic tempo which would replicate that of the machine-driven modern world.

Other writers of the century’s inaugural decades, such as Kafka, incorporated the heightened pace of twentieth-century life more subtly (and arguably subconsciously, at least in part) into their work.13 In addition to the relativity of individuals’ temporal experience, the notion of “compressed” time and space, triggered by the faster pace of everyday life, began to take shape in—while at the same time shaping—literature. As the century progressed, time-space compression14 intensified further, and some literary works

13 Mendilow, who discusses narrative tempo as more of a plot device than a stylistic one (125), argues for a certain timelessness in Kafka’s novels: “The reader labours under the feeling that events are proceeding in some kind of nightmarish time-continuum where duration is marked by intensity only, divorced from length and pace. […] It is not that time contracts or expands, moves or stands still, for all these imply that there is still a time in operation. It is rather that time is extraneous to the treatment of the theme, neither conquering nor conquered but just non-existent” (139). While this analysis is fitting for novels such as Der Prozeß and Das Schloß, Kafka’s first novel Der Verschollene seems to be an exception, as my forthcoming remarks on its variable narrative pace suggest.

14 Cf. David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity, in which he defines time-space compression as the result of “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves. I use the word ‘compression’ because a strong case can
demonstrated a likewise “compressed” narrative pace, which was effected by a wide and varied range of stylistic methods, some of which will be considered in the following chapters.

* * *

Having outlined two methods employed by writers in creating a narrative time and space, the spatialization or materialization of abstract concepts through metaphor, and the manipulation of narrative pace, it should be noted that the two can work hand-in-hand. This is sometimes the case with spatial-linear metaphors, for instance: time, or life, as a path on which one can move at variable rates. Further, some narrative modes (such as stream of consciousness) highlight temporal fluidity while simultaneously forming spatially conceived moments that serve as containers for action. Spatialized form within a novel occurs then when the “time-flow of the narrative is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the immobilized time-area” (Frank 17). Spatialization can take place on the textual level as a result of a writer using various methods to manipulate narrative pace and to crystallize a moment in fictional time, in addition to occurring on the lexical and semantic levels through metaphor in particular. These processes will be examined in light of three overarching themes: the labyrinth, waiting, and storytelling.

1.3. Themes

The structure of this study, divided into chapters by theme rather than by author or work, was motivated in part by the idea that metaphor means little without theme; as be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us” (240).
Phillip Stambovsky asserts, “The metaphors of literary experience are grounded, in the first instance, in a thematic—not a linguistic or semiotic—matrix” (16). A “functional view of theme” (Stambovsky 4) led to a methodology which involved first identifying three significant themes relating to time and space in the twentieth-century German novel, and then moving to the linguistic and semiotic levels by examining the metaphors which support these themes. The goal is to reveal how language is molded in the attempt to capture the times and spaces of human experience, and how ingrained linguistic patterns do so as well. Stambovsky argues that metaphors express themes depictively and prediscursively, and some of the thematic analysis in the chapters to follow assumes this prediscursive metalevel. While close readings of the texts vis-à-vis particular themes disclose certain metaphorical patterns, some of which flaunt the linguistic dexterity of great writers, I suggest that some of the most fascinating metaphors are indeed those that we live by, the ones which are embedded in everyday language and thought.

Metaphorical representations of temporality and spatiality are significant to the three major themes that this study considers in depth: the temporally and spatially disorienting labyrinth; the theme of passing the time while waiting for something known or unknown to occur; and storytelling as an activity carried out by narration as well as by literary figures within a narrative. The three main chapters to follow are structured slightly differently from one another because of the diversity of these themes. Spatial and material metaphors constitute the labyrinth theme almost entirely—through these metaphors, the psychological labyrinths of literary characters are constructed. Thus, most of the subsections of Chapter 2 are devoted to the various metaphors connected with the labyrinth motif, while Chapters 3 and 4 (on waiting and storytelling respectively) offer entire subsections that trace the themes and their significance throughout the novels,
before then concentrating on the particular metaphors which intensify and support those themes. By the same token, the latter two themes warrant more discussion of narrative pace than does the labyrinth theme: in addition to building suspense or slowing the action in the process of storytelling, an acceleration or deceleration of pace often communicates the variable pace of time for characters who find themselves in a situation of waiting.

In Chapter 2, “The Labyrinth,” the analysis centers on literary depictions of individuals’ disorientation, and on spatial and material metaphors as the devices which often enable these representations. As asserted already, metaphors are generated for the purpose of providing cognitive points of orientation and a sense of control over one’s environment. Yet metaphors can also express both physical and mental disorientation. In the case of the labyrinth theme, spatial metaphors are implemented to intensify characters’ sensations of being trapped and disoriented within a literally or figuratively labyrinthine situation. The labyrinth as a theme is considered here in conjunction with the language used to express it, which is often labyrinthine itself in various respects. The conduit metaphor underlying much of our everyday idiomatic speech also connects language and labyrinth, through the conceptualization of words and ideas as possessing a figurative space in which one potentially can become lost.

Chapter 3, “Waiting,” explores the intricacies of social power structures that are revealed through prevalent “waiting hierarchies” in literature: one means of flaunting power is to make others of lesser status wait. Those who are obliged to wait for someone or something feel their own lives suspended, pending the decisions and actions of others. The waiting theme and stylistic devices such as the container metaphor underscore the exploitation of another individual’s time as a way of wielding power. Foucault’s notion of social space as a container of power relations comes into view in the waiting rooms of
various types in these novels.\textsuperscript{15} The waiting theme also highlights the negative effects of indeterminate time intervals on an individual’s psychological welfare, the significance of which is shown by twentieth-century writers’ attempts to represent time as passing unevenly for their often distraught characters.\textsuperscript{16} Further, waiting is connected to two concepts that preoccupied both twentieth-century social theorists and writers of fiction: boredom and impatience. While the contexts in which these sentiments were generated varied greatly—from times of great danger to times of serenity or stagnation—boredom and impatience surface in literature throughout the century with the same sorts of metaphors, along with both similar and divergent means of controlling narrative pace.

In Chapter 4, “Storytelling,” the complementary relationship of theme and the orchestration of a fictional \textit{Zeitraum} reaches its culminating point. Storytelling is performed through the creation of a narrative, but it is also presented thematically as a vital component in the lives of literary characters, whose own narratives become both the signified and the signifiers of the storytelling process. The inclusion of storytelling in the novels’ plots is a signifier for the process as a consistently integral part of twentieth-century life. Beyond mere thematization, though, exists implicit authorial commentary on the storytelling process. This is signified in characters who tell, or attempt to tell, stories through the same metaphors and imagery relied upon by the authors themselves.

The transfer of perceptions and events across temporal and spatial domains engenders obstacles caused by the fallibility of memory, and by the shortcomings of linguistic formulation. The literary figures’ own frustrations with their memories and

\textsuperscript{15} “Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (“Space, power and knowledge” 168).

\textsuperscript{16} As Eviatar Zerubavel notes, “Temporal irregularity […] contributes considerably to the development of a strong sense of uncertainty” (12).
with storytelling, coupled with their compulsion to engage in it nonetheless, are reflected in the language and overall structure of these texts. Memory, an essential ingredient for storytelling, is often represented through spatial metaphors. The time lapse between any event and its recall in the mind results in gaps and modifications, confirming that memories are not static photographic images which can be summoned on command as is often hoped. Nonetheless, human cognition persists in materializing these intangibles, as evidenced by the recurrence of literary metaphors which denote a spatially-bound faculty of memory and the material pictures of memories housed within that “container.” When memory is uncertain, though, spatial and material metaphors remain indispensable in aiding the vital processes of telling, retelling, and remembering.

17 Reinforcing that conceptualizations such as the container metaphor are hardly exclusive to modern times, Saint Augustine’s reflections in the Confessions already point to a spatialized understanding of memory. He writes that memory is “like a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses. In it are stored away all the thoughts by which we enlarge upon or diminish or modify in any way the perceptions at which we arrive through the senses, and it also contains anything else that has been entrusted to it for safe keeping, until such time as these things are swallowed up and buried in forgetfulness” (214).

18 In a recent special German Quarterly issue on the “sites of memory,” Karen Remmler reflects on Marianne Hirsch’s definition of “postmemory” that seems to capture the treatment of memory by many writers and scholars, in particular after the Holocaust: “The space of remembrance is neither timeless nor time-bound, but rather inhabited by images whose meanings evolve over time. The placement of an image outside the time of its inception forms memory, itself in flux. Remembrance both transforms and fixes a reminder of an event, a face, or a feeling. When a recalled image is remembered in place, a site emerges with contours and characteristics that take on meaning” (Remmler 337).

19 “In so far as metaphors can evoke vivid mental images they facilitate memory” (Tilley 8).
C. Wright Mills opened his seminal work *The Sociological Imagination* of 1959 with generalizations about the twentieth century:

Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct: What ordinary men are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighborhood; in other milieux, they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel. (3)

The theme of the labyrinth became common in twentieth-century literature as these “traps” of everyday existence increased exponentially in the modern world.¹ The traditional format of the labyrinth is one of winding paths that double back on themselves, with some paths always spiraling toward its center. As the world has become increasingly decentralized, the paths in conceptual labyrinths remain meandering and

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¹ The labyrinth motif has a long literary history beyond the original Greek myth (see FN 2 below). In Baroque literature it was frequently portrayed as an “Irrgarten.” Several centuries later, Walter Benjamin borrowed from the early Romantics a conception of his “Denken und Leben als Zentrum eines Labyrinths […] in das verschiedene Eingänge führen” (Kaulen 43). Klaus Hammer examines the labyrinth motif in respect to GDR literature and the literary form of the “Anti-Utopie” (1453). Other recent examples of the labyrinth motif in contemporary literature include Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum*, Jorge Luis Borges’s short story collection *Labyrinths*; Christoph Ransmayr’s *Der Weg nach Surabaya* (with its adaptation of the Daedalus tale, “Das Labyrinth”), among numerous others.

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tortuous, but the way to any center is effectively obstructed. As a result, the twentieth-century model of labyrinthine structures (literal or figurative) was characterized by maze-like configurations, replete with dead ends and snares. The term “labyrinth” as used in this study refers in a broad sense both to the physical, perplexing structures in which the characters of these five novels often find themselves entrapped, and to the metaphorical labyrinths which dominate the figures’ mental realms. While the Greek myth of the labyrinth is often far from sight in these more recent literary treatments of the theme, analogies can often be drawn—if only in broad terms such as disorientation, confusion, futility, and the dangers of the unknown. Individuals who are thrust into any labyrinthine situation often exhibit a lack of control over their own time and space as they try to find a way out. Twentieth-century German literature is characterized by numerous figures engaged in such fruitless pursuits. The labyrinth theme in literature underscores the feelings of impotence which result from characters’ vain efforts, but also corresponds to the riddles of the human mind and consciousness which were beginning to be explored with scientific earnest around the turn of the century.

An analysis of this theme’s treatment in literature reveals socio-political, personal, and interpersonal labyrinths. Accordingly, I will concentrate here on the sensations of physical and mental disorientation, and the ensuing attempts toward reorientation, that arise out of estranging and enigmatic individual and socio-historical circumstances. In an escalatively unstable and unsettled environment, the search for security or certainty

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2 Poseidon punished King Minos for his selfishness with the birth of the half-bull, half-human Minotaur to Minos’s wife. Minos asked Daedalus to build an intricate palace, named the Labyrinth, as an inescapable housing for the Minotaur. Minos later used the Labyrinth for human sacrifices, who were forced to wander around disorientedly until they were confronted by the voracious Minotaur. One of these would-be-sacrifices was Theseus, who fell in love with Minos’s daughter Ariadne. She gave him a thread for tying to the Labyrinth’s door, so that he could find his way out after killing the Minotaur.
dominates the actions and motivations of many literary characters, who often represent modern-day Sisyphus figures. Their endless searches and their pursuits of literal and figurative Überblick are hampered by obstacles—real and imagined, tangible and intangible, surmountable and indomitable. Most of the labyrinths examined here are human-made rather than natural, revealing the often constructed nature of labyrinths in the context of human experience. As literary figures build their own labyrinths, the zealous social emphasis on “progress” in the twentieth century, on Fort-schritt, makes the barrage of impediments particularly distressing for those plagued with the drive to step forward and upward to presupposed betterment.

While a close look at the labyrinth as an overarching theme serves as a guide to interpretive possibilities for the novels and helps situate them within their respective eras, each section pays particular attention to the various types of spatial and material metaphors employed by the five authors. The malleability of these metaphors allows for fascinating literary representation of both literal and figurative labyrinths.

2.1. Der Verschollene: “Ich habe mich verirrt”

In Kafka’s essay “Über Apperception,” the author asserts that someone who is foreign to a particular location, someone completely without “Ortsgefühl,” lacks the ability to perceive correctly in that place (Brod, Prager Kreis 95). The foreigner remains disoriented and unable to gain bearings for quite some time. Kafka’s Karl Roßmann embodies these characteristics upon his arrival in America. As the Verschollene he has

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3 In the Nachwort to the first edition of this work (1927), Max Brod noted that Kafka’s manuscript was without a title, but that in conversation Kafka had referred to it as his “amerikanischen Roman.” In the Nachwort to the third edition (1946), Brod revealed that Kafka labeled the work as a whole Der Verschollene in his diaries. Some recent editions
strayed from the security of his home, and is considered by his naturalized uncle to belong to a group of lost sheep (56). But Karl's dubious identification as the missing one goes much further than his immigrant status. The modern world pressures him to find his calling and to travel the road to success, but for one reason or another he continues to go missing in this regard too, always deviating from any such road. But Karl's dubious identification as the missing one goes much further than his immigrant status. The modern world pressures him to find his calling and to travel the road to success, but for one reason or another he continues to go missing in this regard too, always deviating from any such road. Physically transplanted to unfamiliar turf on his parents' orders, and forbidden to communicate with them again, he is the literal embodiment of the “Verschollenen”; after all, “[v]on einem Verschollenen weiß man nicht, ob er schon tot oder vielleicht noch am Leben ist” (Martin 117). But Karl is also figuratively verschollen, continually drifting off of the path which he believes would lead to a better life as he acts based on perceptions that, according to Kafka's notion of Apperception, cannot possibly be trusted yet.

While most of this section will focus on the novel's protagonist Karl, a short discussion of the immigrant Therese, whom Karl meets at his job in a hotel, is in order. Some of the novel's most vivid representations of the labyrinth theme are found in the story which Therese tells Karl about her childhood experiences as a soon-to-be orphaned immigrant in New York—a story which, although undoubtedly more extreme, parallels Karl's own in many ways. Therese and her mother were "in den Massenquartieren des New Yorker Ostens unauffindbar verloren" (196). Significant to the interpretation of Karl's plight as well, America's East is presented as perilous and confusing, implying that a westward flight toward refuge is the most reasonable option. Therese's mother is

of the novel have maintained the title Amerika (e.g. Fischer Taschenbuch 1994), although the editors of the 1983 critical edition decided on Der Verschollene.

Mark Anderson writes of the reader's corresponding disorientation: "Karl's predicament is largely akin to that of the reader as the narrative moves implacably ahead, abandoning unnamed places and inscrutable characters for new ones, apparently following a random, unpredictable course and without posting identifiable spatial and temporal signboards" (109).
delirious from hunger, and a snowstorm in “den langen geraden Newyorker Straßen” contributes further to their severe disorientation (196)—a precursor scene to the well-known Schneekapitel in Mann’s Zauberberg of 1924, contrastively showing the harsh reality of life for the disadvantaged that is worlds away from the privileged Berghof residents. The girl and her mother become disoriented both temporally and spatially in their desperate search for food and shelter:

Therese wußte auch nicht, ob sie von Mitternacht bis fünf Uhr früh in zwanzig Häusern oder in zwei oder gar nur in einem Haus gewesen waren. Die Korridore dieser Häuser sind nach schlauen Plänen der besten Raumausnützung aber ohne Rücksicht auf leichte Orientierung angelegt, wie oft waren sie wohl durch die gleichen Korridore gekommen! (199)

Efficiency of space results in a deficiency of bearings. The primal urge to turn to the maternal figure for orientation and security exists even while the mother is disoriented herself and unable to protect her child. This faltering lifelink is severed altogether when Therese’s mother dies at a construction site shortly thereafter.

Karl is likewise orphaned, for all intents and purposes, after his parents send him on the trip which propels him constantly westward. He is no longer a child, having fathered one of his own, but still he longs for a return to the maternal security from his childhood, and for access to the interior spaces which are metaphorical representations of the womb. Like Therese, he is left to his own devices to maneuver through the labyrinths of America. Unlike Therese, he is less than successful in this endeavor.

5 Karl experiences this same type of déjà-vu later, when he tries to navigate the corridors of Pollunder’s oppressive mansion. Cf. Wucherpfennig (138 ff.) for discussion on the connection between Der Verschollene and Adorno’s thesis of the “Immergleichen.”
6 Some have argued that Karl remains child-like and id-driven throughout. Wucherpfennig goes so far to say that the “sexuelle Vereinigung mit dem Dienstmädchen hatte Karl nicht zum Mann, sondern zum Kind gemacht,” pointing out the image of the dominating maternal figure in the description of the servant’s seduction of him (150).
7 Renner argues that the very “Eintreten” into the ship, the uncle’s house, Pollunder’s country manor, the “Hotel occidental,” and Brunelda’s lair suggest “Mutterleibs-
The labyrinths in which Karl finds himself engender confusion, disorientation, and alienation. Kafka’s metaphors and word-fields emit an impression about Karl’s destiny within labyrinthine social structures. Established inductively is a tenacious sense of something that we as readers are inclined to label somehow, possibly as kafkaesque or uncanny, but which is not so easily pinpointed. The reader receives little help in this regard from Kafka’s narrator, who refrains for the most part from analysis or generalization. Karl’s confusion and his lingering feeling of impotence remain as indeterminate as they are onerous. The mental and physical spaces of the modern Western world are presented in Der Verschollene as chaotic, disorderly, and out of the realm of control for the individual outsider. Because no one can be a true “insider” in all situations, most readers could identify with Karl’s fate in some respect. This natural empathy is enhanced by the recurrence of certain terminology with both figurative and literal semantic shades, and of spatial and material metaphors which impart Karl’s sensations of disorientation tacitly onto the reader.

For instance, Kafka turns to spatial metaphors to set up the labyrinths of words or circumstances in which Karl finds himself sometimes trapped. In a conversation with the Head Cook on his first appearance in the Hotel occidental, Karl steadfastly refuses her offer of accommodations on the grounds that he had promised to return to his travelling companions, Delamarche and Robinson. After the cook comments on his stubbornness, the narrator inserts: “Karl sah das alles ein, aber er wußte keinen Ausweg” (160). His lack of finding “Auswege,” his penchant for hitting physical dead-ends in his journeys, phantasien” (258). Extreme imagery of turning to enclosed—and labyrinthine—spaces for comfort is found in Kafka’s final short story, “Der Bau.” The underground structure in the story is “so gesichert, wie eben überhaupt auf der Welt etwas gesichert werden kann” (Sämtliche Erzählungen 359).
transfers also to uncomfortable or even threatening situations to which, as an outsider, he
knows no escape. After being interrogated later by his superiors at the hotel, who do all
they can to catch him in a lie, Karl can believe “an keinen guten Ausgang mehr” (220).
The more he responds to and cooperates with the interrogation, the more entangled he
becomes in the traps which have been set for him.8 His only choice is to give in
resignedly, as the head waiter tells Karl simply, “Du verrennst Dich immer mehr” (244).
Those in power control the direction that Karl’s American labyrinth takes, and in fact
they build it while they speak.

The novel remains a fragment, but the eventual destiny of the destination-less
outsider is alluded to in a short diary sketch from 1914, an often-cited piece in which
Kafka unites Karl Roßmann of Der Verschollene with Josef K. of Der Prozeß in death:
“Roßmann und K., der Schuldlose und der Schuldige, schliesslich beide unterschiedslos
strafweise umgebracht, der Schuldlose mit leichterer Hand, mehr zur Seite geschoben als
niedergeschlagen” (Der Verschollene: Apparatband 82). The image of Karl Roßmann
being pushed “zur Seite” (significantly, always to the western side) is fitting, considering
his lack of control in determining his own path throughout the novel. Josef K. has the
ability to forge his own direction through a labyrinthine system, if only to be killed
ultimately “wie ein Hund.” By contrast, Karl is handed off from one dubious caretaker to
the next, with no real causality between his own decision-making and his strange and

8 Later when Karl, seemingly wiser to the ways of this world, is asked by the employers
of the Naturtheater, “Zu was für einem Posten fühlen Sie sich geeignet?”, Karl is
cautious in weighing his answer beforehand: “Diese Frage enthielt möglicherweise
wirklich eine Falle, denn wozu wurde sie gestellt, da Karl doch schon als Schauspieler
aufgenommen war” (407). The conduit metaphor here plays on the idea that the posed
question contains a trap in the form of an ulterior motive within it. Karl has become
aware of such verbal pitfalls and appears better equipped to avoid them than earlier in the
novel.

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unexpected destinations. Constantly propelled laterally, he never finds the rungs of the social ladder which he anticipated would guide him upward. The hotel’s Head Cook addresses Karl’s incessant motility with disapproval: “Jedenfalls aber glaube ich, daß es für Sie besser und passender wäre sich irgendwo festzusetzen statt so durch die Welt zu bummeln. Dazu scheinen Sie mir nicht gemacht’” (171). Yet Karl is compelled by circumstance to keep trudging onward before he can take root anywhere. Interpreted in light of Kafka’s own background, Karl might embody the eternally exiled and forcibly wandering Jew, the type of nomadic figure which frequents Kafka’s writing. But Karl also marks a more anonymous and undesignated paradigm: he is the modern “Mensch” who sets out in defiance or in ignorance of the labyrinthine twentieth-century world, straying further and further from the securities of tradition, family, and home in search of gold on the other side.

2.1.1. America’s Larger-Than-Life Labyrinths

One immediate problem for the character Karl is the abundance of possible paths, resulting in far too many contingencies in this representation of America. The cliché that “everything is bigger in America” is a preconception which did not escape Kafka’s novel. As has been documented by many, Kafka had never been to the United States and was influenced by travelogues such as those by František Soukup and Arthur Holitscher when...

9 Or as Neugroschel posits, Karl Roßmann “acts out the geographic migration” of Jews “from Eastern to Western Europe and then to the New World,” as opposed to Kafka himself who experienced the “on-site migration” of assimilated Jewish families (ix). Along these lines, Anderson writes that the many characters whom the protagonist meets “momentarily allow Karl into their world only to expel him from it into another set of foreign circumstances. Like the text itself, Karl remains unterwegs, always on the outside, constrained to keep moving in a permanently renewed condition of exile that is reinforced by allusions to Adam and Eve’s banishment from Paradise and the Jews’ historical flight from Egypt (as in the chapter entitled ‘The Road to Rameses’)” (106).
he wrote this novel (cf. Binder, *Kafka-Handbuch* 415). The latter wrote about “das Große, Breite, Weite, Wunderbare” of the view from the observational platform of the Singer Building in Manhattan (Holitscher 57). The similarly gargantuan proportions of the various edifices in which Karl spends his time result in his inability to properly find his bearings. We learn that Karl, who has entered the US through the allegedly largest harbor in the world (144), does not fully comprehend “die Größe Amerikas” until travelling westward to Oklahoma at the end of the novel fragment (418). But Karl’s orientation difficulties begin even before he steps foot in New York, while still aboard ship. He becomes lost in the ship’s labyrinth when, after disembarking, he returns within for his umbrella:

Unten fand er zu seinem Bedauern einen Gang, der seinen Weg sehr verkürzt hätte, zum erstenmal versperrt, [...] und mußte sich seinen Weg durch eine Unzahl kleiner Räume, fortwährend abbiegende Korridore, kurze Treppen, die einander aber immer wieder folgten, [...] bis er sich tatsächlich, da er diesen Weg nur ein oder zweimal und immer in größerer Gesellschaft gegangen war, ganz und gar verirrt hatte. (8)

This image introduces a pattern that recurs later in Karl’s travels: he is notably hasty about reaching his goal, in this case his umbrella (thus his disappointment when his shortcut is blocked); he confronts an “Unzahl” of similar-looking rooms and corridors; and as a result, he becomes utterly confused as to which direction will take him forward.  

Eventually arriving at the building which houses his uncle’s business and personal quarters, Karl must contend with even larger proportions. In the nine-story “Betrieb, auf dessen Durchsicht man viele Tage verwenden mußte, selbst wenn man jede Abteilung

10 Strikingly similar phraseology is used by Seghers in *Transit* to convey a sense of enormity and a warren of corridors, in her description of the hotel room in the Rue du Relais, which was “überraschend tief mit einer Unmenge von Zimmern. Sie lagen an schmalen Gängen, die auf das hohe Treppenhaus mündeten” (177). 

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gerade nur gesehen haben wollte” (67), Karl’s uncle maintains ten offices and a three-story underground lair. The building is so labyrinthine and impenetrable to Karl that, after living in the house for over two months, he still has no idea where to find his uncle’s bedroom (86). Super-compartmentalization leads ironically to disorder rather than order, at least for an outsider such as Karl, as each compartment loses its individuality within the mass.

Karl’s search for security in this bewildering environment sparks fantasies about the protection presumably to be provided by the walled-in and guarded estate of Pollunder: "die Überzeugung, daß er bald in einem beleuchteten, von Mauern umgebenen, von Hunden bewachten Landhause ein willkommener Gast sein werde, tat ihm über alle Maßen wohl” (75). However, Herr Pollunder’s country manor turns out even more disorienting for Karl than his uncle’s tower in the city. Much of the house lacks electricity, lending it the illusion of boundlessness: “Da nur der untere Teil des Hauses beleuchtet war, konnte man gar nicht bemessen, wie weit es in die Höhe reichte” (76). When Herr Pollunder remarks on the feeling of liberation that he senses upon re-entering the countryside after being in the city, Karl’s internal response is less than concurring: ‘‘Er spricht,’ dachte Karl, ‘als wüßte er nicht von dem großen Haus, den endlosen Gängen, der Kapelle, den leeren Zimmern, dem Dunkel überall’’” (105). Karl is unable to find his way back to his room in this labyrinth. He has the sensation of walking in a big circle, but never passes by his own door again (99). Because Pollunder’s daughter Klara “hatte ihn auf dem Herweg immer so gezogen, daß er sich gar nicht hatte

11 Scheffel outlines the structure of the entire novel as a “sich wiederholendes Geschehensmuster,” reflecting the incidents of déjà vu in Karl’s endless searches in America (15). He divides the chapters into the repeating phases of “Übergang/Neuer Zustand/Konflikt,” and remarks on the status of Karl’s plight as either “verstoßen” or “geborgen,” stages which recur in a distinct pattern (16).
umsehn können” (96), Karl knows neither which floor he is on, nor whether they climbed stairs in their earlier trek through the house. Thus begins his pattern of heedlessly following an “insider” in an attempt to gain access to interior spaces of the American labyrinths.

After eventually leaving the Pollunder’s mansion, Karl finds himself in the middle of still more labyrinths, first at the “Hotel occidental.” As did his previous residences, the hotel itself boasts enormous proportions. Located near Ramses, a city described as “sehr groß” by the hotel employee Therese (181), the hotel holds five thousand guests (224), and the common bedroom for the elevator operators alone has forty beds (191). The hotel’s ground floor has a “Haupttor, die drei Mittel- und die zehn Nebentore, von den unzähligen Türchen und türlosen Ausgängen gar nicht zu reden” (262). Again the notion of countless doors appears, reminding the reader of the impossibility for Karl to measure and quantify his surroundings. Doorless exits, while perhaps difficult to envision, are paragons of the dead ends so pervasive in Kafka’s labyrinthine narrative world. Despite these potentially disorienting dimensions, though, Karl adapts quickly to his new surroundings and runs errands for guests with alacrity within the hotel’s maze. However, he cannot penetrate the labyrinthine structure of institutional bureaucracy and is eventually fired from his job at the hotel (an event I will revisit in more detail).

12 Wucherpfennig writes of the “unfaßbare Abstraktion des Systems” which Karl faces in nearly all situations in America: “Das angemessene Bild für das so geartete System ist das Labyrinth: ein Ganzes, dessen Zusammenhang ebenso gewiß wie unüberschaubar ist; in ihm ist man gefangen und geht im Kreis” (156).

13 The name “Hotel occidental” calls attention to Karl’s increasingly westward positioning as he seeks stability. At Pollunder’s country home, Herr Green gives Karl a ticket to San Francisco, promising him much better “Erwerbsmöglichkeiten” (124); although he is referring to the West Coast here, Herr Green says “im Osten,”—a geographical mistake apparently transferred from Soukup’s travelogue (cf. Binder, Kafka-Kommentar 113).
In his next station, Karl reunites with the hapless company of the rogues Delamarche and Robinson. The “große Höhe” of the apartment building where they live with the singer Brunelda can be measured, as the narrator informs us, by the length of time it takes for Delamarche to meet him downstairs (274). Here the conventions of measured time enable spatial quantification, reversing typical processes of spatialization as discussed in Chapter 1. The spaces Karl happens upon are so abnormally enormous that he must rely on unusual cognitive mapping processes to comprehend them. The intertwining and overwhelming structure of the building’s corridors is reminiscent of the ship, Uncle Jakob’s house, Herr Pollunder’s mansion, and the Hotel occidental:

Sie giengen durch einen langen schmalen Flurgang, der mit dunklen glatten Steinen gepflastert war. Hie und da öffnete sich rechts oder links ein Treppenaufgang oder man erhielt einen Durchblick in einen anderen größern Flur. (287)

As with Karl’s previous locations, this building is no exception in its potentially disorienting physical layout. Without an elevator to take them upstairs, they must climb the “endlose Treppe” (293). Despite Delamarche’s promises that they are nearly to the top, “seine Voraussage wollte sich nicht erfüllen, immer wieder setzte sich an eine Treppe eine neue in nur unmerklich veränderter Richtung an” (288-89). Once again, Karl has no visible goal in sight, and must blindly trust someone who has already proven himself untrustworthy to lead him in the right direction.

Karl never finishes dealing with immense spaces. When he arrives in Clayton to apply for the job with the Naturtheater, he sees that “alles noch größer war, als er nur irgendwie hatte denken können” (389). However, by this time Karl has become something of an experienced pioneer. The excerpts in the novel’s “Fragmente” indicate a more street-wise and savvy Karl. In one of the fragments, “Ausreise Bruneldas,” Karl
carts Brunelda around town in a wagon on the way to a brothel. He is careful to avoid unwanted meetings on the street with people who might wonder what is underneath the wagon's cover. Even when he must diverge from the main road unexpectedly, he does not become disoriented: "Selbst dann kam er, da er alle möglichen Wege vorher genau studiert hatte, niemals in die Gefahr einen bedeutenden Umweg zu machen" (380). At this point he takes precautions, having been caught in so many disorienting predicaments already.

Similarly, at the application site for the Naturtheater, people sense that Karl is adept at navigating through confusion. A married couple asks Karl if he would make his way through the swarm of trumpeting costumed angels, in order to inquire whether they are in the right place: "'Ja,' sagte Karl, 'aber ich müßte über das Podium gehn, zwischen den Engeln durch.' 'Ist das so schwierig?' fragte die Frau. Für Karl erschien ihr der Weg leicht, ihren Mann aber wollte sie nicht ausschicken" (391). By this time, Karl is experienced at pushing his way forward in the attempt to arrive somewhere, and here he does manage to achieve this small goal. Another sign of Karl’s experience as a seasoned immigrant in America is the way in which he deals with his lack of "Legitimationspapiere" in the Naturtheater setting: "Sollte das ein Hindernis für seine Aufnahme werden? Es war nicht unwahrscheinlich. Immerhin wußte Karl aus Erfahrung, daß sich derartige Vorschriften wenn man nur ein wenig entschlossen ist, leicht umgehen lassen" (398). Indeed, Karl has apparently learned how to overcome certain bureaucratic obstacles in his continued attempts to progress forward and/or upward. Signs of progress for Karl? Was Kafka beginning to turn this into a more traditional Bildungsroman? It is hard to imagine a fulfilled Karl Roßmann at the end, based on the track record of Karl.

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14 This is an interesting scene because Karl turns suddenly from the dependent one to a "müterlich-fürsorglichen" character here (Wucherpfennig 149).
and of Kafka’s other protagonists. But in following the labyrinth theme through the novel, it is evident that Karl has adapted somewhat and has even learned from past mistakes.\(^\text{15}\) By the end, the protagonist perhaps shares the resigned but optimistic world view of the married man whom Karl had met earlier, who says of the \textit{Naturtheater}, “es scheint ein gutes Unternehmen zu sein, allerdings kann man sich nicht gleich in alles einfinden, so ist es aber überall” (403).

2.1.2. Attempts to Move Forward

“Wir leben nach dem Lineal, obwohl jeder eigentlich ein Labyrinth ist,” Kafka reportedly remarked (Janouch 137). This philosophy is expressed in the failed attempts of Kafka’s protagonists to follow the paths they have measured out in their heads. The new world\(^\text{16}\) which confronts Karl Roßmann in America is filled with narrow corridors, unexpected turns, and dead-ends, but also with people who stand in his way of a

\(^{15}\) Much has been written on whether \textit{Der Verschollene} is an \textit{Entwicklungs-} or \textit{Bildungsroman}, or a parody thereof. Cf. Jürgen Pütz’s work, tellingly titled as a question: \textit{Kafkas Verschollener—ein Bildungsroman?}, in which the author reads Kafka’s work in the context of the novel-of-education tradition, without actually appropriating it to that category. Wucherpfennig interprets \textit{Der Verschollene} more as a subverted courtly novel, while others, such as Gerhard Neumann, are more convinced of its \textit{Bildungsroman} status, albeit as “eine verkümmerte Spätform” (Neumann 77). Important to my own analysis is not so much Karl’s development or lack thereof, but his perpetual disorientation, his permanent lack of “Aussicht” or “Überblick,” and the fact that he is continually thrust into labyrinthine situations—and still at the novel’s “end.” Also interesting to this discussion is the extent to which Dickens’s \textit{David Copperfield} served as a model for Kafka—cf. Loose 15 ff.; Jahn in Binder (1979) 415; Wucherpfennig 141.

\(^{16}\) In conjunction with the myths and realities surrounding America and its inception, the idea of entering the “new world” lingered on even in the early twentieth century. As Renner points out in his analysis of this novel, “Seit Thomas Jefferson ist die Idee der neuen Welt mit der Vorstellung eines unberührten Naturraums verbunden, der sich durch Zivilisation und Maschinenwesen gefährdet zeigt” (258). Thus the huge modern city of New York is no longer a part of the “new world” in this sense. The crumbling of the America myth is perhaps what drives Karl and so many others ever westward toward yet-to-be pioneered territory.
meaningful forward progression. Karl finds this out already in the first chapter, in respect to the “Schiff mit allen seinen von feindlichen Menschen gefüllten Gängen” (31). The reference to the “glänzende Laufbahn” which the ship’s captain claims awaits the senator’s nephew Karl (37), or even Klara’s more neutral expression of his “künftigen Lebensweg” (91), are spatial-linear “time-as-distance” metaphors which reinforce the notion that Karl’s life should conform to a specific and predetermined path. This conception causes Karl to feel all the more sharply his deviations from the path which he presumes would lead him purposefully forward. The rogues Delamarche and Robinson exploit this idea in convincing Karl to leave the city of New York, on the grounds that he would be able to better work and “vorwärtskommen” in a place without such easy access back to Europe, and where “ihn keine unnützen Gedanken hindern werden” (143). These powerful homesick thoughts, the rogues claim, are potentially immobilizing obstacles impeding his forward motion.17

Karl believes to be some steps behind everyone else around him in the process of social advancement: “immer wieder schien es ihm, daß alle andern in ihrem Leben einen Vorsprung vor ihm hätten, den er durch fleißigere Arbeit und ein wenig Verzichtleistung ausgleichen müsse” (193). This metaphor of life as a race prominently characterizes Karl’s thinking, causing him to dwell on his “langsames Vorwärtskommen” (97) in metaphorical and literal senses. At the Pollunders’, Herr Green had advised Karl in regard to any profession he might start: “fangen Sie nur ruhig ganz unten an und versuchen Sie sich allmäßlichen heraufzuarbeiten” (124-25). After Karl alienates himself

17 Renner, in his analysis of Der Verschollene as a “Stationenroman,” rather than a more linear “Entwicklungsroman,” claims “daß sich Utopie und Psychologie in dieser Geschichte als gegenläufige Orientierungen erweisen. Während die eine den linearen Prozeß in die Zukunft beschreibt, rekordiert die andere die Rückbindung an das Vergangene” (257). Karl is determined to take the former route.
from his uncle, his job as an elevator attendant at the Hotel occidental is to be a springboard for scaling the American social ladder given his limited education. However, the nature of his job entails perpetual up-and-down travels, but "dieses ewige Fahren im Lift" (188) leads to no progress forward. He is a twentieth-century Sisyphus figure, forever pushing uphill a rock which gravity forces back onto him, an apparent punishment for a crime that is not transparent. The promotions that Karl had dreamed about, in the spirit of the American ideal to work one’s way up, prove elusive. For Kafka the elevator is a symbol of so-called “progress” which nonetheless keeps the oppressed at the bottom. The limited physical motion of his protagonist stands for the immobility of entire classes of people.\(^{18}\) Karl realizes in time that “doch alles vergebens gewesen war, denn nun war dieser Liftjungendienst nicht wie er gehofft hatte, eine Vorstufe zu besserer Anstellung gewesen, vielmehr war er jetzt noch tiefer herabgedrückt worden und sogar sehr nahe an das Gefängnis geraten” (264-65).\(^{19}\) The application of such metaphors of

\(^{18}\) Rüsing portrays the hierarchy of the ship’s personnel in the “Heizer” chapter similarly: “Die im Schiffstopos modellierte Klassengesellschaft ist reduziert auf das Großkapital, das Kleinbürgertum und das Proletariat, deren Hauptvertreter Onkel und Kapitän, Karl Roßmann und der Heizer sind” (3). The physical \textit{oben/unten} distinction symbolizing this power structure which keeps the lower classes at the bottom is found in Soukup’s America travelogue, as Rüsing summarizes: “Die dargestellte hierarchische Gesellschaftsstruktur organisiert sich als zehngliedrige vertikale Ordnung: Über zehn Etagen erfolgt die Auffächerung der Individuen längs der ‘oben-unten’ Achse: von oben bei den Kapitänen und Steuerleuten beginnend, sich über die ersten drei Klassen fortsetzend bis hin zu den Zwischendeckpassagieren und schließlich den Heizern, die sich tief unten im Bauch des Schiffes befinden” (ibid.). This class-division imagery, with those lowest in rank stuck in the ship’s underbelly with no chance for advancement, corresponds to Georg Lukács’s Marxist interpretation of this novel, which for him depicts “die Welt des heutigen Kapitalismus als Hölle und die Ohnmacht alles Menschlichen dieser Unterwelt gegenüber” (87).

\(^{19}\) Karl’s vain attempts toward progression are accompanied by imagery of incarceration, such as the balcony at Brunelda’s apartment, portrayed as a prison from which Karl watches the political rally and parade: “Links von ihm stand Delamarche, rechts hatte sich nun Robinson aufgestellt, er war in einer regelrechten Gefängenschaft” (331).
space and positioning to deliver social critique is especially significant to a novel whose era of origin coincided with optimistic promises for modernity and big-city possibilities.\textsuperscript{20}

The repercussions of Karl’s perpetual outsidership, while he forever strives for something better through dutiful “Vorwärtskommen,”\textsuperscript{21} are reflected in a chase scene between Karl and a policeman. In tracking the fugitive, the latter is lucky enough to have “sein Ziel ohne nachdenken zu müssen, immer vor Augen, für Karl dagegen war der Lauf doch eigentlich Nebensache, er mußte nachdenken, unter verschiedenen Möglichkeiten auswählen, immer neu sich entschließen” (284). This chase scene can be taken figuratively: from Karl’s point of view (at least as reflected in the narrator’s commentary), others around him have a clear advantage in that they at least know what their goals are. For Karl though, life is a wild goose chase which causes him to blindly make decisions, and which forces him to choose from multiple options without his clearly knowing what the consequences will be, or even what his ultimate aim should be.\textsuperscript{22} His lack of foresight carries over into nearly every aspect of his life. While playing a song on

\textsuperscript{20} Osman Durrani compares this novel to Harold Pinter’s play \textit{The Caretaker} in that “both works succeed in conveying a compelling impression of the stratification of twentieth-century society. The exploiters and the exploited, lift-boys and managers, tramps and property magnates, are shown to be involved in complex processes whose effects are always socially divisive” (308).

\textsuperscript{21} Even the student on the neighboring balcony from Delmarche and Brunelda is concerned with advancement within the social hierarchy. Because he must constantly drink coffee to stay awake at work, his coworkers and higher-ups tease him, a misfortune which has hurt him in regard to his “Vorwärtskommen” (348).

\textsuperscript{22} One of the narrator’s generalizations indicates that part of the responsibility for this misfortune rests with Karl himself: “Karl dachte gern, wenn er irgendwohin kam, darüber nach, was hier verbessert werden könne und welche Freude es sein müßte, sofort einzugreifen, ohne Rücksicht auf die vielleicht endlose Arbeit die es verursachen würde” (384). As supported by his various roles in the novel—beginning already with his lawyer pro-tem position as he defends the stoker on the ship—Karl jumps right into new situations. He is eager to have an effect on his environment, even if the end goal is unclear or ultimately unachievable through “endlose Arbeit.” In his zeal to become an insider, he loses sight of any other purpose or greater cause.
The piano for Klara Pollunder, for instance, Karl feels “in sich ein Leid entstehn, das über das Ende des Liedes hinaus, ein anderes Ende suchte und es nicht finden konnte. ‘Ich kann ja nichts’, sagte Karl nach Schluß des Liedes und sah Klara mit Tränen in den Augen an” (119). This scene (which as a whole could be taken as a sexual metaphor) points to Karl’s chronic inability to find an end to his pursuits. He is unable to finish what he starts because the end goals, not only of the bigger picture of his life, but also of his day-to-day activities, are concealed from his view. This is seen also in the description of the hotel restaurant’s buffet set-up. Wondering if he would ever reach someone to assist him with gathering provisions for himself and the rogues, he continues to push his way further into this labyrinthine space, the likes of which are completely alien to him: “Karl drängte sich zwar noch weiter durch, aber eine eigentliche Hoffnung etwas zu erreichen hatte er nicht mehr” (155). His hopelessness arises because as an outsider in every situation in America, he has no conception of what awaits him further down the path.

Indeed, toward the novel fragment’s close, there is a metaphorical indication that a finish-line is nonexistent. In regard to the bountiful promises of the Oklahoma theater, Karl “wollte endlich den Anfang einer anständigen Laufbahn finden und hier zeigte er sich vielleicht” (388), and he is comforted to think that everything relating to the theater was taking what he perceived to be the “ordentlichen Gang” (409). However, he fails to see the irony in the fact that the theater’s application process occurs on a racetrack for horses, and the employment offices are set up in the track’s betting booths.23 Not only are workers presented as commodities for entertainment purposes, their futures nothing more

23 Karl is sent from one “Kanzlei” booth to another, until finally he is led to “die Kanzlei für europäische Mittelschüler”: “Diese Kanzlei war wohl auch die letzte Zuflucht” (401). He still clings to his European background as his only certainty in the search for refuge and security in America.
than a gamble, but the elliptical, closed shape of the track suggests that Karl’s “Laufbahn” is still going only in circles even as he assumes to be progressing forward.24

In conjunction with the Bahn metaphor, the image of traffic is also employed in the novel to describe the movement (and sometimes lack of movement) of not only cars, but also of humans, as seen in this report on some of Karl’s first impressions of city life:25

Und morgen wie abend und in den Träumen der Nacht vollzog sich auf dieser Straße ein immer drängender Verkehr, der von oben gesehen sich als eine aus immer neuen Anfängen ineinandergestreute Mischung von verzerrten menschlichen Figuren und von Dächern der Fuhrwerke aller Art darstellte, von der aus sich noch eine neue vervielfältigte wilde Mischung von Lärm, Staub und Gerüchen erhob, und alles dieses wurde erfaßt und durchdrungen von einem mächtigen Licht, das immer wieder von der Menge der Gegenstände zerstreut, fortgetragen und wieder eifrig herbeigebracht wurde und das dem betörten Auge so körperlich erschien, als werde über dieser Straße eine alles bedeckende Glasscheibe jeden Augenblick immer wieder mit aller Kraft zerschlagen. (55)

Karl’s sense of confinement, limited at this point to his view of the one New York street, is expressed through this imagined pane of glass. Nowhere in the book are the physical descriptions quite as tangibly presented and as oriented to the human senses as they are in

24 Wolfradt sees the Rennbahn/Laufbahn/Fahrbahn metaphor a bit differently, as he reads the novel as an extended metaphor for the writing process in his article “Der Text als Botschaft des Textes.”

25 Anderson calls this novel an “anti-tourist guide” which works to “undermine Karl Rossmann’s position in the world, to deterritorialize and disfigure America’s identifying signs, to un-name and silence the named. Thus [...] the reader is confronted with an image of America that presents itself with uncommon force and vividness, only to erase itself in a series of ambiguous, contradictory, anti-mimetic gestures. In Der Verschollene, Kafka accomplishes this erasure primarily through the thematic and structural device of Verkehr. The novel presents itself as a text in motion, as a travelling narrative. Each chapter offers a new form of ‘traffic’ that propels the protagonist relentlessly into new circumstances” (105). Further, Verkehr in Kafka’s work is sometimes interpreted symbolically as Geschlechtsverkehr, such as with the famous final line of “Das Urteil,” after Georg Bendemann throws himself over the bridge: “In diesem Augenblick ging über die Brücke ein geradezu unendlicher Verkehr” (Sämtliche Erzählungen 32). In Der Verschollene, the actual traffic of cars and of hoards of people is disorienting, but it was an act of Geschlechtsverkehr which initially occasioned his journey to this confusing environment.
this passage. Spatial and material metaphors abound, with a “Mischung” of distorted human figures juxtaposed with the synaesthetic “Mischung” of noise, dust, and smells. The image of an ant colony comes to mind: there is apparent industriousness and internal order to the self-perpetuating and regenerative “ineinandergestreute Mischung,” but from above (the outsider’s view) the bustle is “sinnverwirrend.” Thus, to Karl, traffic is a paradox of constant motion and obstacles.

Upon touring the quarters of his uncle’s company, Karl receives a closer look at the human traffic that runs in similar patterns:

Mitten durch den Saal war ein beständiger Verkehr von hin und her gejagten Leuten. Keiner grüßte, das Grussen war abgeschafft, jeder schloß sich den Schritten des ihm vorhergehenden an und sah auf den Boden auf dem er möglichst rasch vorwärtskommen wollte oder fieng [sic] mit den Blicken wohl nur einzelne Worte oder Zahlen von Papieren ab, die er in der Hand hielt und die bei seinem Laufschnitt flatterten. (67)

Here Karl experiences firsthand the mechanical and impersonal nature of bureaucracy, and witnesses those possessed by the urge to get ahead as quickly as possible. They act automatically in this impulse; indeed, they are perceived by Karl essentially as machines, as Kafka underlines through their association with Verkehr. There is a remarkable amount of order in this mechanistic existence, but the natural human element of at least minimal disorder is lacking. Human imperfection, as opposed to impersonal automation,

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26 While running errands later with Therese for the Hotel occidental, Karl becomes equally disoriented as he emerges from the subway to find that the “großen Plätze, von denen sternförmig die Straßen auseinanderflogen, erschienen und brachten ein Getümmel in den von allen Seiten geradlinig strömenden Verkehr” (194). As Anderson notes, Kafka remarked in his diaries that one can recognize strangers in Paris by how disoriented they are when they emerge from the subway (cf. Anderson 102).

27 There are other passages which do not explicitly include the word Verkehr, but which nonetheless convey the picture of a traffic-like flow of people. This image comes forth for instance with the busy hotel employees who moved “im Torgang in solcher Anzahl kreuz und quer” (266), or with the “fast ununterbrochene Reihe von Geschäftsdienern” (273) in the building where Delamarche and Brunelda reside.
is perhaps what Karl later finds comforting about the confusion of the Naturtheater, even if his chances for moving forward are still dubious at best, and utterly impossible at worst.

In addition to Verkehr, another conspicuous word-field related to the labyrinth theme revolves around various forms of the verb irren, with its remarkably broad semantic range: besides the common meaning of “to be mistaken,” it can also denote an aimless meandering which would sum up Karl’s endeavors fairly well.\(^{28}\) The narrator relates Karl’s “Herumirren” (8) when the protagonist ventures back into the ship to retrieve his umbrella. He wanders around, “bis er sich tatsächlich, da er diesen Weg nur ein oder zweimal und immer in größerer Gesellschaft gegangen war, ganz und gar verirrt hatte” (ibid.). The process of getting lost in the ship becomes the first metaphor for his straying obliviously off the clear-cut track which he and others have imagined for his life.

“Ich habe mich verirrt,” Karl tells the stoker frustratedly (9), repeating this phraseology after recounting the story of his umbrella to the stoker (10). Later, when he attempts to defend the stoker before the ship’s personnel, Karl becomes “durch das rote Gesicht des Herrn mit dem Bambusstückchen beirrt” (23).\(^{29}\) The repeated presence of the root irr- in

\(^{28}\) Interestingly, the etymology of irren is derived from the Old High German irri, which held the meaning of “verwirrt,” in addition to “verirrt” and “erzürnt” (Duden Herkunftswörterbuch). In addition to irr-, another word field connected to the labyrinth in Der Verschollene is built around its assonant kin wirr-. “Karl wurde ganz wirr,” when the stoker blurs out the details of his situation in a completely muddled and disorganized manner in the first chapter (13). On the balcony at Delamarche and Brunelda’s apartment, Karl is “in atemloser Verwirrung” as he stares down onto the hectic disorder of a political rally and parade below (333). The cacophonous music in Clayton is described as “ein wirrer Lärm” (389).

\(^{29}\) Later in the novel, when Karl himself is on trial without proper representation, the importance of answering in an “unbeirrt” manner is iterated by the Head Cook who tries to exonerate him (240). It should be noted too that Karl is not the only character in this novel who is led astray by estranging circumstances or people, as emphasized by the irr-semantic field. For example, “Herr Pollunder schien Karl irregeführt zu sein von falschen
all of these variations is noteworthy and contributes to the reader’s general impression that somehow Karl is going about things wrongly, that he is mistaken, and that, if not he himself, then certainly the world around him is “irre.”

According to his uncle, the letter from the servant announcing Karl’s impending arrival had taken long “Irrfahrten” on its way to America (41), stressing the difficulties involved in reaching the correct destination in the modern world of reputed efficiency, in regard to both correspondence and people. After escaping from Pollunder’s country home, Karl had expected that his orientation difficulties were behind him. As Karl stands in the great wide open, the narrator remarks, “In dem hellen Mondschein konnte man sich gar nicht verirren” (127). However, because Karl had failed to pay close attention on the ride there—due to his “verlorenen Momenten” while he dozed in Pollunder’s car (76)—he has no idea in which direction New York lies, and thus is forced to choose “eine beliebige Richtung” (127). The many detours and shortcuts which others have taken on his behalf, for instance when he is chauffeured to his English lessons (65), are detrimental to him in the long run, preventing him from becoming oriented on his own. He must plot his own way despite his ignorance, which leads to missed paths and opportunities, or to

Freunden” (97); and the other applicants for the Naturtheater are also disoriented, as the discordant trumpet music “beirrtte sie” (390).

30 Astrid Lange-Kirchheim affirms the connection between the Irish vagabond Robinson and Kafka’s penchant for the semantics of irre in its many forms: “Bezeichnenderweise hat Kafka Robinson von einem Englander in einen ‘Irlander’ verwandelt, in einen Irrenden also und wohl auch einen Irren, wie sich später zeigt” (263).

31 Kavanagh points out that although the uncle receives this stray letter ultimately, despite his name change since he arrived in America, it is doubtful that Karl Roßmann himself would ever receive such misaddressed mail after changing his name to “Negro” upon employment in the Naturtheater (Kavanagh 228). With his self-appointed name change Karl puts himself voluntarily into a class of the oppressed and less privileged, unlike his uncle, the Senator, who never finds himself in labyrinthine situations.

42
utter disorientation. Indeed, already at this early stage in the novel, Karl’s entire life has already turned into an extensive *Irrfahrt* in respect to his own and to others’ expectations.

2.1.3. Looking Outward, Past All the Confusion?

Karl’s lack of metaphorical *Überblick* in regard to his life’s course is reflected on the literal level through situations in which his outlook is physically blocked. In New York, Karl’s view is obstructed partially due to the city’s layout:

> Was aber in der Heimatstadt Karls wohl der höchste Aussichtspunkt gewesen wäre, gestattete hier nicht viel mehr als den Überblick über eine Straße, die zwischen zwei Reihen formlich abgehackter Häuser gerade und darum wie fliehend in die Ferne sich verlief, wo aus vielem Dunst die Formen einer Kathedrale ungeheuer sich erhoben. (55)

The only view afforded is that of the street and the rows of surrounding houses. The cathedral in the background is “ungeheuer” and menacing, thus not capable of providing a sanctuary which might remind Karl of home. Figuratively and literally speaking, he has no chance of looking out at America and the opportunities which might await him. His gaze rests only within the confines of this lackluster street. Later, Delamarche and Robinson express their amazement that in over two months of living in New York, Karl is only familiar with this one street (145). Hanging onto the coattails of an insider, his uncle, Karl was unable to acquire much of an inside view for himself.

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32 See Nicolai’s word register for several further instances of Karl’s ineffective bids for *Überblick*. Nicolai also points out a diary sketch from 1912 that depicts a dream in which Kafka’s narrator is geographically disoriented until he happens to stand up, at which point he realizes he is in New York’s harbor. Nicolai carefully traces Karl’s attempt at “Erhöhung des Standortes,” which he connects with reaching for higher levels of consciousness (e.g. 71).

33 Anderson notes of this scene, “Needless to say, the text leaves the reader in Karl’s position of disorientation: we know only that Robinson and Delamarche name the sites, not what they are called” (108).
Not only the city prohibits Karl from looking outward. Even in the less restricted environs of the Pollunder’s country house, his view is blocked: “Ein überraschendes Dunkel vor dem Fenster erläuterte sich durch einen Baumwipfel, der sich dort in seinem vollen Umfang wiegte” (89). In addition to the towering structures of the city, even nature works against Karl in his attempts to extend his outlook and his horizons. When standing still, his line of vision is cut short, and in his journeys, he arrives at dead ends.

Often Karl’s view is blocked metaphorically by a mental or verbal unclarity and confusion around him, for example when the stoker spouts “aus allen Himmelsrichtungen” complaints about his supervisor, “von denen [Karls] Meinung nach jede einzelne genügt hätte diesen Schubal vollständig zu begraben, aber was er dem Kapitän vorzeigen konnte, war nur ein trauriges Durcheinanderstrudeln aller insgesamt” (27). It is noteworthy that Kafka seems to prefer the substantive Durcheinander to the adjective form in describing Karl’s messy situations. This type of substantivizing adds a concrete presence to the disorder, which makes it appear all the more threatening. For example, when Klara and Karl scuffle, the latter shouts something “aus dem Durcheinander von Wut und Scham” (91). The confusion takes on an existence of its own, and emphasizes Karl’s helplessness as he is lost within it.

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34 In buildings of grandiose proportions, disorientation is intuitively combatted by peering out a window at the ground below, but this proves impossible for the protagonist in several situations. In the Wirtshaus where he meets Delamarche and Robinson, “Karl wußte zuerst nicht recht, ob die Fenstervorhänge bloß herabgelassen waren oder ob vielleicht das Zimmer überhaupt keine Fenster habe, so finster war es” (128). The narrator of Seghers’s Transit has similar difficulties orienting himself because of a window which does not provide the expected outlook, as he tries to look down from his hotel room: “Man sah von diesem Fenster aus nicht einmal das Straßenpflaster. Ich hätte mir einbilden können, in einen Abgrund hinunterzusehen, wenn ich nicht gewußt hätte, daß das Zimmer im dritten Stock lag” (179).
As a means of becoming self-sufficient and finding his place in America, Karl had learned English within two months. However, he is faced on several occasions with a jumble of languages which thwarts his attempts at comprehension. At least ten people of various linguistic backgrounds swarm around the information desks of the hotel at any given time: "Unter diesen zehn Fragen die immerfort wechselten war oft ein Durcheinander von Sprachen, als sei jeder einzelne von einem andern Lande abgesendet" (255). Later Karl hears "unaufhörlich in den Ohren das Durcheinander der Stimmen dieser Gepäckträger [...], die in einem gänzlich unverständlichen vielleicht mit slavischen Worten untermischten Englisch mehr polterten als redeten" (281). Although he continues to travel westward, these linguistic contact points with the East are reminders of his identity, and Kafka's, as a German from "Prag in Böhmen" (171). Thus his attempts to outrun his European roots and to fit himself into a neat and tidy category are frustrated. All that remains is a linguistic and cultural Durcheinander.

Karl's attempts to maintain and restore order are in vain, as signified by the plight of his once neatly packed suitcase, which on the trip to America he had tried "zu ordnen und wieder neu zu ordnen und jetzt war alles so wild durcheinander hineingestopft, daß der Deckel beim Öffnen des Schlosses von selbst in die Höhe sprang" (130). Karl and order of any kind are incompatible, although he constantly strives toward it. As diligently as he works in the hotel, he is reproached by some inconvenienced guests for "Unordnung" when one elevator (one of many) is out of order (207). Even the tiny room of Brunelda and Delamarche cannot be kept in order, and the disorder and confusion

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35 Martin wonders about Karl's designation here—"wieso konnte er sich als Deutscher bezeichnen, da er doch aus dem noch österreichisch-ungarischen und noch nicht tschechischen Prag in Böhmen stammte?" (125). As a Jewish writer whose native language is "Prager Deutsch," Kafka and perhaps also his literary figure Karl base their identities in great part on the linguistic aspect.
repulse Karl such that he can think only of his escape from the apartment and "das ärgste Möbeldurcheinander" (337). This tangible, concrete representation of Durcheinander is concurrent with the metaphorical jumbles which characterize much of Karl's life in America. The kind of tidiness for which he yearns is superseded by mental and physical clutter. In the end, Karl seems to understand this inevitable state of disarray: "Immer, selbst bei den klarsten Verhältnissen fand sich doch irgendjemand der seinem Mitmenschen Sorgen machen wollte" (410). Karl recognizes at last that human nature, like the universe itself, is entropic. Thus, movement toward any goal is unavoidably and increasingly slowed, and disorder will always prevail. Nonetheless, both he and fellow immigrant Giacomo are comforted by the "Transportleiter" of the Oklahoma theater who wants to assure order before the workers' departure from Clayton. His stern coddling puts them at ease: "so sorgenlos hatten sie in Amerika noch keine Reise gemacht" (416). Finally someone is there to guide them onto what seems to be the right track. However, they cannot see ahead of them; they have neither Aussicht nor Überblick, but only a naive idealism as they sit within the security of the train compartment.

2.1.4. Das Innere

36 In an attempt to appease Brunelda, Karl and Robinson look frantically for her perfume while she bathes. They are unsuccessful in restoring order; in fact they accomplish quite the opposite, according to Brunelda, who demands they stop their search immediately because they are merely bringing everything "in Unordnung" (363). 37 Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes of the intensified "feeling of helpless passivity" caused by the spaces of train compartments: "While the compartment facilitated the pleasurable experience of mechanical motion, it became, in equal measure, a locus of trauma. Its enclosed nature hid whatever happened in it from outside glances" (79); and by the same token, it prevents the forward glances which would provide at least the illusion of some knowledge over one's destiny.
Another spatially-oriented concept that plays a role in Karl’s physical journeys and quest for social advancement is *das Innere*. Denoting the interior or the heart of something, it is an appropriate term for relating Karl’s attempts to penetrate the exterior superficiality of America’s labyrinths. Kafka employs the same term for both physical and mental spaces: Herr Green points out that one cannot look inside “das Innere des Onkels” (109) to determine his motivations; and later, Karl is momentarily apprehensive about leaving the New York periphery and entering “das Innere des Landes” (143). In Freudian thought, the psyche is described spatially, as if it possessed physical boundaries which prohibit an outsider access to its interior realm.38 The overlapping usage of *das Innere* provides a reciprocal analogy here: crossing physical boundaries and moving inward to the “heart” of the United States means, for the outsider Karl, a risky progression into the depths of the American psyche and culture, and further away from the *Heimat* with which he continues to identify. Still, this is the most appealing option for him: “Vieles erinnerte Karl an seine Heimat und er wußte nicht, ob er gut daran tue, New-York zu verlassen und in das Innere des Landes zu gehn. In New-York war das Meer und zu jeder Zeit die Möglichkeit der Rückkehr in die Heimat” (143). Despite his temporary self-doubts, though, he proceeds further into “das Innere,” where he believes he can become a true insider.

Karl is drawn to those whom he understands to be the opposite of him, that is, the insiders who are familiar with, and have access to, interior spaces. Karl’s contact with the stoker at the beginning is significant in this respect; as the stoker works within the innermost confines of the ship, he is fully familiar with the vessel’s interior and thus does not lose his way like the protagonist. Until he is fired, Karl is also in favors with the Head

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38 For example, the references to external and internal perceptions in Freud’s “Ego and the Id” essay.
Cook at the Hotel occidental. He is attracted to her immediately as the person with access to *das Innere*, as he follows her to the insulated "Vorratskammer," into which no outside sounds can penetrate (158). Here he has reached an interior which is protected from the bustling confusion of the noisy American buffet guests, and which even contains fresher food. He cannot stay in the comfort of these confines for long, though. Soon he is disappointed to discover that a *Liftjunge* in the hotel is nothing more than a button- presser; therefore he will never become familiar with the inner workings of the elevator machinery. He learns that "Giacomo trotz halbjährigen Dienstes beim Lift weder das Triebwerk im Keller, noch die Maschinerie im Innern des Aufzugs mit eigenen Augen gesehen hatte" (186). Again his desire to become introduced to the inner realm manifests itself clearly. The main appeal of the *Naturtheater* for Karl later is its claim that "Jeder ist willkommen" (387), and perhaps also his vision of a secure, confined theater space. He is enticed by the promise of finally finding acceptance within the inside space of an institution.

Karl’s quest turns into a paradox, because often when he has reached an inside space, it is the *wrong* inside. At the same time that he longs for interior intimacy in certain circles, he looks for an escape from other interiors. When trapped inside Delamarche and Brunelda’s apartment, Karl’s childhood memories are sparked:

> Schon als kleines Kind hatte Karl immer gerne zugesehen, wenn die Mutter gegen Abend die Wohnungstür mit dem Schlüssel absperre. Sie hatte keine Ahnung davon, daß es jetzt mit Karl soweit gekommen war, daß er fremde Türen mit Messern aufzubrechen suchte. (342-43)

Karl is “eingesperrt,” just as Kafka felt in Prague when he wrote this very chapter (cf. Binder, *Kafka-Kommentar* 55). Karl has often sought the security he refers to here, a comfort associated with home and, in a Freudian sense, with his mother or with the safety
of the womb’s confines—although he also realizes the potential deception of such a sanctuary, as implied in the earlier description of Klara’s room as “eine recht gefährliche Höhle” (113). But as an adult navigating the labyrinths of a different world, he experiences tension between a need and desire for protection, and a yearning for independence and freedom. Throughout the novel Karl is faced with spaces possessing a multitude of metaphorical and literal doors, such that he hardly knows which one to try. Even when there is only one door for him to contend with, as in Brunelda’s apartment, it is locked and he is shut out of his sole option for escaping the labyrinth.

2.2. Transit: “Im Wirbel des Krieges”

As is the case with Karl Roßmann, the figures from Transit experience disorientation on one level because they have been uprooted from their homes and familiar territory. Seghers’s figures are not merely immigrants, though, but refugees in transit to what they presume will be safer ground. Their period of adjustment in Marseilles during the Nazi era is much less about finding their place in a foreign culture than it is about finding their way through the bureaucratic jungle which will allow them to move on. First, however, the refugees must make their way to the point where their safe departure is at least in the realm of possibility. The narrator describes their flight from Paris:

Wir führen in einem großen sinnlosen Bogen, bald in Asylen übermachtend, bald auf dem Felde, bald auf Camions aufspringend, bald auf Waggons, nirgends auf eine Bleibe stoßend, geschweige denn auf ein Arbeitsangebot, in einem großen Bogen, immer tiefer dem Süden zu, über die Loire, über die Garonne, bis zur Rhone. (37)

Although constantly moving, the refugees cannot take a direct path. Instead they must advance circularly forward in an arch whose end is grounded in Marseilles.

49
Kurt Batt writes about the narrative form of *Transit* and its relation to the labyrinthine, utterly disorienting situation of the refugees:

Das unmittelbare Erlebnis der Transitsituation als eines Schwebezustands zwischen Todesgefahr und Aufbruch erzwingt eine Art der Gestaltung, die, weit entfernt von der traditionellen epischen Objektivierung und Distanzierung, das Labyrinthische und Dissonantische einer sich schmerzhaf verändernden Welt auch unmittelbar durch die Form ausdrückt—eine gestaltete Unmittelbarkeit, der die Romanautorin Anna Seghers mit diesem Werk des Übergangs den Abschied gibt. (159)

The correlation between the story itself and how it is told will be discussed further in Chapter 4, but here it is worth mentioning that *Transit* displays interesting correspondences between text and content not only on the level of narrative structure, but on the lexical level as well. Seghers exhibits a distinct partiality in *Transit* for such terms as *vertrackt*, *verwirrt*, *verwickelt*, *verzwickt*, and *verstrickt*. As with Kafka’s *Der Verschollene*, word fields emerge which complement and magnify the work’s leitmotifs (e.g. the *Netz* theme, which will be discussed shortly). The *ver*-prefix functions in these cases as an intensifier, emitting the sense that the characters’ entanglements are utterly complex and sometimes impossible to escape. Seidler notes for instance, in the locale Brûleurs des Loups, the mirrors “die hier die Wände bedeckten, als wollte man das Durcheinander von Fratzen noch fratziger und verwickelter machen” (153). A most disturbing and perplexing historical time is distorted for the narrator even more so by these mirrors, and Seghers’s choice of materially and spatially connoted concepts such as “Durcheinander” and “Fratzen” attempts to indicate this distortion. And for all the times that Seidler finds himself “verstrickt” in the convoluted stories of himself and others, he envies his friend George Binnet for his “Unverstricktheit” and his “Daheimsein” (175). By the same token, nouns such as “Wirmis,” and “Wirbel” reinforce a general state of confusion, and spark considerations of how the individual figures (or groups of

50
individuals) deal with the chaos when face-to-face with all of its substance. The refugees fight to exist amidst "soviel Umhergeziehe, soviel Wirbel" (176), an existence that Seghers tries to make as lucid as possible through concrete language. Seidler sees this materiality in the labyrinthine situational nets which hang everywhere in Marseilles, as he reveals when he scoffs at the doctor’s confidence: “Woher kam ihm die Sicherheit in einer Wirnis aus Zufällen?” (191).

As in Kafka’s work, where the confusion of the traffic runs parallel to the protagonist’s own disorientation, the physical references to the city in *Transit* often hark back to the mental states of the novel’s characters. For instance, the narrator perceives Marseilles as ominous and gloomy: “Man sah zwar schon etwas Sonne auf den äußersten Dächern, doch zwischen den hohen Häusern der Gasse lag schwerer, uralter Schatten” (161). In correspondence with much of Seghers’s prose, the description of surroundings here serves a two-fold purpose; that is, it sets the scene both in terms of the material environment and in terms of mood. This connection between the physical and the metaphysical extends throughout the novel by way of various motifs, and it is carried further with a return to the adjective *uralt* on numerous occasions, lending both the city and the plight of the refugees an eternal-seeming character. However, the imminent dangers at hand are concrete and real, and Seghers does not neglect them in her narration.

39 In the emphasis placed on the continuity of everyday life in Marseilles despite the tragedies of the times, the synchronism in Seghers’s picture of the city emerges. She writes of the fishermen, “die immer gefischt haben und immer fischen werden” (258), and of the pizzeria, where an open fire had always burned, and where “seit Jahrhunderten hat man den Teig so geschlagen” (125). At the same time, the harbor city holds a history for the refugees: “Seit tausend Jahren war sie die letzte Bleibe für unsereins, die letzte Herberge dieses Erdeils” (246). Erika Haas writes about such passages, “So zeigt sich Marseille als der große Umschlagplatz zwischen Abend- und Morgenland, als das Sammelbecken aller Flüchtenden, als die letzte Station diesseits des Meeres. In dieser Funktion wird sie unmerklich in den Rang einer ‘ewigen Stadt’ erhoben, deren Aussehen sich bleich bleibt” (64).
Seidler himself does not necessarily crave a state of orientation upon first appearance in Marseilles; indeed he yearns for the opposite at times. In regard to his involvement in the case of the writer Weidel, who has committed suicide, and Weidel's wife Marie, who does not know this and continues to search for him, Seidler remarks: "Mir hat es schon immer Spaß gemacht, durcheinandergeratenes Garn zu entwirren, und umgekehrt hat es mir immer Spaß gemacht, ganz glattes Garn durcheinander zu bringen" (21). As in Kafka's Der Verschollene, the notion of Durcheinander is a leitmotif in Transit. However, in direct contrast to Karl Roßmann, it is apparent that Seidler is not concerned with preserving or achieving order. The material metaphor here presents situations as easily knotted strands of yarn. Whether he is tangling or untangling these yarns though, it is clear that Seidler's main concern is to stay in control.

In so doing, Seidler begins to search for faces from his past which would give him something tangible to hold onto: "Irgend etwas war mir verloren gegangen, so verloren, daß ich nicht einmal mehr genau wußte, was es gewesen war, daß ich nach und nach nicht einmal mehr richtig vermißte, so gründlich war es verlorengegangen in all dem Durcheinander" (41). Seidler believes that countenances from the past will restore his orientation, alleviating the effects of the physical confusion around him and the mental confusion within him. This means of finding his bearings is also apparent when he sees Paul Strobel, a fellow prisoner from the concentration camp: "Ein Kumpan aus dem Lager! Mitten im Hakenkreuz-Paris!" (16). Spatial-geographical indicators represent his mental temporal divisions (his time in the camp vs. his time as a refugee), demonstrating how the figure orients himself temporally. Later when he sees Heinz, another figure from his past, he is comforted in the same way:
ich wußte auf einmal auch zu meiner unendlichen Beruhigung, daß ich
immer noch da war, daß ich nicht verlorengegangen war, in keinem Krieg
und in keinem Konzentrationslager, in keinem Faschismus, in keinem
Herumgeziehe, in keinem Bombardement, in keiner Unordnung, wie
gewaltig sie auch gewesen war, ich war nicht verlorengegangen, nicht
verblutet, ich war da, und auch Heinz war da. (79)

In a rare exposure of his own vulnerability, Seidler reflects here on the frenzy of world
events, and views Heinz as an anchor into his past, assuring himself that he is not totally
lost in the chaotic and tragic “Herumgeziehe” and “Unordnung” of the present. Later in
the narration, Seidler reflects further on the good fortune of his friend Heinz, the one-
legged man whom he and his companions had helped out of the camp: “Was für eine
Kette von Händen war nötig gewesen, kilometerlang, um die lebenden Reste seines
Körpers von einem Wagen zum andern, von einer Treppe zur andern, von einem Schiff
zum andern zu reichen” (185-86). Solidarity is presented here as the key to gaining
orientation in a most disorienting world.40

The natural human tendency to orient oneself through spatial anchors seems to
intensify when the amount of time remaining is uncertain. In order to orient themselves
on the way to Paris, Seidler and his troupe do what they considered very “vermöhnftig”:
they consult a map and figure out their exact location (39). Spatial, cartographic
orientation should serve as something of a relief for the temporal uncertainty of the
characters—but it does not always, because the borders on maps are ever-changing.
Kafka’s Karl Roßmann apparently had no map during his travels in America, and
Seghers’s refugees remain disoriented even when they have one.41 After admitting to

40 A very similar image of helping hands reaching metaphorically across geographical
boundaries is put forth by the Czech conductor, who mentions to the narrator the outside
chance of a “Freundeshand, die sich Ihnen aus dem Dunkel, will sagen aus dem Ozean,
entgegenstreckt” (47).
41 Transit alludes on occasion to the Exodus story of the Bible, in which the Jews
followed Moses through unfamiliar territory in the desert for forty years without a map.
having been too lazy previously, Seidler eventually searches on a map for the Caribbean island of Martinique, his first likely stopover if he were to leave Marseilles: “Da hing es wirklich, ein Pünktchen zwischen zwei Hemisphären, die kein Präfekturtrick waren, keine konsularische Erfindung, sondern echt, von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit” (212). Again, an orientation of some sort is sought through a map, but the usual cognitive metaphor is reversed here. Rather than presenting time in spatial terms, as is so common, Seghers puts space between geographical hemispheres in terms of the temporal (though immeasurable) terminology of eternity. While the map provides him with visual proof of Martinique’s existence, it does not negate its perceived inaccessibility during these perilous times. The reader is reminded at this point of the novel’s opening line: “Die ‘Montreal’ soll untergegangen sein zwischen Dakar und Martinique. Auf eine Mine gelaufen” (5). The ship which takes Marie out of Marseilles, and onto which Seidler himself nearly boards, allegedly disappears somewhere in between these two “eternities.”

Time is beyond the refugees’ control and is by no means a constant to be reckoned with.\(^42\) Seidler too shows his encumbrance occasionally, and at those moments when it overwhelms him most, Seghers brings in material or spatial metaphors to reinforce these sensations. Once while falling asleep, the narrator has the impression of being on a ship: “nicht, weil ich soviel von Schiffen gehört hatte oder eins benutzen wollte, sondern weil ich mich schwindlig und elend fühlte in einem Gewoge von Eindrücken und Empfindungen, die ich keine Kraft mehr hatte, mir zu erklären” (50-51). The term “Gewoge” lends a sensory and material dimension to his worries. While

\(^{42}\) The empowerment of time (in addition to its appropriation by authorities as a means of wielding power) is noteworthy throughout the novel, for instance when Achselroth’s friend remarks that not only people, but “die Zeit selbst” had left Weidel in the lurch (276).
someone who had not experienced life in political exile could never fully comprehend this plight, Seghers's language choices indicate her hope to deliver her readers something of a concrete sense of the refugees' burdens, and of the weightiness of their situations. The metaphors throughout the work provide tangible cues which correspond in varying degrees of subtlety to personal turmoil and feelings of entanglement. Even Weidel's unfinished novel, which has been entrusted to Seidler, holds parallels to the contemporary situation of exile:

Das Ganze war eine ziemlich vertrackte Geschichte mit ziemlich vertrackten Menschen. [...] Es gab, wie gesagt, in dieser Geschichte einen Haufen verrückter Menschen, recht durchgedrehtes Volk, sie wurden fast alle in üble undurchsichtige Dinge verwickelt, selbst die, die sich sträubten. So hatte ich nur als Kind gelesen, nein, zugehört. Ich fühlte dieselbe Freude, dasselbe Grauen. Der Wald war ebenso undurchdringlich! Doch war es ein Wald für Erwachsene. (26)

The figures in Weidel’s story lose themselves in an unpenetrable forest that is analogous to the concrete and abstract labyrinths of Marseilles. Like the figures in *Transit*, those in Weidel’s story become wrapped up in complex predicaments in which they must sacrifice their own agency. Since Weidel’s novel remains unfinished, the intricacies of the story are never reconciled: “Und plötzlich, so in den dreihundert Seiten, brach alles für mich ab. Ich erfuhr den Ausgang nie” (27). This labyrinthine story, like the exile situation, grants its readers no apparent way out.

During an era when individuals’ fates were in the hands of others, Seidler does his best to keep control of the reigns, on a course that he tries to create for his own life. The characters in Weidel’s story, according to Seidler’s paraphrasing, are not people of such self-guiding action, but instead must succumb to the “Hineinschliddern in ein Schicksal” (26). The spatial metaphor elicited through the physical motion of slipping or sliding that is associated with *schliddern* (presumably a variation of *schlittern*) expresses the
refugees' uncontrollable destinies. Just as the exiles in Seidler's vicinity feel pulled along in a stream of events that are out of their hands, so do Weidel's literary figures, who have slid into their fates as if these were unforeseen fissures in their lives' paths. Seidler recognizes that he must guide himself along his own path, even if this means losing himself sometimes along the way. In the end, Seidler knows "daß er sich verliert, wenn er sich von diesem Geschick treiben läßt, wenn er sein Wohl und Wehe von der Obrigkeit, der Ämterwelt abhängig macht" (Wagner 237). With this in mind, the narrator bides his time in the bureaucratic labyrinths of Marseilles while making his decision to stay in France to work with the resistance.

2.2.1. The Labyrinths of Marseilles

Before arriving in Marseilles, the narrator had imagined the city as an area of mass confusion. But Seidler took comfort in the prospect of losing himself there:43

Ich stellte mir das unbesetzte Gebiet verwildert und unübersichtlich vor, ein Durcheinander, in dem sich ein Mensch wie ich, wenn er wollte, verlieren konnte. Und wenn mein Leben vorerst nichts sein sollte als ein Herumgeschleudertwerden, so wollte ich wenigstens in die schonsten Städte geschleudert werden, in unbekannte Gegenden. (33)

The passive voice in the last sentence is significant, denoting Seidler's resignation to succumbing to the whims of others. At this stage, as opposed to later, he is adventurous and aimless—much more so than most refugees around him, who have specific

43 For Seghers's Seidler, losing oneself in the crowd is an advantage, as he does in occupied Paris: "Und als ich die riesige Hakenkreuzfahne sah, auf dem Place de la Concorde, da kroch ich ins Dunkel der Metro" (25). The conduit spatial metaphor of crawling into darkness marks the labyrinth of the underground as something of a safe haven, a notion that will be explored later in the chapter with other works. Again here, the ability to make oneself lost is an asset. There is similar wording in the very next paragraph: "Ich kroch in das Loch unterm Dach, das mein Zimmer war" (25). In both instances, the movement of kriechen is associated with the narrator concealing himself, securing a hiding place within an enclosed space.
destination points and detailed plans in mind. Despite a common desire to become lost in the present surroundings of a foreign city, Seidler differs from Kafka’s Karl Roßmann in that the former makes no indication that he wants to leave his past behind.44 Seidler at this point prefers not to deal with his future, which by his own admission is nothing but “nebelhaft,” and for which he has made no plans (19).

The narrator reminisces further about his stance at the beginning of his sojourn in Marseilles:

Ich glaubte beinah, ich sei am Ziel. In dieser Stadt, glaubte ich, müßte endlich alles zu finden sein, was ich suchte, was ich immer gesucht hatte. Wie oft wird mich dieses Gefühl noch trügen, bei dem Einzug in eine fremde Stadt! (41-42)

Most of the refugees in the novel see Marseilles as a bridge and not as a point of finality. But the narrator, for the most part not inclined to leave France anyway, persists in seeing it as an end: “Das Stück blauen Wassers da unten am Rande der Cannebière, das also war der Rand unseres Erdeits, der Rand der Welt, die, wenn man will, vom Stillen Ozean, von Wladiwostok und China, bis hierher reicht. Sie heißt nicht umsonst die Alte Welt. Hier aber war sie zu Ende” (64). Temporal and spatial components collaborate in this geographic demarcation of the “old world”—implying that the “new” world with its promising beginnings awaited the refugees on the other side. The idea of existence at the edge/margins/periphery is transferred to the emotional sphere as well, when a desperate Seidler sits on a church bench with head in his hands: “So war ich denn wieder einmal am Rand angelangt, am Rand meiner Unternehmungen” (98). In Marseilles, at the border of the old world, Seidler must confront his personal limits.

44 Karl is pleased about the prospect of losing himself in New York, thereby leaving his past behind and becoming untrackable: “Der einzige Trost war noch, daß der Vater von seiner jetzigen Lage nicht das allergeringste erfahren konnte, selbst wenn er nachforschen sollte. Nur daß er bis Newyork gekommen war, konnte die Schiffsgesellschaft gerade noch sagen” (Der Verschollene 14-15).

57

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Although the city is supposed to function as a bridge to a better life for the refugees, or at least to a salvaged life, Seghers attributes a maze-like quality to Marseilles with its "Gassengewirr" (107). She also employs the term Gewirr figuratively in her narrator's commentary on the well-intentioned warnings he receives from fellow refugees, who inform Seidler about the ins and outs of the bureaucratic process of acquiring visas. Seidler perceives these admonitions collectively as a dark "Gewirr mit völlig gleichgültigen Ermahnungen" (49). Implicit in the metaphorical use of Gewirr is the narrator's sentiment that these warnings, believed to have little relevance to his life, shadow over him and tangle his situation further. To avoid complicating matters and having his self-assurance challenged, Seidler resists such instruction on the process for acquiring visas toward the beginning of the novel. He refuses to acknowledge that he, just as the other refugees, is caught up in the "Wirbel des Krieges" (72), and he claims not to fear the labyrinth he has entered.

45 Cf. also the comparable formulations "ein Gewirr von Gassen" (168), "das Gewimmel von Gassen" (258), or "in dem schwarzen Gassengewimmel am Alten Hafen" (85). The same word-field is invoked to describe not only the cities themselves, but the people who contribute to this confusing atmosphere: "Alle diese alten, schönen Städte wimmelten von verwilderten Menschen" (37). He is also afraid that he has been "von dem Gewimmel angesteckt" such that he is forced to "mitwimmeln" (109). Another passage also demonstrates the effectiveness of this term to connote confusion: "Ein Menschenschub kam aus der Präfektur und wimmelte auf dem Platz, auf dem die Zeit plötzlich stillstand. Es schien kein Mittelung zwischen den beiden zu geben: Jagd und völliger Stillstand" (206). The verb wimmeln conveys a swarming and quite chaotic brand of movement which is not to be ordered during these times of turmoil, providing a stark contrast with the usage of the same verb to describe leisure activity in Siegfried Kracauer's 1926 essay about Marseilles, "Zwei Flächen": "In den Schwammhöhlungen des Hafenviertels wimmelt die menschliche Fauna, rein steht in dem Lachen der Himmel" (Das Ornament der Masse 12).

46 He also acts as a censor in regard to the enlightenment of others, for fear that the truth would simply snarl things further, for instance when he continues to justify not telling Marie that her husband is dead: "Die Wahrheit würde jetzt alles auch nur noch mehr verwicken" (241).
Seidler exudes his confidence even while becoming oriented in his new surroundings. As he looks down from a hill onto the part of the city which he normally traverses, the area strikes him as unfamiliar from that perspective; the resulting description portrays the city as a maze of boats and streets, intensified in this representation by the water in the harbor which mirrors everything (185). But Seidler feels he knows the secret to this labyrinth, and he does not fear the unknown spaces or “Höhlen” which lie beneath him:47 “Ich aber, ich kannte doch jetzt ihre Höhlen, ich kannte jetzt ihr Geheimnis” (ibid.). This proves not to be the case on all occasions.

While looking for accommodations, the narrator notes casually that he has lost himself yet again “in einem Netz von Gassen” (50). This image is reminiscent of the Gewirr and Gewimmel of streets already mentioned, but Netz also connotes something less abstract, whether it is interpreted here as a network, a web, or simply a net. The net is developed as a trope in the novel, and also functions as a spatial metaphor on several occasions. For instance, a fellow refugee in a café chastises the narrator for his self-confidence that he was taking the right steps toward emigration: “Wenn Sie eingefangen werden in diesem Netz aus Voraussicht?” (137). The narrator replies with derision that the process is nothing but a game to him. However, the future of an emigrant requires a metaphorical net which will provide for a safe landing on the other side—resources, both

47 Nonetheless, Seghers paints Seidler as a more complex and ambivalent character than this might indicate. While Seidler claims to enjoy causing confusion and disorder, and seems unbothered by chaotic surroundings, he cannot deny a natural human inclination toward concreteness and certainty: “Ich aber, ich hasse Irrtümer von ganzem Herzen, Irrtümer in Begegnungen. Verwechslung und Irrtümer sind mir zuwider, soweit sie mich selbst betreffen. Ich neige sogar dazu, allen menschlichen Begegnungen übermäßige Bedeutung zu schenken, als seien sie höheren Orts angeordnet, als seien sie unentrinnbar. Im Unentrinnbaren, nicht wahr, darf es keine Verwechslungen geben” (191). Seidler is like most anyone else in that he seeks an ever-elusive certainty, and is determined to find his way in the world. He is in pursuit of the inescapable, something “unentrinnbar,” which is concretized metaphorically in this passage.
financial and human, as well as the necessary immigration paperwork. Seidler busies himself with constructing this safety net, to be sure, but he does not believe in it as wholeheartedly as many others do. Realizing this, he hardly needs the other man’s warning against becoming tangled up in a net of foresight.

Toward the end of the novel, nets make an appearance as tangible symbols, this time as tools of the fisherpeople and as emblems of everyday stability. Seidler and his friend the doctor “traten vorsichtig auf, um nicht in den Netzen hängen zu bleiben, die über den nächtlichen Riesenplatz gezogen waren. Da trockneten sie, mit Steinen beschwert, die Netze derer, die immer gefischt haben und immer fischen werden” (258). The fisherpeople are granted timeless proportions here, and the narrator distances himself from such permanence in his deliberate avoidance of the nets. Another description sheds more light on Seidler’s differentiation between himself and the laboring residents:

Die Netze waren zum Trocknen gelegt. Ein paar Frauen, die ganz verloren aussahen auf dem riesigen Platz, flickten an den Netzen. Das hatte ich noch nie gesehen, ich war noch nie so früh über den Belsunce gegangen. Ich hatte bestimmt das Wichtigste in der Stadt noch nicht gesehen. Um das zu sehen, worauf es ankommt, muß man bleiben wollen. Unmerklich verhüllen sich alle Städte für die, die sie nur zum Durchziehen brauchen. Ich sprang vorsichtig über die Netze weg. (270)

As in the previous description, the nets are lying out to dry on an enormous “Platz,” making the fisherwomen look lost in comparison. However, considering Seidler’s own desire to become lost within a certain space, their depiction as “verloren” is not necessarily negative in connotation. They are lost in the sense that they remain somewhat

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48 In describing Marseilles as a “blendendes Amphitheater” in his essay “Zwei Flächen,” Kracauer writes about the function of these nets in the city’s landscape: “Die Stadt hält ihre Fangnetze geöffnet. Eingeholt wird die Beute in den neuen Hafenbassins, die im Verein mit der Küste eine mächtige Wurflinie beschreiben. Ankunft und Abfahrt der Überseedampfer sind die Pole des Lebens, den Verschwindenden glühst es. Die Trostlosigkeit der kahlen Lagerhauswände ist ein Schein; ihre Vorderseite sähe der Prinz aus dem Märchen” (Ornament der Masse 11-12).

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detached from the horrible events of the early 1940s Europe, lost within their everyday lives. Their nets, rudimentary tools representing their self-sustaining lives, offer them protection from the world: “Die Kriege sind über sie weggegangen” (ibid.). By jumping over these lifelines, Seidler is careful not to disturb the sanctity of everyday life there. While he does not associate himself with this world, and is not particularly interested in becoming caught in the harbor city’s nets, he finds comfort in the workers’ fixed routine, and also in the fact that certain facets of their existence remain hidden from the passers-through.\(^{49}\) He, the lost son, finds familial security in their presence: “Sie waren mir, dem Waisen, Vater und Mutter, sie waren mir, dem Geschwisterlosen, Bruder und Schwester” (271).\(^{50}\)

\(^{49}\) Through his frequent commentary on the daily life of the Marseilles residents, it is clear that this fascinates Seidler, yet he doubts that he could ever really be a part of it: “Ich fühlte, wie mich das gewöhnliche Leben von allen Seiten umspannte, doch gleichzeitig fühlte ich auch, daß es für mich unerreichbar geworden war” (65). The spatial metaphor in this statement exposes the quotidian security that envelops him, but that is in the end unattainable for him personally.

\(^{50}\) In light of his mentor-mentee relationship to the old conductor from Prague, the narrator generalizes: “Es gibt im Leben der verlorensten Söhne Augenblicke, wo sie auf die Seite der Väter übergehen, ich meine der Väter anderer Söhne” (46). Seghers alludes here and on other occasions to the prodigal son (“Der verlorene Sohn”) parable from the Bible. Here the narrator classifies himself as one of the most lost sons, stressing his extreme disorientation and alienation from his roots. But the point of the parable is partially inverted in Seidler’s case, in that his family (reading that here in the broadest possible sense as Germany) left him in the lurch for its own selfish gains rather than vice versa; although physically he is still the one who leaves home, it is obviously not of his own volition. He describes himself in respect to his adoptive relationship with the Binnets “wie ein Kind, das seine eigene Mutter verloren hat, und sich an den Rock einer anderen Frau hängt, die seine Mutter zwar nie sein kann, aber doch etwas Güte abgibt” (40). The prodigal son motif comes up again in relation to the elderly couple who hope to travel to Columbia, where “dieser verlorene Sohn” had migrated after he had “einst schlecht getan in der Heimat” (243). Their elder offspring was a lost son in a completely different sense (or senses, given the literal and figurative possibilities of the following); a soldier in the German army, “Man gab ihn für verloren” (ibid.).
At one point, Seidler imagines momentarily what his life would be like if he were displaced from this environment; rather than being surrounded by “die Häuser von Bleibenden” and “die Arbeiter in den Fabriken und Mühlen, die Fischer, Barbiere und Pizzabäcker,” he sees himself alone with the “schwarzen vierarmigen Riesenkrabbe, dem Hakenkreuz” (254). The paradox of Seidler is that he feels the least lost when he can lose himself in a crowd, or in the bustle of everyday life. Seidler finds security within the labyrinth of Marseilles and its intertwining quotidian activities and workplaces. The symmetry of the swastika, on the other hand, would prohibit one from becoming endlessly (and for Seidler, happily) lost—the four-armed creature is a trap, and its confinement does not allow the option of multiple paths for forging one’s own way forward. The dead ends which branch off from the swastika’s arms are simply that: non-permutational dead ends, and not mere obstacles on the path.

2.2.2. Goals and Dead-Ends in Marseilles

Despite his lack of a conventional forward drive and his apathy about leaving France, Seidler is anything but idle. He becomes a student of Marseilles’s topography as he wanders the city, and in so doing, is increasingly more secure in his own position. As the narrator follows Marie through the city, he reasons that if he decided to leave Marseilles, he could do so easily. He tells himself that he would “alles erreichen” and proclaims himself as “furchtlos,” unlike many of the refugees around him (108). But then the story returns to the pursuit of Marie: “Wie ich mich nach der Frau umdrehte, war sie schon weg. Auch die Treppe war leer, als hätte sie mich mit Absicht heraufgelockt” (ibid.). He reaches a dead end here, symbolizing his uncertain position, and hinting that in other matters he will not necessarily “alles erreichen” either. Later, as he follows her
again, Seidler expresses his awareness of the circular movements of both Marie and himself, as their goals are indefinable and possibly non-existent: “Ich folgte ihr auf die Cannebière. Ich wußte bereits, daß dieses entschiedene Zulaufen doch kein Ziel hatte” (122).

As all five works examined in this dissertation exemplify, the twentieth-century novel-protagonist is concerned with the progression forward toward a goal, whether tangible or not, to improve or to save his life. But Seidler stresses his resistance to this type of thinking, expressing that a grounded awareness of the present is more productive than an ideal view of the future. He realizes and accepts his current state of limbo, even before he reaches Marseilles: “Ich hatte seit unserer Flucht nichts Neues erlebt, das Alte war mir noch nicht verrauscht,\(^5\) ich war ja auch immer noch halb auf der Flucht, halb versteckt” (16). This problem of being caught in the middle between here and there remains with him throughout his stay in Marseilles, until he eventually decides to remain in France.

Seidler’s reflections show that, upon arriving in Marseilles, he was under the impression that he was indeed progressing toward a goal—even if unsure what constituted that goal: “Ich dachte nach Art sehr junger Leute, daß alles, was mir geschehen sei, mich hierher geführt hatte und damit war es gut gewesen. [...] Dann stieg ich die steinerne Treppe hinauf, von der ich noch nicht wußte, wohin sie führte” (43). In telling his story a few weeks later, he realizes that he was not moving goal-orientedly, at least not by design. Instead, everything occurred unexpectedly and uncertainly, as emphasized at the microlevel here with his ascension of the stairs leading to unknown

\(^5\) In other editions, this is “verrauscht,” which elicits a much different type of imagery (e.g. 1963 Luchterhand ed. and 1985 Aufbau ed.). The critical edition cited here is based on the version printed in 83 installments in the *Berliner Zeitung*, 1947.
He seems to obey the advice of the Czech orchestra conductor, who instructs him, "Sie müssen, wenn ich so sagen darf, Ihr Ziel eine zeitlang vergessen, jetzt gelten nur die Zwischenländer, sonst wird aus der Abfahrt nichts" (48). Indeed, Seidler forgets about his goal for a time—for much of the narration he has no apparent goal and is content with the aim of remaining aimless. At first, his motivations for this seem simple enough, for example when he explains to his listener the merits of sitting around for hours sipping rosé: "Nur sitzenbleiben dürfen, nur nie mehr in etwas verwickelt werden" (7). The dulling of the senses with red wine is a favorite pastime of the narrator, and as he indicates here, it temporarily protects against the "Schwermut, ewige Schwermut" (ibid.) and prevents him from entering even further into the labyrinth of difficulties. In fact, he can maintain the deceptive feeling of control by forgetting that such a labyrinth exists. At the same time, his apparent lack of inner drive pushing him constantly forward has much more significance than this passing escape from reality. He sets himself apart from the other refugees around him in his philosophy that a temporary loss of bearings is sometimes a necessity, in order to regain orientation and a more fruitful forward momentum.

52 On occasion the narrator is compelled to move in a certain direction through Marseilles, coinciding with the few times when he becomes caught up in the mad race for departure visas. He finds himself at one point in front of the Mexican consulate: "Ich stand jetzt schon auf der Cannebière. Warum ging ich nicht zum Alten Hafen herunter, warum in entgegengesetzter Richtung herauf, zur protestantischen Kirche? Kam mir dadurch der Gedanke, zum Boulevard de la Madeleine abzubiegen? Wählte ich diese Richtung sofort, weil ich eben dorthin wollte?" (67). In telling his story in retrospect, he questions his own subconscious drives and motivations. Impersonal constructions, with the protagonist as object rather than subject, indicate that he does not always hold his own reigns. For example, he writes that after being interrogated by a bureaucrat, "Mich zog es nach solchem Verhör ins nächste Café" (135).

53 He admits to being "fast immer ein wenig betrunken" (65) during his time in Marseilles.
As will be discussed further in Chapter 4, the material metaphor of throwing one's old life behind recurs through the novel. As Seidler finds himself firmly grounded in the present while considering his place within the historical continuum, others around him look exclusively toward the future, hoping to leave the past behind.\textsuperscript{54} (Marie for one took a different path, absorbing herself completely in the past—"Ihr Verhältnis zur Zeit ist durch die ‘Gegenwart des Vergangenen’ bestimmt," Haas 84). The dire necessity to start a new life elsewhere is often accompanied by cues in the refugees’ speech which indicate a belief that they can move away from much of their past pain when they leave Europe. Seidler comments on a "Schlange von Menschen, die alle hofften, gerade mit diesem Schiff unseren Erdteil hinter sich zu lassen, ihr bisher gelebtes Leben, womöglich für immer den Tod" (64). Like the "Erdteil" itself, both life and the threat of death are presented spatially here, as entities which are in effect possible to leave behind. In reference to Marie, the doctor assures Seidler, "Einmal auf dem Meer, einmal das Land hinter sich, einmal für allemal die Vergangenheit hinter sich, wird sie so oder so geheilt werden" (257). The physical departure from Europe stands in these figures’ minds as a mental separation from their past and present woes; it is a goal, even if not a likely attainable one for many of them. Seidler is also not immune to this type of thinking, as seen in his attempts to rationalize Marie’s imminent departure and separation from him: "Laß einmal erst das Schiff abstoßen, zurückliegen dieses verwünschte Land, die guten und bösen Erinnerungen, das zusammengeflickte Leben, die Gräber und all den Unsinn\textsuperscript{54} This image is strongly reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s “Engel der Geschichte” from his last essay “Über den Begriff der Geschichte.” The angel is grounded in the present while being driven by some force forward. All the while his head is turned to look backwards at the catastrophe amassed behind him: “Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist \textit{dieser Sturm}” (\textit{Illuminationen} 255).
von Schuld und Reue” (241). Marie would be leaving behind not only Marseilles, but also her memories and the “zusammengeflickte Leben,” a material metaphorization of time in exile as a shoddy, patchwork construction of a life. From this unsure ground, her new beginning is supposed to start.

2.2.3. Marie’s Labyrinth

Marie refuses to entertain the possibility that her husband Weidel is not in Marseilles, ceaselessly searching for him in the labyrinth of the city. Caught in her own personal and internal labyrinth, a mental and emotional embroilment which plays out within the city’s physical one, Marie exemplifies in some respects the prototypical twentieth-century literary figure. That is, she is unable to reach her goal, not for lack of trying, but because it is literally unreachable: Weidel is dead. In refuting her own thoughts on the possibility of his death, Marie discloses what drives her endless searching: “Mir kam auch dieser sinnlose Gedanke nur, weil man mich zwingt, hier still zu sitzen. Sobald ich suche, weiß ich, es gibt den Mann. Solange ich suche, weiß ich, ich kann ihn noch finden” (229). The process of searching furnishes her with a sense of purpose, giving her an option other than merely sitting and waiting for the next hand to be dealt. Marie persists in traversing the labyrinth of Marseilles in the belief that there is an end goal. Finding it is an impossible matter of bypassing all of the dead ends and closed doors along the way.55

55 Closed doors tangibly represent the obstacles and dead-ends of bureaucracy in the novel, for example the one which obstructs the restless people waiting outside the Brazilian consulate, when it is thought that the last ship was departing shortly (245). Another instance is observed at the point when the reality of Marie’s departure finally hits the narrator: “jetzt brach die Nacht schon an, längst waren alle Türen geschlossen” (255). As the closing line to the ninth chapter of Transit, it provides a sense of finality, and marks a certain close to this chapter of Seidler’s life.
In spite of the independence which she asserts through her dialogue, Marie latches on to various males as a source of security and orientation, neither of which they can actually provide her.\textsuperscript{56} The image of Marie as a lost soul remains constant throughout the novel—she is lost in Marseilles without Weidel, and thus clings first to the doctor and then to Seidler as well. Later when Seidler disappears out of her life for awhile, she begins searching for him rather than for Weidel. Disillusioned at one point, Marie reminds the doctor ironically, “Ich habe wohl schon einmal versprochen, dir zu folgen bis ans Ende der Welt” (272).\textsuperscript{57} In the end she has indeed followed the doctor “bis ans Ende der Welt”: in the \textit{Jenseits} lies the possibility that she is reunited with her lost one, as she wonders: “Gibt es dort drüben ein Wiedersehen?” (249).\textsuperscript{58} Seghers plays here on the double-meaning of \textit{dort drüben} (as a counterpart to the metaphysical and physical

\textsuperscript{56} Seidler could, however, make Marie’s life much simpler by informing her of the truth about Weidel. His guilt becomes apparent when he dreams of losing Weidel’s luggage with which he has been entrusted: “Ich träumte, ich hätte den Handkoffer stehen lassen. Ich suchte ihn an den unsinnigsten Orten, in meiner Knabenschule daheim, bei den Binnets in Marseille, bei Yvonne auf dem Bauernhof, auf den Docks in der Normandie. Da stand der Handkoffer auf einem Laufsteg, die Flieger stießen en pique herunter, ich rannte noch einmal zurück in Todesangst” (51). The aimless search in Seidler’s dream stands for that of Marie, and the luggage in the narrator’s dream metonymically represents the unattainable Weidel himself.

\textsuperscript{57} This spatial metaphor rings in the narrator’s ears, as he remembers the naïve physical-boundary conceptions of his childhood: “Ich schloß die Augen. Ich sah einen grün gestrichenen Zaun mit welken, dünnen Winden. Ich sah nicht über den Zaun, ich sah nur die raschen Herbstwolken in den Latten, ich mußte noch sehr klein sein, ich dachte, das sei das Ende der Welt” (272). As an adult in exile, he has arrived at what some consider the true end of the world, in a metaphorical, apocalyptic sense.

\textsuperscript{58} The physical and metaphysical connotations of \textit{Jenseits} are elicited again as Seidler remarks on the appearance of an elderly Spanish refugee, “Er sah viel frischer aus, als hoffte er, bald die Seinen wiederzufinden in einem Jenseits hinter dem Ozean” (263). Cf. Haas, who remarks that in such sentiments in \textit{Transit}, there is “etwas von der marxistischen Kritik an der Kirche und ihren Jenseitsverträsten hörbar” (83). Beyond this, though, it seems that such terminology contributes to the overall sense of eternity and mythicallity that will be touched on in connection with storytelling and legacy in Chapter 4.
indicator *Jenseits*), Seidler, believing that Marie means this in a figurative sense, responds, "Ich kenne mich ganz gut aus in den irdischen Verhältnissen. Obwohl sie ziemlich verworren sind. Hier habe ich ganz gute Beziehungen. Da drüben kenne ich mich gar nicht aus" (ibid.). Haas points out the extra-geographical dimension that is introduced and distinguished here: "'Drüben' ist Ortsbezeichnung für das Land, für das das Visum gilt. Diesem Bereich stellt Seidler die 'irdischen Verhältnisse' entgegen" (80).

In any case, since she departs from Marseilles with the doctor, Marie avoids one of her greatest fears, that of being alone. Upon hearing Marie express this apprehension, the narrator has the image of a "völlig leeren, völlig von Menschen geräumten Erdteils, das letzte Schiff abgefahren, und sie allein zurückgeblieben in der vollkommenen Wildnis, die alles sofort überwuchert hatte" (141). Again spatial and physical imagery is associated with a mental state in order to graphically describe the extent of Marie’s anticipated loneliness. Marie deems solitude as the worst imaginable fate, a revelation which elucidates her persistent searching and, in spite of her independence in decision-making, her nonetheless conspicuous dependence on the male figures of the work.

### 2.2.4. The Labyrinth of Bureaucracy

As sketched out in Seidler’s recollections, the physical labyrinth of Marseilles with its dead ends and obstacles parallels the assemblage of metaphorical avenues which are shut off for the novel’s figures. The labyrinth theme is carried further still into the bureaucratic realm. Life for the refugees was, as Seghers writes, a "Visenjagd" (136),

[^59]: Cf. the representation of Karl’s “Jagd” through the bureaucracy of applying for a job in *Der Verschollene*: “Er glaubte, gerade weil er keine Papiere hatte, müsse er bestrebt sein alle Formalitäten möglichst rasch durchzujagen” (399).
departure out of Europe.\footnote{Cf. Jan Hans for more details on the arduous process of obtaining visas in this time and place. Seghers was intimately familiar with the visa process from her firsthand experiences of exile. Autobiographical hints arise in the novel, such as when a friend of Seidler needs proof from a doctor that his eyes are healthy, “denn nur mit gesunden Augen dürfte er einreisen” (244). This probably alludes to the fact that Seghers and her children were not allowed into the US under the ostensible reason that Seghers’s daughter Ruth had an eye ailment. More likely, they were not let in by American authorities because of Seghers’s FBI file and her affiliation with the Communist Party (cf. Stephan, \textit{Das siebte Kreuz. Welt und Wirkung} 244 ff).} As Alexander Stephan writes, “die Hetze der Transitäre nach Conduits, Danger-Visa, Visa de Sortie und Schiffsbillets \[wird\] zum ziellosen, absurden Selbstzweck” (\textit{Die deutsche Exilliteratur} 176). After the proper hoops had all been jumped through in this aimless process, departure was still not ensured, since a spot on an outgoing ship was by no means guaranteed, even if the applicant had completed all steps successfully. Often one or more of the documents had expired in the meantime, forcing the applicant to start the process anew, as an elderly “Mittransitär” explains to Seidler: “Inzwischen ist soviel Zeit vergangen, daß wieder das erste, das Hauptziel entschwunden ist. Dein Visum ist abgelaufen, und wie auch das Transit notwendig war, es ist wieder gar nichts ohne das Visum, und so immer weiter, immer weiter, immer weiter” (48). This repeated adverbial phrase is noteworthy in its fusion of the temporal and the spatial—namely because of the repetition, “immer weiter” surpasses its normal function of comparative degree here (for which only one appearance would suffice) and instead conveys a nearly physical journey deeper and deeper into the bureaucrats’ lair. Its echo points to the state of perpetual but circular motion which characterized the emigration process.

The political instability of the times resulted in the frequent alteration of geographical boundaries. These seemingly superficial modifications meant unwitting changes to an individual’s national and cultural affiliation. This spatial disorientation led
to even more paperwork and hassles, and further obstacles standing in the way of emigration. The situation of Seidler's "kahlköpfiger Mittransitär," whose village Pjamitze no longer belonged to Poland but to German-occupied Lithuania epitomizes this dilemma. He told the consul where he was from with precise detail: "Ich war exakt, ich glaubte mich ebenso exakt wie der Konsul, ich schrieb: Gehörte früher zur Gemeinde Pjamitze. Der Konsul aber war doch noch exakter, seine Karte war doch noch exakter" (207). He now must try to obtain proof of his birth from a place which no longer officially exists. An individual during these times could not keep up with the ever-changing cartography, and thus could "lose" a previously held self-identification on account of the whim and might of others. The bureaucrats, as mouthpieces for the ruling governments, have the final authoritative word on the refugees' time and even on their geography.61 This all serves to reinforce the power of those in control over the destiny of people trying to find their way within the polymorphous contours of Europe.

Seidler tries to stay on the other side of this type of hierarchy by determining his own false identity. Unlike Kafka's Karl Roßmann, who upon arriving in America is confronted with the confusing name change of his alleged Uncle Jakob, forcing him to blindly confirm the stranger's identity (37), the narrator of Transit brings upon himself a knotty identity through deceptions and manipulations of the bureaucratic process. For the sake of simplicity I have referred to the narrator up to this point as Seidler, but this too is a name he assumes before usurping the identity of the writer Weidel. His real name is never revealed to the reader, resulting in more complexities than even his official dossier.

61 In observing the bureaucrats in a hotel milling about, all performing their assigned roles mechanically, Seidler remarks that it looked "als säße in dem Hoteldach einer, der sie an Fäden zog" (237). Even those who think they have some control appear to have an external puppeteer controlling their fates and leading them through the maze.
suggests (Frank Wagner refers to him consistently as “der Namenlose” in his book “...der Kurs auf die Realität”). Even through intense interrogation, the bureaucrats cannot catch Seidler in their net: “So dicht, so ausgeklügelt, so unentrinnbar war dieses Netz aus Fragen, daß dem Konsul keine Einzelheit meines Lebens hätte entgehen können, wenn es nur mein Leben gewesen wäre” (203). This time the net-motif takes the form of a trap, this set of personal questions thrown at him. The net is inescapable, but meaningless, because it is not his own life which he has to account for.

His identity in Marseilles has been split into (at least) two strands, as the doctor remarks to Seidler: “Sie, lieber Freund, wenn ich mich nicht in Ihnen täusche, möchten gern zwei Leben haben, da es nacheinander nicht geht, dann nebeneinander, dann zweigleisig. Sie können es nicht!” (151). The “track” metaphor for one’s life course, as seen prominently in Kafka’s *Der Verschollene* as well, comes into play here with the term “zweigleisig.” Until Seidler’s final decision to stay in Marseilles and not to leave with Marie, he jumps back and forth between these two tracks of identity, trying to weave them together with the lies he tells Marie and the immigration authorities. In the end, Seidler takes on yet another persona when he decides to remain in France and to work on the farm of friends, not far from Marseilles; he assumes the identity of a distant relative of the Binnets (279). Formulating various personas on paper has become a way of life for Seidler, and in so doing, he remains on top of the authorities in the power hierarchy. Had he taken the opportunity to leave Marseilles, he would have relinquished victory to the authorities in a game that he realizes he has won in the end. When an acquaintance

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62 Earlier in the narration, Seidler scoffs at warnings that he should take the bureaucracy more seriously, calling it “Unsinn”: “Es ist ein Spiel wie jedes andere. Es ist das Spiel um den irdischen Aufenthalt” (137). This earthly stay means remaining alive, while losing the game means losing one’s life.
gives him money for the boarding pass, his final obstacle standing in the way of departure, he revels that he has played the game to the end and won (259). In telling his story in retrospect, he has taken his listener—as Seghers takes her readers—through his complicated meanderings in the bureaucratic game, retracing the steps leading him to an end which he could not accept as his final fate. 63

Whereas the ocean in Der Verschollene delivers Karl Roßmann to a new world of paperwork and red tape, the sea in Transit marks the point of ultimate escape from the bureaucratic labyrinth in Marseilles. The narrator describes the last depot for those who were finally able to depart:

Der Vorraum des Hafenamtes war fast leer, gemessen an den Tausenden, deren Ziel das Hafenamt war. Er war der letzte aller Vorräume. Wenn der, der ihn schließlich durchwartet hatte, nicht doch noch zurück müßte, endgültig, hoffnungslos, dann kam danach gar kein Warteraum mehr, nur das Meer. (263)

The previous waiting rooms were only Vor-Vorräume in this maze, and this one, in which the refugees receive the final go-ahead, is thought to provide immediate access to freedom. The expanse of the sea, contrasting with the labyrinthine and compartmentalized nature of the city, is thought even by Seidler to be a place of refuge. He envisions the casualties of war and exile as a confusing network of tributaries and rivers which eventually flow into the great equalizer of the sea, "wo endlich für alle wieder Raum war und Friede" (42). This imagery serves to emphasize the immense space of the sea, as the refugees (including Seidler) conceptualize it. In the Mediterranean and

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63 Not everyone is as resilient as Seidler to the weighty bureaucracy of exile—some characters ultimately give in, such as the Czech conductor who dies from exhaustion, or Weidel, who found death to be the only escape from the labyrinth of bureaucracy and emotional pain.
beyond, they imagine enough space to hold everyone, where no one is held in confinement, and where there exist no labyrinths of bureaucracies and of persecution.

2.3. *Mutmassungen über Jakob*: “Was ist Geradeaus?”

The labyrinths of Uwe Johnson’s novel are distinctly personal and political. The physical dimensions in the narrative world of *Mutmassungen über Jakob* are shaped by Germany’s political division of 1949: besides the westward flight of Jakob’s mother, Gesine Cresspahl’s residence “hinter der Grenze” as a NATO translator “in dem anderen Deutschland” (17) also prompts frequent allusions to the post-World War II demarcations of East and West. Letters are exchanged and received “von jenseits der Grenze” (18).

Deictic references such as *Jenseits* and *Diesseits* as they appear in Johnson’s novel differ from those in Seghers’s *Transit* in that they function less as mystical-mythical elements and more as a reminder of the political border between East and West. But at the same time, the use of this terminology with its spiritual or metaphysical connotations places a seeming eternity between one “part” of Germany and the other. More importantly, though, is that through deixis the inherent arbitrariness and relativity of borders is emphasized.64 Before an utterance like *Jenseits* or *Diesseits* can make any sense, the

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64 With the term “deixis” I refer throughout this study namely to “those aspects of language whose interpretation is relative to the occasion of utterance: to the time of utterance, and to times before and after the time of utterance; to the location of the speaker at the time of utterance; and to the identity of the speaker and the intended audience” (Fillmore 220). Mainly I will concentrate on the “lokale Deiktika” (e.g. adverbs of place) because of their inherent prototypical character for all forms of deixis (Sennholz 168). As such, spatial deixis is to temporal and personal deictic expressions (e.g. personal pronouns) as the spatial metaphor is to representations of time and other abstract concepts—it provides the cognition with an immediate frame of reference. Cf. also Käte Hamburger’s *Logik der Dichtung*: “Die Gestaltung der fiktiven, fließenden oder auch stehenden, Zeit erfolgt durch besondere Gestaltungsmittel, ebenso wie die Gestaltung des Raumes” (66). Hamburger continues with a discussion of deictic terms or time coordinates such as *jetzt, heute, gestern*, etc., as correspondents to spatial adverbs of
reader is required to ascertain first whether the speaker or narrator is located to this or that side, to the East or the West of the divide (and these are facts which Johnson does not always make immediately clear in his novel). For the figures in Seghers’s *Transit*, the terms in their literal denotations have a fairly fixed meaning: *Jenseits* refers to, on the physical level, the world of promised safety and security beyond Europe, while *Diesseits* describes the refugees’ current confines of Marseilles. In *Mutmassungen* such terms retain their inherent variability, in that they are expressed by characters on both sides. When we learn that Gesine writes a telegram to her father at the first post office “hinter der Grenze” (227), for example, it is only situational context which reveals on which side she stands—and even then it is not one-hundred percent certain that it is on the East at this point in the narration. One can be located both vor and hinter at the same time, depending on which perspective is validated. In describing a character’s position in relation to an imaginary line, these locational prepositions emphasize two important points: first, the predominance of spatial metaphors for situating ourselves within the world; and second, the lack of intrinsic rationality behind politically determined and enforced boundaries. A divided notion of East and West, while inflated over time with political significance, is nonetheless arbitrary at its core—or at least highly relative, and thus deictic. These geographical determinations on a larger scale affect people like orientation such as hinter, vor, oben, unten, etc., which will become especially significant to the analysis later in this chapter.

65 Jakob characterizes Rohlfs with some irony as being so powerful in this world that he lives “jenseits [...] von Verachtung und Wohlwollen” (223), while Jakob himself is seen by Rohlfs as having the ability to act “jenseits der Worte” (75).

66 To a certain extent it makes sense to consider in this context Edward Said’s notion of an “otherness” from his 1978 work *Orientalism*, and the construction and subsequent legitimization of identity and power based on constructs. Said writes, “The construction of identity—for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction—involves establishing opposites and ‘others’ whose actuality is always subject to the
Jakob the train dispatcher on a smaller scale, leading to his disorientation and eventual fall when he can no longer cope with the many labyrinths being constructed all around him.

2.3.1. East, West, and the “Grösse der Welt”

The Wall which would be erected two years after the publication of Johnson’s novel is not part of the topographical relief in Jakob’s world. Nonetheless, the drawn partition of East and West is already an undoubted mental barrier, or a spatial division in the residents’ minds. Johnson’s novel brings out the point that even before the political division of Germany in 1949, mental barriers were drawn in terms of previous battle lines and current occupying zones. After the war, the “Soldaten der geschlagenen Armee” came to Jakob’s hometown of Jerichow “und stahlen wie die Raben und stumpf weiterzogen die Küste entlang westwärts als könnten sie sich so entfernen von dem was sie hinterlassen hatten” (68). Again history witnessed masses of people moving westward in hopes of a better life, and in hopes of forgetting and leaving the past behind. In a cognitive spatial metaphor and emotional survival tactic, physical distancing between geographical points is aligned with the possibility of a mental distancing from historical events.

Continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from ‘us’. Each age and society re-creates its ‘Others’” (332). This notion of constructed identity is apparent in the emergence of a we-they dichotomy in some people’s thinking after the inception of the GDR and BRD.

67 The sometimes ridiculous results of the East-West divide are reflected in a statement from Rohlfs’s assistant Hänischen, who reports to his Stasi-boss Rohlfs that Jakob “fährt aber genau bis an die Grenze, wissen Sie, das ist das mit dem See, wo das Ufer noch uns gehört, und das Wasser ist westdeutsch...” (187).

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The events in Johnson’s novel take place during the decade following Germany’s official division into East and West, a time when separation from the Nazi past through repression, rationalization, or revisionism was still a common strategy for at least the political leaders of the two German states. Several of the novel’s characters discuss reasons for and against fleeing westward, or as Jonas Blach terms it, “Republikflucht” (253). The political circumstances of the 1950s cause ideologues to warn idealists, “dass einer sich irren kann, da geht einer weg in die versprechende Ferne” (46). To go westward toward empty promises, and into the ideological and physical “Ferne” is, from this viewpoint, to err. The emphasis which some of Johnson’s narrators place on this physical remoteness (despite the shared border) between the East in all its potential, and the deceptively alluring West, reinforces on a metaphorical level the perception of the two systems as worlds apart. This irony can be sensed for example in a description of people fleeing westward, “auf der Suche nach einem Land, das ferne leuchtet wie man hört” (186).

In Kafka’s Der Verschollene, America and everything about it is “groß” from Karl’s perspective. In this novel, the world itself is “groß”—but what constitutes the world for these figures? Cresspahl reveals his protective stance regarding his independently spirited daughter: “sollte man denken dass ein junges Mädchen so lange Zeit ohne väterlichen Schutz die Welt bereiste? und die Welt war ja gross” (15). The

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68 Johnson points out the varying shades of neutrality or bias in this era’s terminology, for example in a dispute regarding “weggefahren” vs. “geflohren” in relation to Frau Abs’s move to the West (86).
69 A brightly-colored sign on the train that takes Jakob into the West on his visit ironically indicates the distance between the two states and the disappointments which could await one on the other side: “es war schnellzugrot und trug allerhand westdeutsche Namen, unter denen man sich so etwas wie Verlust und Entfernung vorstellen konnte” (259).
"Grösse der Welt" (16) in this case, however, refers strictly to Germany, and specifically West Germany, since Gesine is only crossing the border into the Federal Republic.  

Cresspahl wants to travel “in die Welt zu seiner sehr entbehrtten und geliebten Tochter” (63). While for Jakob coming “noch einmal zuriick in die Welt” (58) refers to his daily return into the world of trains, the world of his work and his livelihood in the GDR, for Cresspahl to travel “in die Welt” means going to the West, already thought of as a different world. Only a decade after the official division of the country, Johnson shows through spatial-geographical metaphors that residents already felt worlds apart from their counterparts across the border.

After the war, Jakob came to recognize “die ungeheure Ausdehnung der Welt und die Vielzahl menschlichen Lebens” (69) through the foreign cultures and foreign languages of the occupying troops. He comprehended for the first time the vast proportions of the world, while remaining locally bound. The railroad allows him to maintain this perspective, as he stays rooted in his home turf without losing sight of the multitude of destinations and departure points beyond his immediate surroundings, and beyond the boundaries of the GDR.  

At the same time, Jakob’s implicit connection to the West through the train tracks provides him neither with any sense of freedom nor with a possibility to leave his current post. Jakob’s resigned stance reveals itself in his response

70 Not only is the size of the world beyond East Germany emphasized in the novel, as well as the psychological distance between people on either side of the border, but Jakob’s hometown in the GDR is also labeled as large: “Jakobs Stadt war gross, und auch die Briefe aus den anderen von jenseits der Grenze kamen in grossen Haufen herein” (32). This is another relative designation, since the fictional location of Jerichow, located 150 kilometers from the Baltic coast, has a distinctly small-town feel and in any case is not a Großstadt.

71 Kurt Fickert brings out another side of Jakob’s paradoxical workplace, by noting that the “switching tower in which Jakob works represents both a means of communication and a place of isolation” (“Symbol Complexes” 106).
to a coworker in this conversation: "'Zu denken' sagte Jöche still verblüfft: 'zu denken
dass der Zug heute abend bei Gesine ist, und er kommt täglich hier durch...'. Jakob
nickte nur, es sah nicht nach Abschied aus" (261).

2.3.2. Constructions of Home and Identity

A pub conversation between Gesine and the academic Jonas Blach indicates that
she does not feel at home anywhere, neither in the East nor in the West.72 When she
suggests that they wrap it up so that Blach can pay and go home, he then responds, "Und
wohin wolltest du gehen Gesine" (193). The implication here is that Gesine has no actual
"Zuhause," thus she is a stranger in whichever environment she finds herself. So when
Jonas remarks of Gesine, "Ihre Seele ist in fremde Gärten gegangen" (253) to refer both
to her love for Jakob and to her migration, the reader is left wondering, since "fremd" has
no real meaning without a relation to its opposite. Gesine expresses to Jakob her
frustration over this perpetual estrangement upon her visit back to the town she had
considered home: "Ich bin mürrisch Jakob: hilflos enttäuscht und wissentlich unheilbar:
all diese fremden Stellen" (190). She has only a fleeting moment of comfort, when she
sees her cat at Cresspahl's house: "Mir war als sei ich am Ende doch nach Hause

72 Similar to Gesine, Blach is depicted as lacking a true sense of belonging and home, as
alluded to in the lyrics of a song he hears: "fern so fern das Heimatland: viele Jahre
schwere Fron, harte Arbeit, karger Lohn, tagaus, tagein, kein Glück, kein Heim, alles
liegt so weit so weit" (256). The secretary of the English department at the university
remarks that he seemed to feel out of place there as well: "Er setzte sich im Mantel bei
mir hin als wollt er so bleiben und weggehen: als wär er nicht bei uns zu Hause" (228);
and Rohlfs comments about Jonas with apparent disdain, "er weiss nicht wo er morgen
hingehen soll, er steht ausserhalb als wär er schon im Westen" (232). Blach generally
gives the impression that he has no firm ties to the GDR, but he remains there even while
he struggles for years with possibly leaving.

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The use of subjunctive here is telling: Gesine feels out of place on both sides of the German divide. Even at her father’s residence, she is not truly at home. In this way, Gesine is no anomaly in the post-war world. The division of Germany transformed familiar homes into somewhat foreign ones (a phenomenon which is analogized by the microcosm of the railroad itself in this novel). Those in the East in particular were, in a sense, uprooted without ever relocating physically, obligated to find their way within freshly defined boundaries (metaphorical and physical) and new structures (institutional/systemic, but also physical, in respect to something such as the modified rail network). Johnson builds a recurring spatial metaphor around the concept of sich einrichten, relying on the various connotations of the verb to subtly reflect this process of adaptation: a new home must be furnished and arranged, and must be properly equipped if the household is to run smoothly and to seem like a home at all. At the same time, accoutering oneself appropriately, at least in respect to the superficial outer layer, becomes essential in order to survive in the new environment (suggesting the need to

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73 Mutmassungen über Jakob contains much feline imagery. In some respects it relates to the perceived freedom and “at-homeness” of cats, but at the same time, the cars driven by the Stasi agents in the novel are also painted as cats slinking or creeping around with much agility (e.g. 40). For more discussion on the cat motif see for example the analyses of Bond, Fickert, Popp, and Schwarz.

74 As Erhard Friedrichsmeyer notes in relation to this novel, the division of Germany “appears to be no less traumatic than war. In fact, the Cresspahl-Abs family union managed to come into being in wartime, but it cannot survive the severance of the two Germanys” (217).

75 The process of placing order onto one’s life or thoughts is given form in the novel on more than one occasion through analogies to furniture. One example is a description of the cabinetmaker Cresspahl, who “wenn Jakob eine Sache zu Ende erklärt hatte, ‘Ja’ in einer umsichtigen arbeitsamen Art, die jedes Stück der Neuigkeiten allseits umwandte und prüfte und wegließ an den zugehörigen Ort als ordnet er das Gehörte Stück für Stück in die Fächer seines siebentürigen Schrankes” (221). Fickert touches on this type of analogy between material and mental spaces in his mention that Cresspahl’s trade is “oriented to an interior world and which he carries out in isolation; as a craftsman he is closer to the artist than to the worker” (“Symbol Complexes” 106).
bundle up for the Cold might take this metaphor too far though). Jakob, like so many after the war, "richtete sich ein" (69). Through the narration we learn that this means he needed to buy furniture and so forth, and to literally set himself up within the physical dimensions of a room, but also that he must begin the process of finding his "place" in the confusing post-war world. By employing the same verb in relation to a homeless woman whom Gesine had seen in Italy, "die sich im Niedergang des Untergrundbahnhofes zur Nacht einrichtete auf den Rosten der Fernheizung" (209), Johnson does not limit his implicit commentary to Germany alone. Whatever one's individual situation, under whichever socio-political circumstances, some degree of adaptation is necessary for survival. The concept of adaptation to a physical environment associated with *sich einrichten* goes hand-in-hand with the contortion of principles and ideals in order to conform to a social system. Jakob is presented as possessing an unusually exceptional ability to remain flexible, to orient himself to any new situation; however, as I will argue shortly, his reliance on these skills and his wont to effortlessly untangle problems as they arise lead to his eventual demise.

The multivalence of the verb *sich einrichten* places an emphasis on the constructed nature of society. Many theorists in the twentieth century, from Durkheim and Weber to Bourdieu later, contended that cultural and social entities are but constructs or collective representations. For instance, contemporary views generally identify *Heimat* as a difficult to define construction, as something like "the imaginary space where a

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76 A room in which Blach stays while visiting friends in Berlin, with its "für ein geistiges Leben eingerichteten Möbeln" (265), subtly connects the tangible furnishings of a residence to the spiritual and mental furnishing involved in determining a way of life, or in the cognitive process of shaping a world view. In addition, Rohlf's speaks of the notion of progress in the paradoxical terms of a stationary and uncompromising piece of furniture: "Was ist der Fortschritt. Intellektuell. Sozial. Deutsche Möbelthesen: Nur an meinem Tisch sitzt man auf dem richtigen Stuhl" (219).
reconciliation with an alienated, moving world" takes place (Blickle 40). In Johnson’s novel, *sich einrichten* points to the unique situation of reconciling with the particular society of the GDR which, rather than arising and evolving in a more natural way, has been imposed on those who are not accustomed to it, and who have not lived their entire lives under its contingencies.

Johnson takes the concept of *sich einrichten* even further in addressing both metaphysical and political freedom. This is revealed in Jakob’s stream of consciousness:

‘Freiheit’ ist eher ein Mangelbegriff, insofern: sie kommt nicht vor. Wer auf die Welt kommt redet sich an mit Ich, das ist das Wichtigste für ihn, aber er findet sich mit mehreren vor zusammen, und muss sich einrichten mit seiner Wichtigkeit; niemand kann so frei sein etwa aus der Physik auszutreten für seine Person. Als soziales und natürliches Lebewesen (ich bin ein...) weitgehend fest. Da ist wohl die Auffassung der Welt von einem Punkt Ich aus gemeint, ‘dies sei aber nicht begriffen als Freiheit, solange man genau wie die Führung des Staates den Menschen (unsere Menschen, die Massen) beeinflussbar denke nach einem sehr schlichten Schema von Kausalität’, da hätt er auch gleich von der Lage in der Landwirtschaft reden konnen. Denn er war immer in dem zweihalsigen Rahmen von Staatsmacht und Staatsbürger geblieben (wie er sagte) mit seinem Unterschied. (135)

In this passage, *sich einrichten* indicates the requirement of tempering innate drives and desires in contention with equally egocentric fellow members of society. Complete freedom is illusory in both the political and metaphysical senses, in that the “Ich” is caught within the “zweihalsigen Rahmen von Staatsmacht und Staatsbürger.” Hegel’s spatial conceptualizations of the state as a harbor for free will, or of a legal system as “Reich der verwirklichten Freiheit”77 and as the ultimately ethical place toward which history teleologically progresses, have been replaced at this point in the twentieth century by a notion of state as an entity which necessarily hinders freedom. Individual will and communal desire never unite harmoniously within the context of the state, as Hegel

77 As delineated in Hegel’s “Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts” (1821). Here: 46.
prophesied. Instead the state is put forth in *Mutmassungen* as a contained arena (thus, still spatialized) in which personal egos and political power constantly clash. Only the sentiments of the Stasi-agent Rohlfs or the official SED doctrine echo Hegel’s idealistic concept of the state as “die Wirklichkeit der konkreten Freiheit” (Hegel 406). A metaphorical spatialization of the state thus remains as an absolute in twentieth-century thinking, but instead of representing a worthy and attainable endpoint to the path of history, the state restricts movement and brings progress to a standstill. Jakob’s thoughts in the above passage convey the realization that the state serves as its own labyrinth, trapping both creators and residents within its confines—psychologically, socially, and physically. (Wolfgang Hilbig’s “Ich” later takes this conception to an extreme with its representation of the self-perpetuating turned self-defeating state).

Jakob’s survival tactics under these constraints include, according to Rohlfs, “dass er ein eigenes Verhalten einrichtet für jeden mit dem er umgeht, er stellt sich verläßlich ein” (83). Rather than *sich einrichten*, now an even more concrete and active process comes into play with the non-reflexive form: in the middle of all the social constructions around him, Jakob also constructs for himself, by forging different personas and

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78 The goal of the socialist state is posited in *Mutmassungen* as the “Beseitigung des Kapitalismus, die Errichtung einer proletarischen Staatsmacht, der Aufbau einer sozialistischen Wirtschaft” (218). Spatial metaphors (reminiscent of those connected with *sich einrichten*) structure this conception of the removal of one system and the building—the “Errichtung” and “Aufbau”—of another.

79 Contemporary theorists such as Anthony Giddens and Edward Soja have discussed the tendency of social theory to turn against spatializing the entity of society, with Soja linking this trend to some Marxists’ rejection of the Hegelian notion of state (*Postmodern Geographies* 43 ff.); “In the Marxian dialectic, revolutionary time was re-established, with its driving force grounded in class consciousness and class struggle stripped of all spatial mystifications” (*ibid.* 46).

80 Rohlfs is not deterred by Jakob’s chameleon-like nature, although the latter’s ability to adapt so versatilely engenders metaphorically material and spatial “Hindernisse und Trennungen” between them (83).
behaviors to appease all parties and to blend in inconspicuously. As such, he does not adapt to his environment as much as he attempts to exert control over it through providing his own "furnishings" as he sees fit. This process of self-preservation is also apparent in Blach, who recollects, "Ich bemühte mich um ein Grinsen in meinem Gesicht, vielleicht um wenigstens da Sicherheit einzurichten" (114). Through the verb (sich) *einrichten*, Johnson comments on the constructed nature of anything resembling individual security.

### 2.3.3. The Path to Socialism; Socialism's Path

As mentioned previously, one focal point of the novel is the discussion and debate among characters as to whether one should flee to the West in search of more personal security and freedom, a question which in Blach's mind would be aptly phrased as "Warum bleibst du hier" (271). Guiding some decisions to stay is the optimism that socialism will not remain as it is, an assurance which Blach notes is not to be forgotten "am Anfang der Spirale, die wir aber und abermals ausmessen in sicheren Sprüngen aufwärts hinan bis zu dem Punkt, an dem einer abstürzen kann, will er sein Leben darauf einrichten. Das Sichere ist nicht sicher, so wie es ist bleibt es nicht, und aus Niemals wird Heute noch. Ich begreife es nicht" (271-72). Society rests on the shaky foundations upon which one then constructs a life. The inherent unpredictability of any social system, and the (spatially formulated) "schamhafte Spanne zwischen dem Wünschenswert und der Enttäuschung" (182) of life within, generally does not deter people from placing their hopes onto it. Johnson's commentary serves to remind that the natural inclination to take steps forward, to progress, develop, and succeed under whichever standards dissolves if the common conceptualization of life as a frontwardly
extending path, upon which we presume to travel, is replaced by a downward spiral. (The
GDR writer Siegmar Faust, who went to the West in 1976, posed the essential question
discussed by Johnson in spatial terms as well: “Aber was sind die Aussichten für
Personen, die nicht ständig beteuern, daß sie schon dem Prinzip Hoffnung zuliebe den
Morgenschimmer eines echten Sozialismus am Horizont heraufdämmern sehen?”, 777).

In addition to Blach, other figures reflect on the nature of life’s path as well. For
example, Gesine asks herself the question, “Ich weiss nicht, was ist Geradeaus?” in
response to a bus driver who asks her whether she will be travelling straight on (144).
Her musing likely pertains to the Weg of her life and the choices which she has made in
determining this path. Gesine might not belong to that “Teil der Bevölkerung und der
internationalen Arbeiterklasse, der von dem einmal eingeschlagenen Weg zum
Sozialismus UNBEIRRBAR überzeugt war” (171-72); but at the same time, she does not
know which way is supposed to be the right one, or at least which way leads “straight
ahead.” The spatial metaphor of the Weg, frequently implemented to represent the
direction of an individual’s life, takes on an additional meaning in the context of the
competing political systems in post-war Europe, and the debates surrounding the
possibility of a “dritten Weg” which would mediate the principles of both the social
market economy and communism. The metaphor of the Weg is further extended to
include the social steps forward which some claim are occurring in the East: “Die
Demokratisierung schreitet voran” (125).

Mutmassungen is clearly a novel about the GDR, and was intended for audiences
not only in the West where it was first published. Johnson, through his multiple narrators,
does not take a conspicuous ideological stance promoting as superior one side of the
border or another. But the book, due to its implicit critique, was destined to be published
at first only in the West. Johnson mocks the promises of progress as touted by socialist ideals, for example through the ironic capitalization in telegram style of “SACHE DES FORTSCHRITTS” (171). In the Stasi-agent Rohlfs’s opinion, flight westward is a legal, moral, and philosophical transgression, and a train ticket to West Berlin is “ein historischer Rückzug” (152). Such a means of expression points to the novel’s overreaching train-as-life metaphor. But the train system only allows escape out of one labyrinth into another, and individual flight from the East is in Rohlfs’s eyes not a step forward at all, but rather a “Rückzug” because “im Sinne des sozialen Fortschritts der sozialistische Mehrwert gerechter ist” (152). Rohlfs sees the train as “eine fortschrittliche Möglichkeit,” as well as “die Möglichkeit der Mobilmachung für die bewaffnete Verteidigung des Sozialismus” (218). For Rohlfs and others who share this view, nearly every means is justified to protect “gegen den Stillstand und gegen das Zurückgehen, gegen die Veränderung zum Alten hin: gegen alle die die Veränderung zum Neuen zur Zukunft hin nicht lernen wollen” (52). The strong zeal to move forward—not to remain stagnant and by all means not to regress—is accented here by directional terms, to such an extent that the future from this perspective can only be envisioned teleologically, as an end point of the solely legitimate Weg.

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81 As Colin Riordan notes, Mutmassungen was often interpreted as a work condemning the GDR (217). However, it is clear that Johnson does not portray the West in a particularly positive light either.

82 This is evident for instance in the train-pub simile in the description of the “Krug” in Jerichow, where the tables are “fest im Boden, und die Bänke umgaben sie wie in einem Speisewagen der Reichsbahn, nur an einer Seite war ein Gang” (304); or more metaphorically, such as in Rohlfs’s assessment of Häschen: “der denkt manchmal zweigleisig” (12); and in the assertion that after the social norm and formality of an introduction between two people occurs, “dann läuft es alles von allein auf den Gleisen des bürgerlichen Benehmens” (200).
Jakob, whose “Gedanken kannten den ganzen Weg” into the future, and also “wo er aufhört, Umleitung, Durchfahrt gesperrt” (51), ponders the drive behind human action, determining that even the most altruistic act is rooted in egoism:


Jakob, devoted to helping make socialism work, nevertheless has this question: If the individual pursues his or her own purposes, each following a different path, how can the communal conception of socialism ever be realized? The spatial metaphor of the path, via the idea of “den eigenen Zweck zu verfolgen,” works here to support Johnson’s commentary on the utopian ideal of common Fortschritt. Ultimately though, it is not this doubt which leads to Jakob’s possibly self-imposed death, but his perceived loss of control over time.

2.3.4. Navigating the Labyrinth

A narrative remark about temporal disorientation caused by the distortion of light in restricted physical spaces allows for an analogy to the spatialized notions of history.

83 Many differing ideas on Johnson’s stance have been put forth. It makes sense that rather than pushing for one or the other, Johnson is stressing the importance of questioning ideologies in general. As he shows in his narration through the characters’ attempted reconstruction of Jakob’s life, there are different versions and many facets of any matter to consider. At the same time, what D.G. Bond writes seems to ring true, that Johnson’s “aim was not merely to examine the new ideologies of his epoch,” but rather, to attempt to “transcend [the political border’s] existence as the ideologues would have it exist, or as Hans Mayer puts it, to show that ‘zur eindeutigen Grenzziehung in der Landschaft und auf dem Papier des völkerrechtlichen Abkommens von Potsdam zwischen den Siegermächten kein ähnlich scharfes Kriterium für die ‘innere Grenzziehung’ gefunden werden könnte’” (884). (Bond quotes Mayer here from “Versuch, eine Grenze zu beschreiben. Zu Uwe Johnsons Roman Mutmassungen über Jakob.” Vereinzelt Niederschläge. Pfüllingen, 1973. 137-47. Here: 144).
and progress delineated in the preceding subsection: "Meist nur vormittags in sehr begrenzten Räumen (Stücken städtischen Strassenpflasters, Fensterdurchblicken, einzelnen Hausfronten, auch in hoch umzäumten Gärten) gibt der Oktober ein so hartes dichtes strahlendes Licht, dass man um zehn Uhr noch meinen kann es sei auf der Strasse der frühe Junimorgen zu sehen" (256). Human-made structures misconstrue the presentation of natural light; similarly, human-made social structures (and the accompanying physical/mental restrictions and borders) distort one’s own intuitive sense of control over time. The ensuing disorientation appears to be a factor in the downfall of Jakob, who is accustomed to reigning over his own time and space.

Unlike the protagonists of Der Verschollene and Transit, Jakob is an insider, highly intimate with the intricacies of his environment. While Karl Roßmann and Seidler were forced to emigrate, Jakob chooses to stay planted despite opportunity and conceivable incentive to leave. Jakob’s flight westward is only temporary when he seeks the refuge of the mother who had sought her own asylum across the border. In his choice to stay in the East, Jakob perhaps adheres to the philosophy of Cresspahl, who dismisses as foolhardy the notion that misfortune can be escaped by a departure to the West. Instead Cresspahl abides by the principle, “man kann nicht vor seinem eigenen Leben davonlaufen” (216), in essence rejecting the conceptualization held by some of leaving the past “behind.”

Jakob’s workday is structured around the labyrinth of the train system.84 The German train network had become more complex and more prone to delays and errors in

84 Gotthart Wunberg and Robert Detweiler read Mutmassungen in direct light of its labyrinth motif; the former, however, expressly states that Johnson’s work should not be viewed as an exact allegory for the original labyrinth myth, while the latter goes against that and relates the novel’s plot (perhaps inaccurately—see Friedrichsmeyer 216) in terms of the Greek minotaur story.
calculations after the country’s division. The one system diverged into two, the Bundesbahn in the West and the Reichsbahn in the East, but remained convergent in some respects. Bundesbahn trains continued to come through the East, and were often given priority over GDR trains so that the Reichsbahn would appear to the outside world to be running smoothly and punctually. One of Jakob’s tasks as a dispatcher is to make sense of the resultant chaos of train schedules that is embodied in the papers covering his desk:

Das Papier auf der schrägen Tischplatte vor ihm war eingeteilt nach senkrechten und waagerechten Linien für das zeitliche und räumliche Nacheinander der planmäßigen und der unregelmäßigen Vorkommnisse, er verzeichnete darin mit seinen verschiedenen Stiften die Bewegung der Eisenbahnzüge auf seiner Strecke von Blockstelle zu Blockstelle und von Minute zu Minute, aber eigentlich nahm er von dem berühmten Wechsel der Jahreszeiten nur die unterschiedliche Helligkeit wahr, am Ende machten die Minuten keinen Tag aus sondern einen Fahrplan. (20)

What to the layperson would likely be a mere jumble of lines on the page is for Jakob a reliable chronometric diagram. Not only his working hours are governed by these time tables, but indeed his whole life and the passing of seasons around him; it is hardly surprising then that the disruption of this order would be profoundly disturbing to him. The “Netz aus Planzeiten und Fahrstrecken” (22), in which sometimes “das Geschling sehr unentwirrbar und überall voller Kletten schien” (23), has become less of a neat and clear sketch and more of a labyrinth in its design. The time tables, normally supplying a visible map which would guide Jakob through the workday, are at this point virtually unnavigable: “übereinandergelegt und durchsichtig hätten Planblatt und Betriebsblatt ausgesehen nicht wie zwei ähnliche sondern mehr wie ein nördliches und ein südliches Sternensystem ineinander” (24). Yet despite the disorder, Jakob continues charting the trains unrelentlessly and, in so doing, he documents the “entfernten Geschehnisse, die
unablässig dahingingen und auf einem Blatt Papier als technische Kurve zurückblieben aus der Zeit, die ohne Aufhören verging” (25). He records history in the only way he knows, extracting local events out of the stream of time, for instance when the Warsaw Pact trains filled with troops travel through his station, on their way to attack Hungary after the country’s renunciation of the Pact in early November 1956.

For each locomotive under his charge, Jakob “wusste nach der Zeit und nach Kilometern wo der Zug stand im Fahrplan und wo er tatsächlich stand sich selbst und jedermann im Wege, der Verspätete ist gleich im Unrecht” (22). Despite the abhorred delays, he is still able to calculate the location of each train. In this respect, Jakob’s “übersichtliche ordentliche Arbeit” (59) is even the object of envy. Blach, for example, upon observing Jakob at work, bekam eine unbandige Lust auf solche Arbeit. Hier handelte es sich um feste dauerhafte Dinge, Wagen, Zugmaschinen, Apparate; die Bewegung aller war sich ergänzend sich entsprechend zusammengeflochten und gebündelt in einer einzigen überhöhten Übersicht; aber was in Jakobs Kopf vorfiel und geschah, das hatte eine wirkliche Entsprechung, da fiel in der Tat etwas vor, musste einer sich hier nicht vorkommen als versorge er allein die Zeit eines halben Tages und das Gelände eines kleineren Fürstentums mit Weltereignissen? (244)

From Blach’s point of view, Jakob has incredible power in the form of controlling others’ time and space. Indeed, Jakob’s “Übersicht” appears impeccable. However, Blach underestimates the skill, training, and intuition which stand behind Jakob—his work is not only about “feste dauerhafte Dinge” or the inherent concreteness of the dispatcher’s job, but also about Jakob’s ability to turn the abstractness of time into something which can be overseen and seen on paper.

Jakob demonstrates his intricate field knowledge as he quizzes an apprentice who will be tested on untangling the labyrinth of the dispatcher’s world:

89
Der F-d-l blockt sein Befehlsabgabefeld A², damit gibt er dem Stellwerk A² (Befehlsempfangsfeld) frei, der Block wird weiss. Nun hat er, der F-d-l, sich alle feindlichen Befehlsabgabefelder gesperrt, die im Stellwerk stellen die Weichen und legen die Fahrstrasse blockelektrisch fest mit Festlegefeld a¹,², damit wird beim F-d-l Auflösefeld a¹,² entblockt, jetzt können die im Stellwerk Signal A² ziehen: Einfahrt. (236)

Johnson includes Jakob’s explanation in all of its specificity, which is probably less comprehensible to most readers than the interspersed passages written in Russian and in Plattdeutsch, in order to ward off any doubts that Jakob is the ultimate insider when it comes to the trains. But with the delays caused by the trains of other countries to the GDR’s West and East, Jakob’s familiar network, which previously had been embodied in a train schedule with neat, visible intersections of time and place, begins to fall apart:

“Da ist ein grosser freier Platz auf dem Blatt zwischen Zeit und Raum wo sonst ein säuberliches dichtes kluges Knüpfwerk war” (250). The multivalence of the Netz-motif as discussed in the section on Seghers’s Transit is called to mind: Jakob has seen the timetables on paper transformed from a tidy and efficient network into a random web, and the tracks outside his station’s window have become the “Geschlinge da unten” (249). These knots of confusion are tightened further by the fact that the dispatchers have been charged with more responsibility, as Jakob explains: “wenn einer früher zwei Gleise zu bedienen hatte dann heute manchmal vier” (252). This loss of literal Übersicht

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85 Jakob explicates: “Ja und überhaupt ist zu beachten hingegen und im besonderen dass der Verkehr im Vergleich zur Vorkriegszeit etwa dreifach dichter ist, denn die Strecke hat im Schienennetz des ungeteilten Deutschland natürlich sehr andere und im ganzen geringere Aufgaben gehabt” (49). The international freight trains which cross this Netz now are given priority so that it would appear to the outside that the East German railroad were running smoothly and punctually.

86 The various plays on the Bahnnetz in this novel are reminiscent of Gerhart Hauptmann’s Bahnwärter Thiel (1888) whose eponymous protagonist also works at an “ungeheuren eisernen Netzmasche” (18), and whose mean-spirited second wife has a strength over him that resembles “einem feinen Spinnengewebe und doch fest wie ein Netz von Eisen legte es sich um ihn, fesselnd, überwindend, erschaffend” (16).
is concurrent with Jakob’s diminishing oversight of his own life and events around him.

Nevertheless, he does his best to juggle the responsibilities thrown at him, managing the

Eilgüterverkehr und Vorortzügen und Fernverbindungen, die blieben als ein verknüelte Haufen für den kommenden Tag, man konnte es nur noch zusammenwickeln und ordentlich verschüren und wegschmeissen: sagte er, er hatte einen queren Strich gezogen und alle Fahrten mussten aufhören wo der hingefallen war. (245-46)

This metaphorical tangibility of temporality shows that at this point, the protagonist still believes to have something of a handle on time. However, Jakob’s resigned attitude that the knots of delays are not to be untangled, but only “ordentlich verschüren,” marks the beginning of his turn toward insecurity and uncertainty.

The commentary of other figures unwittingly reflects on this change in Jakob, for example in a description directly following the incident with the Warsaw Pact trains:

“Wie Jakob so dagestanden hat mit dem Mantel über dem Arm und so als ob er nicht wisse wohin nun gehen” (251). For the first time in the chronological pre-mortem representations of Jakob, he is portrayed as lost and disoriented, although there are indeed hints earlier in the novel as to Jakob’s frustration that he no longer reigns over his time.

The narrator reflects at one of these moments:

Wie aber verträgt sich ein Ding wie Unbescholtenheit mit der bewundenswerten Vielzahl von Ereignissen in dem Raum der Zeit? denn eines begibt sich nach dem anderen und bedeutet dies in Gegensatz zu jenem und ist unwiederbringlich dahin in die Zeit: ob einer das beachtet oder nicht, ob er es wünscht und gutheisst oder es am Ende doch lieber zurücknehmen möchte. Dennoch also war der Vormittag mit Joche vergangen und nicht mehr unversehrt zu retten und neu zu beginnen, an diesem unaufhaltsamen selbstwilligen Ablauf der Zeit kann einer leicht bescholten werden. (65)

Jakob’s illusion of mastering events “in dem Raum der Zeit,” which he used to glean from overseeing the trains and finding quick solutions to problems, has started to dissipate. Shortly after this paragraph, the third-person narrator also comments on an
individual’s lack of control over movement through time: “So hat einer wenig teil an der Art seiner angeblich ganz unverwechselbaren Bewegung durch die Zeit” (67). The motion of time itself is the unstoppable and elusive force which no one—not even Jakob, as he comes to realize—can call to a halt.

This lack of control spills over into other aspects of Jakob’s life, as the following passage implies in regard to the departure of Jakob’s mother:

alle Umsicht ist wieder aus der Reihe zerrissen und zerknotet wie ein morsches Netz. Jedenfalls hat sie noch mit Jakob telefonieren wollen, hat es versucht, aber der Münzapparat auf dem Bahnsteig ist angeschlossen an das Stadtnetz und nicht an die Basa, beim zweiten Versuch hat das verdammte Telefon sie wieder falsch verbunden, die Nummer war schon richtig und Jakob seine, nur sie bedeutet bei der Post was anderes, und da mochte sie nicht aus dem Zug, den sie nun einmal glücklich erreicht hatte, mit den beiden schweren Koffern. (54)

Like in Transit, the concept of the Netz appears in both a literal role as a lifeline (in Seghers’s work as fishing nets, here as the impenetrable telephone network) and a figurative role (as a metaphorical net holding back Jakob’s mother from reaching her son). Both of these functions emphasize the characters’ hindrances and their personal entanglements as they grapple with gaining or maintaining control of some sort.

While GDR citizens become enmeshed in the various labyrinths that have been constructed around them, the institution of the Reichsbahn has built and caught itself in its own net: “Die Polizeiposten hatten eine Zeit lang auch den Pförtnerdienst, das heisst: sie liessen niemand durch […], aber sie hatten natürlich keinerlei Einsicht in das verwickelte Gefüge des Betriebs und der dienstlichen Zuständigkeit, so dass die Reichsbahn selbst sich behindert vorkam durch die zu befliessene Einhaltung ihrer eigenen Vorschriften” (238-39). But Jakob, who strays from respecting ideas of the communal only in the respect that he considers the Reichsbahn his personal domain, continued for
quite some time to believe (even amidst the delays beyond his control) that he was maintaining both *Einsicht* into and *Übersicht* over this labyrinth of bureaucracy and inordinate order. His imminent misfortune hinges on the realization that these points of orientation and his sense of direction (in regard to his belief system, as well as to his physical orientation) were faltering.

As in both of the previous novels discussed in this study, the physical labyrinths of the everyday are often most apparent when characters peer down onto them from above, for instance out of a window:

> Aus den breiten Fenstern des hohen fahlroten Turms am Rangierbahnhof sah er die verschlungenen Gleisstränge bis zur Elbebrücke, klein und schnell rollten die schweren Züge unter ihm, die Rangierbrigaden schoben und zogen das weite Feld einzelner Wagen und Wagengruppen zu langen Zügen zusammen mit Laufen und Pfeifen und Hin und Her neben der kurzen breiten Maschine, aus den Hallen sprang Hammerlärmen dünn und scharf in das dicke Fauchen von Dampf. (21)

The tracks and equipment over which Jakob has authority become maze-like only from above. When Kafka’s Karl Roßmann looks down on the buzz of activity below his window in New York, or from the balcony of his prison at Brunelda’s apartment, he is dumbfounded by the confusion of his new land of residence. Johnson’s novel differs in this respect because the confusion belongs to the protagonist’s jurisdiction. This prompts Jakob’s particular urge to regain *Überblick*. This notion of *Überblick* plays a role in *Mutmassungen*, as it does in most of the other novels studied here. Jakob says to Rohlfs, “Ich habe gewiss einen Überblick. […] Und eben diese Möglichkeit von Überblick: sagte er: beschwert die Arbeit” (47-48). Jakob’s overall perspective—gained by looking down from his tower—gives him knowledge that makes it difficult for him to accept unconditionally Rohlfs’s statements on the merits of the current system. Although Jakob
will remain faithful to the system, he nonetheless knows (through his “Überblick”) that, at least up to this point, socialism is not living up to all that it had promised its adherents.

Jakob’s death is all the more mysterious to those who knew him because he seemed to have such clear oversight of the trains under his responsibility, and a complete familiarity with the schedule presiding over “his” tracks. The newspaper announcement about Jakob’s death comments on this enigma: “Eine Schuldfrage kann kaum erhoben werden, da der Verunglückte das Gelände aus jahrelanger Erfahrung kannte und für beide Fahrten die Strecken freigegeben waren. Ein Beobachten der Strecke war schlecht möglich wegen des dichten Nebels, der ja fast undurchdringlich ist in dieser Jahreszeit” (300). The fog signifies unclear paths and uncertainty, as an element which causes confusion and difficulties in orienting oneself within the nebulosity of the physical environment. On the metaphorical level, fog represents unclarity of thought or of conviction, and a vagueness which prevents a clear determination of direction when a person is faced with multiple choices. Fog then, as a sometimes opaque—yet always vaporous, i.e. intangible—natural element serves Johnson as the perfect complement to the conceptual “life-as-path” metaphor. As the disorienting physical phenomenon which obstructs paths and makes spatial boundaries invisible, fog is introduced as a theme in the novel’s very first speculations on Jakob’s death: “Nun sieh dir mal das Wetter an, so ein

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87 Jakob’s possessiveness regarding his job and workplace is evidenced by the narrator’s expressions such as “die von Jakob verwaltete Zeit” (41), “Jakobs Bahnhof” (54), “Jakobs Turm” (55), “Jakobs Fenster” (59), and of course, “Jakobs Zeit” (ibid.); in the first person, Jakob refers to “meine Züge” (50), affirming his feeling of responsibility for, and identification with, his work.

88 Fickert notes justifiably that Johnson’s inclusion of the fog and his juxtaposition of the “fog as fact and the fog as symbol” keeps alive the possibility that Jakob’s death was an accident, and further that “the contrast between diffused light or lack of light (fog, night) and bright light plays a part in depicting the changing attitudes of Johnson’s characters, their transition from self-assurance to self-doubt” (“Symbol Complexes” 107).
November, kannst keine zehn Schritt weit sehen vor Nebel, besonders am Morgen, und
das war doch Morgen, und alles so glatt. Da kann einer leicht ausrutschen” (7). Another
unidentified speaker in the conversation contradicts this, and maintains that Jakob, with
all of his experience and know-how, would hardly have been so easily disoriented.

Beyond the workplace, too, others had depended on Jakob for their own senses of
direction and bearings. For example, Gesine becomes disoriented in the very region
where she grew up, and thus must rely on Jakob during their late-night journey through
the “Gräfinnenwald,” as she recalls: “Ich konnte nicht einmal den Polarstern finden,
allein hätte ich mich gewiss verlaufen in den unzähligen Wegen” (192). Even in the midst
of nature and away from his mechanized workplace, Jakob acts as the guide, directing
Gesine through the labyrinth of countless paths in the forest.89 His sense of orientation
appears indefectibly sharp wherever he is, and his generally cool and confident demeanor
reinforces this impression.

However, with his trains perpetually delayed and thus further out of his control,
Jakob becomes less competent in navigating the labyrinths around him. His instinct to
find the quickest and most sure-fire solution to a predicament might have even resulted in
his ruin. Rohlfs’s advice to Häschen—“Gewöhnen Sie sich nicht daran dass der kürzeste
Weg für Sie vom Tabakladen zur Post querüber führt. Für jeden liegt der kürzeste Weg
woanders, bedeutend” (82)—is strangely reminiscent of the novel’s first line, “Aber
Jakob ist immer quer über die Gleise gegangen” (7). What may have seemed to be the
most direct way only leads to his own demise, possibly through suicide.90

89 Later in the novel, upon Jakob’s departure back to the East after visiting Gesine and his
mother in the West, Gesine stands “verloren vor dem Zug” (296). Once again she is
separated from the only person who has provided her with security and clear orientation.
90 Some scholars, such as Colin Good, find that the “question of whether or not he
actually committed suicide is, in the final analysis, relatively unimportant; it is the fact of

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Historically, so-labeled Western peoples have used the East as their starting point for physical orientation. In the novels examined in this study, with *Mutmassungen über Jakob* as no exception, some figures travel either forcibly or voluntarily westward in pursuit of more propitious circumstances. In a sense, they are moving further away from their point of bearings, thereby displacing as well as disorienting themselves. But Jakob chooses to remain in the East, unconcerned with progress forward or westward or upward. He therefore finds himself not displaced, but nonetheless disoriented and alienated in a changed and ever-changing environment. During his short visit to the West, Gesine relates to Jakob a dream which features her own disorientation:


Playfully, Jakob reminds Gesine and the reader of his role as the great orienter, the one who untangles the knots in life’s labyrinthine paths for those around him—whether

his death which points to his inability to cope with the kind of situation into which he has been forced by the clash of two ideologies” (358). While I agree that *Mutmassungen* is not primarily a detective story, I also would argue that due to this very “inability to cope” which Jakob develops, suicide seems like the most plausible scenario.

91 This cultural phenomenon is reflected linguistically, for instance in the English verb “to orient.” Derived from a Latin root indicating the direction of the rising sun, it was passed on to English via Old French in the fourteenth century, originally meaning “to turn to face the east” (hence the phrase “the Orient” as well). Not until the nineteenth century was the verb’s meaning generalized to “ascertain or fix the direction of” something (*Dictionary of Word Origins* 376).

92 I tend to agree with Kirstin Soholm’s remarks on this phenomenon: “Von Entwicklung, Unruhe und Zukunftssystemerheit ist in Jakob nichts; er sucht nicht verzweifelt die Verwirklichung seiner Identität als ganzes Subjekt; er sucht nicht, einen wie auch immer gearteten ‘Riß’ zu überwinden” (1521).
passengers on his trains, or his own family and friends.\textsuperscript{93} Should Jakob’s unexplained death be interpreted as a suicide, then we can infer that he was motivated by the inability to reconcile the contradictions of his current situation. Like Cresspahl, he does not want to run away from his own life ("vor seinem eigenen Leben davonlaufen," 216) by abandoning obligations at home, but at the same time he cannot bear the increasing loss of control over his own environment. His predicament culminates when he allows the Warsaw Pact trains through on their way to Hungary, despite his apparently opposing convictions.\textsuperscript{94} For someone accustomed to intuitively honing in on the "Ausgang" to all labyrinths, like in Gesine’s dream, the resulting frustration very well could lead him to seek the one escape route which could be measured with certainty and finality, and over which he would have ultimate control: his own death.

2.4. "\textit{Ich}": "hier unten konnte man vielleicht entkommen?"

The spatial concept of socialism’s path (and the \textit{Weg} known as socialism) as mused upon by some characters in Johnson’s \textit{Mutmassungen über Jakob} denoted a

\textsuperscript{93} Friedrichsmeyer surmises that “[b]y virtue of never having been uprooted, Jakob is to Gesine a whole man, who in contrast to her has escaped injury” (222). In not leaving home, Jakob diverges from the typical twentieth-century figure for whom “the route away from oneself tends to reach a point of no return,” and also unlike traditional “quester fables” whereby the search leads one away from home, only for the character to return and find the answers within (Friedrichsmeyer 225). Jakob’s search is carried out while he remains rooted at home, but it is doubtful that he finds any answers within himself, given the novel’s outcome.

\textsuperscript{94} This is implied during Jakob’s invective about the dispatcher up the line who \textit{does} hold up the trains: “Der hat eine Meinung über die Russen, hält er sie auf, ja glaubt er denn dass wir uns nichts denken dabei! ich weiss auch wohin sie fahren, hält er sie auf. Als ob zehn Minuten was nützen. […] Die Leute wollen nach Hause, die haben auch eine Meinung über die Russen, deswegen tun sie doch noch keinen: Menschen was” (247). Blach also senses that Jakob’s convictions were otherwise when Jakob speculates on what would have happened if they had prevented the trains from moving through. Blach responds, “Und ihr hättet euch benommen nach eurer Meinung” (251)—an option which Jakob passes off with a smile as “Verrücktspielen” (ibid.).
directionally-conceived path aimed toward a distinct goal: a more harmonious future.

Three decades later, Hilbig follows in Johnson's footsteps by further ironizing this type of idealism. Hilbig also plays on references to Ziel as increasingly and absurdly tied to the Zielobjekte of the Stasi, the GDR's own citizens, rather than to the originally proposed goal of an ameliorated society. Hilbig's novel "Ich" spans the four years preceding the Wende, when it had been long since apparent that many of the previously envisioned and pledged rewards of a socialist system were not achievable under current circumstances. The emphasis on the end goal of the "Sache des Fortschritts," the backbone concept of a utopian-principled system, is replaced by a focus on the path itself, as reiterated often by Hilbig's Stasi functionary Feuerbach, who proclaims, "Nicht die Ankunft, sondern der Weg ist das Ziel! - Der Weg! betonte er" (21). Feuerbach wants to want to evoke an authoritative yet mystifying aura with his mantra (similar to the Buddhist slogan of similar sentiment), but in remaining ambiguous, he leaves his mentee M.W. in the dark. This Weg leads nowhere in particular, and the attempts by the novel's protagonist to follow the prescribed labyrinthine path result only in frustration and dead ends.

One of the work's underlying spatial metaphors is introduced already in an epigraph to the book:

Statisch ist der rahmen der öffentlichkeit.
in der rahmen, sich die möglichkeit
einer eigenen dynamik zu verschaffen,
ist das 'ich' ein kommissarisches.

Szene-Statement. Berlin 1983

The idea of a social framework, inside of which one may move around, provides the temporary illusion of freedom, of individual will and identity. But this is shattered when the established boundaries become clear. The limits of the Rahmen are carried as a
leitmotif throughout the entire novel, for instance vis-à-vis the term “Bereich.” In the context of Stasi-speak compounds such as “Tätigkeitsbereich” (9; 340), “Phantasiebereich” (18), or “Intimbereich” (142), this word appears often to refer to physical locations as well as more abstract domains. The writer-turned-informant M.W. works simultaneously within two such “Bereichen”: the literary and cultural underground, the Szene, and the Firma, slang for the entire Stasi institution. However, M.W. finds the expression “Milieu” more appropriate than “Szene” (194), and indeed both labels, Szene and Firma, vaguely allude to conceptual places. People try to tie their identity and security to these “sites,” although in reality they are only abstractions with no solid, physical homebase. The novel “Ich” is in large part the tale of a person who is discovering the emptiness which lies behind the boundaries of both these milieus, and the instability of the imagined boundaries themselves. Although the Szene, in accordance with the statement which Hilbig employs as an epigraph, laments the limits of “öffentlichkeit” (and in a token orthographic way rebels against the constraints of social convention), in M.W.’s mind the Szene is nonetheless “übergreifend” (167-68), and is defined by “engen Grenzen” (18). From this viewpoint, the Szene also restricts creative freedom, and in that respect shares common ground with the Firma in this novel.

95 “Ich” interchanges a third-person narrator and a first-person one, and most indications are that the personage behind both is one and the same. During the third-person narration, the main character of the novel is known sometimes as “M.W.,” sometimes as just “W.,” other times as “Cambert”—his informant code name—or as the initial C. For the sake of simplicity I have chosen to refer to him throughout as M.W., following the reasoning of the majority of secondary literature on “Ich” that these initials appear to mark his first and last names. However, the character also seems to be adapted in part from a previous short story by Hilbig entitled “Der Brief,” in which the character is known as C.

96 An interesting spatial metaphor of the container variety referring to the Szene is found in a description of the woman from West Berlin whom M.W. begins following off-assignment, and who “fiel auf die sogenannte Szene herein” (314).

97 Paul Cooke notes M.W.’s role in reinforcing this: “Indeed, the role of informant is seen as being equivalent to the role of the writer. Both the informant and the writer are pushed...
The interdependence of the *Firma* and the *Szene* is clear: one would not need to exist without (some form of) the other. Since they practically cancel each other out in this way, finding an identity outside of them becomes imperative for M.W. Having discovered the waning strength of both institutions as the end of the GDR era approached, and realizing the futility of his assignment (it turns out that he is spying on another informant, not on an actual dissident), M.W. decides that he must branch off on his own and penetrate a different *Bereich*: the private one. The drive toward *das Innere*, as discussed in relation to other novels in this study, continues in "Ich" with this type of spatial imagery. After M.W. has seen the interior of both the *Firma* and the *Szene*, and without finding the desired security within their confines, he shifts his aspiration from reaching the inside to chasing a presumed light at the end of the tunnel into the West.

98 This is also seen as Hilbig turns to a play on words with "Sicherheit," as the abstract notion of security and safety on the one hand and as the vague notion which M.W. has of the "Staatssicherheit" machinery of which he is a negligible cog. Toward the beginning of the novel, he implicitly admits that literature is disorienting and makes him feel vulnerable and in search of security: "ich war verloren für die Literatur, ich hatte mit ihr nichts mehr zu schaffen, oder sie nichts mehr mit mir, ich hatte nurmehr mit der Sicherheit zu schaffen" (30). What he soon finds out though is that it is not the job of the Ministry of State Security to ensure that the state is secure, but to secure its own existence, even if that means inventing resistance: "Wo es Sicherheit geben sollte, mußte es auch Verdacht geben, das war logisch" (228).

99 M.W. would like to advance "ins Innere gewisser Intimverknüpfungen" (234).

100 M.W.'s longing for encasement and comfort manifests often with his favorite fetal position: "dies war, bildete er sich ein, fast die Form eines Fötus, kurz vor dem Ausschlüpfen aus dem Mutterleib" (144). He fantasizes at other points about enclosed female spaces, such as in a dream in which the character Cindy's amniotic fluid floods a...
2.4.1. East and West

As in the previous novels discussed, again in "Ich" we find numerous examples of deixis: for instance, the common GDR usage of "von drüben" (15) to refer to something or someone from the West; or "jenseits des eisernen Vorhangs" (241). To be in West Berlin, for the protagonist, is to be "draußen" (283). The underlying relativity of deictic terms such as drüben, draußen, and jenseits points again here to the intrinsic constructed nature of borders. But the novel "Ich" stresses, even more than this artificiality, the mutual dependence of the two "sides"—be it East and West, or Firma and Szene. It is a precarious symbiosis which keeps both sides afloat. And people on either side are perceived as dangerous by those in power during this transitional time, as a remark by Feuerbach illustrates: "Es gingen jetzt jede Menge brüllender Löwen durch die Welten westlich und östlich des sogenannten eisernen Vorhangs, und sie alle glaubten sich persönlich verantwortlich für ein Umdenken, was plötzlich ein ganz groß geschriebenes Wort sei" (200).

Certainty in determining one's political allegiance is imperative to Feuerbach: "man muß wissen, auf welcher Seite man zu stehen hat, Kopf und Faust der Partei, und so weiter" (350-51). Thus the paranoid M.W. also frets about the "Randexistenzen" who might be following him, and who cause him "heillose Verwirrung": "man wußte nicht, room, turning it into "eine geschlossene Kaverne [...], ein Kellerloch, eine Zelle" (140). The female body itself is depicted as a mysterious labyrinth with "verborgenen Eingängen" (323).

101 Still today, more than a decade after the Wende, the spatial-geographic demarcations like "drüben" are prevalent in the German media, even if self-consciously through the use of quotation marks, e.g.: "Der Westen erhalte gleichzeitig Zuwanderer von 'drüben' und von 'draußen', also von Ausländern" (In a recent Spiegel article from April 4th, 2002: http://www.spiegel.de/ politik/deutschland/0,1518,190220,00.html). The prevalence of such terminology reinforces, or even helps create, alienation. This has been discussed in recent years in the problematic concept of an East German "Trotzidentität."
The concept of these opposing sides and of the “Rand” separating them is interesting in relation to spatial conceptualizations—the ambiguously identified M.W. is himself a “Randexistenz,” at times the “Verfolger,” while at other times he is the “Verfolgter,” or at least he so perceives. He is a writer who is suddenly respected and accepted by the Szene, because of his “siebzehn links und rechts des eisernen Vorhangs publizierten Gedichten” (316), but who also moonlights with the Firma. The ambivalence of the sides on which a person might stand begs questions surrounding points of orientation, and how and where a line can be drawn to distinguish between East and West.

The narration of “Ich” takes place from approximately 1986 to shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. It is a time in which “immer mehr Schriftsteller das Land verließen, sich jenseits der Grenze, häufig in Westberlin, etablierten” (152). In the background of the novel’s denouement is the loosening of strict border control between East and West. On September 10, 1989, Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Horn officially opened the border between his country and Austria, and thousands of East Germans headed westward via this hole in the Iron Curtain. In East Berlin the increased motility was already quite visible during the time depicted in “Ich”:

102 This reversal is seen for instance in his chasing of the “Studentin” (actually a journalist) from West Berlin. He picks up his pace and turns here and there to try to lose her: “ich wußte die Richtung nicht mehr, doch ich war ihr endlich entkommen [...]. Es gab keinen Zweifel, ich war vor ihr geflohen. Sie hatten den Spieß umgedreht und war auf einmal zu meiner Verfolgerin geworden!” (330).

103 The fears and suspicion such as those which Rohlfs conveys to his assistant in Mutmassungen über Jakob—“Zwischen Staatsbürger und Staatsfeind darf man nicht eine Grenze ziehen vorher. Jedermann ist eine Möglichkeit” (82)—are parodically confirmed by the double roles played in “Ich.”
hinzuwollen schien" (172). The figures in "Ich" are also preoccupied with going to the West. M.W. fumes upon learning that the Stasi functionaries are rewarded for exceptional service with assignments in the West (173-74). M.W. is also scornful of the Stasi building, "wo ein begrenztes Stück westlicher Wohlstandsgesellschaft strahlte, welches das Ministerium sich schon im Diesseits eingerichtet hatte" (320). Feuerbach informs M.W. that the "Chef" in his former homebase of "A." also longs to go westward (179), which in the end he eventually does—or so we can assume, in light of his sudden trip to Hungary at the novel's close. Even those in the business of preventing flight to the West are stricken by the urge to travel there or to imitate Western lifestyle, and to import piece of the Jenseits into their Diesseits of the GDR.

Jonas Blach’s question in Mutmassungen, “Warum bleibst du hier”, becomes infused in one way or another into most conversations in "Ich". Rather than being answered by some figures with optimism (however wavering) about the future of a socialist society, as is the case in Johnson’s novel, the question is answered in Hilbig’s work with exclusive reference to the individual:

alles Reden war nur Vorwand für das einzige Thema: Ob jemand die Absicht habe, das Land zu verlassen, oder nicht. Es war dies offenbar zum Hauptkriterium dafür geworden, wie das Dasein eines Menschen zu beurteilen sei. Die Frage nach dieser Absicht—Hierbleiben oder Nicht-Hierbleiben—beherrschte das allgemeine Bewusstsein ganz und gar (und die Frage war längst zu einer Paraphrase auf Hamlets Monolog geworden), das Nachdenken über diese Frage war zum alleinigen gemeinsamen Wesenszug eines ganzen Volks geworden. Die Frage geisterte durch alle Schichten. (154)

The narrator continues with the assertion that a high level of suspicion surrounded anyone who indicated no desire to leave the GDR. To stay or not to stay, that is now the all-pervasive question of “Dasein.” The Stasi officer in A. also states straightforwardly
that it no longer matters whether the system is working, or whether it has any future at all, because individual survival within this system is the sole point of significance (153).

Despite his disdain for others’ trips westward, M.W. in particular fantasizes about a migration to the West—a dream realized by his alter-ego Harry Falbe, but never fully by himself. Like figures in the other novels examined in this study, he too is caught up in the reverie of losing himself in unfamiliar territory: “Wäre es nicht reizvoll, dachte er, in Westberlin spurlos zu verschwinden?” (172). As a loner-writer, he figures that he could “leicht im Abseits der Metropolen verschwinden, in den düsteren Seitenstraßen ein Schattendasein führen” (173). The labyrinth of the Western city is his preferred location. This fantasy is contrasted by the reality of the East, about which M.W. remarks regarding the disappearance of Harry Falbe: “Was ist das eigentlich alles für ein Unsinn, wie kann in diesem Land etwas verschwinden, haben wir nicht eine Mauer, hoch genug, und ist hier in diesem Land etwa nicht alles unter Kontrolle?” (269).104

The idealization of the West as preferred destination is extremely hyperbolic in Hilbig’s novel, such that M.W.’s dreams about life on the other side call to mind “the grass is always greener” proverb:

es spukte mir der Gedanke an den Tunnel unter der Mauer durch den Schlaf, er spukte durch den Schlaf des ganzen Lands, es war womöglich der Gedanke, den ich aufklären sollte...und es gab dort vielleicht Zimmerpflanzen, dunkelgrüne großblättrige Gewächse südlicher Herkunft, sie gediehen prächtig in der stetigen Wärme und dem strahlenden Licht,

104 A similar comment is made about the missing child who was first attributed to M.W., and later to Harry Falbe: “In diesem Land kann doch ein Kind nicht einfach verschwinden” (305). Such sentiments are also conveyed through spatial imagery, alluding to the novel’s underground thematic. When M.W. learns that Harry Falbe has disappeared—“wie im Kino, er ist einfach abgetaucht” (267)—he wonders how this could be at all possible: “Wie kann man hier abtauchen, sagte C., wenn man hier untertauchen will, in diesem Land, müßte man sich eingraben wie ein Maulwurf...” (ibid.).
Hilbig mocks the apotheosis of the West and carries the light metaphor—the darkness of the East as contrasted with the bright, warm daylight on the “other” side—quite far, returning often to the concept of “Aufklärung” which heads the book’s final chapter and which alludes again to language used by the Stasi. This motif is taken to such an utter extreme that it quite obviously ridicules idealized views of the West, and any simplified view of unification as solution. In so doing, he tacitly ridicules any idealized view of an allegedly brighter West. Hilbig does not explicitly call into question the division between the supposedly “dark” East and the contrastively “enlightened” West through his narrator—thus, by maintaining this split as a most obvious given, Hilbig actually draws attention to the relativity of political borders, and to the lack of sound rationale behind the programmed partiality toward one side of these borders over the other. The GDR is presented as a “postmodern dystopia” (Cooke, “Stasi as Panopticon”)—as is, arguably, the BRD.\textsuperscript{105} Indeed, M.W.’s hope to discover, or recover, his own identity is not fulfilled when he crosses the border into West Berlin in the S-Bahn (284). He remains temporally and spatially disoriented, and still lacks any certainty about his own sense of self. Hilbig puts forth neither East nor West as superior in this respect. In the West, M.W. finds no answers to his confusion; in the East, his identity is far from secure, due to his double role as informant and writer. Indeed, this situation lies at the root of his deep insecurities.

\textsuperscript{105} Sylvie Bordaux comments on this typical non-preferential treatment by Hilbig: “Sicherlich ist der Kulturschock, die Enttäuschung [sic] über den Westen, das Versagen dieses politischen und gesellschaftlichen Systems, das Nicht-ankommen und Sich-nicht-zurechtfinden im Westen ein Motiv mancher Texte Wolfgang Hilbigs. Jedoch wird der Westen nicht pauschal verworfen und abgelehnt […]. Der Vergleich Osten/Westen wird selten eindeutig verwendet. Bei dem Ost-West Vergleich schneidet der Osten bei Hilbig ebenso schlecht, wenn nicht schlechter ab. Es gibt bei Hilbig kaum Nostalgie und kein Festhalten an der sozialistischen Utopie, die definitiv versagt hat” (55).
M.W.’s boss in his hometown of A. gives him advice which will ring in his ears throughout the next few years: “Wissen Sie, man sieht am besten, wenn man aus dem Dunkeln ins Licht sieht! Und nicht umgekehrt…” (132). Like many of the tips given to the fledgling informant M.W. by this boss, as well as by his supervisor Feuerbach in Berlin, this is a throwaway statement which despite its somehow profound overtones remains cryptic and meaningless. The irony of the phrase stems from the connections between the West and light which are made throughout the novel. Expressions such as “die Sonne, die im Westen brannte” (161) which catches M.W.’s eye, or his imagining a place somewhere “dort im Westen unter dem lichtdurchzuckten Himmel” (172) allude to his obligation to look “aus dem Dunkeln ins Licht.” Physically speaking, the sun remains up in the West after it has already set in the East; metaphorically speaking, the West is alleged to hold vision and enlightenment which has not yet filtered into the dark East.

106 M.W believes to be adhering to this principle as he moves into his first residence in Berlin, where he gains “Aussicht”: “Als alles schon aussichtslos schien, hatte er hier ein Zimmer zur Miete gefunden: er wollte darin nichts als einen glücklichen Zufall erkennen. Und gerade in diesem Viertel zeigte sich ihm die Großstadt weiträumig und hell... zum ersten Mal bestätigte sich der Satz, den er im Kopf hatte: er glaubte aus dem Dunkel ins Licht zu blicken” (135). These and other formulations possibly allude to the end verse of the “Moritat” in Brecht’s Dreigroschenfilm: “Denn die einen sind im Dunkeln/ Und die anderen sind im Licht/ Und man sieht die im Lichte/ Die im Dunkeln sieht man nicht” (Dreigroschenbuch 116). In addition to the fact that Brecht served as a literary model for GDR writers of Hilbig’s generation, Hilbig alludes to the shady nature of being “underground” in various senses, lacking recognition and thus legitimization by the larger society.

107 The physical properties of dark and light also represent psychological states in “Ich”. Without light, disorientation sets in more quickly, as M.W. can attest: “Bei geschlossener Jalousie saß er in seinem Sessel und suchte in der Dunkelheit nach Orientierung” (220). M.W. claims himself and the whole city of Berlin to be in a state of depression, and in his own manic state, he ponders the professed tenet of looking into the light from the darkness: “Vielleicht sah man auch im Dunkel des Wahns ab und zu in ein Licht... und vielleicht war dies eine Art lichter Wahn” (294). Introducing the possibility of delusion, Hilbig’s narrator throws doubt on where the “Licht” actually exists—if anywhere. Can this light truly burn in the West, if, as the narrator proclaims, depression is “kein Begriff, der im Osten zu Hause war,” originating instead from the “Westteil der Stadt” (308)?
However, a person looking into the light, for instance from the darkness outside through a window into a lit room, is often not seen by those on the other side. If one is in spy mode, this is an advantage; if one is searching for the basic needs of recognition, acceptance, and identity, then this is a disadvantage—it is momentarily as if one did not exist at all. M.W. preserves the twentieth-century penchant for seeking das Innere:

“Draußen auf dem Bürgersteig hatte W. noch einen Blick durch das Fenster ins Innere des Cafés werfen wollen, wo schon Licht brannte...doch der Kellner, plötzlich lebendig geworden, kam, um die dunklen Vorhänge vor das Fenster zu ziehen” (199). The result is that he remains “für den anderen im Innern unsichtbar” (200). In the context of this post-Wende novel’s larger metaphorical structure, the message here points to the West’s facility in disregarding the East. While by no means truly enlightened, the West (in broad terms now) nonetheless sees itself as a shining star, as the sun—and many in the East see it this way as well. The West is blinded by its self-declared brightness and prosperity. M.W.’s own disorientation worsens when light suddenly pours into his dark room, “daß er geblendet rückwärts taumelte” (140). And when “die flackernden Fetzen

108 This type of voyeurism is frequent not only in “Ich” but also in Hilbig’s short stories, such as “Die Angst vor Beethoven,” in which the protagonist “sieht von außen als Voyeur seines eigenen Innenraums” (Schulz 417). This situation of looking in from the outside symbolizes M.W.’s position with the Stasi as well. Schulz remarks interestingly, “In fast allen Erzählungen Hilbigs weiß sich das (schreibende) Ich buchstäblich von der Macht inszeniert, ferngesteuert, ‘auf den Weg geschickt’, ‘fremdgedacht’. Einmal im Kontakt mit der Macht, bleibt es unter Aufsicht, selbst wo es aus dem ‘Innern’ zu schöpfen meint” (415).

109 In his discussion of the “virtual geography” surrounding media coverage of the Berlin Wall, McKenzie Wark posits East and West Germany as “each a lopsided mirror of the other” (60). Through television above all, each side has an image which highlights differences over common ground. Wark continues, “In the imaginary of the West, the West itself figures simply as existence, an everyday thing. It seems the most natural thing in the world for the East to want to climb through the looking glass to join it. In the imaginary of the East, the West does not appear as everyday existence. It appears as something other” (ibid).
der von Westen herüber durch die Baumlücken pfeilenden Abendsonnenstrahlen” land on his face in the S-Bahn, M.W. has the feeling that his head is “wie von Ohrfeigen hin und her geworfen” (343). The light from the West literally blinds and disorients him, even as he makes his way through various labyrinths in the East—implying that he would not reach his goal, no matter which side of the artificial border he were on.

To look into the light is also to envision the golden future, and to M.W. this means imagining his life as a writer in the West:

Man sieht am besten, wenn man aus der Dunkelheit ins Licht blickt, sagte man in der Sicherheit. –Das war richtig, es wurde jetzt Zeit für mich, damit anzufangen: nachzudenken darüber, wie mein Leben drüben in der westlichen Welt aussehen würde…als Literat! Kontakt aufzunehmen und nachzudenken…noch hier aus dem Verschwommenen mußte man auf dieses Leben blicken…vorsorgen, vorbeugen. (324-25)

But even when he crosses the border into West Berlin, M.W. remains by his own classification “noch längst nicht wieder M.W.” (284), but rather “der nüchterne Beobachter ohne Zeitempfinden” (283)—temporally disoriented, and lacking an understanding of himself which he can claim with any certainty. And as he enters the West, he might reflect on the question posed earlier by his boss, “Worüber schreibt ein ernstzunehmender Schriftsteller in einem Land, das die Zukunft auf seiner Seite hat?” (153).

2.4.2. Weg versus Ziel: Aimless Wanderings

M.W. accentuates his own tendency toward conformity, to remain on track, with such declarations as “es gehöre zu meinem Wesen, auf dem Weg zu sein” (7); and “zu meinem Wesen gehört eine Vorliebe für die sogenannten kleinen Schritte; ich könnte sagen, ich bin nicht der Mensch, der sich auf Biegen und Brechen durchsetzt” (ibid.).
M.W.'s true essence is to remain on the beaten path, as his Stasi report on himself affirms: “Impulse gehen von ihm nicht aus, er macht den Eindruck eines Mitläufers” (236). M.W.'s general compliance is a character trait which fits nicely with his “Laufbahn als Mitarbeiter der ‘Firma’” (78). The spatial-linear metaphors formed with the verb *laufen* and with the substantive *Weg* lay stress on M.W.'s constant labyrinthine movements through the city, but also on his submissiveness and his characteristic towing the line. M.W. contemplates for example whether Feuerbach had once trekked down the same path as he: “war er einst die gleichen Wege gegangen wie ich?” (37). Emerging from one of his deep sleep phases (reminiscent of those experienced by the first-person narrator in Kafka’s “Der Bau”), he thinks of his immediate future in similar terms: “Und vor mir lag eine neue Wegstrecke, in der ich mein ‘Ich’ wieder aufrichtete an den Erscheinungen des Sichtbaren im altbekannten Licht” (26). His desire for a solid sense of self is temporarily sated, because he has found at least his shadow near the familiar and comforting light.

Feuerbach is confident that M.W. somehow will always find “den richtigen Weg” (350). His staying on the right path is a product of his zeal to please his higher-ups, and his will to accomplish, achieve, and advance manifests itself sometimes; however, he is often reminded that this is not the point at all. Feuerbach warns him: “Sie denken immer nur an das Ziel, Cambert, ich glaube, Sie wollen weit hinauf. Dabei sage ich Ihnen immer, Sie sollen vielmehr an den Weg denken...” (22). As “ein guter Spürhund” (80),

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110 Even when following the so-called “Studentin” from West Berlin, an assignment which he gives himself, he obeys rules of conformity: “dann folgte ich ihr immer offener, schließlich war ich, in gleichbleibendem Tempo in ihrem Rücken, wie ein Automat, der von ihr selbst gesteuert wurde...sehr schnell lernte ich, mich ihrer Gangart anzupassen” (312). M.W. exudes no evidence of a free will, despite branching out on his own away from the *Firma*. Instead he is under this woman’s spell, and even adopts her manner of walking.
he is supposed to “ein bißchen gegensteuem, ein bißchen links und rechts von der Spur
schnüffeln, nicht immer nur blind und geil in Richtung Ziel stürzen” (ibid.). Although his
drive to advance “hinauf” as perceived by Feuerbach is more or less replaced by an
impulse directing him regularly “hinunter” (as will be discussed in the next section),
M.W. never learns to temper this urge to work toward a goal, and he never manages to
reduce his concerns to the Weg alone. After all, his identity begins to hinge on at least
having an objective (as he declares for himself: “ohne meine Verfolgungs jagden wäre ich
nicht ich gewesen,” 319).

Resigned to the futile tasks he eventually labels as “meine ziellosen Reisen”
(309),111 M.W. is nevertheless preoccupied with finding some sort of goal underlying the
mission of the Firma. What he comes up with to this end endorses the self-perpetuating
and ludicrous nature of the institution:

\[
\text{Ziel des Dienstes war es, alle...Ich sagte: alle! dachte er. Ausnahmslos}
\text{alle...zu Mitarbeitern des Dienstes zu machen, auch wenn dieser Gedanke}
\text{wahnsinnig klang. Damit alle von allen überwacht werden konnten, - das}
\text{war die Sicherheit, die ihren Namen verdiente. (75)}
\]

If the purported goal is to gather everyone on one side, then it is indeed better not to
concentrate too much on this—for as soon as everyone is on the same side, then the
Firma has rendered itself useless. M.W. ponders this contradiction, and becomes
cognizant that “jeder Vorgang hatte nur das Ziel, eine möglichst lange Reihe (am besten
eine unendliche Reihe) weiterer Vorgänge nach sich zu ziehen, - und jeder Vorgang

111 Reversing the typical Freudian search for maternal security, W. recalls that “er in
seiner Kindheit stets auf der Flucht vor seiner Mutter gewesen war...und damit vielleicht
unbewußt auf der Suche nach seinem Vater?” (107). He looks for the metaphorical
patriarchal element in the state, or in the umbrage of the Firma, but just as with his literal
pursuits on the streets of Berlin, he is always “auf der Suche” and never “am Ziel.”
Instead of finding the paternal security he seeks in Feuerbach, whom he views as
“väterlich,” he feels only “losgelassen” by him, “im Stich gelassen, entwurzelt” (318). 110
mußte mit der Einreihung in den Dienst der Organisation enden. Die Wirklichkeit dieses Apparats ist der Versuch, einen Staat von Mitarbeitern zu schaffen" (80).112 Feuerbach nearly admits the danger that such a state would pose for his job security when he tells M.W., “Wissen Sie was, wir dürfen das Ziel gar nicht erreichen, denn wir irren uns nicht. Wir dürfen nur so tun, als ob wir das Ziel erreichen wollen” (76).113 The state neither is, nor has, destination and destiny, as Feuerbach snaps at M.W., “Das Schicksal ist altmodisch. Das Schicksal wird demnächst einen anderen Namen bekommen, wahrscheinlich!” (156).

Of course, rather than admitting that defeat is pending—that is, that there is no reasonable goal anymore—M.W.’s Stasi mentor claims that they are indeed following a teleological and logical path, but that his charge need not know where it leads:

Wenn man auf die Straße rausschaut, dann ist die Welt noch in Ordnung, sagte Feuerbach, der sein altbekanntes Rezitativ anstimmte. Und nur das sollen wir, hinausschauen, sonst nichts, und gar nicht fragen, wohin die Chose fährt. Nur damit Sie es wissen! –C. folgte seinem Impuls zu schweigen. –Und der Oberleutnant fügte hinzu: Und wohin die Chose fährt, das wissen wir, und sonst keiner. Sie müssen es nicht wissen, denn durch Sie läuft die Chose… (251-52)

112 This is reminiscent of Rohlfs in Johnson’s Mutmassungen, who tells his assistant: “Wir kommen zu sprechen auf die Zielsetzung. Es ist nicht unser Ziel die Leute einzusperren. Wir brauchen sie nämlich” (82).

113 In one of the more pronounced Doppelgänger moments for M.W. (at this point under the guise of “C.”) he reverses the dynamic by saying to Feuerbach, “Sie denken immer nur an das Ziel” (358). This concession demonstrates that he has melded into the character of his boss at the Firma, and any individuality he might have gained after his “Ich” ventured out on its own missions is again lost. M.W. also succumbs to the warped logic of his superiors with a strange delusion, as he explains early on: “Und ich hatte die Phantasie, daß unsere Augen am schärfsten waren, wenn sie geschlossen waren. Mit geschlossenen Augen sahen wir tatsächlich beängstigend weit voraus. Fragen Sie mich nicht, wie das möglich ist” (50). The spatial-linear metaphor of a path stretching into a future is invoked here—but since the path has no determined endpoint, the faculty of “vision” is also not necessary in order to believe that one can see down it.
The vague but weighty-sounding "Chose" stands in for the likewise vague and allegedly weighty project of the state, of which M.W. and his assignments are only a microcosmic part. Via Feuerbach, Hilbig uses the spatial-linear metaphor interestingly—the "Chose" is something which runs somewhere (or "fährt" in this case), but instead of being a path which M.W. and other informants could access and follow, it only runs through them.\textsuperscript{114} The only thing that M.W. actually "follows" here is his impulse to remain silent and to conform. He branches out only minimally into unknown territory, and he does so out of a restlessness spurred by the changing times, such as in the S-Bahn when he "einige Stationen über das Ziel hinausgefahren war, um durch ein paar Straßen zu wandern, die ihm noch unbekannt waren [...]. Und dabei hatte er immer wieder gespürt, daß ein unbestimmter Geruch von Zwecklosigkeit über die Stadt gekommen war" (245). Here he even goes beyond the "Ziel," only to find more of the same sense of purposelessness.

The protagonist, acting as C., informs himself, M.W., that the GDR has become the place where "so viel Folgenlosigkeit herrscht" (365). In an apparent play on words, he bemoans the fact that his Folgen (act of following) in the end had no Folgen (consequences), because as it turns out, he was not on the trail of a dissident writer at all, but rather of yet another instrument of the state. Like the other novels' protagonists in this study, M.W. craves an Überblick of the system which is simply not at his disposal: "Er neigte zu paranoiden Reaktionen, wenn sich Dinge ereigneten, die er nicht überblickte..." (72). Oddly though, he consistently turns to the underground of Berlin, where he has literally no oversight whatsoever either, and which is just as labyrinthine as

\textsuperscript{114} At other times Feuerbach speaks more inclusively (yet nonetheless spatially) to M.W.: "Sie sind mit Ihren Gedanken schon wieder beim großen Ziel. Aber das ist nicht unsere Sache, wir sind die Männer, die im Alltag stehen, in der Mitte der Bewegung, wir müssen den Weg besetzt halten, wir werden am Ziel garantiert nicht mehr dabei sein. Wir müssen auf dem Teppich bleiben" (75).
aboveground, if not more so. M.W.’s escape from the everyday is an underground
labyrinth with which he is well familiar—even if it is “bei weitem noch nicht
überschaubar” (54)—and for which he, comfortingly, does not even attempt to find an
endpoint or Ziel.

2.4.3. The Underground Labyrinths

The spatial metaphorical expression of being “under cover” refers to physical
covertness, but also to the hiding of one’s true identity—possessing a Deckname in
German. For much of the novel, M.W. remains under cover in one or both of these ways.
Hilbig makes M.W.’s search for cover even more concrete by placing his protagonist in
the labyrinth of Berlin’s underground catacombs for much of the novel. This refuge in the
cellars, accompanied by M.W.’s fluctuating psychological state and his self-proclaimed
Schlafphase, results in multiple possibilities for interpreting the novel’s underlying
spatial metaphors. The layers of Berlin seem to represent levels of consciousness, and his
time in the Keller (or sewer system or even the subway) is a time of repression and of
forgetting. There is also allusion to the concept of the literary “underground” and acts of
subversion—through his narrator, Hilbig criticizes those dissidents who remain under
cover and whose rebellion consists only in the self-indulgence of writing poems for
fellow undergrounders.115 Submersion is not equivalent to subversion, and Hilbig’s

115 The author is also commenting on the paradoxical situation of some younger-
generation writers in the GDR who, as Stephen Brockmann elaborates, “were perhaps the
most ironic example of the insider-outsider contradiction in GDR society. On the one
hand, they viewed themselves as genuine outsiders in opposition to existing power
structures; but on the other hand they were heavily infiltrated by the Stasi, and their
abstruse poetic theories helped to take the edge off any attempt to combine literature with
anti-establishment politics. Their attempt to escape to a no-place beyond politics led—
nowhere” (95).
protagonist questions the legitimacy of those writers who are acclaimed in the West:

“War es dadurch nicht möglich, daß immer mehr Produkte aus dem Untergrund an die Oberfläche gerieten?” (199). The wordplay with Oberfläche here implies the increasing superficiality of the literary underground and their material, and at the same time implicitly privileges the underground spaces which characterize M.W.’s comfort zone. In trying too hard to be labyrinthine, perhaps, the underground writers were losing their subtle effectiveness in the eyes of the narrator. (Brockmann points out the connection between the Prenzlauer Berg writers and the underground journals’ “telling names like Ariadnefabrik that revealed the labyrinthine nature of their conception of literature,” 93).

The labyrinths of “Ich” are distinguished and defined in part by the deixis of the terms oben and unten, which are found often in the novel in both literal and figurative contexts. Geographically speaking, M.W.’s hometown of “Kleinstadt A.” is “unten” relative to Berlin which is from that point of view “oben.” M.W. explains that from Feuerbach’s perspective, the phrase “oben bei uns” refers to “das Privileg, in der Hauptstadt zu wohnen” (173). A Stasi proxy from “Kleinstadt A.” even concedes this inferiority: “wir wissen ja nicht sehr viel da unten bei uns” (270). Within the hierarchy of the Stasi there also exists this dichotomy: Feuerbach’s superiors are known as “die da

116 Located “unten” or “nach Süden,” the small town of A. is where M.W. winds up at the novel’s end, back in his birthplace and his mother’s residence, with hopes to hang on a little longer with the Firma. M.W. is chastised by Feuerbach for not going home one day when he was observing him in Berlin: “Und sind dann runter in die U-Bahn...nach Hause hätten Sie doch auch laufen können! Aber Sie stiegen in die Bahn nach Alexanderplatz, fuhren aber nur bis Frankfurter...dort gingen Sie nach oben und stiegen in die S-Bahn um. Und Sie fuhren garantiert nicht in Richtung Pankow, sondern nach Süden, gibts dort auch schon eine Szene? Wohin treibt es Sie bloß immer...” (196). But down in the U-Bahn is, in a sense, “heimwärts” for M.W., as this is where he feels most secure—and his drive southward within the city parallels his eventual return to the small town of A. His search for the security of home is however as futile and endless as his other pursuits: “der kühle Beobachter ist doch überall ein Heimatloser, so tröstete er sich” (83).
oben” (258), and as the “ehrwürdigen Genossen da oben” (261)—which means physically they work on the higher-altitude floors of the building, in addition to being figuratively above or over him—whereas the IMs are located “dort unten auf der Straße” (258). Feuerbach sneaks into M.W.’s room while he sleeps: “Mitten im Zimmer stand er da oben, wie ich ihn kannte, er setzte sich nie, als wären meine Stühle verseucht; er [...] wüßte, wie nervös es mich machte, wenn er stehenden Fußes auf mich einredete” (292). This scene exemplifies how Hilbig constructs the physical layouts of his characters with their power dynamics apparently in mind. The perspective from above is elsewhere associated with knowledge, for example as Feuerbach convinces M.W. “daß man oben, in den sogenannten höheren Etagen über uns, mehr von mir wisse als ich selbst” (61). “Oben, in den Regionen über Feuerbach, zu denen W. keinen Zugang hatte” (193), however, is not where the protagonist aspires to be most of the time. Instead he is happy to have the chance, “sich ein Versteck einzurichten” (208), and to remain “unten in seinem Zimmer” (265) at his lessor Frau Falbe’s house—that is, when he is not exploring even further unten in the underground of Berlin.

M.W. criticizes the “schnelle—und vorübergehende—Aufstieg” (192) of the writer/informant named Reader whom he trails, and be it in the Firma or in the Szene, he is not interested in this type of ascension. M.W. (as first-person narrator) maintains from the beginning that he has other interests than merely a “Streben nach Aufstieg” (38). It is not clear whether this an ideologically motivated principle, or merely an apathy which accompanies his often-mentioned depression. In either case, though, this rejection of advancement explains M.W.’s attraction to the viscera of Berlin. He is constantly driven downward into the cellar of his building—which belongs to the many “Altbauten, die erfahrungsgemäß, reich unterkellert waren” (311)—and into the underground world of
Berlin, earning him the appellation “Katakombensau” (16) from Feuerbach, and the self-imposed label of himself as a “Höllenfürst” (320).\textsuperscript{117} M.W. describes the labyrinthine underground which gives him “den gewünschten Zugang” (8) to a more private world, outside of the reach of Feuerbach and others:

in Berlin: längere Zeit wohnte ich in einer Straße, die ganz aus den kahlen Reihen rußdunkler Mietskasernen bestand, welche wahrscheinlich von der Jahrhundertwende her stammten. Unter diesen Blocks führte ein einziger durchgehender Kellergang von einer Querstraße zur nächsten, und oft sogar über die Querstraße hinaus bis unter die nächste Häuserreihe. (ibid.)

He later wonders about this realm of sewage system/mythical catacombs, “hier unten konnte man vielleicht entkommen?” (249). On the one hand, the labyrinth of the underground is a potential escape route for him from the rest of the world; but on the other hand, he cannot avoid disturbing monuments to the past, “in den weitverzweigten Speichern unter der Oberfläche der Stadt Berlin, wo so viele tausend Tonnen von Finsternis aufbewahrt wurden” (30). Here the main character takes particular notice of the numeral 33, which marks a particular apartment in the building where he lives, but also denotes the year in which Hitler came to power. With Hilbig’s statements about the underground, such as “hier faulten die Exkremente der Stadt” (250), connections are drawn to Hitler’s bunker beneath the surface of Berlin, where he hid and committed suicide in the final days of World War II.

\textsuperscript{117} There are other such parallels made between the underground and the underworld in which M.W. asserts his chthonic sovereignty, for example: “Ich war, dies konnte ich mit Fug und Recht behaupten, abgehartet genug für den Dienst in der Unterwelt” (37). M.W., like his creator Wolfgang Hilbig, also worked for a time as a boilerman. Schulz sees Hilbig as producing in his works a “proletarische Mythologie—die Ausgesetztheit des Körpers vor Maschinen, ‘Feuerschlümpfen’ in gigantischen Räumen, Hitze, Lärm und Dreck,” which incorporates the “romantische Imagination von unterirdischem Bergwerk, alchemistischen Schmelztiegeln und Initiationen im Märchen mit dem Kesselhaus im Kombinat” (415-16).
In the underground, then, the ugly past meets an uncertain present. Yet this is
where M.W. seeks refuge, “im Unterirdischen [...] in den Kellern der Häuser [...] in den
reich verzweigten und unübersichtlichen Gängen unter dem Pflaster der großen Stadt
Berlin” (14).\textsuperscript{118} Here the possibility of Übersicht diminishes completely, and there exists
a uniformity that leads not to order and predictability, but to confusion and
disorientation—“im Grunde genommen sahen all diese Gänge gleich aus” (28).\textsuperscript{119}
However, even above ground he demonstrates no signs of Übersicht. On the surface of
the city, around Stasi buildings or elsewhere, the perpetual outsider M.W. becomes
frustrated when he senses himself going in circles (much like Kafka’s Karl in the
labyrinth of the Pollunder’s mansion): “immer wieder war ich die Zirkel meiner Wege
gegangen, schon so oft, daß ich oft genug das Gefühl hatte, der nicht enden wollenden
Serie eines Déjà vu unterworfen zu sein...immer weiter unterworfen diesem Weg,
straß auf, straß ab, unten entlang, oben entlang, immer wieder” (357).\textsuperscript{120} From his very

\textsuperscript{118} While it can be assumed reasonably that readers will know that Berlin is a
“Großstadt,” Hilbig provides distinct and ironic contrast to the “Kleinstadt A.” by
pointing it out in this parceled manner of “der großen Stadt.” In Kafka’s Der
Verschollene, everything about America is “groß”; in Johnson’s Mutmassungen, “die
Welt ist groß”; and here it is the microcosm of Berlin which is “groß,” but which from
M.W.’s perspective is not big enough for his disappearance (at least not in the Eastern
segment of it), with exception of when he is underground.

\textsuperscript{119} While navigating the Stasi building in Berlin, he thinks that he has ventured into the
wrong office, “in ein anderes der gleichförmigen, nach außen als Wohnung getarnten
Amtszimmer” (340). This situation is likewise labyrinthine to him but far less
comfortable, because he is not considered (nor does he consider himself) an insider in
this building, as he is in the desolate catacombs. The buildings which house the Stasi
operations cause him to wonder aloud in front of his boss about their dead-endedness:
“Da fragt man sich sofort, ob man je wieder rauskommt, da drin, sagte ich, wenn man
dort...Ich unterbrach mich, denn ich hatte aus der Art seines Schweigen gespürt, daß er
sich über meine Geschwätzigkeit ärgerte” (32). Another telling passage in this respect
relates M.W. waiting for Feuerbach to come out of one of the Stasi structures, located
amidst the uniformity of the prefabricated sprawling labyrinth of Plattenbau (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{120} Déjà vu is a spatial concept in that it is conceptualized as either a recurring isolated
event, with at least a somewhat defined beginning and end, or as a contained memory,
first day in Berlin he had gotten lost, despite his wish to become “ein Experte der
Orientierung in der Stadt” (138), and he complains later as well about the multiple exits
of the “Betonlabyrinths unter dem Bahnhof” Alexanderplatz (281) because he must “stets
erst neu orientieren” (54) when he emerges from within. But while underneath, in
contrast, he feels secure.

Before M.W. finds out that Reader is not really a dissident but another IM, the
former fantasizes about retreating with the latter’s “revolutionary” texts to the basement:
“Ich malte mir aus, wie ich mit der Beute durch die Keller rannte, um sie in Sicherheit zu
bringen...vor wem wollte ich sie in Sicherheit bringen? –Hier unten konnte ich sie lesen,
auf meinem Platz, wo ich mich sicher fühlte” (30). Already as a child, as if practicing
to be a censored writer, M.W. had hidden his own prose in the “unterirdischen Gänge”
underneath the bombed-out building ruins of his hometown A. (275). He also remembers
the years during the war, “wenn er mit seiner Mutter im Keller Schutz gesucht hatte”
(139). M.W. thus associates the recesses of the earth with maternal shelter and the naïve

scene, or mental “picture.” The spatiality of this phenomenon comes through here and in
Der Verschollene by the images of the protagonists going pointlessly through the same
physical motions within—what at least appears to them to be—the same physical spaces.
The déjà vu is also carried out in “Ich” through the various Doppelgänger and their
commonly repeated mottos.

Reader, planted in the underground to legitimate the authority of the Stasi, finds
possible real-life correspondence in figures such as Sascha Anderson or Rainer
Schedlinski, seemingly oppositional intellectuals in the GDR who were revealed later as
having worked for the Stasi (the latter is “IM Gerhard,” whom Hilbig thanks in his post-
script “Anmerkung”). Martin Kane sees resemblance not only between Reader and
Anderson, but also between M.W. and Anderson. “Cambert, however, clearly lacks the
style and entrepreneurial verve with which Anderson carried out his double role, and is
much more a projection of the dismal figure Hilbig imagines he himself might have cut,
had he been recruited by the Stasi” (Kane 78).

Cf. the literal bounty brought underground and necessary for survival in Kafka’s “Der Bau”:
“Die erste Arbeit ist sehr mühselig und nimmt mich ganz in Anspruch: die Beute
nämlich durch die engen und schwachwandigen Gänge des Labyrinths zu bringen”
(Sämtliche Erzählungen 373).
protected feelings of childhood. However, with the postwar rebuilding of the town, his access to these subterranean areas had disappeared: "Nein, es gibt hier in dieser Stadt keinen Ort, wo man sich ungeschenk treffen kann, hier bewegt man sich immer vor aller Augen" (110). He finds instead that the security of unten is actually oben in Berlin. In the tumultuous years preceding the Wende, the physical underground of the big city becomes his refuge: “Berlin wurde von einer ähnlichen Serie von Glutwellen überrannt und lahmgelegt, aber ich hatte die Möglichkeit, in meinen Kellergängen Zuflucht zu suchen” (319). In his solitude he finds courage and rebellion which do not exist above. “Auf seinem Kellerplatz dann wieder waren seine Gedanken rebellischer, und er schien entschlossen, das Vorhaben ganz für sich in die Tat umzusetzen…als ob solche Möglichkeiten nicht längst der Vergangenheit angehörten” (289). While providing safe distance from the “Glutwellen” and potentially real progressive action up above, things still heat up enough underground to give him a feeling of security: “Es war beinahe warm unter der Erde, jedenfalls nicht ausgesprochen kalt, ich fror nicht, wenn ich hier eine oder zwei Stunden verschlief” (37).\footnote{Being underground, as positively as this location is viewed by M.W., has its disadvantages as well. Without the aid of natural light, he loses all sense of time: “ich verlor vollkommen die Orientierung; die halbe Nacht war ich in Panik durch die Gänge geirrt und hatte Beruhigungstabletten geschluckt…jetzt war die Kellertür offen. Als ich auf der Straße stand, war ich überrascht, daß es schon heller Tag war” (41). Another time, he is not sure whether it is one o’clock in the afternoon or one in the morning while underground (298).}

The underground gives him the security and warmth—or alternately, “das kühle Gefühl von Sicherheit, welches die massive Betonwand ausströmte” (364-65)—of an enclosed space, and his isolation there allows him time to figure out what is happening with his paranoid life up above:
Wem wollte er entkommen, außer von Zeit zu Zeit seinem Vorgesetzten Feuerbach? Und er nahm sich vor, dies alles herauszufinden...wenn er sich schon oben in Berlin nicht zurechtfand, so konnte er sich vielleicht in diesem System hier unten zurechtfinden. War es ein System, das sich zu dem Netz der Häuserreihen und Straßen über ihm kongruent verhielt? Dies müste erst erforscht werden...es konnte die Aufgabe seiner nächsten Tage sein, so lange jedenfalls, bis sich Feuerbach beruhigt hatte. (249)

With the system of the *Firma* less than transparent to him, M.W. seems undaunted by the task of figuring out the more concrete “system” of underground Berlin. However, the labyrinth underneath the streets is only a temporary diversion for the protagonist.

2.4.4. Webs and Nets

The *Firma* is a metaphorical labyrinth in itself, in that it allows its players no exit:

die Behörde hatte sich schon am Ende befunfen, als sie begann sich zu bewegen. Die Behörde war das Ende (der Selbstzweck, das Ziel und das Ende), aus dem einfachen Grund, weil sie keine Möglichkeit sah, einer in ihrer Mitte kreisenden Figur einen Ausweg offenzulassen. Die Firma war das Ende, das nicht fertig werden durfte... (353)

This passage exemplifies the conceptual or situational labyrinths which accompany the physical labyrinths in Hilbig’s novel. This more figurative “Ausweglosigkeit” appears often in the form of words, sentences, or thoughts—and is ushered in by the *Netz* motif so familiar to twentieth-century literature.

The underground, a network whose only exits are above and outside of the circular system itself, reminds M.W. strongly of the “genitive-of-genitive” rhetoric of the state, such as on the disputed paternity proclamation:

das fortgesetzte Netz der unterirdischen Zellen zwang mich förmlich, ihm zu folgen, und doch war das Ganze nichts als ein Kreislauf. – Und ich mußte dabei an ein Papier denken, das mir oben einmal in die Hände gefallen war. Es war mit eigentümlich vernetzten Sätzen bedeckt, deren Sinn sich mir nur erschloß, wenn ich mir die Mühe machte, ihnen Schritt für Schritt nachzugehen. (22)

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These paternity papers appear later as well, and are described as being covered with “wirren, vernetzten Formeln” (339).\(^{124}\) The cryptic circular language in official documents, of which the underground reminds M.W., reflects the identity of anyone connected with the Firma: “Wir waren der Schatten der Existenz, wir waren der Genitiv des Menschen” (372). Reader and M.W. are followers (Verfolger), of the followed (Verfolgte), of the original followers (Stasi), and find themselves followed as well—in Readers’ case by M.W. and fans from the Szene, and in M.W.’s case by the Firma. Or they are assigned to follow each other, as Feuerbach tells M.W.: “Sie müssen jetzt dem Spion nachspionieren” (351). The agents, M.W. comes to realize in the end, are the human embodiment of their own language, characterized by its “bis zur Unkenntlichkeit des Ausgangspunktes fortgesetzten Aneinanderreihung von Genitiven” (23). With this accumulation of obtuse genitive constructions, their beginnings become obscured and their endings may never surface—for instance, M.W.’s attempts “die hingeworfenen Sätze Feuerbachs zu Ende zu denken, schien ihm dabei zum bloßen Kurzschluß zu geraten” (75-76).\(^{125}\) The protagonist’s thoughts short-circuit while trying to follow the

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\(^{124}\) Cooke writes that “[b]y giving his signature to the paternity declaration, Hilbig’s protagonist, like Faust, enters into a pact with the GDR’s own version of the devil and, in so doing, initially feels liberated rather than constrained” (Speaking the Taboo 196). This is an appropriate analogy in light of the underground, stygian imagery which is used throughout “Ich”.

\(^{125}\) Such references point to the post-structuralist thought that is mocked in the novel. Meaning is undermined because the signifier (whether linguistic, social, or otherwise) is no longer traceable back to, or directly chargeable to, the signified. Cooke fruitfully discusses how Hilbig has been “highly disparaging of much contemporary critical theory, particularly the work of French poststructuralist and postmodernist theorists” (Speaking the Taboo 34 ff.), and this critique shows through in “Ich”. Further, M.W. considers the “Hysteresis der Genitiv” which occurs so frequently in bureaucratic speech to be inherent in the German language itself. It is a language, he says, which builds its own constricting grammatical labyrinths and whose structure discourages one from the ultimate “Ziel” as much as Feuerbach does in everyday life: “Man konnte in dieser Gedankensprache immer nur einen Schritt auf den anderen folgen lassen, lediglich um festzustellen, daß man noch immer nicht am Ziel war und wieder einen nächsten Schritt

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sentences which are to M.W. "unentwirrbar" (62). The irony here is Feuerbach's contention that M.W.'s way of operating (that is, trying to find closure, completion, and conclusions to his pursuits) can only result in more "genitive-of-genitive"-type quandries: "Wenn Sie immer nur Schlüsse ziehen, und noch mal Schlüsse aus den Schlüssen ziehen, kommt es da nicht vor, daß Sie gar nicht wissen, was der Anfang war?" (76). Thus, the "utterly uncompromising mapping out of desolate internal and external landscapes" (Kane 75) of Hilbig's work has "only a tenuous and intermittent point of contact with any empirical reality: they are constructs of language, and as such are necessarily fragile, shifting and capricious, since language itself is for Hilbig treacherous and cannot be depended upon to pin down and identify with any reliability" (ibid.). M.W.'s labyrinthine pursuits are not only psychological and ideological, but also linguistic. Or a combination of all three: Julia Kristeva asserts that all social practices are "articulated like a language" (124), and indeed, the hierarchies facing M.W. are just as labyrinthine as the language he cannot decipher.

Nonetheless, M.W. is eager to continue trying to figure out the system of the Firma, including its language. Perhaps the correspondences he sees between the physical underground labyrinth and language are what draw him continually downward. He seeks the materiality of the underground, hoping that it will provide a likewise concrete key to the abstraction of genitives upon genitives in his life up above, and to the spaces of language from which he feels shut off: "Jetzt war er zum Schriftsteller erklärt worden,

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und plötzlich war ihm die Sprache, die er früher mitbewohnt hatte, zu einem Raum geworden, aus dem er ausgeschlossen war. Vielleicht war es ihm möglich, von unten...aus dem Unterirdischen heraus, durch die Keller, durch den Boden dieser Sprache...in ihre geschlossene Räume einzudringen?” (131). Language takes on spatial properties here, presented as compartmentalized spaces inaccessible to M.W., the designated writer who has perpetual writer's block, and who cannot untangle the empty and convoluted language of his superiors in the *Firma*.

The inextricableness of language and thought means that his every thought also becomes tangled within this linguistic web. M.W. lives “ständig in dem Gefühl, es sei um alle seine Dinge ein lückenloses Netz aus fremdem Wissen gelegt, und er selbst sei eingewebt in ein System einander ergänzender Informationen, wenn er darin auch nur ein winziges Segment war...und es gab an der Oberfläche, die er überblicke, keine Möglichkeit, sich diesem Netz zu entziehen” (187). In addition to the more conspicuous *Netz* metaphor as discussed in relation to the other novels, the idea of living “*in dem Gefühl*” (as opposed to, for instance, “*mit dem Gefühl*”) is a spatial metaphor which contributes to M.W.’s portrayal as a figure trapped by both external and internal circumstances. At other times, this imprisonment is much more sharply expressed, as it is in a snail analogy: “Er lebte in einer Art Gedanken-Kaverne, und diese schleppte er immer mit sich herum” (65). The labyrinths in which he is hopelessly stuck are physical, situational, conceptual, emotional, and linguistic. His eventual realization of just how entangled he has become also leads to his understanding that he is not the spider constructing a web with the other players of the *Firma*. At first, M.W. tries to convince himself that he will be able to successfully weave “ein Netz von Aufschlüssen” through his “kleinen, aber zielbewußten Schritten” (72), and that eventually Feuerbach and others
in the *Firma* will appreciate this zeal. However, the powers above him spin the web instead.\(^{126}\) In essence he is, as they are too at this point in history, only an insect caught in the web:

> Was sollte ich tun...ich verglich mich mit einer Spinne, der auf einmal die Fähigkeit abhanden gekommen war, sich ihr Netz zu weben, --tatsächlich hatte ich das Gefühl, daß mir alle Fäden aus Information und Gegeninformation, die mich umspannen hatten, zerrissen waren. Ich war über mich selbst nicht mehr informiert (niemand mehr informierte mich über mich selbst!), und dies war vielleicht das Erbärmlichste an diesem Zustand. --Die Information, sagte ich mir, sei meine Heimat gewesen. Sie löste sich plötzlich auf, wie das Biotop einer Spinne...sie löste sich auf und verschwand wie ein ganzes Gesellschaftsgebilde, in dem ich fußte. (335)

The dilemma is not so much that M.W. has lost his footing in terms of his social position—as the spy of a spy, he has figured out that he is yet another embodiment of the amassed genitives—but that he has lost track of the parameters of his own life and identity. The pseudo-*Heimat* he had thought to find in the State Security organization has been destroyed and is thus revealed as having been only a construction. Although the Stasi had told him to build a labyrinth around his own existence so that he would not be traceable, in the end he does not even have control over this web-spinning.\(^{127}\) M.W.'s

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\(^{126}\) Bordaux writes fittingly of Foucault's notions of power in relation to this novel: "Das Funktionieren der Macht als eines ihrer Hauptcharakteristika wird bei Foucault noch erweitert und verfeinert: die moderne Macht ist nicht nur etwas, was hauptsächlich funktioniert, sondern sie funktioniert in einer bestimmten Form und zwar wie ein Netz, sie läuft nicht durch die Individuen, sondern längst der Individuen, teilweise an ihnen vorbei und übt sich fließend und pluralistisch aus" (135). Cooke writes along these lines as well, "Hilbig constructs the GDR as a postmodern nightmare, in which the state's power spreads amongst the population like a web, and, as in Foucault, not only controls individuals, but also actually constitutes them by implicating them in its system of domination" ("Stasi as Panopticon," forthcoming).

\(^{127}\) Along with advice from the *Chef* in A. about taking part in the *Szene* comes also encouragement to manufacture a labyrinthine identity: "Also schweigen Sie sich am besten aus über das, was Sie tun, wo sie herkommen, geben Sie sich etwas verwirrt, Ihre Herkunft kann Ihnen ruhig ein bißchen peinlich sein [...] Geben Sie falsche Reiseziele an [...]" (169).
attempt, “die Spur zu verwischen” by buying train tickets to and from false locations (140) is in vain, since the Stasi erases his tracks for him anyway, for example by withholding letters to his mother, and reporting that he is in different locations outside of Berlin. “Deutlich war nur, daß dieses Netz über sein Leben gebreitet war, aus Fragen und Antworten gewebt, ein Netz aus Informationen, die sich oft genug nur in Fragen versteckten” (188).

What started out as the hope of penetrating the Netz (network) of the Stasi has turned into the fear that an inescapable Netz (web or net) is being thrown over him in various forms. Neither a net nor a web are opaque; M.W. never loses complete sight of the events around him, and the holes, however tiny, fuel the faith that escape must be somehow possible. At the same time, the snarls and knots of the net increase the frustration level of those caught within. But Hilbig and the other authors in this study often move beyond this thematic device through their employment of spatial or material metaphors. Via this use of language, the ubiquity yet elusive near-tangibility of the Netz from the literary figures’ perspective begins to take shape for the reader as well. The imagery of web-weaving is implicit at times, e.g. “Und der Dunst, der von den nassen Böden aufstieg, verwob sich düster mit meinen Sinnen und verschleierte mir den Ausblick nach vorn” (28). Other instances are more explicit; over M.W.’s past hangs “ein graues, hektisch gewebtes Netz von Sprache, das ich tatsächlich als ein undurchdringliches Gewebe von Simulation bezeichnen konnte. Oder es war alles Simulation, was jenseits dieser grauen Lagen war” (62). Certain verbs with the prefix

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128 Hilbig alludes here and elsewhere to Baudrillard’s concept of simulation; the webs surrounding M.W. allow him no leverage for positioning within—or without—the realms of the Firma and Szene. Neville Wakefield generalizes about the post-modern concept of simulation, “In an era of simulation there is no reality beyond appearance and therefore no dialectics of inside and outside from which to position a critique” (6). M.W. resides
ver- intensify characters’ entanglements further, as was noted in relation to Seghers’s
Transit: M.W. is “andauern in Schreibversuche verstrickt” (65); he is “verwickelt” in
conversations with Feuerbach (65); and his many meetings (or more precisely, his
“Vorladungen”) with the Stasi “verwoben und vernetzten sich” (105).

The physical labyrinths in “Ich” provide M.W. with refuge from these more
abstract labyrinths of everyday life in the final days of the GDR. His retreats underground
give him a fleeting feeling of control over his own situation—as indicated by the active
grasp he claims to have on this activity: “Dies waren die Augenblicke, in denen ich die
Flucht ergriff” (40); and “ich ergriff die Flucht” (374)—not a flight westward, as most
around him, but downward. Overall, M.W. is despondent about his lack of control over
his web-spinning and about the net being thrown over his own progression forward. This
impotence is incorporated into one of his nightmares:

sein Körper war ihm verlorengegangen. [...] Er war durch Gänge
gekrochen, vielleicht auch nur durch einen einzigen geradlinigen Gang,
sehr niedrig, und doch hatte er sich ungehindert vorwärts
bewegt...vielmehr war er bewegt worden, es war ein Voranwalzen,
Gleiten, Rutschen auf einer schiefen Ebene. (250-51)

The switch to the passive voice indicates that, in his subconscious, even the physical
labyrinths through which he usually moves so adroitly begin to menace him. The
protagonist is thrust forward not by his own force, but by an unseen one whose origin is
long since untraceable.

within that gray area of simulation, immobilized and unable to critique meaningfully his
own life and the world around him.
2.5. *Nachwelt: “Und Verdrängung der einzige Ausweg.”*

one might call the sprawling urban region defined by a sixty-mile (100 kilometre) circle around the centre of the City of Los Angeles a *prototopos*, a paradigmatic place; or, pushing inventiveness still further, a *mesocosm*, an ordered world in which the micro and the macro, the idiographic and the nomothetic, the concrete and the abstract, can be seen simultaneously in an articulated and interactive combination. (Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 191)

Edward Soja finds a certain beauty and harmony in the megalopolis of Los Angeles, outlining its "enticingly generalizable features of a postmodern urban geography" (223). One of these features is physical decentralization, which results in an increased potential for disorientation. The protagonist of Marlene Streeruwitz's *Nachwelt*, Margarethe, becomes lost in the labyrinths of Los Angeles on several occasions. Los Angeles is, according to Margarethe's contact-person Manon, "nur ein großes Dorf, von dem die Leute immer nur einen sehr kleinen Ausschnitt kannten. Kennen wollten" (317). If even the inhabitants are not well-acquainted with their own city, Margarethe has little hope of orienting herself in her ten days there. However, within this brief time span, Margarethe actually meets and converses with a number of people in this big "village." The Netz-metaphor, as discussed in various contexts in this chapter, comes into play here with the network of people with whom she becomes acquainted in Los Angeles through originally only one person, Manon. All of the people in this network have some connection to the late sculptor Anna Mahler, whose life Margarethe is researching for a planned biography, and nearly all are European immigrants themselves.

Margarethe's partner Helmut decided at the last minute to remain in Austria rather than accompanying her on the trip. It is clear that in some respects Helmut functions for her as "the orienter," as did Jakob for Gesine in Johnson's novel. The narrator presents Margarethe as lost and disoriented, in large part due to his absence. She does not know
which over-the-counter medicines to buy because Helmut (a doctor), is not there to advise her; she has not packed appropriately because if she had known from the outset that he was not coming along, then she would have included more emergency and first-aid items in her suitcase (107). Margarethe imagines what it would be like if Helmut were driving her around, with their discussions about which way to go: “Weil der, der fuhr, immer ein anderes Gefühl hatte als der, der in die Karte schaute. Aber so. Allein” (128).

In addition to her pervasive feelings of loneliness, disorientation sets in at times for Margarethe in Los Angeles, such as in a movie theater:


The intensity of her “Ortlosigkeit” and disorientation is enhanced by the material presentation: the feeling “stieg…auf”; she wants to push it away, but it only burns stronger within her. The same uneasy feeling arises shortly later and “streifte sie. Verschwand sofort wieder. Aber sie mußte ganz ruhig stehen. Sich sammeln. Und es war, als käme dieses Gefühl von außen. Wäre vorne an ihr vorbeigestriffen” (154).

Margarethe deems Los Angeles the epitome of stereotypical Western decadence and artificiality. Her disorientation humorously paints a caricature of consumer capitalism, such as when she tries to find her car again after exiting a shopping mall. She had conscientiously observed her surroundings before going into the mall, having noted a large red arrow which would serve as her mnemonic device. When she emerges later, however, she “mußte von oben alle Autos entlanggehen. Auf beiden Seiten. Sie hatte jede Orientierung verloren. Der rote Pfeil zu Saks war in jedem Stockwerk angebracht” (220).
In this parking garage and elsewhere, Margarethe, like other protagonists in this study, seeks the Überblick which is missing from her life and from the environment around her.

The artificiality Margarethe perceives in Los Angeles does not help her sense of orientation and grounding. She takes notice of the fluorescent lights in the drugstore, which are more than “taghell” (153). In this consumer-driven neon environment, laden with the technology of the twentieth century, nature becomes ostensibly superfluous. Later she meets the young artist, Syd, who uses spotlights in his basement studio: “Er hätte so immer Tageslicht, sagte Syd. Wann immer er wolle. Auch um vier Uhr früh” (334). In the golden state of California, sunshine and natural light are easily avoided and even deemed unnecessary. Even natural light is blinding to the protagonist; on her way to Palm Springs, Margarethe becomes disoriented as she cannot estimate the distance ahead of her, due to the bright sun and lack of trees (276). Rather than looking out of the darkness and into the light, from the East to the West as in Hilbig’s “Ich”, Margarethe has traveled westward only to be surrounded by constant light that prevents her from finding her bearings.

It is noteworthy that Margarethe’s research takes her so far westward from her home base of Vienna. Her bitterness toward the West is made quite clear, as she blames the Western world for her self-perceived disfunctionality: “Warum war aus dem Funktionieren nicht mehr Wohlgefuhl zu beziehen. Das war wohl wieder einmal das Abendland. Sich nur unter Schmerzen fuhlen konnen. Sich bemerken. Uberhaupt” (174). Despite this negative view of Los Angeles, Margarethe fantasizes about staying in the US; but something draws her eastward – “Das Auto zurueckgeben. Ein billiges kaufen. Und losfahren. Von Westen nach Osten. Oder nach Suden. [...] Und nur noch leben. Im Leben verschwinden” (175). Travelling into the early sun of the East is expressed as
driving “in die richtige Richtung” (262). Time and again it becomes clear that Margarethe skips the steps of idealizing the West and hoping for a better life there, as opposed to many of the characters looked at in this study so far. She wants to head eastward instead—the East Coast is a possible middle ground between the extremes of California and her problems back home in Vienna. Conceptualizing her circumstances spatially, she wishes to disappear within life.

In taking a superior stance to the West and its various alienating factors, Margarethe cannot forget that she too is a product of the Western world when she compares Los Angeles to her home: “Das Leben dort genauso und genauso nicht wie anderswo. Wie sollte sie etwas herausfinden, wenn schon die hier Lebenden ihre Umgebung nur ahnen konnten. Welt war nicht zu finden. Hier. Oder sonstwo” (298). She concludes that there is little difference between Western Europe and America, and she shows her ambivalence toward the homogenization taking place. As her trip takes place in March of 1990, Margarethe begins to conceive of a world suddenly devoid of the Iron Curtain, while simultaneously experiencing the highly alienating environment of the mega-city: “Und mußte man sich deswegen die Welt nach dem kalten Krieg als ein riesiges Los Angeles vorstellen. Nur auf Autobahnen herumfahren. Einzeln. Jeder in seinem Auto. ‘Out there you’re on your own.’” (317). The widespread flight from East to West witnessed firsthand by Hilbig’s M.W. is something that Margarethe only reads about in the newspaper, thousands of miles away. As people in the Eastern Bloc begin to break out of their geographical confinement, Margarethe dwells on her own psychological confinement.
2.5.1. Confinement

In a novel that is in parts markedly devoid of physically descriptive adjectives, the frequency of the attribute *schmal* in *Nachwelt* is striking. Margarethe navigates the “schmalen Gang” between the clothes racks in a store (217) or in the stuffy Santa Monica museum (391), ascends a hiking path which becomes increasingly “schmaler” (278), treads “die schmalen Fußwege” (300) of Los Angeles, and drives on a street at the bottom of a “schmalen Tals. Eng” (320). “Schmale graue Tragbahren” adorn an exhibit at the “Temporary Contemporary” museum (237), and the facades of houses squeezed tightly together are also “schmal” (353).

At first glance there is nothing which distinguishes *Nachwelt* in respect to the prevalence of narrow dimensions from some of the other novels discussed here. One remarkable difference in Streeruwitz’s style, though, is the frequent lack of verb or predicate. We learn from the simple sentence fragment, “Schmale Gänge” (9), and later again “Die schmalen Gänge” (11), that there are narrow hallways in the house of Albrecht Joseph, one of Anna Mahler’s several ex-husbands. No other sentence elements are necessary here to push the issue of the narrow hallways’ symbolic capacity. On one level, these physical configurations structure the narrative backdrop. But the metaphorical aspect of this spatiality is unmistakable as well. By the end of the twentieth century, it has

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129 In *Der Verschollene*, Kafka brought us “die schmalen Terassen der Höfe” (198); “einen langen schmalen Flurgang” (287) in the apartment building of Delamarche and Brunhilde; and “dunkle schmale zerrissene Täler” on the way to the promised-land of Oklahoma (419). The hotel’s rooms in *Transit*’s Rue du Relais “lagen an schmalen Gängen, die auf das hohe Treppenhaus mündeten” (177). In Hilbig’s “Ich” we read of a “schmalen viereckigen Schacht” (249). This terminology of narrowness is common in German literary works dealing with the labyrinth motif. Cf. for example Ransmayr’s “Das Labyrinth”: “die steinernen Gänge, die sich so oft verzweigten und kreuzten, die breiter und schmäler wurden und einmal ins Freie, dann wieder in die Tiefe des Palastes führten und irgendwo in der Finsternis endeten” (211).
become understood that these narrow enclosures function semiotically and almost as clichés by this time, pointing to the constriction, restriction, and confinement of literary figures.

Such a sense of confinement runs as a thread throughout Nachwelt with physical and metaphorical implications. The threat of literal quarantine looms large from the beginning of Margarethe’s trip when Manon informs the protagonist that the area is being sprayed with pesticide (10). Margarethe toys at first with taking Manon’s advice to stay home after dark—“von dort an mußte sie sich nur noch im Haus bewegen” (14); but then she reconsiders: “Was sollte sie hier tun. Konnte man wirklich nicht hinaus. Sie konnte doch nicht jeden Abend nach Einbruch der Dunkelheit hier herumsitzen” (17). Her loneliness mixes with these feelings of physical confinement and as a result, she is frequently on the go throughout her ten days in Los Angeles. She often hops impulsively into her car (and in so doing, looking very much like the Americans whom she likes to reproach), for example when “einkaufen war plötzlich verlockend. Vielleicht hatte sie ja nur wegkommen wollen. Sie fuhr” (216). Regardless of these jaunts, she feels trapped by circumstance in many ways, and the freedom she tries to create for herself does nothing to alleviate her perceived confinement as a woman: “Wie hieß dieser Zustand? Doomed? Verstoßen ins Anderssein, das sich nichts nehmen konnte. Durfte. Keinen Raum. Das sich im Falle, eine Frau zu sein, zwischen den Beinen verbarg” (56-57). The protagonist’s sense of personal incarceration even turns into a psychosomatic reaction. Upon waking up one day in Los Angeles, Margarethe finds herself unable to move (95). This physical paralysis signifies her own conviction that she is confined and restricted, as a woman and as an unhappy person, within everyday life.
Streeruwitz’s particular style underscores this perceived confinement. Nele Hempel’s observations of the correspondence between the choppy syntax and the content of Streeruwitz’s plays apply as well to Nachwelt:

Über die den Sprachfluß zerstörende Interpunktion hinaus setzt Streeruwitz noch weitere sprachliche Mittel ein, um beschädigte Sprache zu gestalten. Oft mangelt es den Sätzen ihrer Dramenfiguren beispielsweise an Verben, was natürlich mangelnde Handlungsfähigkeit suggeriert und so dem Gefangensein der Figuren in ihrer Sprache und in ihrer Existenz voll entspricht. (38)

Margarethe’s “Gefangensein,” her overall sense of constriction, is reflected in her unfinished thoughts. The labyrinths in her personal and professional spheres lead to dead ends in her thought processes. Professionally, the Mahler research becomes a tangle of conflicting stories from which a tidy biography refuses to break free. Personally, Margarethe feels confined in her relationships. Love to Margarethe is a cycle of incarceration and liberation which leads to anything but fulfillment: “Von den Trieben erzwungene Gefangenschaften und Befreiung von Anfang an lebensnotwendig” (127). She sees her role in the relationship with Helmut as to play the kitten whose master always wins the game: “Liebevoller Verlust seiner Freiheit. Und dann wieder eine Befreiung notwendig” (241). As in some of the previously discussed novels, the idea of Verstrickung works spatially-metaphorically, expressing here the lovers’ intertwinement and then dissolution: “Und die Verstrickung ineinander ein stetes Spiel. Freiheit auf Fesselung folgte” (158). Prompted at one point by hearing the song “Stand by Your Man,” she reassures herself that after her first real love affair she was “nie in ein anderes Gefängnis.”

In addition to these emotional prisons which Margarethe constructs for herself, she also is confronted by the thought of real, physical incarceration of figures past and present. For instance, upon reading about a death-row inmate who announced his desire to be executed, she tries to imagine such a fate: “Aber das Elend. Die Polizeistation. Das Untersuchungsgefängnis. Das Gefängnis. Immer gefesselt. Die anderen Häftlinge. Was für Welten” (298).

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Leben verstrickt worden. Sie war dann doch immer sie geblieben. War nur kurz hinter
dem namenlosen ‘meine Frau’ verschwunden” (257). The spatial imagery invoked by
terms like “verstrickt” and “hinter...verschwunden” brings forth Margarethe’s anxiety
about having an identity which is tied up with or enveloped by another person.

Anna Mahler reportedly had thought of marriage as being “gefangen,” and posited
that life as a widow meant that one was finally “frei” (189). Afraid of becoming a
prisoner in her own relationship, Margarethe promises herself to be stronger around
The spatial metaphor points back again here clearly to her fear of confinement, of hiding
away inside of a male-dominated compromise or in something only “Geflicktes.”

2.5.2. Entfernung

Just as her sense of confinement apparently brings on a spell of physical paralysis,
at one point her psychological and physical distance from Helmut manifests itself in
physiological symptoms as well, when she nearly faints in a department store dressing
room: “Sie hatte das Gefühl, von weit hinter den Augen zu sehen. Die Welt glitt von ihr
weg und wieder auf sie zu. Zurück” (38). She recalls the incident a short time later: “Wie
die Welt auf sie zugekippt und wieder weg. Wie die Wellen des Meeres am Strand. Nur
gеometrischer” (40). The wavering distance she observes between herself and the world
highlights her own ambivalence: Margarethe yearns to create distance, but at the same
time she cannot handle the loneliness which these emotional and geographical spans
weg. Entfernte sich. War ihr trostlos. Aber das Gefühl blieb außen” (169). In addition to
repressing emotion—the narrator tells us often that Margarethe forces herself not to think
of painful topics, to forget them altogether—she often prefers to avoid people as well. Hiding out misanthropically becomes the easiest way to maintain this distance: “Fühlte sich sicher. In diesem warmen Zimmer, und die Welt weit weg” (54).

Margarethe finds to be irreconcilable the conflict between her fear of confinement and her fear of being alone. Margarethe, as Anna Mahler is alleged to have done, creates physical distance between herself and others in order to cope with, or to create, emotional distance. In so doing, she becomes a wall of resistance which traps her emotions in and keeps others out: “Eine Widerwille schwappete hoch in ihr. Sie hätte zu weinen beginnen können über die Heftigkeit. Eine Wand in sich. In sich und außen” (154). Margarethe wants distance, independence, and to remain unreachable, yet she longs paradoxically for Helmut to call. Her frustration when she cannot reach him takes the form of fragmentary thoughts strung together: “Aber seine Unerreichbarkeit. Nicht einmal die Maschine mehr zu erreichen. Hilflose Wut” (21). She considers leaving her own answering machine turned off—“Wäre es nicht besser, unerreichbar zu sein” (24). Margarethe’s desire to lose herself in a new place under the cover of anonymity marks a continuity twentieth-century literature. This same desire was notable with Kafka’s Karl Roßmann, Seghers’s Seidler, Johnson’s Gesine Cresspahl and Blach (who went to Jerichow “damit die Welt ihn ein bisschen aus dem Gedächtnis verlor,” 170-71), and Hilbig’s M.W. Similar to these characters, too, Margarethe’s dream of inaccessibility is just that—an idealistic dream. She finds out that “losing herself” away from home does not actually mean a new and improved outlook or opportunity, and she cannot cut the cord to her past and to her

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131 The lack of accessibility is a latent fear of the protagonist, who sometimes imagines herself unable to reach her child in the event of a nuclear attack: “Eine ständige Angst. Nur Hintergrund. Aber immer da. […] Und sie bliebe im Straßenverkehr stecken und konnte das Kind nicht mehr erreichen” (115).
life back in Europe. After not communicating with Helmut for three days, for instance, she tries to divert her thoughts from him by leaving her apartment. But she can never entirely escape her own thoughts. This is not helped by the fact that at the end of the twentieth century, no physical distance is too great to bridge virtually; indeed Margarethe must shroud the answering machine’s blinking light with a towel.

The possibility and facility of narrowing the gap between physical distances increased in the twentieth century, while emotional and non-material distances arguably increased as well. The nuclear family was no longer as easily defined, with the prevalence of step-families (to which both Anna Mahler and Margarethe belong), and with family members spread out across the globe rather than being concentrated in one region. Margarethe searches for a substitute core with which to ground herself. However, Margarethe’s personal center, the neglectful Helmut, no longer serves as her point of reference; he is in the process of moving to the outer margins of her life.

A discussion which Margarethe records between two women who knew Anna Mahler personally points to the artist’s creation of distance so that she always moved to the margins of others’ lives, before they could do so to her:

Manon: Divorce never bothered her. She always left. -Christine: It was always her that left. -Manon: She left. -Christine: She always took the decision so it never happened to her. -Manon: Nobody left her. -Christine: She made it happen. -Fistoulari war ihr untreu. -Manon: You could have stayed. It could have been o.k. She left. She crossed the ocean. She did not go around the corner on this. She really left. (190)

While Margarethe has come to Los Angeles only temporarily—and were she given the choice, she would have preferred to have Helmut by her side—Anna Mahler continually had taken leave of her surroundings in order to regain a sense of space and personal freedom from the men in her life. According to Manon’s representation, Mahler hated her
first husband Zsolnay, and she only married him “um von der Mutter wegzukommen” (245). Mahler also sent away her daughter Alma to boarding school and saw her as seldom as possible. “Entfernung” (33) describes both this physical distance and the intense emotional distance in the mother-daughter relationship.

Margarethe, for her part, constantly laments the physical and emotional distance she experiences, whether she has created it or not—“Und die Entfernung. Der Abstand, über den so hingeplaudert worden war, nie größer gewesen” (287). Distance is for Margarethe the large space between the reality of a person’s life and the stories told about it afterwards, a figurative gap depicted in terms of a material one: “Diese Entfernung. Zwischen dem, was gesagt wurde, und dem, was dann Wirklichkeit war. Warum war der Tod so weit von der Wirklichkeit entfernt. Sie lehnte sich zurück. Wie war dieser Riß zu schließen” (211). The distance she cannot bridge between the present and the past in writing the biography is but one type which weighs on Margarethe’s mind. On a more personal level, the distance regarding Helmut is put forth in much simpler terms: “Sie fühlte sich von ihm entfernt” (41). Margarethe perceives that Helmut has power over her “durch Abwesenheit. Entzug” (240), and she tries to turn the tables by creating absence as well. In this sense, Margarethe differs little from Karl Roßmann or her fictional contemporary M.W., who also long for the security of father figures while at the same time striving for true independence.132 This interpersonal burden evolves into a weight within Margarethe, and causes her to feel “weit entfernt von allem. Konnte sich selber

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132 When considering Margarethe’s nearly child-like ambivalence it is interesting to return to Wucherpfennig’s analysis of the fragment in Der Verschollene in which Karl pushes Brunelda around in a wagon, as if she were a child in a baby-stroller: “In Brunelda zeigt sich, was dem Wunsch, sich von der Familie zu lösen, letzten Endes entgegensteht: ein tyrannisch-frühkindlicher Liebeswunsch” (149). This is the paradox displayed by Margarethe as well.

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sehen. Wie sie dasaß. Schwere um die Mitte. Beschwert, als könnte sie nie wieder eine Bewegung machen. Warum war er nicht da” (234). She gains a type of oversight here that others might envy, a distanced perspective from her own self and situation. Unfortunately, her momentary out-of-body experience does not provide the clarity of perspective which she seeks, but only reinforces her own paralysis and reliance on Helmut.

Emotional distance is rivaled but also enhanced by the prominence of physical distances in the novel, brought to the foreground again and again as Margarethe tries to navigate her way around the city—and the reader sits in on these car rides as each turn of the journey is recounted. Assessing physical distance becomes a way of life—especially in Los Angeles, where one must drive in order to go nearly anywhere. In the busy metropolis, though, she can pretend to be “entfernt” from everything, but not “allein”: “Die Scheinwerfer der Autos. Im Strom des Abendverkehrs mitglitt. Dazugehörte. Nicht allein war. Sie hätte für immer so dahinfahren mögen. Im Fahren von allem entfernt. Aber auch nichts möglich” (57). In the anonymity of the city she finds the distance as well as the alienation that both comforts and discomforts her.

2.5.3. Perspective and Clarity

Wie sollte sie Höhe gewinnen. Überblick. Wenn sie sich so in die Realitäten fallen ließ. Sich hineinziehen ließ. Wie sollte sie einen Bericht anfertigen über eine Person? (212)

Margarethe is similar to some other protagonists in this study: she demands perspective, a meaningful overview of a world which she thinks affords her none. She differs, however, in having no desire to move toward das Innere of anything. Instead she only wants to forge a distance from which she can observe the world and report Mahler’s story with
clarity, ideally as if she were an object detached from reality, rather than as a feeble subject which falls helplessly into it. The narrator reminds us from time to time in Nachwelt that Margarethe’s goal is to find “Klarheit,” both in her research on Anna Mahler and in deliberations on her own life. “Sie hatte nur diese zehn Tage zum Nachdenken. Klarheit zu finden. Über alles. Über sich” (116). She considers it a mistake that she went to a party instead of staying home to brood: “Wenn sie Klarheit wollte, dann sollte sie lieber allein bleiben” (109). Reading provides no distraction for her either, as she cannot relate to the book’s characters: “Klarheit so nicht. So nicht der weite Ausblick zu gewinnen, in dem ein sicheres Gehen” (127). Her muddled thoughts stop her before they can end on even an uncertain note, such as “möglich wäre.”

In her search for oversight and clarity, Margarethe envies the elderly Ernst Krenek, who “kannte sein Leben. Wüßte, was es gewesen. Hatte es ausgehalten. Welches Unglück hatte sie noch vor sich?” (287). In respect to the road-of-life metaphor, Krenek has it nearly all behind him and can look back on it as a retrospective, while Margarethe is disquieted about which obstacles still stand before her on this road. She considers gaining overview by starting a new course of study: “Ein kleines Gebiet, auf dem Überblick zu gewinnen war” (354). Her attempts to affect Überblick in her everyday life are represented by some of her physical movements, which take her upward to a spatial position where she can look downward and outward onto the labyrinths below. While she is hiking, for instance, she reveals her urge to ascend in order to win “Höhe” (279).

Comparable somewhat to the recurrent unten/oben distinction of Hilbig’s “Ich”, Streeruwitz relies on the terms bergab and bergauf frequently as she describes Margarethe’s travels. A typical passage to this effect also uses repetition of the

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133 The “Blick von unten” which is brought to the forefront of Hilbig’s novel “Ich” is also touched on here—although in question are not workers under the control of the state,
expressions “Sie fuhr” and “bergab” to convey the monotony and prolonged duration of Margarethe’s time in the car (112). The narrator keeps us apprised of whether Margarethe is moving upward or downward, whether in her vehicle or on foot. To reach the area where Manon, Albrecht, and Pete live, Margarethe must drive “steil bergauf” (222), and then she naturally goes “die Straße bergab” (225) to leave for home. Later we learn that she is on a street which “zog sich gerade hin. Hinauf und hinunter. Aber nicht steil” (234).

As with the updates on her horizontal motions, that is, whether she is turning right or left, East or West, at any given point, the narrator’s remarks on Margarethe’s upward or downward progression are more than physical indicators. The erlebte Rede which reflects Margarethe’s thoughts—even, or especially, the most mundane ones—demonstrates that she is consumed with this up-and-down motion. As we saw above in her desire to gain “Höhe,” she often strives to the tops of hills in order to gain oversight and a broader view: “Sie ging weiter. Schnell. Lief fast. Sie wollte auf den Berggipfel. Sehen, was dahinter lag” (279). Indeed, her short-term goals are often located at a higher altitude, such as the theater she seeks (“Es ging bergauf,” 339). Many of her interviews regarding Anna Mahler are located at the top of a hill. However, all of the up and down motion can serve to confound and disorient, and especially in an unfamiliar place, as seen for example when Manon drives the protagonist around: “Hinauf und hinunter.

but the postwar generation, who were, from Margarethe’s perspective, smiled down upon condescendingly by their parents: “Die Erwachsenen hatten sich immer von den Kindern abgewandt. Hatten auf die Kinder hinuntergelächelt” (291). In Hilbig’s and Streeruwitz’s works, physical dimensions highlight social power structures in similar fashion. This had also been Anna Mahler’s place of residence. Manon talks of Anna Mahler’s location on the top of the hill: “Sie lebte hier auf dem Gipfel des Hügels, und sie wollte, daß mehr Menschen zu ihr hinaufkämen” (253). While living at the top gave her Überblick, it only increased the distance from meaningful human contact.
Margarethe verlor die Orientierung” (309).\footnote{The \textit{hinauf} and \textit{hinunter} adverbs are used in an expressly metaphorical way at least once in the novel. After a friend of her high school boyfriend was in an accident, she had been scared to call him: “Sie hatte sich verkröchen. War herumgeschlichen. Hatte alle gemieden. Die Berge hinauf und hinunter. Rastlos” (378). Emotionally, she was disoriented and uncertain, a state that is presented as a descension and ascension of mountains.\textsuperscript{135}} Driving on her own, Margarethe becomes lost easily as she loses her equilibrium upon descending from a hill, moving into an area where skyscrapers—like those in \textit{Der Verschollene} which blocked Karl Roßmann’s view in New York—obstruct any comprehensive view (338-39). The labyrinth of the city is thus not only disorienting but also prevents Margarethe from gleaning the perspective and clarity that she craves.

Margarethe’s need for \textit{Überblick}, coupled with her anxiety about physical or metaphorical confinement, draws her often toward the seemingly unbounded ocean: “Sie wollte zum Meer” (163); “Sie wollte ans Meer. Sie wollte viel Raum über sich haben. Höhe” (299). While Kafka’s Karl Roßmann viewed the Atlantic Ocean comfortably as a pathway back home (all the while knowing he cannot go back), Margarethe looks to the Pacific, which has no associations with her actual home. For this reason, it becomes a potentially new source for the security she has been unable to find in Austria. When she becomes lost, she drives westward in the direction of the ocean (112; 173). Only “der weite Blick über das Meer dämpfte die Schwermut” for Margarethe (337), and toward the end of her stay in Los Angeles once again the narrator informs us, “Sie wollte ans Meer” (380). The constant repetitive motions of the sea pledge the certainty and predictability she craves: “Klarheit aus einem solchen Immerwieder” (202). The tide comforts Margarethe by enveloping her with security: “Sie sah dem Meer zu. Ließ sich vom Dröhnen der Brandung einhüllen” (99). Indeed, from her point of view as she approaches
the beach, everyone “strebt nach rechts. In Richtung Meer” (396), toward this calming venue. The open water looks limitless and unrestricted, and as literature throughout the twentieth century has documented, people tend to turn further and further west for potential comfort. The Pacific is ideal in this respect because it links what is considered “the West” with what is considered the “Far East,” the original orientation point and site of the rising sun. It is perhaps this longing to come full circle which causes Margarethe to join many others in the course of the world’s history in associating the ocean with death: “Sie hatte immer gedacht, Sterben leichter sein müsse mit der Aussicht auf ein Meer” (233). While at a higher altitude and looking with “Aussicht” over the ever-changing but somehow still uniform and predictable ocean, Margarethe can temporarily forget the labyrinths which form the undergirding of her quotidian existence.

2.5.4. The Search for a Way Out

The city of Los Angeles proves labyrinthine in many respects for Margarethe. She drives extensively during her sojourn and becomes lost both on the road and within others’ houses: Margarethe “verlor sich in Einbahnstraßen” (284); she gets lost leaving the spacious house of one of her interviewees: “Sie habe sich verirrt. Wie käme sie hinaus” (335); after visiting Albrecht’s apparently smaller house on more than one occasion, she is “immer noch nicht sicher, den Weg zu finden” during her final time there (368). Margarethe gets lost in what she perceives to be a bad neighborhood coming back from the theater where she had seen Waiting for Godot (an excursion Manon tried to discourage her from, for this very reason). This passage exemplifies the type of staccato

136 See the section on Mutmassungen über Jakob earlier in this chapter.

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statements which Streeruwitz strings together to prolong the narrative moment of

Margarethe’s lost state:


Unlike Karl Roßmann, Margarethe has a map to guide her during her stay in America, but it does her no good anyway (nor do the street signs). She becomes so disoriented that the next morning, when she wants to look at a map to see if pesticide had been sprayed in the vicinity of her labyrinthine journey, she realizes that she has no idea what area she had covered (346). This seemingly “endlose Fahrt” (284) is one of several undertaken by Margarethe. She spends a great deal of time in Los Angeles looking for an exit or a way out of one location or another. Her anxiety that the trips will never end, or will end in disaster, finds resonance in the simple and conspicuous repetition of “fuhr.”

Her frequent lack of a physical Ausweg finds correspondence in her want of emotional escapes. Margarethe has flashbacks to a scene in her childhood: a priest shows concentration-camp footage before the six-year-olds’ first Holy Communion, telling them that the Nazi evils were present within them all. Margarethe had repressed this incident for years: “Und Verdrängung der einzige Ausweg. Wie sollte man es auch ertragen”

The intervals between such repetitions are sometimes larger than in the above passage, and are interfused with Margarethe’s stream of consciousness: “Sie fuhr nach links. [...] Sie fuhr in die richtige Richtung. Fuhr in die Sonne. Nach Osten. [...] Sie fuhr weiter. [...] Sie fuhr. [...] Sie fuhr dahin. [...] Sie fuhr. Was machte sie hier. Wohin fuhr sie eigentlich” (262-63). These expressions strewn amidst more personal thoughts bring the reader back periodically to Margarethe’s positioning on the roads of Los Angeles, and suggest that she must continually prod herself to keep her attention on the road.
(172). As a child she did not need a way out yet, since she and her friend Claudia “hatten sich die Unruhe weggehüpft. Damals” (288). She remembers fondly these times when she was able to skip her troubles away, or to skip away from them—a tactic exercised by adults as well. The spatial-linear metaphor in any case remains strong here; if life is a path, then it follows that we can move forward and leave the past with all of its blemishes behind us. Margarethe has discovered the repression inherent in this approach, however natural.

Writing and researching is another method of escapism and of repression for Margarethe. She freely admits toward the beginning of the narration, “Die Anna Mahler-Biographie war ein Versuch gewesen, einen Ausweg zu finden” (32). An “Ausweg” for Margarethe is figurative: she is trying to come to terms with her forebears’ past and with her own life; and literal: writing is a solution to her current financial problems. Eventually though, like Streeruwitz herself (who gave up on writing Anna Mahler’s biography after doing the research), Margarethe comes to realize that this project is not the way out of anything. Quite the opposite: by delving into others’ lives, she enters labyrinths just as inescapable as—or even more so than—her own.

At one point Margarethe becomes suddenly cognizant of the pointlessness of her pursuits, and of the impossibility of finding clarity and vision:

Sie fuhr. Was machte sie hier. Wohin fuhr sie eigentlich. Was war das für ein sinnloses Unternehmen. Was hatte sie hier verloren. Warum war sie

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138 Here the author and semi-autobiographical protagonist seem to diverge. Streeruwitz has claimed her writing, at least at one point in her life, was an attempt “ein großes Unglück meines Lebens sprachlich zu erfassen, es nicht zu verdrängen, sondern manifest zu machen, um damit umgehen zu können. Die Frage lautet ja immer: Verdrängen oder Nicht-Verdrängen? Und da ist Schreiben für mich eine Anti-Verdrängungsstrategie” (Theater Phönix 1993). Significant to the theme of the labyrinth and disorientation, Streeruwitz also views literature as a “Versuch einer Orientierung” (Marlene Streeruwitz im Gespräch 44).
hierhergekommen. Und wie hatte sie einen Augenblick annehmen können, das alles wäre wichtig. Hatte sie jetzt wegen Anna Mahler diese Liebe verloren. Wegen einer Biografie. (263)

Her entire trip and research project are depicted here as a single “Irrfahrt,” and the lack of aim and purpose are encompassed in the interrogative-as-declarative statement, “Wohin fuhr sie eigentlich” (very few question marks punctuate Nachwelt, despite the numerous queries posed). She is no longer worried about losing herself, but about possibly having lost Helmut because of her career. So she is back at square one personally as well as professionally. When she decides not to follow through with the Anna Mahler biography, however, Margarethe feels “befreit. War verwundert über die Selbstverständlichkeit, dieses Eindringen in andere Leben” (371). At the end of her trip in the geographical labyrinth of Los Angeles then, she is perhaps on the way to breaking out of her self-imposed confinement and at least some of her personal labyrinths.
CHAPTER 3

WAITING

The frustrating labyrinths and dead ends of twentieth-century experience resulted in the representation of many static periods of waiting in German literature. The uniqueness of situations in which the writers in this study found themselves resulted naturally in extremely diverse treatments of the waiting theme: refugees waiting in forced exile, as depicted in *Transit*, are in most respects hardly comparable to Margarethe waiting fixatedly for a phone call in *Nachwelt*, for instance. But this chapter does establish certain consistencies throughout the twentieth century, regardless of the particular circumstances surrounding a work’s origins: evident in all five works examined here are (1) the symptoms of waiting, such as boredom and impatience; and (2) the social and personal hierarchies that are formed through the dynamics of waiting.

Boredom and impatience were discussed by many theorists and philosophers in the twentieth century in the context of modernity or postmodernity. Among the key figures who addressed these topics are Benjamin, who related boredom to his notion of the *flâneur* in the *Passagen-Werk*, and Henri Lefebvre, who in his groundbreaking

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Critique of Everyday Life described quotidian experience in the modern world as “unchangeable in its boredom” (228). Like waiting itself for the protagonists in these novels, boredom too could be seen as a dubious constant that stands for, at least temporarily, stability and safety, if not stimulation or progression toward a goal.

Impatience is another result of having to wait for things in a world that stresses instantaneousness, as discussed for example by David Harvey in The Condition of Postmodernity. The preoccupation with boredom and impatience due to waiting in the last century is illustrated by the prevalence of these phenomena for literary figures in a variety of situations.

An analysis of the waiting theme in a range of contexts also allows a sharper look at the exploitation of the less powerful carried out by those identified to be in power. The ordering and regulating time, as Elias Canetti wrote in Masse und Macht, underlies all human activities and defines the ruling powers of any era (137-39). Control over others’ time is often exerted through forced waiting periods. In some cases, gender roles within a society or within an interpersonal relationship are fundamental in determining the waiting hierarchies, while in other cases it is more a matter of socio-economic class. Either way, the hierarchies of waiting are structured according to who is making whom wait, as the powerless are forced to endure a “Schwebesituation im Meer der Ungewissheit” (Pikulik 145). Sometimes writers portray their characters as vying for the upper hand, such that the positioning within this sea of uncertainty shifts accordingly throughout the narration.

2 Pikulik is referring here to Siegfried Kracauer’s understanding of waiting situations as outlined in his 1922 essay “Die Wartenden” (Ornament der Masse) in which Kracauer refers specifically to waiting as a third alternative to either blindly embracing or outrightly rejecting religious faith. Because Kracauer was among the refugees in Marseilles in 1940, though, his earlier essay takes on an interesting significance in relation to the situation depicted in Transit—waiting which indeed involves a form of faith and blind hope.
In other instances, the characters’ stances in relation to one another are firmly set, and the reader experiences only the resulting dynamics between the waiting and the waited-on. The former are often at the mercy of the latter, but at the same time, those who are compelled to wait are often represented as admirable in their persistence and courage, as Anna Seghers asserts: “im Warten steckt kein Zauber, es vermag nichts über den anderen, es gehört nur dem Wartenden an, eben deshalb erfordert es Mut” (Das siebte Kreuz 127).

Waiting, with its hierarchical tendencies, is sometimes depicted in literature as a type of social game. As the following close readings indicate, some of the characters seem to learn the rules of the game, even if without much awareness (e.g. Karl Roßmann); others ignore them when possible (Seidler); some are frustrated when the rules of waiting are broken or turned against them (Jakob; M.W.); while still others think that waiting is the solitary rule in the game of life (Margarethe). Occasional reflections on waiting and on characters’ status within the “game” are to be found in these novels, but for the most part, the particular social construction of the waiting hierarchy appears to reside below the conscious level, as something to which the figures adapt without knowing.3

Beyond these implications of the waiting theme for different aspects of twentieth-century experience, I also consider the following question in this chapter: how does a writer portray a character who is supposed to be in limbo, while at the same time

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3 In any case, the literary works studied here support some of the social theories put forth by Pierre Bourdieu or John Searle on games, rules, and hierarchies; in particular, a person’s habitus or inherent capabilities seem to become “functionally equivalent to the system of rules, without actually containing any representations or internalizations of those rules” (Searle 142). In general, no one needs to explain to Karl Roßmann explicitly what is expected of him in the context of a particular waiting hierarchy, for instance; he performs instinctively, as if playing by the rules in his new environment from the very beginning.
maintaining the narrative illusion that time is passing? Mendilow poses the question in regard to language, and its successive and linear nature: "How can the novelist working in such a medium convey an impression of simultaneity, of backward and forward movement, of immobility? How can he communicate immediacy, and the sense of the living, and duration in all its modes?" (32). One problem with this task, as Genette notes, is that duration—and by association also narrative pace—is "intrinsic not to the text of that narrative but only to its graphic presentation" (33). Given this, how do writers retard and precipitate the relation of characters' time spent waiting, and as such manipulate a particular receptive experience? One way to deal with this problem is simply through specific word choice, such as in the succinct statement in *Transit*: "Die Menschen warteten fieberhaft" (220). Waiting for something to happen, which at first seems like an immanently passive act, turns feverish in this formulation of the impatient, restless desire for an acceleration of bureaucracy. This chapter will point out examples of how the particular syntax of a passage can also communicate waiting periods, or their antithesis of rushing to do something, and the distorted sense of temporality that comes with having too much idle time on one's hands.

Spatial and material metaphors mark further means of representing time spent waiting. The container metaphor is especially pertinent to this chapter as a common means of verbally representing empty time—that is, time which must be "filled" in some way, in order to prevent the modern phobia of "Horror vacui—der Schrecken vor der Leere" (Kracauer 109). Viewing time spent waiting in terms of quantifiable space is a psychological survival tactic for literary characters, who probably could only despair if they were to regard time in its infinite, limitless essence. By imposing boundaries on it, and by creating their own mental time frame around a finite amount of seemingly
occupiable space, those who must linger in the "Wartesaal der Geschichte" (C. Schwarz 214) are able to appropriate that which is essentially controlled by others—their own time.

3.1. Der Verschollene: "warum läßt Du mich denn solange warten"

The urge toward social progress as discussed in Chapter 2 manifests itself in great anxiety about "getting ahead." The ensuing impatience serves only to lengthen the subjective duration of the wait in the mind of those waiting. Karl’s perspective on the passage of time while waiting for the end of the uncomfortable dinner at the Pollunders’ is expressed by the narrator with a graphic simile: "Das Essen vergieng [sic] langsam wie eine Plage" (80). The material metaphor "Das Essen zog sich [...] in die Länge" (82) also elongates the waiting time to correspond with how it is experienced by the impatient Karl (while in his own utterances, Karl is far less prone to such metaphoricization and more inclined toward simple perceptual declaration: "Wie langsam die Zeit vergeht," 117).

Behind such moments of intolerance toward waiting lie various hierarchies and power structures which subordinate Karl ever further. Not only must he wait until the lengthy meal is over, but then he must conform to the schedule imposed upon him, so that others of higher standing are not kept waiting unnecessarily. Before leaving the Pollunders, for example, Green orders Karl to visit Klara first because that fits well in Green’s "Zeiteinteilung" (112). Karl, despite his impatience to leave the country manor, bows to Green’s planned distribution of time without protest.

Another scene aptly demonstrates Kafka’s tendency to frame power structures within the social dynamics of waiting. After Karl is fired, Robinson voluntarily lies to the policeman about this fact: "Nur ist er riesig beschäftigt und wenn man etwas von ihm

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haben will, muß man lange warten” (282). Robinson’s statement indicates that in the version of American society crafted by Kafka, social importance can be judged by whether one is made to wait, or whether one makes others wait. Notions of perceived power and wealth are revealed through Kafka’s representations of interactions that are based on the competing forces behind these waiting periods. This novel’s treatment of the waiting theme also supports Anderson’s characterization of Der Verschollene as diverging from the tradition of the nineteenth-century property narrative (Cf. Kafka’s Clothes 114): in this work, time itself is commodified and valued higher than most concrete possessions, leading to a variety of material and spatial metaphors which represent periods of waiting and the figures’ resulting boredom and impatience.

3.1.1. Hierarchies and the Dynamics of Waiting

Karl typifies the outsider in almost every situation in which he finds himself. As such, he is rarely attended to with immediacy and urgency, but instead is coerced into waiting for others to act at their own convenience. This circumstance comes to light already in the first chapter, “Der Heizer.” Karl is an obvious outsider within the labyrinthine layout of the ship, as elucidated in the previous chapter, but he posits himself as an insider in his defense of the stoker before his superiors. The stoker is paradoxical in that he is an outsider himself, but at first he appears to epitomize the role of the literal and

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4 “Accurate timekeepers and accurate maps have long been worth their weight in gold, and command over spaces and times is a crucial element in any search for profit” (Harvey 226).

5 As Gabriele von Natzmer Cooper and others have noted, Der Verschollene shares with Der Prozeß and Das Schloß the leitmotif of the outsider who tries in vain to become an insider (75). This common feature prompted Max Brod to designate Der Verschollene as the first work in Kafka’s “Trilogie der Einsamkeit,” in which “Fremdheit, Isoliertheit mitten unter den Menschen sind das Grundthema” (Amerika, “Nachworte” 261).
figurative insider. Sovereign in regard to the ship’s inner workings, he presents himself as confident in his wish to confront his higher-ups with his dissatisfaction—until actually faced with them, at which point he becomes craven and is revealed as an insecure and inarticulate outsider within the hierarchy of the ship’s personnel. Karl steps in to his defense and seems to hold a voice of some authority, until it is discovered that his uncle, the esteemed Senator, is present on the scene as well. The Senator proceeds to divulge the details of his nephew’s expulsion from his parents’ house after being seduced by a servant, who then became pregnant. At this point, Karl’s outsider status is reaffirmed as he is hooked off the stage where he had voiced his opinions (36 ff.).

The theme of waiting clearly exposes the dynamics of such power structures and hierarchies among characters in the novel, as the following examples support. After deboarding and then realizing that he left his umbrella on the ship, Karl “bat schnell den Bekannten, der nicht sehr beglückt schien, um die Freundlichkeit, bei seinem Koffer einen Augenblick zu warten” (8). This acquaintance, it can be assumed, does not wait by the suitcase for the length of time that Karl remains inside the ship. Karl realizes his mistake shortly after leaving the suitcase behind—the stranger has no incentive to heed Karl’s request to wait. In Der Verschollene, waiting for others never takes place out of kindness or courtesy, but only out of duty or obligation. The stoker, for instance, is depicted as waiting subserviently outside the doors of the ship’s officers: “Der Heizer an der Türe wartete angespannt auf den Augenblick, bis seine Hilfe nötig würde” (22). As in Kafka’s Der Prozeß and Das Schloß, characters’ positions referential to doors and

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6 Inseparable from the theme of waiting in Der Verschollene is the notion of subservient expectation, as the lowest figures in the hierarchy await their next command: “Der Diener erwartete in Habitachtstellung jeden Augenblick einen auf den Heizer bezüglichen Befehl seines Kapitäns” (27-28).
doorways play a significant role in this novel: the door assumes symbolic proportions as the barrier between the insider and the outsider. Thus, although Karl waits hesitatingly outside of the stoker’s door upon their first encounter, the stoker is eager to secure him on his side of the door (9), perhaps longing for the companionship of a fellow outsider and compatriot.

Inside the captain’s quarters, “wo doch die Herren am runden Tisch längst empört über den nutzlosen Lärm waren, der ihre wichtigen Arbeiten störte, wo der Hauptkassier allmählich die Geduld des Kapitäns unverständlich fand und zum sofortigen Ausbruch neigte” (29-30), we see an exception to the norm of waiting hierarchies. The other members of this old boys’ network around the table cannot comprehend why the Captain chooses not to exert his authority. Described as “ungeduldig” (26), they are resentful that their work is being put on hold, and that, in essence, the lowly stoker is forcing them to wait rather than the other way around.

Later, in the segment preceding the chapter “Ein Landhaus bei New York,” Karl’s uncle is embarrassed to keep the esteemed Pollunder waiting for his nephew who, having just found out about the excursion to the country manor, hurries off to prepare for the trip (71). Once at the Landhaus, Karl’s outsiderness is intensified further through the figure of Klara, Pollunder’s daughter, and his destiny to be the waiting party is confirmed. Karl is immediately attracted to Klara, but they abruptly clash as Klara asserts herself as the more dominant of the two. She is instructive but authoritative in informing Karl about how things work at the estate, in particular the waiting hierarchies. For instance, as Karl

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7 Politzer notes about this scene, “In this display of impatience Karl proves to be a typical Kafka hero. Not only is he deaf to his uncle’s words, he also disregards the senator’s gesture of disgust when he sees that his warnings are in vain” (136).

8 Karl’s dependence on others to lead him through “the system” is reminiscent of Josef K.’s situation as well. Displaying impatience with the waiting involved in his trial, K.
stands up from the dinner table because he is disgusted by the eating habits of another
guest, Herr Green, Klara reprimands him: “Sie müssen noch sitzen bleiben,” sagte Klara.
[...] ‘Wir werden bald zusammen verschwinden. Haben Sie Geduld’” (82). When Klara
later shows Karl his bedroom, she does not allow Karl any time for exploration: “Karl
wollte natürlich das Zimmer sich gleich anschauen, aber Klara erklärte ungeduldig und
fast schreiend, das habe doch Zeit und er solle nur vorher mitkommen” (89). She refuses
to be made to wait by this outsider to her home. Klara exhibits her power in this fashion
again when she announces that she is retiring to her room with no intentions of waiting
for Karl: “Ich werde nicht gerade auf Dich warten, aber wenn Du kommen willst so
komm” (94). Kafka portrays Klara with the same powerful allure possessed by many of
his female characters, but she is also an indigenous insider who stands in contrast to the
stranger Karl. Thus she is privileged enough to either wait or not wait for Karl as she
chooses. She also plays with Karl’s expectations and awareness as he tries to figure out
the rules of these waiting hierarchies. For instance, Klara first tells him that it is too late
for his piano-playing. As she starts to leave for her bedroom, she pauses: “‘Warten Sie’,
sagte sie, ohne seine Hand anzunehmen, ‘vielleicht sollten Sie doch spielen.’ Und sie
verschwand durch eine kleine Seitentür, neben der das Piano stand. ‘Was ist denn?’
dachte Karl, ‘lange kann ich nicht warten, so lieb sie auch ist’” (117). But of course, Karl
has no other choice but to wait. He is simply not in a position himself to turn the tables in
the mansion; therefore, Herr Green expresses his anger and flaunts his insider status when
Karl causes him to wait while he says goodbye to Klara and Mack: “Roßmann warum
kommen Sie denn nicht? Warum lassen Sie mich warten?” (121). Green finds it unacceptable that a nonentity like Karl would have the nerve to keep him waiting this way.

In contrast to characters such as Klara and Herr Green, Karl is at first uncomfortable with treating others as subordinate to himself. He is hesitant to make the servant wait for him in the Pollunder household, even if the position as a Diener might entail this. “Wenn Sie hier warten wollen, so ist das sicherlich eine große Freundlichkeit von Ihnen und ich nehme sie dankbar an” (102), Karl tells him. Knowing all too well how it feels to be left in wait, Karl then assures the servant with the utmost formality and politeness that he will, in any case, return after awhile to inform him of his next steps, so as not to keep him waiting in vain. However, shortly after this scene, Karl begins to show a noteworthy side of himself which has been overlooked in much of the scholarship written about this novel. Namely, Karl develops an assertiveness as he proceeds on his disorienting journey: he gradually learns the rules of the American waiting game, and thus he figures out that he can demand those of lower social status to wait for him. For instance, “im Ton strengen Befehles,” Karl says to a servant, “Sie warten auf mich knapp vor dieser Tür!” (115). Karl becomes likewise abrupt when the servant knocks on the door while Karl is waiting for Klara’s return.

Es klopfte an die Gangtür und der Diener, der die Türe nicht ganz zu öffnen wagte, flüsterte durch einen kleinen Spalt: ‘Verzeihen Sie, ich wurde soeben abberufen und kann nicht mehr warten.’ ‘Gehen Sie nur’, sagte Karl, der sich nun getraute, den Weg ins Speisezimmer allein zu finden, ‘lassen Sie mir nur die Laterne vor der Tür.’ (117)

Karl has pushed to the wayside his earlier polite formalities and instead dishes out commands like never before, as he begins to adapt to an environment that is dictated by waiting procedures. This can be observed later, when a waiter from the Hotel occidental
is commissioned by the Head Cook to take Karl and his suitcase to the hotel where he
will start his new job as an elevator attendant. Karl requests, “Dann warten Sie bitte noch
einen Augenblick” (166). Despite his politeness here, he nevertheless retains the upper
hand (for the time being) by structuring his own time table rather than reacting to orders.

The character Therese, Karl’s friend and coworker in the hotel, provides some
telling examples of the novel’s waiting dynamics.9 When the two first meet, Therese
knocks on his door and Karl asks her to wait outside while he dresses. Therese replies
that he should just unlock the door and return under the covers, assuring him, “ich werde
ein wenig warten” (178). He reacts to her orders, and she considerately waits for him to
cover up. With Therese—like with only very few of the novel’s many characters—Karl is
actually on equal footing, a status which becomes apparent in this discourse of waiting.

In the actions and reactions of the society around them, however, Karl often has
the upper hand between the two. This translates to better service for Karl than for Therese
when they are in town running errands.

Therese merkte bald, daß Karls Hilfe hiebei nicht zu verachten war, daß
sie vielmehr in vieles eine große Beschleunigung brachte. Niemals mußte
sie in seiner Begleitung wie sonst oft darauf warten, daß die
überbeschäftigten Geschäftsmänner sie anhörten. Er trat an den Pult und
klopfte auf ihn solange mit den Knöcheln, bis es half, er rief über
Menschenmauern sein noch immer etwas überspitztes, aus hundert
Stimmen leicht herauszuhörendes Englisch hin, er ging auf die Leute

9 As mentioned in the previous chapter, in the only extended embedded narrative in the
book, Therese tells the story of how her mother climbed onto the construction site where
she eventually met her death. “Sie sagte Therese nicht, ob sie warten oder weggehn solle,
und Therese nahm dies als Befehl zum Warten, da dies ihren Wünschen am besten
entsprach” (201). Destitute and delirious from hunger and weariness, Therese’s mother
cannot assert her usual maternal authority by telling her daughter to wait for her or to go
elsewhere. Therese assumes the filial role anyway, believing that the natural order of
things would involve an instruction from her mother to wait. This leads to Therese
witnessing her mother’s death, an event that the woman would have presumably
prevented had she not been mentally confused in her state of desperation.

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It remains unclear to what extent Karl’s prompter service is effected by his newfound assertiveness and his willingness to show impatience and dissatisfaction with waiting, and to what extent Karl’s gender gives him such priority over Therese. This is a significant distinction, as the former would imply a commentary by Kafka about Karl and the impact that living in America has made on his internal character, while the latter would be more a criticism of the external society.

Karl never maintains his power to make others wait, or to prevent himself from having to wait, for very long. Karl cannot move ahead socially, thus any steps forward he has taken within these hierarchies are soon negated. When Karl is fired from the hotel with only vague justification, the Head Waiter makes Karl wait while his fate is determined by others; indeed he does not even acknowledge the elevator boy, causing Karl to wonder whether he is expected to stay or to leave. "Karl aber glaubte, es würde sich nicht gut ausnehmen, wenn er jetzt, da er nun schon einmal hier war, das Bureau wieder verlassen würde, ohne vom Oberkellner den Befehl hiezu erhalten zu haben" (222). Karl is no longer in control of his surroundings, a fact proven by his premature termination from the hotel, and reinforced by the indefinite waiting times suddenly imposed on him. These waiting periods are accompanied by no hints as to what will happen next, as his future is in the hands of those whose own lives are in other hands with even higher status. Open exchanges are absent in such situations, providing no opportunity for the oppressed waiting party to gain the upper hand—in fact, an intimidating silence often pervades the atmosphere, such as when Karl’s fellow employee Giacomo enters the hotel office, “wollte zu Karl treten, ließ aber, durch die allgemein herrschende Stille erschreckt, davon ab und wartete” (246). Giacomo, as so many
exploited figures in this novel, knows that the only prudent gesture during this
tremendous “Stille” is to wait until he is called upon by those above him before he acts.

After causing Karl to be fired from his job, Robinson has the nerve to reproach
Karl: “warum läßt Du mich denn solange warten” (268). Robinson believes to have some
authority over Karl, but at the same time he admits his dependence on Karl while he
recuperates, because “Delamarche ist ja viel zu ungeduldig” (269). The chapter “Ein
Asyl” then begins with the chauffeur demanding pay from Karl for the extended
“Wartezeit” outside of the hotel (272). A penniless Karl is asked to pay for the time that
the vagabond Robinson had kept the driver waiting for him. Instead of requesting the
money directly, the driver says as Karl rushes away: “Noch einen kleinen Augenblick
Geduld mein Herr!” (ibid.). Unable to compensate the driver for the time spent waiting
for him, Karl’s powerlessness is accentuated further here. He has made someone wait for
him, but this results only in a debt, not in any real power.

In Karl’s next station following his stint at the hotel, he is back to square one in
the social chain as the person who waits rather than one who obliges others to wait. At

10 Further, Robinson’s explanation for loitering in the hotel is that he needed to wait for
Karl because the latter had promised him money. The relationship between Karl and his
rogue friends does not really change, though, despite the fact that Karl maintains a paying
job for some time and is thus actually higher in social rank. The waiting boundaries were
drawn in an earlier scene, after a rift about some money Karl had hidden from them, to
which Robinson self-righteously declares, “Alle Geduld hat ein Ende” (164). When Karl
then discovers that the two have stolen the cherished photograph of his parents, he calls
back to them in the darkness that they may return it anytime with impunity, an offer to
which he receives no answer. “Noch eine lange Weile wartete Karl ob man sich oben
nicht doch noch anders entscheiden würde. Zweimal rief er in Abständen: ‘Ich bin noch
immer da.’ Aber kein Laut antwortete, nur einmal rollte ein Stein den Abhang herab,
vielleicht durch Zufall, vielleicht in einem verfehlten Wurf” (169). Karl’s act of lingering
in the hope that the unreliable men would return with one of the few possessions from his
past accentuates his impotence and standing as an outsider, and it rouses his own
impatience with this status that he cannot shed.
the residence of the slovenly Brunelda, Karl must learn about a new hierarchy and acquire skills for adapting to yet another situation of endless waiting. As the disoriented Robinson and Karl wait for Delamarche to act before they dare to do anything, the narrator refers to the former two as “die zwei hinter ihm Wartenden” (291). Both Karl and Robinson lose any unique identity at this point, as they become literal and figurative shadows of Delamarche. They are simply the waiting ones, the “Wartenden” who cannot be certain of what lies beyond Brunelda’s apartment door where they linger.

Once inside the apartment, the inferior status of Karl and Robinson becomes intensified. Not only must they wait in a temporal sense, they also must wait on Brunelda and her sycophants, serving their every need. After Robinson explains the situation to him, Karl paraphrases the waiting hierarchy that had been established before his own arrival: “Du bist also der Diener des Delamarche geworden?” (310). Robinson proceeds to defend his position, but Karl insists that he is certain this is “kein Dienst, sondern eine Sklaverei” (313). Karl has been dragged into this form of slavery as well. Delamarche barks at Robinson and Karl, “Verkriecht Euch irgendwohin und wartet, bis man Euch braucht” (360). The two have become such undesirables in this environment that they are only to wait invisibly until they can be of use. Also interesting is Delamarche’s changed role; on equal footing with the wanderers Robinson and Karl in the past, now as Brunelda’s personal assistant/servant he has the authority to order around his old friends, making them wait in the same way that Brunelda does to him. The reverse is not true,

11 While perhaps never to this extreme, Karl submits himself to this type of servile mentality regularly, as he possesses a “vorbehaltlose Anerkennung aller Autoritäten und Hierarchien, verbunden mit ausgeprägtem Statusdenken, und eine ebenso absolute Verinnerlichung der ‘Dienstordnung’” (Engel 544). But the circumstances at Brunelda’s go too far even for Karl, who at least needs some promise of gratification before he will submit to authorities.

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according to this microcosmic hierarchy; Brunelda has the upper hand and becomes impatient waiting for Delamarche to undress her, for example: “das mußte Delamarche besorgen auf den sie nun ungeduldig wartete” (296).\footnote{The distinct dynamics of waiting between these two comes forth clearly in a scene in which Delamarche combs the impatient Brunelda’s hair: “Ungeduldig über die lange Dauer des Kämmens, fuhr Brunelda mit der dicken roten Zunge zwischen den Lippen hin und her, manchmal riß sie sich sogar mit dem Ausruf ‘Aber Delamarche!’ gänzlich von Delamarche los, der mit erhobenem Kamm ruhig wartete, bis sie den Kopf wieder zurücklegte” (369-70).}

While they are sequestered on the balcony, Robinson explains to Karl that the same rules apply to him; in their capacity as servants, the two are not allowed into the apartment until those privileged enough to live inside ring a bell: “Warte hier nur ruhig mit mir, bis es läutet. Dann kannst Du ja versuchen, ob Du weckommst” (302). At first, Karl accepts and plays by these rules. However, his experience in America has taught him that such hierarchies are part of a fairly simple game, and that there always will be others out there who must listen to them; it is only a matter of finding people with lower social status who will do so.

When Karl and Robinson leave the apartment to fetch breakfast from the kitchen for Brunelda, they are met with an abrupt “Setzt Euch und wartet bis ich für Euch Zeit habe” (365). Karl determines that after a half-hour they have waited long enough, figuring they can discretely arrange a Bruneldian breakfast from the leftovers on unwashed dishes. Before doing this, though, Karl expresses his impatience to a worker in the kitchen: “warum wollen Sie uns denn das Frühstück nicht geben? Nun warten wir schon eine halbe Stunde, das ist lang genug” (367). Once out of the immediate clutches of Brunelda and Delamarche, Karl recognizes that he might have some authority again and refuses to wait indefinitely.
Back in the confines of Brunelda’s quarters, though, Karl’s subordinate status returns. He is scolded by Brunelda for taking too long with breakfast, a tirade deemed by the narrator as “sehr ungerecht” (370). The commentary on the injustice of this situation is one of the few instances of a direct judgment from the narrator in this novel. If this utterance is considered to be erlebte Rede, it could be presumed that Karl is reflective of his situation and ponders it in relation to past experiences and observations. He does not rebel against this unfair treatment, but—rather than giving in with complete submission to the whims of this tyrannical woman—he decides to play along, in the hopes that this behavior will offer him a way out or a way up the social ladder. After setting the table properly with the breakfast, Karl tells Brunelda “Zum erstenmal habe ich nicht gewußt, wie alles eingerichtet werden soll, nächstes Mal werde ich es besser machen.’ Aber noch während des Redens erinnerte er sich, zu wem er sprach, er war zusehr von der Sache selbst befangen gewesen” (371). In the end, Karl humors Brunelda’s impatience while trying not to forget that this is a game in which he is at this point trapped, but for which he at least understands the rules.

Upon an apparently tardy arrival at the “Unternehmen Nr. 25” (a brothel) with Brunelda, a scene in one of the novel’s fragments, the administrator asks Karl whether he is always so unpunctual. Karl responds that he had faced various obstacles on his way, to which he receives a curt reply: “‘Die [Hindernisse] gibt es bekanntlich immer’, sagte der Verwalter. ‘Hier im Haus gelten sie aber nicht. Merk Dir das!’ Auf solche Reden hörte Karl kaum mehr hin, jeder nützte seine Macht aus und beschimpfte den Niedrigen. War man einmal daran gewöhnt, klang es nicht anders als das regelmäßige Uhrenschlagen” (384). The analogy of such reprimands to the strikes of a clock punctuates the power relations associated with waiting: the ability to structure the time of others is equivalent
to social power. Karl is no longer as directly accommodating to those who aim to harass and regulate the time of the lower class. His previous senses of subservience and guilt have disappeared, and considering his past instances of making others wait, he must include himself in his sentiment that “jeder nützte seine Macht aus.” Karl has learned to exploit what little power he has, whenever he can.

Many scholars have noted that Der Verschollene is not an Entwicklungsroman or Bildungsroman in the traditional sense. For instance, Anderson writes that “Karl never engages in introspection, rarely thinks back over the course of his adventures in order to give them some coherence or meaning, passively endures the accidents and adventures that befall him and propel him forward. Thus he never learns from his experiences, but re-experiences the same events in a timeless, deterritorialized present” (109). But tracing the theme of waiting throughout the novel provides one contradiction to Anderson’s generalization. The accidents and coincidences continue to drive Karl forward toward an elusive goal, yet at the same time he does indeed learn—for better or for worse—that he can assert some temporary authority by subjecting others (those whom he considers socially weaker) to the frustrating process of waiting.

3.1.2. Impatience and Monotony in Capitalism

The various hierarchies showcased in Der Verschollene are specifically characteristic of a capitalist society. The difference in classes and power has in most cases to do with matters of money and labor in Kafka’s version of America, a place of here-and-now desire fulfillment where some are privileged, and, as a rule, need not wait for others; instead they are used to being waited on by the lower classes. Generally, the

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13 See also FN 15 in Chapter 2.
less economically fortunate must wait for something to happen, or for others to act, before they proceed with their own lives. This leads to increasing impatience in the well-off, as they become accustomed to immediate gratification.\footnote{Harvey discusses this point in relation to his notion of time-space compression: “In the realm of commodity production, the primary effect has been to emphasize the values and virtues of instantaneity” (286).}

There is a sense in Der Verschollene that the wealthier are arrogantly eager to cause trouble for the lower classes, as if they are waiting for any false steps so that they can report them to the appropriate authorities. In regard to Robinson hiding out in the Hotel occidental, Karl worries that his traveling companion will be discovered by one of the “nervösen reichen Gäste, die nur darauf warten, dem herbeilaufenden Hotelbeamten eine Beschwerde mitzuteilen” (212). The only waiting carried out by those who can afford to stay in the hotel is their expectant lurking, in the hopes that if they wait long enough, then they can cause trouble for the lower-class employees who must work there to serve them.

The very idea that someone with power and a higher social status was made to wait for an elevator is the alleged impetus behind Karl’s termination. The Head Waiter complains in disgust to the doorman in this scene.

“Wissen Sie wer gerade hinauffahren wollte, als dieser Kerl hier vom Lift weggelaufen ist?” wandte er sich zum Portier. Und er nannte einen Namen, bei dem es den Portier, der gewiß alle Gäste kannte und bewerten konnte, so schauderte, daß er schnell auf Karl hinsah, als sei nur dessen Existenz eine Bestätigung dessen, daß der Träger jenes Namens eine Zeitlang bei einem Lift dessen Junge weggelaufen war, nutzlos hatte warten müssen. (226)

The prominent and esteemed figure remains anonymous to the reader, remaining one of many who loom imposingly over the harried hotel workers. The goal of the affluent guests is to waste minimal time waiting, leading to exploitation of the elevator attendants.
Despite the thirty elevators for the mere five-story building, in front of Karl's elevator there is often "ein solches Gedränge, daß er, kaum daß die Gäste oben entlassen waren, wieder hinunterrasen mußte, um die dort Wartenden aufzunehmen" (188). Once again, individuality disappears behind the designation of the "Wartenden" among the masses of this mass culture. This passage also emphasizes the possessiveness of the elevator boys: Karl wants to avoid making his passengers wait at all costs, so that they will not defect to one of the other elevators. When no passengers are riding in the elevator car with him, he even pulls on some of the ropes to propel it faster toward the waiting crowds below: "Er wußte übrigens, daß dies die andern Liftjungen auch taten und er wollte seine Passagiere nicht an andere Jungen verlieren" (189). Karl is learning about competition in a capitalist society, and about an impatient public which refuses to wait.15

This impatience permeates not only the lives of the upper classes but of everyone who is pressured from above too, making the whole atmosphere of the novel feel hurried. Karl observes various everyday activities which contain an element of impatience. His first impressions of the Hotel occidental revolve around the waiters in the lobby who "konnten doch die ungeduldigen Gäste nicht zufriedenstellen, denn immer wieder hörte man an den verschiedensten Stellen Flüche und Fäuste die auf den Tisch schlugen" (152). Karl experiences the flurry of American society first-hand when he cannot get the

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15 Karl is not nearly as shrewd as his coworkers, however. The elevator boy whom Karl often covers for in his absence does not reciprocate the favor, claiming, "Ich konnte doch nicht zuerst zu Deinem Lift laufen und meine Gäste warten lassen, so bin ich also zuerst mit meinem Lift hinaufgefahren" (218). The others refuse to keep their own passengers waiting at all, while Karl attempts double duty to help out his fellow toilers. This particular elevator attendant draws attention to this discrepancy: "Ich hätte Dich schon gerne vertreten, aber Du weißt ja, daß das nicht so leicht ist" (ibid.)—a fact which Karl does indeed know from experience.
attention of the constantly running wait staff. A blind hurriedness to get somewhere, anywhere, as quickly as possible causes people on the streets to pay no heed when Robinson is later carried through on a stretcher—they simply jump over him “mit richtigem Turnerschwung” (269). In another example, Karl peers down from Brunelda’s balcony onto the political spectacle of the streets below, taking note of the “vor Ungeduld lärmende Gruppe” that is eager to come into the proximity of the candidates (331). The influence of Holitscher’s travelogue, *Amerika. Heute und Morgen*, on Kafka’s novel becomes clear here. Holitscher writes about the “atemlosen Lauf” and the “mördersiche Tempo” of life in America (381) which comes through in Kafka’s text.

The impatience of the society in which Karl finds himself does not lead to greater productivity—people are constantly busy, but are habitually going in circles. On a small scale, Karl cannot concentrate on searching for Brunelda’s perfume amid her looming impatience (361). On a larger scale, the country’s impatience to become more and more productive and efficient leads to monotony and redundancy. An employee at the uncle’s shipping firm works
gleichgültig gegen jedes Geräusch der Türe, den Kopf eingespannt in ein Stahlband, das ihm die Hörnuseln an die Ohren drückte. Der rechte Arm lag auf einem Tischchen, als wäre er besonders schwer und nur die

16 “Einigemal hatte Karl einen Kellner über den Tisch hin bei der Schürze gefaßt, aber immer hatte sich der mit verzerrtem Gesicht losgerissen. Keiner war zu halten, sie liefen nur und liefen nur” (154).

Karl is becoming initiated at this point in the everyday, mechanized life of the working class, and in the boredom of routine induced by the bureaucratic mode of twentieth-century production. He is informed that two other employees are simultaneously recording the same phone calls in order to compare notes and thereby avoid mistakes. Any sense of unique and individual purpose the employee might otherwise have is hindered through this hyperefficiency in an impatient world. When Kafka began his America-novel in September of 1912, the “Taylorism” incited by Frederick Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) was already dictating such modes of machine-like productivity in the workplace.

This type of tediousness on the job is also witnessed at the Hotel occidental, where the man working at the booths in the lobby provides guests with information continuously during his shift: “Er sah weder auf die Tischplatte, wo er fortwährend Handreichungen auszuführen hatte, noch auf das Gesicht dieses oder jenes Fragers, sondern ausschließlich starr vor sich, offenbar um seine Kräfte zu sparen und zu sammeln” (256). The alienated worker holds a monotonous yet strenuous job that prevents any meaningful interaction or recognition that he is dealing with humans rather than machines.\(^{18}\) Again the depersonalized term *Gedränge* (cf. 188), accompanied by

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synecdochical hands reaching upward, convey the lack of individuality in this impatient environment, where “ungeduldig fuchtelnde Hände aus dem Gedränge ragen” (256).19

After experiencing the repetitious monotony of the working world in his position as an elevator boy at the Hotel occidental, Karl is driven to escape the doldrums of such jobs, and of trivial interactions with the likes of Delamarche, Robinson, and Brunelda. As such, he becomes enticed by the poster with this text:

Auf dem Rennplatz in Clayton wird heute von sechs Uhr früh bis Mitternacht Personal für das Teater in Oklahama [sic] aufgenommen! Das große Teater von Oklahama ruft Euch! Es ruft nur heute, nur einmal! Wer jetzt die Gelegenheit versäumt, versäumt sie für immer! Wer an seine Zukunft denkt, gehört zu uns! Jeder ist willkommen! Wer Künstler werden will melde sich! Wir sind das Teater, das jeden brauchen kann, jeden an seinem Ort! Wer sich für uns entschieden hat, den beglückwünschen wir gleich hier! Aber beeilt Euch, damit ihr bis Mitternacht vorgelassen werdet! Um zwölf wird alles geschlossen und nicht mehr geöffnet! Verflucht sei wer uns nicht glaubt! Auf nach Clayton! (387)

The exclamation marks punctuating each sentence of the poster signal urgency and encourage immediate action—and promise condemnation otherwise.20 In the modern

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19 Interestingly, monotony and tedium do not always result in boredom amid the constant activity of this money-spinning capitalist prototype. In his study The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature, Reinhard Kuhn deems Kafka’s fictional world one “devoid of ennui” (336). Despite the absence of visible boredom in Karl, who is generally too busy trying to establish himself or being pulled along to his next station in life, there are several instances of possible boredom among other characters in the novel, from the sleepy boredom of the professor who is dragged along unnecessarily to the riding classes to assist with Karl’s English, to the woman who yawns constantly while she mends on a neighboring balcony, to the student who struggles to stay awake as he studies.

20 Politzer poses some pertinent questions about the poster’s exclamatory voice: “Who is shouting here at the top of his voice? The theatre owner or the proprietor of the race course? A resident of Clayton or an Oklahoman? A lunatic or a philanthropist? A salesman or an evangelist or a proselytizer?” (156). Any definitive interpretation of the poster is dependent on these unanswered queries.

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capitalist society epitomized by early twentieth-century America, waiting and precaution are disdained and disapproved, as an “act now” mentality has gained much prevalence.21

Once at the auditions, however, the eager must wait around for someone to show up and instruct them. They are at the mercy of the anonymous parties behind the poster’s message, and thus a new waiting game begins for Karl. Another waiting man complains, “wir warten hier schon seit einer Stunde und hören nichts als die Trompeten. Nirgends ist ein Plakat zu seh, nirgends ein Ausruf, nirgends jemand, der Auskunft geben könnte.” Karl sagte: „Vielleicht wartet man, bis mehr Leute zusammenkommen. Es sind wirklich noch sehr wenig hier”” (391). Karl knows that in America the custom is to wait around for the insiders, for those who are in the know, as long as necessary. He searches for such a party and eventually spots “auf dem andern Ende des Podiums einen unruhig auf und abgehenden Mann, der offenbar nur auf Leute wartete, um ihnen alle Auskunft zu geben, die man nur wünschen konnte” (391-92). Karl is hindered in getting to this presumed fount of knowledge when he runs into his acquaintance Fanny, who encourages him to obtain a position in her theater troop, and to inform her right away whether he was successful. She adds, “Denke daran, daß ich in großer Unruhe auf die Nachricht warte”

21 The temporal and spatial references in the poster’s text are also noteworthy. The remarkable size of the theater is emphasized, although it is unclear at this point whether “groß” has strictly a physical meaning, or whether it refers more to the theater company’s self-proclaimed notoriety. Karl finds out later from Fanny that it is allegedly “das größte Theater der Welt” and is said to be “fast grenzenlos” (394). Geographically speaking, Oklahoma itself connotes vast open spaces, especially during the early twentieth century. Yet within this expanse is promised a tightly-knit community, as indicated by the familiar form of address in the poster’s message. The Naturtheater is marketed as a place where one belongs—exactly what Karl has always desired. In fact, Karl is not concerned with the poster’s truth value, but only with its promise of acceptance: “…mochte das große Theater von Oklahoma [sic] ein kleiner Wandercirkus sein, es wollte Leute aufnehmen, das war genügend” (388). Past individual history and experience are irrelevant, as only those who are thinking of their (own) futures and who act in their (own) best interests in the immediate present will belong to the group.
Fanny perceptively uses Karl’s sensitivity to waiting in order to pressure him into action, and as such asserts her power over him—perhaps put forth here in the form of her “womanly wiles.”

In this realm of the favored present, the mysterious, bureaucratic theater company that in some ways is a microcosm of America, a strange and apparently excessive sense of urgency prevails. The servant who leads Karl around the theater’s management offices is resentful toward him for his prolonged application process—as if this were Karl’s fault. The servant, becoming impatient with his charge, “wartete nicht mehr die Fragen ab, sondern lief gleich fort” (401). Karl’s interviewer is similarly brusque when he inquires about Karl’s last place of employment: “Karl wollte schon antworten, da hob der Herr den Zeigefinger und sagte noch einmal: ‘Zuletzt!’” (406). But this far into the novel fragment, Karl too has acquired a hurried mentality which contrasts with his mellow demeanor upon arrival in America. For instance, he considers his time too valuable for trivial formalities such as the Dankrede given to the auditioners, a speech with which he grows impatient and “ganz unruhig” (415), since there is a train to catch which is supposed to deliver him to a brighter future.

3.1.3. Time as Conceptually Tactile and Mobile

Despite the continuous movement from station to station in the novel, Karl exhibits much impatience when the time of these advancements is thought to be passing too slowly. This leads to various measures taken in the attempt to speed up the time: it is as if in America, in the country that claims unlimited possibility, the protagonist believes that time itself can be accelerated. For instance, during the car ride on the way to the Pollunders, Karl wants to hear stories about Klara, “als sei er ungeduldig über die lange
The stories are a distraction from the impatience of arriving at the desired destination, and in that sense have the intended effect of hurrying the time along and reducing his waiting period.

Time is also materialized in the novel, becoming metaphorically tactile to those who wish for the powers to harness it. At the Pollunders, when the clock finally strikes midnight for Karl, he can feel the reverberations of the clock’s bells on his cheeks, as if time were reaching out to touch him, taunting him with its authority over his destiny: “In diesem Augenblick erklangen zwölf Glockenschläge, rasch hintereinander, einer in den Lärm des andern dreinschlagend, Karl fühlte das Wehen der großen Bewegung dieser Glocken an den Wangen” (120-21). Time in Kafka’s representations is teasingly elusive in that, as something with such material substance, it projects the appearance of being tameable, capable of being reigned in by human hands if only the conditions were right.22 From this point on, the bells of a clock signify the tremendous impatience not only of the novel’s characters but of the society as a whole. Another physical manifestation of this anxiety occurs in the hotel’s setting: “nur die Uhr schlug in Bestätigung der Worte des Oberkellners halb sieben und mit ihr, wie jeder wußte, gleichzeitig alle Uhren im ganzen Hotel, es klang im Ohr und in der Ahnung wie das zweimalige Zucken einer einzigen großen Ungeduld” (247).23 The bells ring as audible expressions of the impatience that quivers inside all of the novel’s players.

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22 Cf. Chapter 1 of this study on Hans Castorp’s attempts “die Zeit am Schwanze zu halten” (Zauberberg 659).
23 Nicolai remarks on the particular significance of this image based on Kafka’s censure of impatience in his aphorisms: “Im Hotel fällt daher das wie eine Ungeduld erfolgende Uhrenschlagen mit der Störung des Gefühls der Oberköchin durch den Denkvorgang zusammen, wodurch Karls Stellungsverlust besiegelt wird” (192).
The clock’s pronounced role in Der Verschollene points to the common conceptualization that time itself advances forward (unfortunately out of human control). Rarely does one recognize that time is not advancing, but merely the hands of a clock which simulate time’s passage through a human construct. The verbs *drängen* and *vorrücken* are employed to convey this understanding of time pushing forward: "Die Zeit drängt schon" (49); "Nun war aber auch schon die Zeit sehr vorgerückt" (154); “Nun setzte aber Karl außerdem seine Hoffnung auf das Vorrücken der Zeit” (223). All three of these cases convey a sense of either the premature or accelerated passing of time according to the protagonist’s wishes. In the former two instances, Karl regrets that time has already advanced before he could achieve an immediate goal, whereas in the latter instance, he hopes the time would speed up. He and those around him find themselves stuck in this fickle mode, and as such, the pace of time is never quite acceptable for their purposes. In waiting for time to pass until his departure from the Pollunders, Karl prods himself, “sich zur Abwechslung ein wenig auf das Kanapee zu werfen, damit ihm die Zeit rascher gegen Mitternacht vorrücke” (114). His mental impatience translates into physical restlessness with the hope that time will somehow move faster forward.24 Additionally, the denotation of a military advance with the verb *vorrücken* reminds the reader of the battles that the impatient protagonist fights and loses against the unstoppable temporal force governing his life. Indeed, all of the characters yearn to

24 Later, although “[r]asch schlafen und von hier fortgehn war sein einziger Wunsch” (93), the restless and impatient Karl does not even give himself a chance to fall asleep in the country house: “Sofort setzte sich Karl aufrecht, dieses Liegen war schon unerträglich geworden” (94). This type of restless motion, borne of impatience, is recurrent in the characters of Kafka. A judge in Prozeß provides another example: “In Verlegenheit oder Ungeduld rückte der Untersuchungsrichter auf seinem Sessel hin und her” (42-43).
maneuver time as if they were generals in control of the combat; instead, they all embody nothing but an irregular timepiece\(^{25}\) in their futile attempts to make time wait for them.

3.1.4. Representations of Impatient Hurriedness and Time Spent Waiting

An interesting paradox arises in that this novel—a “modernist travelling narrative”\(^{26}\)—juxtaposes its constant motion, and its characters’ efforts to force time to move more quickly, with literal and figurative traffic jams. The many periods of waiting stand in contradiction to the urge to press ever forward and to scurry up the rungs of the capitalist ladder. This makes the times of standstill all the more conspicuous and frustrating to the figures in the novel.

Karl’s uncle preaches to his nephew the virtues of patience and of waiting before acting, a philosophy which stands at odds with everything the young immigrant will witness in New York. The uncle, who as an immigrant himself can empathize with his nephew’s impatience to adapt, analogizes Karl’s situation to that of a newborn:

Die ersten Tage eines Europäers in Amerika seien ja einer Geburt vergleichbar und wenn man sich hier auch, damit nur Karl keine unnötige Angst habe, rascher eingewöhne als wenn man vom Jenseits in die menschliche Welt eintrete, so müsse man sich doch vor Augen halten, daß das erste Urteil immer auf schwachen Füßen stehe und daß man sich

\(^{25}\) The Head Doorman looks at Karl from the side, “als beobachte er eine schlecht gehende Uhr” (254) after the former took longer than the requested fifteen seconds to arrive at the hotel’s front door.

\(^{26}\) Anderson writes: “The modernist travelling narrative—like Der Verschollene—denies [the] consumptive reading [of a property narrative] because it is always in motion, is always one step ahead of its reader, never turns around to question its own origins or motives and allow the reader to catch up with it. [...] A travelling text works to destabilize the identity of the protagonist as well as the genealogical structures through which this identity is normally presented. The protagonist has no property, is always on the road, never knows what is about to happen, and never asks why he is there at all” (114).
The *Jenseits/Diesseits* metaphor that played such a significant role in the previous chapter on the labyrinth rears its head again in this context. The uncle not only advises that Karl reserve judgment on his new environment until later, he also implies that his previous experiences will bring nothing to bear on his current situation—it is a new beginning, an initiation period which must simply be waited out. Like a newborn, Karl’s time in the “womb” of Europe was a gestation period which has little to do with his adaptation to the new world—or in this analogy, to the “human(e) world”? In this sense, Karl’s uncle views his nephew as a type of noble savage who possesses much inner potential. They must only wait for the fruits from within to ripen.

Karl, however, has other ideas. His desires to get ahead as rapidly as possible, to gain access to the inside space of this unfamiliar country, and to please his new father figure develop quickly into an impatient drive to succeed. Karl requires only two and a half months to achieve a perfect mastery of English (“Karl sah wohl ein daß zur Aneignung des Englischen keine Eile groß genug sei und daß er hier außerdem die beste Gelegenheit habe seinem Onkel eine außerordentliche Freude durch rasche Fortschritte zu machen,” 61). The marked frequency of the terms *eilig* and *rasch* (Herr Green, for instance, does everything “rasch”) in this novel contributes to an underlying sense of hurriedness and of the characters’ impatience to move forward toward a nebulous goal. Soon, Karl too can count himself among those who are motivated to take rash measures toward a desired, if always vague, end.

In his zeal to begin work at the Hotel occidental and to begin his social ascension, Karl refuses both a sightseeing tour of the nearby town and a day off to adjust to his new surroundings: “Nicht einmal zu einem kurzen Weg, zu dem ihn Therese aufforderte...
konnte er sich entschließen” (184). His earnestness invokes a double meaning of the “kurzen Weg” which Therese offers him—neither will he accept a short tour of Ramses, nor does he look for a shortcut in his path to success. He sees nothing wrong with starting as an elevator boy, as long as he does not have to wait to do so; the longer he waits, the greater chance in his mind that he will become a professional loiterer like his nemeses Robinson and Delamarche.

Once on the job, he carries out his duties with as much alacrity as possible. During his “off” time, he runs through the city with Therese, completing errands for the hotel with great haste. Even the subway station’s elevator—his vehicle of service at the hotel—is too slow for him, compelling him to take the stairs (194). In fact, the elevator is representative of the hotel job itself, which is taking him nowhere and which keeps him waiting for opportunity.

Kafka relies on a particular syntax to emphasize this type of Eile: through numerous clauses strung together with only the brief pauses of commas, the sentences run along with the figures (e.g. 194). This marks a prime example of Kafka’s ability to move his narration forward, not requiring the reader to wait long for the next station or the next undefined goal. The extended sentence is a frequent device in Der Verschollene for showing rapidity in the narration. The passage below typifies its use in intensifying the commotion, and constant motion, of America.

Aus den Straßen, wo das Publikum in großer unverhüllter Furcht vor Verspätung im fliegenden Schritt und in Fahrzeugen, die zu möglichster Eile gebracht waren, zu den Teatern drängte, kamen sie durch Übergangsbezirke in die Vorstädte, wo ihr Automobil durch Polizeileute zu Pferd immer wieder in Seitenstraßen gewiesen wurde, da die großen Straßen von den demonstrierenden Metallarbeitern, die im Streik standen

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27 While he loiters around in various stations, Robinson is at heart a rogue, and thus he is not used to waiting long in one place (e.g. 297). Robinson does not conform to the rules of the capitalist go-getter society around him, but nonetheless, he is as impatient as the next person, as evidenced by his particularly short attention span.
besetzt waren, und nur der notwendigste Wagenverkehr an den Kreuzungsstellen gestattet werden konnte. (74)

Again here, *Eile* and the verb *drängen* complement the prolonged sentence to move the narration. Not only can the extended sentence, characterized by many successive clauses, reflect Karl’s observations of the bustling big city, it can do just the opposite in certain contexts, by painting a scene of waiting and of a lack of motion. Wolfgang Jahn writes of the “Situationsspannung” created syntactically in Kafka’s *Der Verschollene* through the following example from the novel:

> Gerade wollte er sich nach diesem Entschluß zu schnellerem Lauf zusammennehmen, um die erste Quergasse besonders eilig zu passieren, da sah er nicht allzuweit vor sich einen Polizeimann lauernd an die dunkle Mauer eines im Schatten liegenden Hauses gedrückt, bereit im richtigen Augenblick auf Karl loszuspringen. (284-85)

As Jahn asserts, the deferment of the waiting policeman’s positioning and intentions toward Karl to the final clauses of the lengthy statement contributes to a distinct narrative tension (82). Such “braking of recognition” (Shklovsky 66) is elicited through the combination of temporal and spatial elements here—the description of the policeman’s physical position anticipates a future moment. The narration provides a momentum toward that point in time. The act of waiting is thereby reproduced within Kafka’s particular syntax.

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28 A notable exception to the hurriedness of *Der Verschollene* is Kafka’s portrayal of one occupation which requires patience for success: “Der Polizeimann hielt sein schwarzes Stöckchen quer vor sich und wartete still mit der großen Geduld, die Polizeileute haben müssen, ob sie im gewöhnlichen Dienst oder auf der Lauer sind” (274).

29 A passage from the novel “Ich” provides a similar sense of suspense anchored to spatial and temporal cues. After a knock on M.W.’s window, he lapses into old habits: “er erinnerte sich an seine alte Eigenheit, bei einem Klingeln an der Tür niemals sofort zu öffnen, sondern erst zu warten: das Lesen seiner alten Texte—zum Teil waren sie schon vor zwei Jahren, hier in diesem Zimmer, geschrieben worden—hatte diesen Mechanismus sofort wieder in Gang gesetzt” (213). As the protagonist waits (a defense mechanism triggered in part by reading texts which originated in a different time but within the same present space) the reader must wait as well. Rather than by way of a
The reader’s own impatience to learn of Karl’s ultimate fate is left unrequited by Kafka. *Der Verschollene* remains as a fragment, without revealing whether Karl’s train trip transports him closer to the space of the insider for which he yearns, or merely distances him further from his roots. The reader, like Karl, is left waiting.

3.2. **Transit: “Ein blödsinniges Warten auf Nichts”**

In his book *Warten, Erwarten*, Lothar Pikulik writes about those forced to wait in the particular situation of exile:

> Ihr Leben wird damit im ganz pragmatischen Sinne zu einem einzigen, sich oftens entnervend hinziehenden Warten, sei es auf ein Dokument, welches das beantragte Asyl, sei es auf eines, welches die angestrebte Aus- und Weiterreise garantiert. Anna Seghers hat diese Situation in ‘Transit’ geradezu als Horror-Szenarium gestaltet. (124)

It is indeed a horror scenario, and has also been called kafkaesque, as the reasoning behind various steps in the waiting process remain unclear to the refugees in *Transit*. The mundane aspects of waiting for an uncertain result are foregrounded in testimonies to the intense boredom experienced by the protagonist, in numerous statements such as “dann gab es nichts als Langeweile, eine gottlose Leere” (24); “meine Langeweile war tödlich” (25); and, “Mich überfiel von neuem die grenzenlose Trauer, die tödliche Langeweile” (27). Seidler’s plentiful boring moments represented in the novel are complemented by reflections on the endless waiting periods. For his part, Seidler’s impatience results less syntactically supported delay, as in the above citation from *Der Verschollene*, the lag in plot delivery stems from an excursus into the protagonist’s thought process as he waits. Eventually we find out that it is only his landlady Frau Falbe knocking at the window, but in the meantime we have witnessed M.W.’s mental slip into the past.

30 Helen Fehervary notes that Seghers’s earlier novel *Die Rettung* also thematizes “the exile experience of passing time aimlessly, and it addresses the futility, even before the German invasion of France, of waiting in dark times for what Samuel Beckett later called Godot” (150).
from the lengthy waiting times necessary for acquiring visas and more from his eagerness
to gain meaning and perspective in a situation beyond his full comprehension: “Ich
wartete ungeduldig auf den Tag, als könnte er mir nicht nur diese Stadt erhellen, sondern
alles, was mir unbekannt geblieben war” (52).  

Seghers comments in her novel Das siebte Kreuz on the defense mechanisms that
are taken up when one is sentenced to waiting for practical matters to be resolved, as well
as for some sort of greater meaning to reveal itself:

Wenn man zum Warten verurteilt ist, zu einem echten Warten auf Leben
und Tod, von dem man im voraus nicht wissen kann, wie es ausgeht und
wie lange es dauert, Stunden oder Tage, dann ergreift man gegen die Zeit
die seltsamsten Maßnahmen. Man versucht die Minuten abzufangen und
zunichte zu machen. Man errichtet gegen die Zeit eine Art von Deich, man
versucht noch immer den Deich zu stopfen, auch wenn die Zeit schon
darüber fällt. (Das siebte Kreuz 394-95)

Those who wait often muster up energy to engage in activities to help them pass the time
more quickly, as Seghers posits through the material imagery of constructing a dike to
stop the endless flow of monotonous time. But can waiting itself be perceived as
powerful? In Transit, the answer lies in the resolve of the waiting refugees, who want to
believe that waiting can break down even physical barriers; the refugees persist even
when the consulate closes and they are told to go home, regardless of whether they have
the appropriate visas: “Sie aber, als ob der Wind sie zwar drehe und schüttele, doch
gleichzeitig auf der Stelle zusammenhielt in einem Wirbel von Angst, sie warteten noch,
als ließe sich das verschlossene Tor erweichen” (76). Later in the novel, the ghost-ship
metaphor  of the novel’s beginning returns with those waiting in front of the Brazilian

31 Klaus Müller-Salget comments on this search in the novel for greater meaning: “Eben
dies ist die Geschichte, die in Transit erzählt wird: wie einer aus Leere, Langeweile,
ungelebtem Leben hinfundet zu dem, was dauert, zu einem Sinn des Lebens” (341).
32 Cf. Silvia Schlenstedt’s commentary in the critical edition of Transit, in which she
notes that Seghers wrote while in exile about the “bateaux phantômes” (315).
consulate to no avail—they do not receive their visas before the ship departs. Seidler later imagines that the Wartenden who are refused entry to the Brazilian consulate, “warten und warten müßten, daß sie immer noch warteten, wenn das Schiff auch schon abfuhr, ein leeres Schiff in ein leeres Land” (245). The refugees have invested so much time and energy in waiting that they must believe in a meaningful force behind it.

Waiting plays a significant role throughout Transit, but does not always provide the desired and sought power, purpose, or existential meaning. Near the end of the novel, Seidler receives a message that has been passed on from his one-legged friend Heinz—“Du sollst hier auf ihn warten” (278). Seidler’s decision to stay in Europe to fight with the resistance movement is endorsed by Heinz’s request that the protagonist stay and wait for his return. The work’s final sentence also points to the waiting theme. The narrator awaits the return of Marie’s “restless mythic spirit,”\(^3\) despite his rational mind telling him that she is dead: “Ich werde eher des Wartens müde, als sie des Suchens nach dem unauffindbaren Toten” (280). Marie’s search for Weidel in the Jenseits continues much longer in the narrator’s mind than any period of waiting he undertakes in the Diesseits. The message conveyed in Transit is that the waiting in Marseilles, incessant as it seems for the refugees in a time of utter despair, is ultimately finite. Through the waiting theme, then, the small glimmer of hope that characterizes Seghers’s novel shines through.

3.2.1. Die Wartenden

While Der Verschollene is characterized by intervals of waiting and impatience interspersed within a farcical progression forward, Seghers’s Transit is a novel entirely

\(^3\) Fehervary 173. In Anna Seghers. The Mythic Dimension, Fehervary delineates Marie’s kinship to Maria Magdalene as well as to Andromache from Greek mythology, in their devotion to, and unending searches for, the deceased (ibid.).
comprised around a mode of waiting. The senses of boredom and, even more so, of impatience that underlie Der Verschollene move to the forefront in Transit. These two ancillary effects of waiting are accompanied by an atmosphere of fear and danger in this novel. Although it centers on the narrator/protagonist Seidler and is partially autobiographical, the work as a whole does not depict an individual, but a collective plight of refugees attempting to flee Marseilles in 1941. The situation distinguishes itself quite obviously from Karl Roßmann’s in its life-and-death urgency and the terror of Third-Reich persecution. At the same time, waiting as represented in Transit shares common ground with Der Verschollene in its revelation of hierarchical dynamics. The refugees are at the mercy of the consular bureaucracy and as such are compelled to bide their time suspended in protracted waiting periods, during which their fates are determined by others.

Throughout the novel the refugees are labeled by the narrator as “die Wartenden” (e.g. 131, 204, 221, 244) and “diese wartenden Menschen” (201). Seidler separates himself quickly from the “wartenden Haufen” (54) by adopting the bureaucrats’ view of the refugees as a collective herd—at least for some of his time in Marseilles, until he gets to know some of them as individuals through their stories. By giving people a tag on their name such as, “den Wartenden Heinz” (142)—capitalized as if it were a proper name—or the “wartenden Spanier” (ibid.), Seidler reinforces his perceived status as being in

34 A comparison can be drawn here with the cast of Mann’s Zauberberg. They are all waiting for their time at the sanatorium to end, whether it be through a doctor’s release or through death. Mann’s narrator labels a person in such circumstances as “der Nichts-als-Wartende,” who resembles “einem Fresser, dessen Verdauungsapparat die Speisen, ohne ihre Nähr- und Nutzwerte zu verarbeiten, massenhaft durchtriebe. Man könnte weitergehen und sagen: wie unverdaute Speise ihren Mann nicht stärker mache, so mache verwartete Zeit nicht älter”; Mann then continues with a sharp wordplay on this idea of a waiting person as a “Fresser,” using verschlingen in reference to time gone by in the sanatorium (288-89).
These frequent designations also bring forth static images of people standing in line—a literary rendition of how the scene in Marseilles must have looked from a bird’s-eye view. The identities of the refugees are determined not by their convictions or past accomplishments, but instead by their relationship to their time served in Marseilles. They are stationary, tarrying entities who are not especially welcomed where they must wait, in the land of the “Bleibenden” (254). Dubbed “Transitären” (184), they are not yet “in transit” in the sense of being actively on their way. They are in transit in that they are located between their point of departure and their destination, yet they have been brought to a halt in this middle ground. Even those officially labeled the “Abfahrtbereiten” (261) are not nearly free from their waiting sentences, but remain in limbo indefinitely.

The identity of individuals around Seidler is thus determined by their forced waiting time. Unique personal histories are neglected as all crowd members are lumped into one category by the authorities, and by Seidler at first as well, as they are considered as having one and the same solitary life goal—the acquisition of a visa. An instance of

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35 Seidler remarks on this unequivocally: “Und ich, ich besaß überhaupt nichts als Zeit” (14). When Annette Binnet leaves him waiting for an extended period of time, his response is, “Was lag mir schließlich daran?” (15). As he is in no outward hurry to leave Europe, he can resign himself to waiting at this point. The contrast between the narrator and the others becomes clear when he is called before the American consulate: “Für mich war damals alles ein Spiel. Doch die Gesichter der Menschen, die in der Vorhalle warteten, um in die höhere Vorhalle heraufgelassen zu werden, waren bleich vor Furcht und vor Hoffnung” (198). In contrast, the more time the protagonist has for waiting, the more he views himself as immortal—imagining that he can even outrun death itself: “Schon rückte der Tod immer dichter nach mit seiner noch immer unversehrten, knarrenden Hakenkreuzfahne. Mir aber, vielleicht weil ich ihm schon einmal begegnet war und ihn überholt hatte, mir schien es, auch er, der Tod, sei seinerseits auf der Flucht. Wer aber war ihm auf den Fersen? Mir schien es, ich brauchte nur Zeit zum Warten, und ich könnte auch ihn überleben” (69-70).

36 This is not to say that the hoards of waiting people remained completely immobile as they held their places in line. Seidler often mentions the fervent and impatient chattering among the refugees, especially when a fresh rumor is born and moves down the echelons.
personification stresses the loss of personal identity of the waiting immigrants as they are swallowed up by the long lines in front of the consulates: “In allen Städten des Erdeiteils warteten jetzt diese Schlangen vor unzähligen Türen” (161). Phrased in this way, the serpentine lines assume a life of their own, as if they were actually doing the waiting rather than the individuals constituting the lines. In addition, the image of snakes is evoked with the term Schlangen, reinforcing the animal imagery from earlier in the same paragraph: “Wie Tiere auf eine Erdöffnung lauern, in der sich etwas Genießbares zeigen wird, so lauerten diese Menschen auf den Türspalt, und ihre Kraft war auf nichts gerichtet als auf den Fang der Sardinenbüchsen” (ibid.). It is only with great reluctance that Seidler eventually counts himself among the others who have melded into these lurking lines, although even more so than the other characters, Seidler leads a “papierene Existenz” in Marseilles, since he assumes the name and identity of the deceased writer Weidel to aid him in the bureaucratic process of obtaining visas.

3.2.2. Hierarchies of Waiting in Marseilles

The power dynamics of waiting take many forms in Transit. Early in the novel, Seidler demonstrates his respect for others’ time and for these presumed dynamics when he looks for Weidel before learning of the writer’s suicide. To the woman working at the hotel, who is evasive as to Weidel’s whereabouts, he explains, “Ich möchte auch einen Unbekannten nicht nutzlos warten lassen” (22). Of a military commander, Seidler observes that “er verstand nur, empfangene Befehle weiterzugeben. Nun wartete er auf Befehle” (8). Even those who clearly have power over others must defer to a yet higher power, and each such deferment leaves the hierarchically lower ones waiting longer to

37 Walter 586.
find out their next move. Such hierarchies in the novel center predominantly on the bureaucratic avenues (and dead-ends) that rule the refugees’ lives in Marseilles. In many cases, this process is not merely frustrating, but also leads to the negation of what little bit has been accomplished by waiting in the first place. The situation of the conductor from Prague exemplifies this phenomenon:

Die Gewährung des Visa de Sortie hätte aber so lange gedauert, daß ihm inzwischen das Transit erloschen sei, darauf das Visa, darauf der Kontrakt. Letzte Woche hätte man ihm das Visa de Sortie gewährt, er warte jetzt Tag und Nacht auf die Verlängerung des Kontraktes, die ja dann ihrerseits die Verlängerung seines Visas bedinge. Die aber sei die Vorbedingung für die Gewährung des neuen Transits. (46)

Lapsed time can also mean lapsed citizenships and thus changes in identity, as the chancellor explains to Seidler: “Hier gibt es einige Ihrer Landsleute, die zwar schon zwei Monate Visen haben. Doch warten sie ebenso lange auf eine Bestätigung seitens der Deutschen, daß sie nicht mehr als deutsche Bürger betrachtet werden. Nur dann gibt ihnen die Präfektur das ‘Visa de Sortie’, die Erlaubnis, das Land zu verlassen” (102). The process of obtaining the appropriate documentation leaves the exiles in such a state of identity-limbo that “die Wartenden” is, sadly, the most appropriate categorization for them during this time.

Not only is the procedure of waiting less than transparent for those subjected to it, the structure of the waiting hierarchies themselves is likewise confusing: the decisions about who is granted preference regarding transit visas seems arbitrary, at least to outsiders of the system: “In dem engen, kleinen Vorraum gab es ein Dutzend vermutlich bevorzugter Wartender” (54). It is assumed that some of those nameless waiting parties are advantaged for one reason or another—“Die Wartenden gerieten plötzlich in Wut” when Seidler himself is treated as a privileged character by the bureaucrats (131).
physical dimensions of the waiting rooms themselves are noteworthy—here the room is described as narrow and small, not to mention, it is only a “Vorraum” which will likely lead to another space where still more waiting will take place. The balding Mittransitär remarks to Seidler: “Sie kennen ja selbst die Präfektur von Marseille. Die Männer und Frauen, die in den dunklen Gängen der Fremdenabteilung warten von früh bis spät” (260). The dark and narrow hallways enhance the ominous effect of the building’s interior on those who wait day in and day out. Only rarely do the refugees gain access to the spaces beyond the waiting rooms. At one point the doorkeeper leads Seidler into “die Region der Konsulatssekretariate. Auch hier gab es wieder Warteraume” (131). The appearance of waiting rooms upon waiting rooms is strongly reminiscent of the way Kafka shapes his characters’ physical surroundings to enhance the futility plaguing their lives.

The consecutive Vorräume in which the refugees are compactly sequestered contrast with the Innenräume which are as empty as they are hopeless for most of the waiting foreigners. The sounds made by the waiting persons resonate only in hollow emptiness in the innermost room of the Brasilian consulate that constitutes the heart of the labyrinth: “Der Innenraum war genau so leer wie das letzte Mal und hinter der Schranke seufzten und jammerten alle Wartenden in die Leere” (243-44). Despite this emptiness, their patience wears thin as they attempt to penetrate this interior realm together (“plötzlich warfen sich alle Wartenden in den Innenraum, und schrien dem jungen Mann in die Ohren: ‘Wir müssen mit diesem Schiff abfahren! Wir können nicht

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38 In several anecdotes, waiting leads to only more of the same. Seidler observes at one point, “Da wartete eine junge Frau, von einem Polizisten bewacht, die wohl im Bompad eingesperrt war, bis es einen Schiffsplatz für sie gab, oder endgültig keinen, damit sie in ein Dauerlager eingesperrt werden könnte im Innen des Landes” (183).
länger warten. Wir brauchen das Schiff”, ibid.). By barging into the Innenraum they attempt to access something meaningful within, hoping to exchange their waiting status for a ticket to freedom inside this barren consular room.

The physical dimensions in Seghers’s novel serve to reinforce the hierarchical relationships that arise naturally from a situation in which some are more privileged than others. Seidler notes the demeanor of the official who gives him (acting as the well-known writer Weidel) preference, speaking to him “als warte nicht hinter meinem Rücken ein Schwanz bis zur nächsten Straßenecke, den er wahrscheinlich nie selbst gesehen hatte; denn er war immer innen, und der Menschengenschwanz immer außen” (209). The reference to the line of people as a “Schwanz” enhances the inherent depersonalization brought about by these spatial demarcations. The official, whose home base is “innen,” has been blinded to this long tail of people which is relegated to Vorräume or even further away—in any case, they are “immer außen.” At one point Seghers visually sketches out this waiting hierarchy. Seidler describes his location on the steps: “Ich erschien jetzt meinerseits auf der Treppe, über den Köpfen der Wartenden, die neidisch zu mir heraufsahen” (204). Seidler is entitled enough to become, with little effort or joy, an “in Ordnung befundener, vorbereiteter Transitär” (ibid.). The image of the waiting crowds (from which the first-person narrator keeps his distance, literally and figuratively) looking up to him while he stands above them on the stairs is especially striking in regard to the division between those who must continue to wait and those who do not.

In a sense, Seidler-as-Weidel presents himself as a type of insider in this conglomeration of outsiders. Unlike most of the other immigrants, Seidler quickly finds connections who “belong” in Marseilles, such as the Binnet family, or Nadine. The latter
calls attention to her status as an insider through her rather short-sighted observation to Seidler: "Ihr Ausländer seid alle sonderbar. Ihr wartet nie ab, bis die Sachen von selbst vorbeigehen" (94). As the insider, Nadine has the privilege to wait for things to blow over, whereas the refugees naturally do not. Seidler even insinuates his discomfort about Nadine’s privileges: "Wir öffneten eine Menge Konservenbüchsen und Flaschen. Ein ganzer Stadtteil Hausfrauen hätte dafür Schlange stehen müssen" (189). The narrator, who does not have to wait for this food through his connection to an insider, nonetheless knows that this is not the norm. Still he welcomes his contacts to the social Innenräume of Marseilles, and enjoys the change of pace and place when he visits the store where Nadine works: "Wie war es mir gut, an diesem Ort zu warten, der keinem der Orte glich, an denen ich mich sonst herumtrieb" (250). Seidler finds waiting for the native Nadine to be pleasant, with the reward of her attention in sight. This is far superior to waiting for others to sort out a bureaucratic situation in which he does not feel particularly invested.

In his own acquisition of a visa Seidler acts like an insider as well. While he too must wait sometimes during the bureaucratic process, generally he minds it less than most others because he becomes more and more convinced that he will not be leaving on a ship anyway. He has not pinned all his hopes on escaping, and thus waiting is not nearly as painful for him. In fact, people such as the balding Mittransitar express their surprise that he is not hastier to seize opportunity. His acquaintance asks in disbelief after he offers Seidler his ship ticket, "'Auf was warten Sie noch? Ich kann mein Billett noch in dieser Minute loswerden, hundertmal. Da, sehen Sie nur!' Er zeigte leicht auf die Menschen, die aus der Rue de la République in die 'Transports Maritimes' drängten" (260). In the end, then, Seidler’s hours of waiting prove futile for a different reason than
for many of his contemporaries: not because of an inability to beat the bureaucratic
immigration system, but because he refuses the ultimate reward at the end of the maze.

Beyond the realm of bureaucracy, hierarchies of waiting emerge within
interpersonal relationships as well, often borne of desperation or absolute necessity. The
Czech conductor, for instance, "könnte jetzt nicht mehr länger auf Lebenszeichen von
Söhnen warten, sonst sei es für ihn zu spät" (46). (The Foreign Legion member laments
too, after Seidler explains to him that Marie is waiting for a man who will never return,
"Ich bin zurückgekommen", sagte er traurig, 'doch niemand wartet auf mich'”, 218).
Familial ties cannot be severed in spirit, but fear and danger have cut these desired
waiting periods short. More often than not, though, the waiting hierarchies erected in
_Transit_ are the result of haphazardly formed but nonetheless strong emotional bonds,
revolving primarily around the Seidler-Marie-Doctor trio.

Complicating this chain of power in the relationship of the latter two is the
elevated social position of the doctor. Marie reveals her guilt in holding back the
unnamed doctor in Marseilles while she stalls, hoping to find Weidel: "Das schlimme ist,
daß ich den einen nicht finde, den anderen nur aufhalte. Er hat schon lange nutzlos auf
mich gewartet, der Zweite, der andere. Er hat seine Abreise meinetwegen verschoben. Er
kann nicht mehr länger warten. Nur meinetwegen” (138). She views the doctor as higher
up on the hierarchy—as a male perhaps, as well as a physician—and thus she imposes
limits on this favor of waiting that she has requested. The doctor puts himself in this
superior light as well, complaining when Seidler comes home late with the Binnets’ ill
son, for example: "Er schimpfte, weil er auf den Patienten warten mußte” (104). Shortly
thereafter, Seidler asks the doctor whether he is afraid of losing important work by
lingering in Marseilles waiting for Marie—"Sie sind doch vor allem Arzt!” (105). As it
turns out, this is indeed a question with which the doctor has been struggling day and
night, but for the time being he continues to wait for her as she searches the city for
Weidel.

Especially frustrating for the doctor is Marie’s independence and her overall
refusal to submit to a hierarchy of waiting in Marseilles. He warns the narrator not to wait
for Marie to make up her mind.

Seidler, however, has other ways of maintaining his power over Marie, at least in his own
mind. First of all, because leaving Marseilles is not an urgency in his mind (he would
probably only do so for Marie’s sake, if at all), he is not waiting there only for her while
she seeks the dead Weidel. Second, he constitutes the very reason Marie keeps searching
for the writer. He could choose to end her waiting for an ultimate reunion by telling her
the truth immediately, but does not: “Und ich, der einzige Mensch, der wuβte, daß ihre
Suche zwecklos sei, ich wartete atemlos, daß sie an meinen Tisch treten mußte” (153).

He waits for her, breathless from his yearning to see her, but he knows at the same time

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39 Seidler's obsession with Marie comes through most distinctly in his descriptions of the
moments spent waiting for her to walk into a café or restaurant: “Ich lud Marie ein in ein
tkleines Café am Boulevard d’Athènes. Sie ließ mich kaum warten. Doch wartete ich die
wenigen Augenblicke verzweifelt, törich. Da war es denn für mich ein Wunder, daß sie
eintrat, geradewegs auf mich zuging” (162). Indeed, he is cognizant of the control that
both her presence and her absence have over him, and as such he must force himself to
abstain from waiting for her—but not before it becomes established as a habit (“Ich
zwang mich, das Warten aufzugeben. Doch die Gewohnheit behielt ich bei, mit dem
Gesicht zur Tür zu sitzen,” 112). Even after Marie leaves on the fatal ship, Seidler cannot
break this habit. “Ich ging zurück in den Mont Vertoux, ich setzte mich aus alter
that her actions are dictated in part by his own, or by his lack of action, and by his silence about Weidel’s death and his stolen identity. Further, even before he knows Marie’s name, he senses that he has some control over her actions—oddly, through the power of his own waiting: “Mir aber, warum sie auch kommen mochte, erschien ihr Kommen die Folge meines Wartens” (107). Whereas the doctor wishes Marie would stop waiting for her husband’s miraculous reappearance, Seidler cherishes and promotes this form of waiting and her search, because it keeps her in Marseilles and postpones the narrator’s own decision on whether to leave with her.40

In any case, a considerable amount of silent negotiation takes place in regard to the waiting hierarchy of Marie and Seidler. When it comes to her immigration paperwork, Seidler commands Marie to wait for him to act on her behalf: “Du darfst dich da nur nicht einmischen, nichts verwirren. Man wird dich zur rechten Zeit rufen. Dann wird man nichts mehr von dir verlangen als eine Unterschrift” (163). The otherwise sovereign woman generally heeds Seidler’s paternal warnings, if only so that she can devote more time to her search for Weidel. While Seidler remains authoritative on the bureaucratic front, in the interpersonal sphere he waits for her to make the move that might drag the truth out of him: “Ich wartete beinah verzweifelt darauf, sie mochte wieder zu fragen beginnen, in mich dringen, mich quälen, die ganze Wahrheit endgültig

Gewohnheit mit dem Gesicht zur Tür. Mein Herz, als ob es noch nicht die Leere verstanden hätte, die ihm von nun ab beschieden war, fuhr fort, zu warten. Es wartete immer noch weiter, Marie könnte zurückkehren” (274).

40 Her search also provides him with a distraction—and lends a purpose to his own waiting periods that extends beyond waiting for paperwork to come through. Seidler describes his waiting spells with the doctor: “Oft hatten wir lange zu zweit zu warten, ehe Marie eintrat. Ich sah ihren Eintritt immer schon auf dem Gesicht des Arztes, dessen Ausdruck sich jäh veränderte, ein sonderbarer, für mich unerklärlicher Ausdruck von Argwohn und Besorgnis. Ich aber, während wir warteten, sah Marie die Stadt durchlaufen, von Tür zu Tür gehen auf einer Suche, deren Zeuge ich nun nicht mehr war, da ich abends an einem Tisch mit ihr landete” (128).
aus mir herausfragen” (250). As if against his will, Seidler is incapable of stopping this
game of waiting to tell her the truth. And the longer he waits, the trickier it becomes to
reveal his lies. In the personal sphere, then, he loses at his own game of waiting and of
remaining in control. A piece of advice the narrator receives from strangers about how to
handle Marie—even before the two really know each other—resonates here as well:
“Warte nicht, bis es zu spät ist” (122). Hierarchies aside, the natural impulsiveness of
love is intensified in times of war or in times of exile, when one’s time seems endless but
actually could be shorter than ever.

3.2.3. Passing the Time in Exile

Seidler’s patience is tried whenever he realizes that his is not the upper hand when
it comes to waiting, such as when he promises his friend Claudine that he will wait in line
for her in front of a shop. He looks for ways to pass the time but usually ends up simply
bored. Seghers’s frequent illustration of boredom in Marseilles is striking, primarily
because the accompanying temporal standstill contrasts so greatly with the fervor of the
crowds packed in the waiting rooms in the consulates. Seidler tries to manipulate existing
waiting hierarchies to alleviate his boredom; in one case, in the café which “starrte vor
Kälte und Langeweile” (119), he makes others nervous through his own willingness to
remain silent: “Ich beschloß, zu warten, bis jemand mich ansprach. –Nach zwanzig
Minuten begann ihnen meine stumme Anwesenheit unerträglich zu werden” (ibid.). He

41 “Warum bleibe ich hier in der Kälte stehen und warte?” (162). Seidler does his share of
waiting futilely (e.g. “Ich wartete umsonst auf das Paulchen,” 24). But only on rare
occasions does he explicitly show his disdain for pointless waiting, such as when he tells
of his journey before his arrival in Marseilles: “Zum erstenmal in Paris kam mir der
Gedanke, auf was ich denn eigentlich hier warte. Viel welkes Laub lag auf der Avenue
Wilson, der Sommer war schon dahin, dabei war kaum August. Ich war um den Sommer
betrogen worden” (30).
wants to keep up the appearance that the waiting game is indeed just a game to him: "Ich hatte halb belustigt gewartet, halb gelangweilt. Und ohne Gefühle und ohne Absicht betrat ich das Zimmer des Konsulatskanzlers, als man mich aufrief, halb belustigt, halb gelangweilt" (54-55). Nonetheless, the frequent commentary on his own boredom reveals that this outweighs his amusement overall. He often puts forth an air similar to that of the Corsican travel bureau employee, who maintains a "Dauergähnen" (118); the employee is safe, and his job and income are secure, while the refugees around him are on edge.

In times of danger and uncertainty but also of boring waiting, the characters fidget to pass the time (as discussed in relation to Der Verschollene as well). Seidler reports on his own activities in this regard: "Ich folgte ihm nach aus purer Langeweile. […] Ich wartete zwei Minuten, bevor ich ihm folgte—aus purer Langeweile folgte" (118). In Marseilles there are even moments of reflecting on these tactics, as Seidler remarks casually to his listener: "wenn man sich fürchtet, ist es besser, etwas zu tun, sogar viel zu tun, als wie den Tod mit Gezuck und Gezappel zu erwarten, wie die Küken den Geier. Und diese Betriebsamkeit vor dem Tod hat mit Mut nichts zu tun. Nicht wahr?" (20). Waiting, as Seghers wrote in Das siebte Kreuz, takes courage, but passing the time mindlessly does not necessarily. Seidler asks himself on an "empty" evening of waiting: "Was sollte ich tun? Lesen? Das hatte ich einmal getan an einem ähnlichen leeren Abend. Nie wieder!" (109). As the next chapter on storytelling will reinforce, Seidler has little respect for written literature, preferring instead the oral tradition as a means of passing

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42 Another passage displays the Janus-face of the waiting Seidler equally well: "Ein Abgeordneter des Portiers kam zu mir, Whitaker könne mich erst in einer Stunde empfangen, ich möchte also die Güte haben, zu warten oder wiederkommen. Also ich wartete. Zuerst machte mir Spaß, was ich sah. Bald fing ich an, mich zu langweilen" (236).
the time. For the most part, Seidler has no problem with passing time by listening to the stories of others, and is even willing to wait patiently for such stories to emerge: "Ich trank und wartete, bis er von selbst erzählte" (207). Seidler generalizes his conviction that storytelling can somehow shorten the time spent waiting, assigning this function to the various rumors and stories that permeate the harbor city: "Aller Klatsch dient dazu, die Wartezeit zu verkürzen, denn die Menschen sind wie verzehrt vom Warten" (142).

The refugees' time in Marseilles is sometimes passed by the telling of stories which actually thematize waiting. To Seidler's astonishment, a Polish Jew tells the narrator of his desire to return home, and then proceeds to recap a supposedly well known fairy tale:

Sie kennen vielleicht das Märchen von dem toten Mann. Er wartete in der Ewigkeit, was der Herr über ihn beschlossen hatte. Er wartete und wartete, ein Jahr, zehn Jahre, hundert Jahre. Dann bat er flehentlich um sein Urteil. Er konnte das Warten nicht mehr ertragen. Man erwiderte ihm: 'Auf was wartest du eigentlich? Du bist doch schon längst in der Hölle?' Das war sie nämlich: Ein blödsinniges Warten auf Nichts. Was kann denn höllischer sein? Der Krieg? (208-09)

The man's "Märchen" is an apparent allusion to Kafka's "Vor dem Gesetz" parable, in which someone waits until his dying day to be let into a door that, as he finds out all too late, is intended only for him, despite its apparent inaccessibility. The implicit invitation to hell in the Polish man's parable, represented by a "blödsinniges Warten auf Nichts," is

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43 Bettelheim's comments on the application of fairy tales to twentieth-century circumstances are relevant here. He writes that practically "nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale. True, on an overt level fairy tales teach little about the specific conditions of life in modern mass society; these tales were created long before it came into being. But more can be learned from them about the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society, than from any other type of story within a child's comprehension" (5). While Seghers was not directing her novel toward children, she did find it important to reach as wide and varied an audience of possible, and one means of doing so was by incorporating fairy-tale type anecdotes such as this one about waiting.
a metaphor for the situation of the refugees who are waiting for their transit visas—as well as for the situation of the more relaxed Seidler, as he eventually comes to realize.44

With its pointless waiting for what seems like nothing, exile brings with it a distorted temporality. As they attempt to pass the time, the refugees in Transit are relegated to two types of spaces: first, those of the consulates and other structures representing the transit-visa bureaucracy to which they are subject; and second, those buildings where they wait for the next step in the process—cafés, restaurants, hotels, and so forth. Both categories of waiting spaces are contained within the harbor city of Marseilles which is, on the one hand, their space of refuge, but, on the other hand, their holding cell. This ambivalence of place leads to a varied perception of time: sometimes the refugees are relieved to have gained more time, as in the case of an extension on a temporary visa, but on other occasions the excess of time spent waiting in Marseilles is burdensome and feels correspondingly endless.

This distorted sense of “normal” time is evident in many situations. When Seidler schedules a meeting with Nadine for eight days later, his instinct is that this meeting will never come to be, because it seems so far in the future: “Ich hätte mich ebensogut auf acht Jahre später verabreden können” (94). Seidler also begins to question his own intuition for time (e.g. “in den letzten Tagen—oder sind es vielleicht schon Wochen?”, 143), as he begins to realize that for the waiting refugees, time passes at a different pace than for the bureaucratic figureheads. When the consul retreats with the papers of his friend, Seidler remarks on the length of time it took behind closed doors, “ich hatte den

44 Seidler's revelation comes in the form of a comparison between himself and most of those around him: “Ich aber wartete so geduldig, wie man nur wartet, wenn man das Warten tut um des Wartens willen, und das, worauf man wartet, ist unerheblich. Ich mußte auch schon sehr tief in der Hölle stecken, von der mir mein Mittransitär im Café St. Féréol erzählt hatte” (209).
Eindruck auf Jahre” (221). In *Transit*, time is not measured in its usual way, but through the bureaucratic instruments of the era. The novel also puts forth the idea of going back in time through fake *Entlassungsscheine*—in reconstructing a palimpsest of identity, one needs to be careful not to write on top of the stamp, but to make it look as if the writing is underneath (81). The rubber stamp becomes a tangible marker of time, replacing the conspicuous clocks and watches from *Der Verschollene*.

The conscious reflection on the distortion of time that occurs through waiting is articulated by Marie.

Die Worte “vor kurzem” bedeuten doch in dem Mund eines Konsuls etwas ganz anderes, als wenn wir sie aussprechen. Für einen Konsul ist die Zeit etwas anderes. Für einen Konsul bedeuten ein paar Monate gar nichts. Ich habe nicht zu fragen gewagt, was ist denn die Zeit für einen Konsul der Vereinigten Staaten? Für einen Konsul der Vereinigten Staaten bedeutet vielleicht, was sich vor ein paar Monaten zutrug: Vor kurzem. (228)

The refugees’ time corresponds not to an external standard, rather it is individually relative, contingent on their personal bureaucratic predicaments. Seidler sometimes scorns those for whom “die Zeit umschlug mit ihrer Ausreise aus der Heimat,” and who use the term “ehemals” to mentally cordon off the time before exile (83). Despite his attempts not to fall into this habit himself, Seidler clearly submits to the same mentality.

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45 In contrast to the protagonist, the Foreign Legion member maintains his patience with waiting in this scene, as his prior experiences have taught him to do: “Wir warteten weitere Stunden. [Der Konsul] erschien endlich doch noch einmal. [...] Nur mein Freund hatte schweigsam gewartet mit seiner teuer erworbenen Wüstenuhu” (221).

46 In addition, time and physical age do not correspond in the conventional way in this novel. On the faces of the emigrants, the passage of time can be detected—chronologically, it is a short amount of time, but mentally, an eternity: “Wie war die Welt in diesem Jahr gealtert. Alt sah der Säugling aus, grau war das Haar der stillenden Mutter und die Gesichter der beiden kleinen Brüder, die über die Schulter der Frau sahen, waren frech, alt und traurig” (36). Like the story told in *Der Zauberberg*, the refugees’ story is “viel älter als ihre Jahre, ihre Betagtheit ist nicht nach Tagen, das Alter, das auf ihr liegt, nicht nach Sonnenumläufen zu berechnen; mit einem Worte: sie verdankt den Grad ihres Vergangenseins nicht eigentlich der Zeit” (*Zauberberg* 1).
In thinking about Paris, his location before the trek to unoccupied France, Seidler remarks, “Das mußte in uralten Zeiten gewesen sein” (71). Although not more than a few months had passed in the meantime, he compartmentalizes Heinz and the memory of their past together as “Lagerzeit” (77), implicitly differentiating it from his present time as a refugee.47 It is the act of waiting in various stations which seems to cause such compartmentalization of their memories.

Seghers highlights the relativity of her protagonist’s temporal perception in Transit through a narrative pace that varies depending on the different phases of waiting and activity.48 Narrated time decelerates noticeably throughout Transit with syntactic reductionism (e.g. “Ich rauchte und wartete,” 93).49 The story is at times deliberately prolonged so that the reader gains at least limited insight into the wait for immigration and transit visas. Depending on the current status of his visas, time seems relatively short or long to Seidler; after he is granted a four-week extension on his stay in Marseilles, he remarks, “Die mir gewährte Zeit kam mir lang vor. Ich war fast glücklich” (64). The use of gewähren emphasizes the control that others have over the protagonist’s own time (whether he wants to admit it or not); time is represented here as something that can be granted at will from one person to another. After receiving this gift of time, the

47 Seidler perceives himself in material terms, as a burden on his friend’s back, a “lästiges, unvermeidliches Anhängsel aus den alten Lagerzeiten” (232).
48 Schlenstedt writes of the dynamic “Szenerie vom Beschäftigtsein der Beschäftigungslosen, von Flüchtlingen, die aus bisherigen Tätigkeiten herausgerissen, durch Barrieren der Bürokratie und mangelnde Abfahrtsgelegenheiten gehindert werden, weiter zu fliehen—Flüchtlinge im Stillstand” (335). Lamberechts also maintains that time in the novel Transit wins “ihre eigene Größe vor allem als Dauer und Tempowechsel” (202). While I think that Seghers used certain stylistic devices, as discussed above, to vary the narrative pace of Transit accordingly, the assessment by some that the narration is “monoton wie das Getöse in den Warteschlangen” is probably too simplified (paraphrase of Louis Parrot by Schlenstedt, 348).
49 Seidler continues here with another reflection on the monotony of the waiting process: “Das Warten am selben Ort war unsinnig. Wo hätte ich aber sonst warten wollen?” (93).
protagonist’s language slows down along with his suddenly more torpid lifestyle. The extended statements of his thought process (articulated to his listener here) reflect anything but urgency:


In the recounting of this protracted process of deliberation, the language used parallels the nonchalance Seidler feels after finding out about his four-week reprieve. Besides the repetition implied by *stundenlang*, as hour follows hour ad infinitum, the replication of this term points to the incessant nature of activities around Seidler both within the pizzeria and in the harbor outside the window, and it reinforces the sheer amount of time on the narrator’s hands.\(^5\) The pizza chef’s movements also take the form of a constantly repeated action which becomes a somewhat hypnotic image.\(^5\) The effect of witnessing

\(^5\) Repetition is also employed to convey hurriedness and impatience that characterizes portions of the characters’ days. At one point, the narrator relates that he and Marie ran through the city from one end to the other, after she momentarily mistakes a Frenchman for her missing husband. Within five sentences, Seghers repeats the verb form *liefen* eight times to reinforce the cinematic image of characters in motion (168). Lamberechts maintains that there are two types of time portrayals in Seghers’s works; in the first, often observable in the *Erzählungen*, time is concentrated and fable-like; and in the second, characteristic of her epic works, time unfolds in a more natural way (201-02). In *Transit*, a novel constructed around *Erzählungen*, I would argue that the time depiction falls between these two poles as the narrative pace vacillates between the standstill of waiting and the temporary rush of accomplishing an immediate goal.

\(^5\) The image of kneading dough is a recurring one in *Transit*. The motion of this activity is universal and easily imagined; Seghers does not need to include further detail, as the verbs *schlagen* and *kneten* alone suffice in prompting the reader to visualize this scene of repetitive movement, the “Klatschen von Händen auf Teig in vertrautem Rhythmus” (*Ausflug der toten Mädchen* 37).
the same scenes over and over is pleasantly numbing for the narrator as his perceptive faculties slip into a dream-like slow motion. Heinz Neugebauer’s declaration that Seghers’s exile novel *Die Rettung* possesses a “Zeitlupentempo” (75) applies to such passages in *Transit* as well.

The uncertainty of duration that accompanies all the refugees’ waiting periods is represented in the narrator’s depiction of the instability inherent in his existence as a refugee en route to Marseilles: “Alles war auf der Flucht, alles war nur vorübergehend, aber wir wüssten noch nicht, ob dieser Zustand bis morgen dauern würde, oder noch ein paar Wochen, oder Jahre, oder gar unser ganzes Leben” (39). In the subordinating clause following *ob*, a noteworthy effect is brought about by the accumulative usage of the conjunction *oder*. This run-on style intensifies the incertitude of the refugees’ situation and the frenzied thoughts of someone whose current hell of a “Warten auf Nichts” appears everlasting.

### 3.2.4. Filling the Time: Spatiality, Materiality, and Waiting

Seghers reifies the burden of waiting by imparting physical weight upon it through metaphor. Exemplifying the heaviness sometimes bestowed on the process of waiting, Seidler writes of his tired head that feels crushed from so much waiting (“Durch meinen müdten, vom Warten zermalmtten Kopf,” 94). Even the thought of so much time on his hands weighs heavily on him: “ich […] dachte, wie schwer es mich drückte, daß ich soviel Zeit hatte” (15). Seghers’s first-person narrator also expresses the lethargy he feels while waiting for his emigration issues to be settled by a third party: “Mir war es
unmöglich aufzustehen. Die Glieder wie Blei! Vom törchten Warten gelähmt!” (93). Boredom from listening to the many rumors in the harbor city causes Seidler to become “halb gelähmt vor Langeweile” (87).

Representations of the exilic waiting experience seem particularly suited for spatializations and materializations of temporality. In referring to his time after leaving Marseilles, under his new persona as a farmer in the French village, Seidler provides a typical example of a conspicuous material metaphor that emphasizes the distortion of time due to the multifaceted dilemmas of the peripatetic: “Ich bin jetzt ein paar Wochen dort. Mir kommen sie wie Jahre vor, so schwer wiegt die Stille” (279). While in the previous instances, material metaphors were employed to convey the burden of life in exile as if it were a burdensome load on the refugees' shoulders, here it is used to communicate the weightiness of the tranquility of Seidler's new provincial existence.

While in exile in Marseilles, Seidler had shifted constantly between waiting and running the bureaucratic obstacle course. Both modes encumbered him. In this French village and with yet another identity, he is no longer hassled by the chatter of other exiles, or by the demands of immigration officials. Still the silence weighs heavy, and the time seems to drag in his continued existence as an expatriate. By the same token, while still in Marseilles, Seidler had possessed a “Furcht vor der Stille” (133) because both time and meaningful events seemed to cease during this period.53

The theme of waiting also prompts the spatially-oriented “container metaphor” as discussed previously. Seidler, the narrator of Transit, perceives time spent waiting as

52 Johnson utilizes similar imagery of leaden limbs: “Er fühlte die Müdigkeit wie ein Gewicht in seinen Gliedern und in seinen Gedanken,” (Mutmassungen 44).
53 The threat of silence is likewise clear when Seidler describes “wie die Stille selbst diesen Raum bedrohte” (135).
oppressive; he describes an evening ahead of him as empty ("leer," 44), and he explains that he and his foreign legion friend have many hours of "unausgefüllter Zeit" (243). He perceives the empty time as threatening, especially when he thinks it is unfillable, even drawing on tomb-imagery to express this—"Der Tag, der vor mir lag, kam mir unausfüllbar vor wie mein ganzes Leben, und die Nacht, die dann folgen mußte, wie mein Grab" (181). For Seidler, boring and wasted time is more ominous than most any other aspect of his experience as a refugee in Marseilles, and the uncertainty of its duration makes it even more threatening.54

Because Marie spends most of her days scouting in vain for her dead husband, Seidler also worries about the uncertainty which is her constant companion: "das störte mich grimmig: wie lange würde sie suchen? Kein Zweifel, sie suchte jetzt stark, doch wichtiger war die Frage, wie lange? Noch fünf Minuten? Bis zum Mittagessen? Die Woche über? Noch ein Jahr? [...] Womit eine Zwischenzeit ausfüllen, von der sie nicht wußte, ob sie Stunden dauerte oder ewig?" (205). The question of "how long" is a vital question for all of the Wartenden, but almost as significant is the question of what to do until the waiting is over: that is, how does one fill up this "Zwischenzeit" of indefinite insecurity? Seghers employs the container metaphor to reinforce the emptiness of this time, and the compulsion to fill up the imagined container so that time and individual

54 Seidler laments on occasion that there is not enough excitement: "Wie öd ist der Cours Belsunce. Wie zäh ist die Zeit zwischen zwei Abenteuern! Wie langweilig das gefahrlose Leben!" (184); "Ich ging zu Binnets hinauf, als die Zeit mir zu öd war. Wie einem die Zeit doch öd werden kann auf der zitternden Erde zwischen zwei Feuersbrünsten" (190). His time is not only boring, it is " öd" in this spatial representation of time between two more defined, less ambiguous points in his life—even if those points involve peril. The locational presentation of temporality also shines through in Seidler's rejoicing, "Ich hatte also bereits eine Strecke Zeit hinter mich gebracht" (185). The equation of time as distance provides a cognitive mapping that provides him with at least the illusion that indefinite waiting periods are quantifiable.
histories progress further. The conceptualization of time as possessing specific boundaries, a cognitive aid in times of distress, reveals itself as somewhat foiled when the waiting time feels completely uncontained and infinite. The doctor, in explaining his own state of transit, displays this notion of limitlessness in duration: "'Die Sache hat sich hingezogen,' sagte er müde, 'wie jede Sache in diesem Lande. Endlos hingezogen'" (123). The spatial-directional connotations of *hinziehen* highlight the metaphor of containment, or in this case, the lack thereof.

Marie also expresses her own anxiety about the amassing of empty, sluggish days: "'Der Tag ist lang. Der einzelne Tag ist lang, wenn man nichts tut als Warten. Doch all diese langsamen Tage sind plötzlich ein Haufen Zeit" (165). The concreteness alluded to through the substantive *Haufen* here brings to mind again the weighty burden resting on the shoulders of the refugees, preventing them from moving toward their desired destinations; time wasted through waiting accumulates such that it becomes practically tangible and visible. This occurs gradually, imperceptible to the forcibly waiting participants until suddenly they are faced with a *Haufen* of unfilled time. But time eventually dissipates and is whisked away before the eyes of the refugees: "Nicht nur unermeßliche Leere schien den Platz zu erfüllen, trotz seiner Zeitungsbuden und frierenden Bäume, sondern unermeßliche Zeit. Vermischt mit dem Staub, schien der Wind ungeheure Stöße von Zeit dahierzufegen" (206). With a viable word play on the multiple meanings of *Stöße*, as stacks of a concrete substance or as gusts of wind, time is depicted here too with a material quality. It consists of particles, the moments which are metaphorically similar to dust: once underway, they are impossible to recapture, despite their visibility as they float by. For Seghers's figures, time is immeasurable—as suggested not only through the repeated appearance of *unermeßlich*, but also by the
pairing of time with diaphanous elements such as wind and air. Time constantly flows beyond the grips of human control, whether figuratively carried by the wind, or flowing as an independent current or stream. Time remains uncontained, and thus even spatializations provide no substantial consolation.

Nonetheless, Seidler and the other refugees attempt to take control of their time, to fill it so that their waiting is minimized. At one point, someone grabs Seidler on the arm to speak with him, a temporary obstacle on his way to an appointment: “ich schüttelte ihn ab, ich war eilig, ich hatte jetzt eine Verabredung, ich hatte die Zeit besetzt” (184). A significant aspect of this passage is the polysemous verb besetzen: while besetzen is a conventional verb denoting the act of reserving a specific time, a temporal “occupation,” it can also indicate a spatial occupation, such as in regard to a seat, a room, or a territory. This double meaning, along with the phonetic similarity and etymological relationship between besetzen and besitzen, emits a sense of Seidler’s new possessiveness toward his own time. The verb provides a counterpart to the füllen/ausfüllen imagery, as the protagonist attempts to fill the spaces of time to his advantage, and to remain as high as possible on the waiting hierarchies constructed around him in France.

3.3. Mutmassungen über Jakob: “die Welt hat nicht eben auf mich gewartet”

Waiting in this novel takes on two distinct forms: waiting in private situations, and waiting related to the workplace. The former originates in part as a consequence of war, as the novel reflects on Jakob’s mother’s process of waiting for her husband to

55 The metaphorical concepts of “time is a valuable commodity” and “time is a limited resource” (Lakoff/Johnson 8) are also conveyed through Seidler’s desperate tone here.
return from World War II. She waited for three years with “Hoffnung und Zuversicht” for the “jungen jähzornigen Landwirt aus Mecklenburg” (95); Frau Abs finally had to accept that her husband was not coming home: “In den ersten Jahren bei Cresspahl hatte sie noch gewartet. Aber der Name Abs war nicht in den Listen des Roten Kreuzes und des Roten Halbmondes” (96). The subsequent division of post-war Germany also instigates waiting periods as Gesine’s father and Jakob’s mother spend time waiting for letters from their children, who end up on opposite sides of the political-geographical divide from their respective parent. The more universal occurrence of dependents shedding that status likewise results in aimless parental waiting. Gesine’s father loses his sense of purpose after Jakob and Gesine leave the house, as he simply waits his life away (or waits for the end of his life): “Cresspahl wartete sein Leben ab, niemand konnte aufkommen für seine Umstände” (18).

The other form of waiting, that which takes place in the workplace or which is related to occupational duty, plays the greater role in terms of the novel’s power structures. Jakob explains to Rohls the reason for the lack of punctuality on the tracks for which he is responsible: “Oberhalb ist noch die Kreuzung mit den westdeutschen Schnellzügen von Hamburg nach Berlin, die müssen pünktlich sein, und ich muss meine Züge warten lassen vor der Brücke” (49-50). The waiting of these trains signifies the perceived hierarchy of West over East Germany. The trains from the West take priority over Jakob’s trains, and the result is that the East German system appears deficient through no fault of its own. Trains waiting for other delayed trains leads to the disorder which increases exponentially by the day, as the following anecdote exemplifies.

wegen dieser sieben Minuten herzhaften Männergesprächs hat an der Abzweigung bei den grossen Seen ein Güterzug auf unsern Triebwagen

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warten müssen, da war der Plan in Unordnung gleich zu Anfang des neuen Tages. (166)

Jakob explains at one point to Rohlfs: “die Pünktlichkeit ist kein Gegenstand des Ehrgeizes mehr und nicht des Diensts am Kunden sondern sie ist die Voraussetzung für einen so prallen Betrieb überhaupt” (50). It is not only Jakob’s own pride at stake here, but the integrity, reputation, and above all, the reliability of the train system with which he equates himself. His dissatisfaction with the extensive delays of his trains, resulting from the division of Germany and the ensuing flawed scheduling, translates for Jakob into a diminished sense of well-being and an uneasiness with his own life:

“Ich wünsch mir nichts” sagte er, und ein unterschwelliger Auflauf von Herzklopfen machte ihm bewusst dass er gesagt hatte was sein Leben war in diesem Herbst, die träge verzichtsame Unruhe bewegte sich in ihm als habe er sie immer gelebt und ohne einen Anfang irgend wo in der Zeit. Er hatte etwas versucht mit seinem Dasein, das so überstand: denn die Zeit ("die Sseitn") war und waren so gefügt dass einer wenig Gewalt hatte über sein eigenes Leben und aufkommen musste für was er nicht angefangen hatte. Nun treibt einer hin und her zwischen seiner Arbeit und einem möblierten Zimmer nach Regeln und Gewohnheiten, manchmal wundert er sich dass dies im menschlichen Vermögen ist. (56)

While the boredom originating from his daily routine emanates from these sentiments, more significant is Jakob’s discontent and impatience with the lack of efficiency in the current system.56 Because his identity is grounded so solidly in his work, Jakob believes to be losing control not only over the trains’ punctuality but also over his own life—and in particular during this autumn of 1956, when he perpetually waits for “his” delayed trains. This anxiety regarding the inadequate operations is so all-pervasive that, as he says

56 The railroad employee Jöche, to whom Jonas Blach entrusts his oppositional manuscript, is presented at one point as “beschäftigt mit der Rückkehr in die Ungefährlichkeit unseres Alltags” (59). The everyday is portrayed here as a safe, if unstimulating, “place” in which one retreats or takes refuge. Johnson attempts to show this aspect of the everyday in great depth—as Wilhelm Westecker writes, “Hier werden wir in das Dickicht des Alltags geführt” (55)—while subtly implying the gradual breaking down of this security for Jakob.
in the above passage, he cannot remember a time when it was not present within him. Jakob experiences his trains' waiting almost as if a part of himself were put on hold by an exterior force. The “von Jakob verwaltete Zeit” (41) is no longer under his complete command.

3.3.1. Hierarchies of Waiting in the GDR

Jakob has sympathy with the “übermüdeten gereizten Menschenmenge, die wartend stand neben Koffern” (249), and with the “wartenden Bevölkerung” (ibid.) outside of his station. The waiting persons are collectivized here, but this differs in an important respect from the type of deindividualization that is apparent in the bureaucratic view of the “Wartenden” from Transit. Jakob does not differentiate himself into a separate category from those who must wait, as do the bureaucrats in respect to the refugees in Transit. Although he has some control over their waiting times (albeit to a limited degree during this particular autumn), Jakob does not relax as a privileged member of the “Nichtwartenden.” Instead he attempts to use his authority to the others’ advantage, and to keep their waiting times to a minimum.

In Johnson’s novel, the theme of waiting takes a slight turn from the previous two novels discussed, in that now even those with some semblance of official power are made to wait. Their actions are thus contingent to some extent on the actions of those whom they would consider their systemic inferiors. For instance, the Stasi-Hauptmann Rohlfs lurks in wait for those whom he needs to observe or interrogate. Dependent upon others for information, he must wait for them to act first, in order for his plans to succeed, for instance when he requests the assistance of Jakob’s mother in convincing the NATO interpreter Gesine Cresspahl to become a spy for the GDR. A narrative remark like “Die
Grossen des Landes warfen ihr Auge auf Jakob” (28) is less ominous-sounding when one imagines that this “eye” is waiting for Jakob to act first, and is ineffectual until he actually does something. The utility and greatness of the “Grossen” is contingent on the observed subject. In addition, the train dispatcher Jakob, who has the capability and power to leave people waiting, avoids doing so at all costs and is resentful of the delays which occur to inconvenience hard-working people. This marks an inversion of the waiting dynamics as outlined in Der Verschollene and Transit, in which authority figures keep others waiting as a matter of course—even if some characters in those two works might feel compassion for those who wait, their attitude is one of resignation and an acquiescence to the greater system.

While Rohlfs depends on waiting to maintain his position, his constant presence threatens those whom he follows. Frau Abs even flees the GDR after “eines Abends in Jakobs Oktober ein Herr namens Rohlfs auf sie gewartet hatte vor dem Kücheneingang des Krankenhauses und ein vertraulich angelegentliches Gespräch begann mit ihr über den Sozialismus” (19). Both Rohlfs and his car are depicted as predators lurking in wait for their prey: “Mittags in leichtem Regen hielt der Wagen in der Bahnhofstrasse von Jerichow halb in dem schlammigen und zertretenen Vorgarten eines anscheinend verlassenen Einfamilienhauses und wartete still und steif und boshaft auf dem Sprunge

57 Granted, the “Auge” of surveillance (represented likewise collectively in the following statement as the “Einblick”) does not heed this implied dependency on its object, and thus has patience in waiting for its prey: “der Einblick erlernte geduldig die Geschäfte und Bewegungen Jakobs in der Stadt” (28).

58 Johnson depicts characters who differentiate between the value placed on individuals over the community in which they exist, versus individual desires made a subordinate second to the priorities of the community decreed and enforced by the state. Johnson addresses the tension between individual desires versus collective priorities and community harmony” (Baker 59). Interestingly, in this respect Baker groups Jakob and Rohlfs together, in their prioritization of the communal, and Gesine and Jonas together, for the preference they give to the individual.

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wenige Zeit” (39-40); “Der Wagen klettert durch den Graben wie ein Bär. Am meisten
spürt man seine Kraft, wenn er still zitternd dasteht bei laufendem Motor mit seinem
Licht in der Nacht und auf den Absprung wartet” (161). For his part, Rohlfs is aware of
his position as a lurker: “nun stehe ich beinah da wie einer von diesen intellektuellen
Ochsen vor dem Sozialismus. Oder vielmehr sitze ich hinter Hänschen im Wagen auf der
Strassenseite und warte auf die Strassenbahn und darauf dass Jakob über die Laderampe
des Güterbahnhofs kommt, er geht also doch immer querüber” (26). His intimate
knowledge of Jakob’s routine might be less remarkable if it did not also point back to the
novel’s well-known first line, “Aber Jakob ist immer quer über die Gleise gegangen” (7).
The fact that Rohlfs has waited regularly for Jakob privies him to information that
intensifies the speculation surrounding the nature of Jakob’s death. In trying to use Jakob
to win over Gesine, Rohlfs must penetrate the laconic protagonist’s personal realm—a
process which often leaves him waiting.

The novel features much vying for hierarchy and silent stand-offs, and not only
between Rohlfs and Jakob. When Jonas enters the Cresspahl home, for instance, there is a
moment of uncertainty as he adjusts to interacting with the reserved duo of Cresspahl and
Jakob—“Ich wartete. Sie warteten, bis ich mich umwandte” (78). Jakob has no problem
waiting for the dynamics to sort themselves out. Indeed, he is secure and comfortable in
nearly every situation, talented in surveying the scenes around him and ascertaining the
prevailing hierarchies of waiting before acting accordingly.

Gesine, guten Tag: hörte ich ihn schon sagen, ich sah sein Gesicht erinnert
an mich in den Augenwinkeln, er sieht sich um und findet dass sie alle
warten können und wendet sich zurück zu mir und lacht nun auch mit den
Lippen […]. (150)
Because of his ability to adapt to various settings—whether among intellectuals, or blue-collar workers, or representatives of the state—the chameleon-like Jakob often heads up hierarchies of waiting. We often find other characters waiting for him rather than the reverse, even when this somewhat surprises them, such as when Gesine marvels, “Was werd ich mich wundem weil Jakob nicht zu Hause ist: ich habe ja wohl geglaubt er wartet hier auf mich” (144). She naturally opts to wait until he comes back (145). The fact that so many people are willing to wait for Jakob reinforces his ultimate significance in their lives. Even the trains are held up at one point as Jakob himself is sought—ironic, considering Jakob’s devotion to keeping his trains running on time.

Perhaps because much of the action surrounding Jonas Blach takes place outside of his physical workplace, the implications of the waiting hierarchy in regard to his character are less concrete than in the cases of Jakob and Rohlfs. Because of the impending invasion of Hungary, Blach decides to wait to present his oppositional paper on practiced socialism, a paper which is eventually discovered and for which he is then arrested. Thus it is not a specific individual by whom Blach feels compelled to wait, but instead the larger regime and the political events of the time exert control over his actions. From time to time Blach had considered the so-called Republikflucht discussed by the characters, but had always decided to stay in order to try to effect a change from the inside. He reconsiders this in retrospect: “ich hätte auch vor sieben Jahren gehen können und seitdem täglich. Vielleicht hab ich zu lange gewartet” (152). He has waited in an attempt to exert some control over his surroundings. Ultimately though, his waiting does not give him the upper hand, but just the opposite, as he ends up incarcerated and waiting out a sentence from the state.
Overall, the hierarchies of waiting as portrayed in *Mutmassungen* highlight the existence of stark divisions within a society whose eventual aim is classlessness.\(^5^9\) The distinction between the GDR and the BRD is also brought to the foreground through the comment that the East must wait much longer than the West to receive news even from officially sanctioned publications.\(^6^0\) Meanwhile, even those in the East are having to wait less and less for some media to reach them, a situation with which Rohlfs is uncomfortable. He complains about the immediacy of the propaganda from “drüben” that comes across the radio waves, and imagines that those in the West are waiting around for things to fall apart in the East. “Ich möchte wetten drüben stehen sie Gewehr bei Fuss und warten auf den ersten Stein der hier ins Fenster fliegt und mir an die Nase wie ich hier sitze beschaulich mit meinem vergnügten Abend” (128). It does not matter which side throws the “first stone” however, since both East and West construct waiting hierarchies of their own, and both sides display an impatience that seems dependent on a general post-war outlook, regardless of ideological stance.

### 3.3.2. Impatience with the System

In one respect, Jakob is reminiscent of Karl Roßmann, who likewise wishes to govern time: that is, Jakob also cherishes the pocket watches given to him as gifts, as they

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\(^5^9\) The nature of the waiting hierarchies between East and West are quite different. Gesine remarks on the norm dictating that the doorman in the West German hotel “würde warten und mich von der Garderobe führen bis zu dem Sessel, in dem Jakob sass” (264)—a service which irritates Jakob. To him, such waiting hierarchies are ridiculous and unjust.  
\(^6^0\) While staying with friends in East Berlin “[Jonas] wusste kein Buch zu bestellen, weil er darauf hätte warten müssen und Einrichtungen treffen für den nächsten Tag; so sass er am Ende im Zeitschriftenlesesaal; auf die amtlichen Veröffentlichungen musste man warten, die Blätter der kommunistischen Parteien Westeuropas kamen in diesen Tagen endlich durch” (267).
grant him the possibility of "Aufsicht über die Zeit" (65). But again it should be stressed that his compulsion to master time does not originate in a desire to control others, but to keep the cogs running smoothly for the sake of others. Unlike Kafka's Karl, whose impatience with waiting is motivated egoistically in his desires to advance his social position, the ideal socialist Jakob (at least from Blach's perspective) relinquishes his individual concerns for what he perceives as the good of the whole. This stance is reinforced by the pivotal, while oddly anti-climactic, scene in which Jakob gives clearance for Warsaw Pact trains to move through on their way to invade Hungary, rather than retaining them for a time in protest as the dispatcher to the north of him had done. Jakob shouts out in disgust over this particular "Ehrenpussel" up the line, who holds up the commuter trains, anarchically privileging his own political convictions over the welfare of his fellow citizens:

Schreib mir den Namen auf von dem Kerl! Der hat eine Meinung über die Russen, hält er sie auf, ja glaubt er denn dass wir uns nichts denken dabei! Ich weiss auch wohin sie fahren, hält er sie auf. Als ob zehn Minuten was nützen. Mach ihm klar dass seine verdammte Ehrenhaftigkeit uns hier an den Rand bringt, wir können nicht ewig reinen Tisch machen, wir haben hier Züge zu stehen. Die Leute wollen nach Hause, die haben auch eine Meinung über die Russen, deswegen tun sie doch noch keinem Menschen was. (247)

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61 A contrast to this desire to control humanly structured time is provided by the cat in the novel. A cat's impatience is not measured quantitatively, through a measure of time spent, but qualitatively, as Jonas Blach notes: "Eine Sekunde lang war ich ihr lästig gefallen. Eine Katze kennt keine Sekunden" (180). Johnson utilizes the figure of the cat in this case to humorously bring out a further distinction between humans and cats, who generally will not wait for anything if they do not want to—keeping the felines on top of any waiting hierarchy. The Cresspahl cat remains in control in respect to Blach, whom Cresspahl finds "im Schlafanzug auf den Dielen hockend und mit der Katze beschäftigt. [...] Dennoch wartete er, bis sie von ihm ablief" (180).
62 "Jonas actually comes to admire Jakob as a working man, a practical man, a man of integrity, and an individual who naturally harbors the concerns of the socialist collective in a noncompetitive, unproblematic manner" (Baker 53).
Jakob’s own impatience with the delay stems from his great concern for the commuters for whom he feels responsible. Jakob finds it unacceptable to inconvenience them, regardless of his personal opinions, even if it means allowing the troops through sooner. His unwillingness to keep the commuters waiting any longer for their trains—especially on this one day, and in this unique situation with grave political implications—could be interpreted either as passivity and apathy toward his international counterparts (as the intellectual Jonas Blach seems to imply), or as the expression of his rational belief that nothing is solved by disrupting everyday life in the GDR in order to prove a point. But behind his action stands, most likely, an unreflected and natural behavior. His relationship to the object of his work, the trains, becomes muddled at this point, as well as when his mother passes through his station while fleeing the GDR, but his dedication to preventing people from having to wait remains steadfast: “Und meine Mutter in die Flüchtlingsbaracken von Westberlin mit der Eisenbahn, und ich sorge dafür dass sie alle sicher und pünktlich kommen wohin sie wollen” (137).

The outburst in regard to the dispatcher up the line contrasts Jakob’s normally even-tempered demeanor. As Soholm summarizes, “Jakob wird ständig als ‘geduldig’ bezeichnet, er wendet sich der praktischen, heutigen Tätigkeit als Eisenbahner zu, ist nicht-politisich und nicht-ideologisch” (1521). From Jonas Blach’s viewpoint at the beginning of the scene, Jakob sits casually at work and converses as if he were on the

Baker elaborates on the notion of Jakob as an ideal figure within the socialist society (and perhaps he is too ideal for a real system, possibly causing his demise)—“Socialism’s intrinsic ethical value as a normative system by which an entire nation can exist is demonstrated in the consistent politeness with which Jakob approaches the many people who come in contact with him. In his nonagonistic demeanor, Jakob possesses a higher consciousness about socialism than those other characters of the novel who struggle openly with the East-West dichotomy” (61). I agree with Baker’s premise here, although Jakob’s “higher consciousness” about the merits of socialism appears to me rather unconscious and unreflected.

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steps of his apartment building "und lasse sich die Neuigkeiten eines fremden Tages erzählen ohne Interesse ohne Ungeduld" (243-44). In this respect Jakob resembles Cresspahl, who "rauchte geduldig mit langen Pausen immer aus der einen Pfeife" (169), and he contrasts Jonas, who possesses "allerhand ungeduldige Gedanken" (73) and Rohlfs, who tends to look at the clock periodically (146). These characters' impatience originates in their rush to actively advance their particular versions of the socialist system. Rohlfs's assistant Hānschen is likewise impatient, proclaiming as they look for Jakob, "Diese Warterei ist nicht auszuhalten" (297). The assistant is perhaps most frustrated that he is not in a position to schedule and structure their waiting episodes himself, at least as the narrator interprets this comment: "Er hatte damit ausdrücken wollen dass sie damit ja mindestens drei Tage zu früh angefangen hatten" (297).

Other characters display their impatience with the frustrations of everyday life. When Jakob and Gesine return from visiting Jakob's mother in the refugee camp, they

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64 People attest to Jakob's patience throughout the novel—in fact, it is the one aspect of him about which they are not compelled to speculate. Johnson goes to some lengths in emphasizing "Jakobs Geduld" (e.g. 54). (Also: "Jakob indessen hielt sich ziemlich lange in seiner Geduld," 23; and: "[...] sagte Jakob mit einer Art von Geduld, nachdem er eine Weile gewartet hatte," 140). Even during his personal crisis in regard to the Warsaw Pact trains, Jakob is still "weniger ungeduldig als Bartsch" (248). People looking at photos of him characterize him by his even keel and always moderate temperament, "Das is Jakob. Der da, siehssu, welche so ebmnässich kuckt" (24). He even sleeps "lautlos und geduldig wie ein Tier" (207), and everyone seems to agree that "Jakob hat ja die Ruhe" (61). One moment in the narration indicates speculation in this regard, however—when Jakob looks on a scene "und erwartete mit? vielleicht mit Geduld" (108). The question mark and extra spacing in the middle of this thought is noteworthy and suggests, at least at this exceptional point, some doubt as to whether Jakob's internal sentiment correlates with his outward appearance.

65 As Ree Post-Adams notes, the narrator too expresses impatience "beim Versuch, die Geschichte Jakobs adäquat zu vermitteln [...]. Der Erzähler wird ungeduldig, da er die Fakten nicht so sinnvoll zusammenfügen kann, wie er es gern möchte" (53). The narrator's anxiety about his or her own impasses contributes to the overall tone of impatience and frustration that reverberates in Johnson's novel.
are cut off in traffic and “mussten lange Zeit warten. Gesine beschimpfte die reglosen
glänzenden Autokästen vor und neben ihnen mit den sorgfältigsten Ausdrücken” (293).
Blach also displays his impatience from time to time, such as when he makes a statement
“noch in dem kurzen tonlosen Auflachen von Ungeduld” (112), or when he “richtete sich
ungeredig auf, als sein Zug die Fahrt mitten auf der Strecke verlangsamt hatte und
stehenblieb” (298). Blach’s impatience reaches a peak when he sits in on a lecture in his
field: “Er schrieb nichts mit. Dass er auf das Ende wartete, konnte nur Ungeduld sein,
denn er wünschte sich nichts anderes” (270). As Baker has noted, Blach is “dissatisfied
with his work as a teaching assistant in English, he is dissatisfied with the real socialism
around him, and he is dissatisfied in love” (63), and for these reasons, Blach remains
fascinated in Jakob and in his ostensible satisfaction with life.66

Blach’s own impatience is similar to Rohlfs’s in the sense that he too awaits the
particular incarnation of socialism that he believes in—in his case, a more democratized
version. He lies awake at Cresspahl’s house, pondering the many “Meinungen über die
Freiheit” and bemoaning, “die Welt hat nicht eben auf mich gewartet, ich verhalte mich
ja geradezu als hätte ich was zu sagen was niemand weiss und jeder werde
zugrundegehen ohne die Neuigkeiten aus meinem Kopf, will ich etwa unentbehrlich
sein?” (190). Blach regrets having waited, and not having spoken up sooner with his
convictions. The impatient world did not wait for him to prepare his ideas for perfect
formulation. In the end, Blach’s hesitancy to leave the GDR when he had the opportunity
results in his sentence to ten years of incarcerated waiting.

66 Baker also comments on the significance of Blach witnessing “Jakob’s only
identifiable moral fall” (64) when he lets the troops through, because unlike Blach, Jakob
blends in so well to every environment that his actions are nearly impossible to judge.
3.3.3. The Pace of Waiting

How is the time spent waiting (whether with patience or impatience) represented in the particular language and style of Johnson’s novel? The structure of *Mutmassungen über Jakob* factors heavily into the novel’s varying pace, as Fickert writes: “As though on stage or in a film, the speakers accelerate or impede the course of events and embellish the speculations about Jakob made by Gesine, Jonas, and Rohlfs as they give voice to their thoughts” (“The Protean Narrator” 93). Their soliloquy-like monologues prevent the narration from flowing steadily and with linearity, and the time spent waiting by characters in the novel corresponds with the resulting narrative spaces and gaps in their storylines. Johnson also keeps the reader waiting on the syntactic level with sometimes lengthy parenthetical asides which interrupt the narration, such that one might need to return to the beginning of the parenthetical in order to recall the original thought which was broken off (e.g. 69, 223). In the middle of a story, Gesine interrupts herself to say “Warte: die Strasse roch nach Sprühregen und Staub und nach meiner Müdigkeit” (198). The unexpected command that the listener and reader wait while she shifts storytelling gears maintains the authority of the narrative voice, while simulating the non-linearity of human experience and of how that experience is orally conveyed. On other occasions, impatience or restlessness on the characters’ parts is expressed by protracted statements consisting of conjoined but essentially separate thoughts, strung together by commas.

Sie schwiegen alle vier und warteten, Stimmenlärm und Lampenlicht beulten den Raum immer mehr aus, und irgend wo an der grossen Wiese in der Dämmerung stand ein Güterzug beladen mit Panzern undJeeps und leichten Kanonen vor einem unbeweglichen Signalarm, das war der erste, die Soldaten waren längst von den Wagen gesprungen und standen in kleinen Gruppen rauchend zusammen und wunderten sich über die vielen zivilen Züge, die ungehindert an ihnen vorüberkamen, während sie warten mussten, und wenn Jakob sich räusperte über der Membran, sagte der Dispatcher der anderen Richtung: “Sie geben ihn mir nicht.” (246-47)
Due to the sheer length of this conglomeration of clauses, the reader is forced to wait along with Jakob and his colleagues for the decisions being made up the line. Johnson’s syntax thus effects a certain pace in terms of the plot’s unfolding.

Another exemplary passage constructed similarly (but provoking a dissimilar effect) highlights the impatience of the other dispatchers when Jakob follows the order from above to keep the way clear for the Warsaw Pact trains:

er hatte einen queren Strich gezogen und alle Fahrten mussten aufhören wo der hingefallen war, da schrien die Lautsprecher ihn schon lange an: wie sie das machen sollten, so unendlich wären die Ausweichgleise nicht, wie lange sollen denn die Fahrstrassen noch leer stehen, ob denn verdammt nicht der eilige Verkehr noch schnell durchkönne, wir haben hier auch was zu tun, nimm uns doch diesen einzigen Schnellzug ab, bitte. (246)

The receptive impression would have been much different had Johnson built a traditional dialogue out of these statements; the pace here would have been slowed considerably through the visual impediment on the reader caused by the appearance of quotation marks (or dashes, as dialogue is designated in this novel), or even by the separation of the complaints with periods rather than commas. The Faulknerian stream-of-consciousness is unmistakable, although it is not Jakob’s thought process to which we are privy, but rather the pervasive protests from the loudspeaker. The urgency of the exchange (presented here as one-sided) is effected by Johnson’s syntax. Correspondingly, when time is to be represented as passing more slowly for his characters, a contrastively reductionist style brakes the pace. This is striking for instance in the simple portrait of Rohlfs sitting on a stool sipping vodka and waiting for the appropriate time to approach Gesine: “Manchmal sah er aufwärts zur Uhr” (146).

3.3.4. Spatialized Moments of Waiting
In other instances, a particular word choice and metaphor allows the author to paint a contrastive picture of time spent waiting versus time spent in motion. The following passage, describing the arrival of the troops that are passing through, illustrates this technique. Johnson writes of the tired and irritated mass of people,

die wartend stand neben Koffern und umdrängten Mitropakiosken unbeweglich wie die Güterwagen sich nicht rührten, weil nicht nur auf den Fahrstrassen der südlichen Richtung rangiert wurde sondern auf allen, und die Laderampe war noch nicht einmal abgeräumt. Indessen öffneten sich die Tore der Garnison in der Stadt, die Scheinwerfer der Armeelastwagen glitten hinaus auf die nächtliche Strasse, mit roten Leuchtzeichen hielten sie Verbindung, Motorräder rasten voraus auf die Kreuzungen mit dem Stadtverkehr und sprangen quer auf die Fahrbahn und winkten mit gekreuzten geöffneten überkreuzten Armen die Strassenbahnen und Lastautos und Personenwagen und Fussgänger zum Stillstand, in ungestümen Wendungen glitt Heck für Heck der Armeetransporter davon unter der städtischen Beleuchtung unter den Blicken der wartenden Bevölkerung. (249)

The stagnation of the waiting masses is highlighted through adverbs and adjectives such as “wartend” and “unbeweglich.” This image of standstill contrasts starkly with the motion verbs that conjure images of animals as they describe the troops moving through: “glitten hinaus,” “rasten voraus,” and “sprangen.” In the space of this single moment of narrated time, Johnson adeptly distinguishes between stopped time spent waiting idly, and time that races forward for those allowed to advance with their military mission.

Through both conventional and neologistic use of language based on typical conceptualizations, time is also depicted as measurable in spatial dimensions. As in other works in this study, the container metaphor for time is employed on occasion, such as in a statement about the dispatcher Martienssen, who relieves Jakob after his shift at one point: “er hatte das Dreifache von Jakobs Zeit ausgefüllt mit der Reichsbahn” (59). Again here the verb *ausfüllen* comes into play, in this case to emphasize the significant amount of space that the railroad has occupied in this individual’s life. In other cases,
materializations underline the characters’ efforts to manage their environments. For example, Jakob cuts “ein weitläufiges Stück Zeit aus der Nacht” (245) in an attempt to take control of the train schedules.

A description of Blach’s thought process after he realizes the true extent of Gesine’s inaccessibility exemplifies the coping mechanism implemented by mental materializations:

Er dachte aber an Cresspahls Tochter. Und war erstaunt wie wenig das Gefühl der Entbehrtung der heftigen Ungeduld glich, die er aus früheren Zeiten an einigen Gewohnheiten kannte: die Frage nach der Post dreimal täglich, die eigenmächtige Abkürzung verabredeter Trennungen und dies alles. Die Erwartung war nicht länger ungebärdig. Die Entfernung liess sich in zu vielen Hinsichten ausdrücken: in Tarifkilometern der Reichsbahn und der Bundesbahn, in Aussenministerkonferenzen (mengenmässig), in parteilichen Namen und anderen handfesten Umständen. (181)

Blach’s impatience and expectation has taken some shape, becoming metaphorically visible and measurable in that it is no longer “ungebärdig.” Waiting is less of an abstract, seemingly endless activity for him here, and more of something that can actually be expressed in terms of distance or of political structures. This makes his situation “handfest” and thus somehow more bearable, illustrating the utility of spatial conceptualizations in times of duress or concern. In another case, impatience is metaphoricized as it is figuratively blown into the warm air of a train compartment:

“Manchmal pusteten die strengen festen sehnsüchtigen Lippen des Armisten Ungeduld in die dicke Hitze des dichtgeschlossenen ratternden zitternden Abteils” (301-02).

Impatience among the characters in Mutmassungen often signifies a consciousness that time is passing without anything being accomplished. The stylistic materialization of this anxious feeling exaggerates its intensity to demonstrate how impatience loads an extreme heaviness onto the characters’ spirits.
A final notable means of materialized temporality in this novel is the representation of time as animate, with the waiting capabilities of humans or animals. In one case it is the day itself which has the ability to wait for the hopeful but essentially directionless Blach—"der Tag wartete auf ihn als eine grossartige Möglichkeit, er wusste nichts vorzuhaben" (265). This type of materialization stresses the high hopes placed onto the potential of time by Blach, and it makes clear the disappointment of the "albern verwarteten Jahre" (136), years wasted away through waiting for just the right moment to act on one’s principles.

3.4. "Ich": "Nun konnte ich nur noch warten...worauf?"

The protagonist of "Ich" spends most of his time waiting for people: first and foremost for his boss Feuerbach, but also for his “assignment” Reader, for his landlady Frau Falbe, for the mysterious Cindy, and for essentially anyone else with whom he has regular contact. At times the waiting fosters a sense of purpose within him, as he imagines that he is part of a larger plan, of something with much greater consequence than himself. But gradually he realizes that the question of why he is waiting for things to happen remains unanswered. Likewise undefined is the matter of for whom, or for what, he is supposed to be waiting. This triggers impatience but also a profound boredom that accompanies his time spent waiting pointlessly.

In his "Notes from Underground," Dostoevsky asserts that “man is a frivolous and unseemly being, and perhaps, similar to a chess player, likes only the process of achieving the goal, but not the goal itself" (33). But M.W. does not love the process, as he does not control this game—he is not the chessplayer, but the pawn in this analogy. His persistence toward closure, an end to the game, carries over into his disdain for the
fragmented, unpunctuated, and seemingly unstructured postmodern literature that he is forced to hear at the Szene readings. Instead, he prefers the ordered, albeit lengthy, composition of Thomas Mann’s sentences. In particular, he thinks of Mann’s short story “Beim Propheten”: “Ich dachte daran, wie sich der Autor einen Absatz lang bei einem Treppenaufstieg aufhält: mit welchen Sätzen aber, in denen die Länge und Mühe dieses Emporsteigens so wunderbar deutlich und zugleich ironisch bedeutsam wird” (12). Mann’s prose moves with an upward or forward progression which M.W. experiences neither in his own life nor in the literature of the Szene.

His higher-ups in the Firma often command M.W. to wait as a stalling technique in order to evade explanations of any details that might give away the futility of his assignment of spying on a spy, in an operation that will probably become obsolete in a matter of months anyway. As the state’s authority wanes, it continues to exert its ostensible power by maintaining the hierarchies of waiting that have helped sustain it for four decades. Do the Stasi officers in the novel actually believe that they have all the time in the world to wait for things to sort themselves out, as they frequently assert, or is this merely a ruse to keep M.W. and others like him under their tight control for as long as possible? In either case, the figures in “Ich” have no other choice than to wait and see what transpires; after all, the novel’s point is not to depict what eventually takes place historically (the end of the GDR state), but this waiting period that directly preceded it.

3.4.1. The Game of Waiting in Vain

The protagonist’s obligation to spend the majority of his time waiting signifies his status as an ineffectual participant within a larger design. Hilbig’s novel shares with Mutmassungen über Jakob the hierarchical inversion regarding who is compelled to wait
for whom. Like Rohlf’s in Johnson’s novel, those characters assumed to be in power in “Ich” are also forced to wait for their subjects to act—an inevitability inherent in the nature of the covert Stasi operations. Because of M.W.’s double role as spy and spied on, though, he ends up waiting constantly and is unable to take advantage of this inverted hierarchy.

Like the setting of Seghers’s Transit, cafés (in addition to bars) in “Ich” are the most common venues of the protagonist’s waiting periods. One of Feuerbach’s frequent mantras is his command that M.W. wait for him “in dem kleinen Café, Sie wissen schon, welches ich meine, dort können Sie auf mich warten” (33). From this statement and from M.W.’s own (41), we learn that the protagonist has often waited for Feuerbach in this very location. After a waiter passes on a request from Feuerbach that M.W. wait for him there, the first-person narrator remarks, “In beinahe allen ähnlichen Fällen wartete ich umsonst. Und mir war klar, daß ich umsonst warten sollte...damit er mir bei Gelegenheit vorwerfen konnte, daß ich nicht auf ihn gewartet habe” (49). Although M.W. is the one stood up by his boss on such occasions, Feuerbach finds a way to blame his underling anyway. The narrator then explains that when reproached by Feuerbach for not waiting

67 The character Cindy marks a noteworthy example of an inverted, or even subverted, hierarchy in the GDR. Cindy “fiel unter die Kategorie der sogenannten Selbststeller, es waren wegen kleiner krimineller Delikte Verurteilte, die abwarten mußten, bis für sie ein Platz in den überfüllten Gefängnissen frei wurde; es war eine Festlegung, die von den meisten Betroffenen als zusätzliche Schikane empfunden wurde” (84). Her jail sentence is a mockery: she waits for the opportunity to enter voluntarily into incarceration. Cindy supports the waiting hierarchy, but on her terms and while still retaining some control over it. Cindy also asserts her control when she tells M.W. that he must wait for her attention—he must wait and may not return until Harry Falbe goes to jail again (95).

68 Cf. also Roland Barthes’s “Waiting” fragment in A Lover’s Discourse, in which the “scenography of waiting” takes place inside a café (37).

69 This type of irony reappears later in the novel when Feuerbach and his supervisor reassign M.W. back to “Kleinstadt A.” in Saxony. As M.W. appears in their office, the latter remarks to Feuerbach, “Haben wir da endlich unseren jungen Freund, auf den wir
for him one time, M.W. does not defend himself because he knows this is the boss’s preference (50). Not only is he blamed for missing the single appointment, but he must assume the responsibility for having ruined “eine ganze Reihe von Treffs” (ibid.). Because of him, they allegedly need to start over from the beginning—although what exactly that beginning point is, and for that matter what the supposedly ruined project actually entails, are left as a mystery. When M.W. asks questions about these secrets, Feuerbach makes M.W. wait sometimes weeks before giving him an answer (191). He thereby maintains the pretense of power, but in reality he is covering up his own ignorance or the lack of an answer altogether. Thus M.W. waits and waits for nothing, not only because his superior does not show up at the agreed locations, but also because the assignment that Feuerbach was to bring with him is only a farce anyway. Beyond the café, M.W. also waits in his apartment “fast immer vergebens” (50) for the appearance of Feuerbach, that is, when he is not avoiding his apartment for that very reason.70 The dynamic between the two becomes a reciprocal game of waiting and outwaiting, as is evident when M.W. waits an extra hour or two in the cellar of his building because he takes the light in his apartment as a sign that Feuerbach is waiting for him—“Feuerbach müsse ihn mit dem Auto überholt haben und warte schon oben in der Wohnung” (298).

70 Other examples of his waiting for Feuerbach appear later in the novel: “Er wartete auf den Oberleutnant, ein paarmal glaubte er ihn auftauchen zu sehen unter den Fußgängern, die auf dem Trottoir durch den Lichtschein der gerade aufstrahlenden Lampen gingen; es war fast noch hell...Feuerbach kam nicht” (170); and yet another instance, with a repetition of this simple last line, is found toward the end of the novel, when Feuerbach is supposed to meet M.W. “gleich” in the café: “Eine halbe Stunde saß ich in dem Café und wartete, wartete auf die Bedienung, der Schattenkellner kam nicht, der Büffetier schaute an mir vorbei...und Feuerbach kam nicht” (341-42). Even after M.W. has believed to gain some status within the Firma, he still waits in vain, invisible even to the café’s staff.
Because he waits so long and so often, waiting becomes the one thing that M.W. does with any confidence. When falsely accused of paternity, he does not react at all but instead waits passively, “daß sich der Irrtum aufkläre” (97). Since he is most comfortable in the mode of waiting, M.W. never takes the initiative (even when he is trouble, and when his action could lead to his exoneration). Instead he just waits for things to clear themselves up somehow on their own or, more likely, by others. In so doing, he believes to be following the example of everyone around him in the GDR, since “eine bewährte Methode im Land war: man löste aufgekommene Konflikte nicht, sondern ließ sie altern, bis sie an Altersschwäche eingingen” (117). “Sitting it out” becomes his main modus operandi, as he lets matters hang over him until they eventually disappear (a tactic he believes to have learned from Reader, who as M.W. claims, “hatte mich darauf verwiesen, zu warten wie die übrigen...ich konnte sitzen bleiben und abwarten,” 373).

There is, however, an indication of M.W.’s uncertainty as to whether this means of functioning is most preferable: the word vielleicht comes up often in his tentative reflections (or in the third-person narrator’s reflections) about his tendency to wait out everything. And the protagonist remains the passive waiter not only in regard to the Firmer, also in the Szene, M.W. is considered “der Schweigsamste, er steuerte nie etwas

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71 Wark writes about the use of passive constructions in media reports of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which make it seem that “[i]f the cold war has indeed ended, it had nothing to do with the rational decisions or dialogue between the parties. Events did not appear as the outcome of particular or definable leadership actions. The historical end has simply ‘taken place’” (49-50). This is only one of the media’s “narrative lines” that Wark discusses, but the pre-Wende literary figure M.W. holds this line with his biding passivity as events (albeit mostly trivial) occur around him.

72 E.g. “Vielleicht wäre alles anders geworden, hätte er früh genug davon erfahren. – Mit dauernder Angst hatte er auf sie gewartet, sie kamen nicht, langsam setzte etwas wie Erleichterung ein” (118-19); “Vielleicht holten sie ihn gar nicht zurück...vielleicht war es das beste, hier draußen bei Frau Falbe abzuwarten, was geschah” (228). While in the end, he does nothing but wait, the repetition of vielleicht implies at least some speculation as to whether he should take a more assertive role in his own life instead.
zu den Streitigkeiten bei” (233). Because of his insecure position in both realms, he has neither means nor motivation to assert himself within the various hierarchies of waiting.

3.4.2. Waiting as a Way of Life

Waiting is the solitary area of his life in which M.W. considers himself sovereign. He has the independent idea to shadow the woman from West Berlin whom he calls the Studentin (she turns out to be a journalist): “Die Idee kam mir in der merkwürdigen Situation, in der ich mich in eine Türmische preßte und, den Bürgersteig entlang spähend, wartete, daß sie wieder ausreichend Vorsprung gewann... und ich hatte sogleich das Gefühl, daß ich dieser Aufgabe gewachsen war. Ich hatte das Gefühl vielleicht zum ersten Mal in meinem Leben...” (313). Waiting and lurking is the one thing for which he feels talented anymore. With the Studentin, M.W. can be the one to determine when and where he waits for her, as opposed to being ordered to do so. At the same time, though, his “authority” remains clandestine—“Dort klemmte ich mich in einen Winkel und wartete auf die Studentin” (337)—and he continues to engage in a futile exercise, the goal of which he cannot be certain.

M.W.’s endless waiting leads to temporal uncertainty and disorientation as well. During one stretch of waiting, he forgets how much time has lapsed, not knowing whether he has waited for one, two, or three days for Feuerbach, and loses track of where he is while he waits (189). M.W. becomes not only temporally but also spatially disoriented as waiting invades every moment of his life; waiting is his only marker of routine, but is anything but a certainty since there are no defined endpoints to it. Both his “professional” waiting and his personal waiting become overwhelming for him, as he
waits on more than one occasion with a longing for his lessor Frau Falbe (whom he had previously despised and avoided whenever possible) to appear at his apartment as well.\footnote{Wie lange wartete er eigentlich schon auf Feuerbach? – Nein, wie lange wartete er schon auf Frau Falbe; sie hatte versprochen, gleich mit dem Kaffee zu erscheinen" (222); “Er hatte vergeblich darauf gewartet, daß jemand von oben zurückkam, es geschah nicht, und Frau Falbe ließ sich an diesem Abend nicht mehr blicken” (223).}

With M.W. in a near-catatonic mental state of waiting, Feuerbach’s subject is positioned exactly as he wants him: vulnerable and dependent. Feuerbach tries to convince his mentee that the backbone-philosophy behind the \textit{Firma} is to wait things out: “man muß abwarten können, bis sich die Dinge in ihrer Nacktheit zeigen. [...] Das ist unsere Art, abzuwarten” (224). Feuerbach’s motives are, of course, egoistic: for his part, it is hardly surprising that he is satisfied with having underlings who wait for him. If they consider themselves a part of a greater, important project while actually doing nothing productive, then they remain immobile within the state’s hierarchy. And if the utopian goal of the classless society were ever actually achieved, positions such as Feuerbach’s would be superfluous and their power would be forfeited. This necessitates a diversion away from any ultimate goals, as the narrator postulates: “Die Firma war das Ende, das nicht fertig werden durfte...” (353). Feuerbach perhaps anticipates his post-Wall existence, when he will be outdated and superfluous. Thus he encourages his minions to wait, while secretly dreading the day when the waiting will be over.

\subsection*{3.4.3. Boredom and Impatience in the GDR’s Final Months}

Despite Feuerbach’s implication that life with the \textit{Firma} is still exciting and purposeful, the boredom displayed by M.W. in his perpetual state of waiting is impossible to overlook. The first-person narrator characterizes a bulk of the narration as

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his Schlafphase, a dream-like state that is—at least in his retrospective communication of it—permeated with boredom. The narrator of "Ich" also takes some comfort, however, in his own boredom and in this state of slumber. It is one certainty that he can count on, and he even waits with anticipation for the onset of his extreme "Müdigkeit" (329). When he feels tremendous pressure from Feuerbach to achieve greatness within the system, he succumbs directly to sleep. Upon waking, he is relieved, "daß er wieder der alte war: Feuerbachs bester Mann. [...] Und er war dann wieder der gelangweilt, aber mit versteckter Aufmerksamkeit umherschlendernde Typ, der auf einen Decknamen hörte" (232). His boredom oddly bolsters a sense of security, as this is how he has been instructed to feel, yet simultaneously it marks his ever-increasing dependence on the state for selfhood.

The banality of M.W.'s life is reflected in a Stasi report in which he recounts that his observed subject in the Szene "kratzt sich während des Abends mindestens 50x eine Stelle am Hinterkopf rechts (endogenes Ekzem?). Langweilt sich, schwitzt, beklagt sich über Hitze" (236). Not only the boredom of the observed is considered report-worthy, but the statements in turn exude the tedium felt by their author, the observer. This point is even more interesting, however, because the person described by M.W. bears his own name. The lines between observer and observed merge, underscoring the identity problematic of the novel.

74 When Feuerbach discusses with M.W. the nature of the Szene, he remarks that "dort nichts Dramatisches passiert, es wird für Sie wahrscheinlich schnell langweilig werden" (168). Later, the Stasi officer tells M.W. that he is only doing his job well if he suffers the boredom and uncertainty that accompanies waiting: "Sie sollten das Elend kriegen bei dem langen Warten und in der Unsicherheit. Das wäre bei Ihnen zu verstehen gewesen, bei einem, der seine ordentliche Arbeit und guten Verdienst hat" (178).
From such descriptions of his waiting periods, one might think M.W. would be in full agreement with Volker Braun’s observation of the GDR as “das langweiligste Land der Erde” (cf. Buck 33). But M.W. actually classifies West Berlin as the place “wo es am langweiligsten war” (313). His impatience is spurred by boredom as a result of waiting on either side of the Wall, along with his eventual realization that patience is a luxury afforded to those who are understood to hold power. We learn that during the applause after his Szene-readings, Reader “geduldig wartete, sodann verkündete, der Termin seines nächsten Abends werde noch rechtzeitig bekanntgemacht…es wurde immer seltener, daß er Ort und Datum des nächsten Abends schon vorher wissen” (17). Having gained authority as an alleged oppressed underground writer (turning out to be another Stasi informant), Reader perpetuates the myth of his power further by always requiring his audience of followers to wait for his next move. In addition, Reader recites from the same text (or at least, this is M.W.’s impression) at every reading, continuing each time where he left off after repeating the last few sentences from his preceding appearance (17). This contributes further to the power Reader has over his expectantly waiting audience—he determines when, if ever, they will be privileged to the end of his work.75

Not only does Reader oblige his audience to wait for the next installment of his manuscript, he also leaves M.W. perpetually waiting for anything of note to report on

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75 M.W. makes a connection between Reader’s work and that of Samuel Beckett: “Wenn ich nicht irrte, erschien die Formulierung gleich auf der ersten Seite eines Buchs von Beckett…was mich daran interessierte, war übrigens der Anschein, daß sich Becketts Figuren stets schon am Ziel befanden, wenn der Text begann. Sie waren schon am Ende, obwohl sie sich dauernd bewegten, oder vorgaben, sich zu bewegen, oder auf die Bewegung warteten oder auf das Ende der Bewegung warteten: das Ende lag schon vor dem Beginn des Textes” (352-53). Like the figures who wait for Godot in Beckett’s play, M.W. consistently receives as little confirmation and legitimation of his efforts as he did at the beginning. For an in-depth discussion of Beckett’s works in relation to “Ich”, see especially Cooke’s Speaking the Taboo, 205 ff.
him. M.W.'s task becomes nothing less than a "Geduldsprobe" (235) as Reader is only slightly less elusive than Beckett's Godot, and has the same type of dominance—M.W. is tied to and dependent on Reader through waiting in the same way that Vladimir and Estragon are to Godot. Reader's Stasi file remains a thin disappointment to the impatient observer M.W.: "sie war schwachbrüstig und wollte nicht wachsen!" (15). Later, a jaded M.W. thinks with "Wehmut" how "der gesamte Berliner Untergrund auf seine Lesungen gewartet hatte, und ich hatte ebenfalls gewartet" (309). Even Reader, M.W.'s assignment and his presumed subordinate, had made him wait and proves to be the one in control.

Feuerbach reprimands M.W. regularly for his impatience and for his insistence on tangible progress in the case of Reader. In addition, M.W. is frustrated with waiting for others to strike first. He is annoyed that the Stasi does not pursue the "Zielperson" Reader more aggressively (18). The Stasi's tendency to wait longer and longer for their objects to make the initial move symbolizes its weakening, and its shift from a powerful to a pointless institution as the end of the GDR era approached. This leaves the informant M.W. forever on the way to a "destination: unknown." His boredom, comforting at times, is nonetheless a result of his nagging "ziellosen Strebung."76

Beyond Feuerbach, other higher-ups in the system profess the virtues of patience as well. For instance, after lecturing M.W. on how he should proceed with his writing career, the Chef who is over Feuerbach adds, "Mit Geduld erfahrt man alles, wir haben Zeit" (164). The boss's use of the collective pronoun is interesting here—in which group exactly, with such an abundance of time and patience, does he include himself? He refers

76 In his work Langeweile. Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte eines literarischen Motivs, Völker characterizes Goethe's Werther as such (175). The aimlessness of the Empfindsamkeit is analogous in this unexpected way to the sentiments of figures in an entirely different context two centuries later, a parallel that Hilbig might at times playfully contrive with his references to "Wehmut," for example.
to the patience of those who know "so gut Bescheid" (ibid.) as if there were secret knowledge about the GDR's future. This attitude notwithstanding, there are moments when the more powerful exhibit impatience themselves, revealing their instability, as M.W. notes: "So fühlen sich die Mächtigen am wohlsten, wenn sie sich bedroht glauben. Und wenn nirgendwo die Anzeichen für eine Palast- oder Straßenrevolte zu erkennen sind, erfinden sie solche" (8). In order to legitimate their own dominion, they cannot wait around for true rebellion to take place; instead they quell their impatience by creating their own adversaries. Those who consider themselves insiders within the system are also without patience for those on the other side of the door: "...man war da drinnen ohne Geduld mit den Ausgeschlossenen, die in der Kälte standen und lauschten, ohne Erbarmen mit den Phantomen, deren Köpfe aus dem Nebel in die Lichtbahnen ragten, mit den Schatten, die da draußen an den Türritzen rochen..." (142).

As opposed to the impatience of M.W. and his higher-ups, and the "immerwährender Ungeduld" of the proletarian barflies (300), the lines of people waiting outside the Friedrichstraße train station for passage out of East Berlin display the utmost patience: "Nirgends in dieser Republik zeigten Warteschlangen so viel Geduld wie beim Grenzübergang...und doch, man konnte es förmlich riechen, war es nur eine erzwungene Geduld, eine Geduld der Vernunft, und sie stand auf tönen Füßen" (281). A similarity to the images in *Transit* is struck here with the personified queues undergoing a "Geduldsprobe" (ibid.). Patience in this context is coerced and therefore stands unstably "auf tönen Füßen." It is this forbearance of time's often slow pace, however, which eventually allows them to cross boundaries. In this way, the inversion of the waiting hierarchy is completed. Those who are patient enough to wait will ultimately gain
potency and control over their destinies, thereby diminishing the exclusive privilege belonging to those who have always constrained others to wait as depersonalized masses.

3.4.4. The Spaces of Waiting

As Chapter 2 elucidated, spatial and material metaphors play a great role in establishing the atmosphere of the time period depicted in "Ich"—a time of impending change, but also of uncertainty. Time hangs thickly in M.W.'s spaces of waiting—e.g. in the Keller, "hier unten, wo die Zeit stagnierte und wie mit einem Summen um ihn kreiste, und es war, als entatme er aus seinen Lungen auch die Zeit" (71). He likes to imagine that something momentous will happen soon to break the tedium of surveillance, something which would turn the tables and instill fear in the arrogantly fearless Reader:


In this passage hinting of fear and impending doom, M.W. fantasizes that Reader finally finds himself in an uncertain situation of waiting himself. Contained in his pseudo-threat, though, is an implied resignation that Reader is, in fact, not waiting for anything at all.

77 This image is comparable with, while at the same time divergent from, one from Hilbig's earlier poem "aufenthalt", which begins, "aus den wohnungen in denen wir uns aufhalten // flüchten die stunden wie die luft auch der schlaf// hält sich nicht lange auf" (abwesenheit 23). While no more optimistic than "Ich", the poem represents time as passing rapidly even during monotonous hours of waiting. Hilbig returns on many occasions in his poetry to the image of passing time and waiting within domestic spaces, even using personification to transform them from spaces for waiting into spaces which themselves wait: "am wald wartete // einst ein steinernes haus // leer" ("das unbewohnte haus," ibid. 22).

78 The buildings in the city are described as if they are in suspense, waiting for a "Knall" of some sort: "die schweigenden, zusammengescharten Gebäude verharrten wie in Erwartung eines riesenhaften, alles zertrümmernden Schlags" (121-22).
M.W. remains the waiting party in this relationship. This is indicated figuratively in his
description of the underground area beneath the more flourishing sections of Berlin,
where Reader lives and where there lie “leere Rattenfallen, die niemals zuschnappten,
denn hier gab es keine Ratten” (27). The traps remain empty and, like the Stasi in many
cases, are unsuccessful in their intended function as they lie in wait indefinitely.

M.W., on the other hand, is like a rat caught in a trap, waiting for his release. His
dependence on Feuerbach, who has the potential power to liberate him from the constant
waiting, causes great consternation when the boss disappears out of his life for a month.
A material metaphor is employed to represent the protagonist’s abundance of time
without guidance: “Im Zimmer saß er in dem roten Sessel und ließ die Zeit verstreichen”
(254). While the verb *verstreichen* is used intransitively to denote passing time in
German, its transitive usage can suggest spreading a substance with the ability to adhere
or to cling, such as paint or butter—connotations which emphasize the nature of time
spent waiting as something that envelops and even “sticks” to a person. As used here,
with *lassen*, it also reminds us that M.W. has no control over the distribution of his own
time due to the waiting hierarchies to which he is subject; he has no choice but to let it
pass as it will, while he waits impatiently for his boss’s return.

The operations director in the town of A. tries to convince M.W. that both the
*Firma* and the literary world work under a different conception of time from everyone
else. As such, M.W.’s impatience to find out what is actually occurring (in any area of his
life) comes across as unjustified, as the boss asserts: “Was würde es Ihnen schon
ausmachen, noch zehn Jahre zu warten, oder sagen wir, noch drei, vier Jahre? Das ist
doch keine Zeit für Literatur! Wie kann ein Schriftsteller in so engen Zeitbegriffen
denken...für uns, sage ich Ihnen, existieren solche Zeiträume gar nicht” (326). The way
the rest of the world structures its time has no relevance for M.W., according to his higher-up, who dismisses the normally reassuring spatial conceptualization of Zeiträume as being too narrow. M.W. is thus denied any means of mentally framing his everyday routine, or of imagining any future goals.

The sheer amount of time at M.W.’s disposal causes delusions in the protagonist’s sense of reality. Toward the end of his time in Berlin, he becomes feverish in the S-Bahn and his thoughts turn to this seeming abundance of time left for waiting. “Die Firma ist meine Heimat, und ich bin mein eigener Spitzel. Und ich kann warten, ich habe Zeit, ich habe viel Zeit...” (343). M.W. now nourishes a deluded sense of independence so that his impatience subsides. He is willing to bide his time in this imaginary space of refuge, the Firma which he now considers his secure “Heimat.” As it turns out, he is as misled as the rest of the Firma seems to be about how much time actually remains for them in their current positions. So they all continue to wait, perhaps even with some hope, because they know of nothing else to do at this point:

Nun konnte ich nur noch warten...worauf? Worauf sie alle warteten, Kesselstein, Reader, die Literaten...sie alle blickten wie ich in irgendwelche dunklen, verworrenen Labyrinthe und erwarteten ihre Vertreibung aus der Finsternis. Die Literaten hatten auf nie dagewesene Weise resigniert...und die Mächtigen hatten ebenfalls resigniert...so hockten sie einträchtig beieinander und hielten sich gegenseitig an den schmutzigen Pfoten...und warteten. (372)

The confusing spatiality of the labyrinth makes another appearance here in Hilbig’s criticism of the affiliates who belong to the barely distinguishable Firma and Szene. They all wait for problems around them to be resolved somehow—even if that means only their eventual expulsion from the dark spaces in which they are accustomed to lurking.
3.5. *Nachwelt*: “Das Warten existierte nur für sie”

Pikulik reflects on the inherently special status of waiting at the end of any century:

> End- und Übergangszeiten sind Zeiten des Wartens, der Erwartung. Wenn ein Jahrhundert ausklingt, wenn gar eine Jahrtausendwende bevorsteht, stellt sich die Frage, was das Kommende bringen werde. Der Blick in die Zukunft relativiert dann das Interesse an der Gegenwart, oder die Gegenwart wird auf die Zukunft hin taxiert. (9)

A fin-de-siècle is not only a time for relating future and present, as Pikulik notes, but the waiting and expectation also provide a natural time for ruminations about the past. In her 1999 novel *Nachwelt*, Streeruwitz takes the opportunity—via Margarethe—to do just that. However, the protagonist’s research trip is impeded by many periods of waiting (both personal and professional) and profound boredom. As she waits for a phone call from Helmut, or while stuck in traffic or other uncontrollable situation, the reader becomes aware of the lackluster tone of Margarethe’s life. When Manon reassures the protagonist that she is still young and that there will be life and love after Helmut, Margarethe sighs, “Aber das sei doch das Langweilige an der Sache […]. Man hätte eine Liebe. Und eine andere. Und wieder eine” (379). In her propensity for boredom, Margarethe shares common ground with the legendary Anna Mahler, whom Manon describes as “unglücklich und gelangweilt über das Unglück, ein Mensch zu sein. Sie war schnell gelangweilt” (247). In addition, Mahler allegedly read three or four books or magazines at the same time because she was “zu ungeduldig, eines fertig zu lesen” (252).

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79 This aspect of Mahler is particularly stressed by Manon: “Sie war sehr schnell gelangweilt” (252); “In persönlichen Beziehungen war sie sehr schnell gelangweilt” (253).

80 Mahler was remarkably patient, however, in waiting for the proper type of stone to arrive for her final sculpture, as one of her students reports (361). When it came to her
The fact that Streeruwitz empowers her female protagonist(s) to exist in a perpetually bored state marks a turn both toward and away from literary tradition. The Emma Bovarys and Effi Briests of European literature are bored with their roles as prescribed by bourgeois mores. In both cases, though, their boredom ends in their ultimate demise. Margarethe, at the end of the twentieth century, is allowed to be bored perpetually; she is not granted an untimely exit by her creator. In this way, she is a privileged literary figure and joins the ranks of the male characters who quite often have been “allowed” to be bored, without being rejected by society or dying prematurely from it. Similar to Hilbig’s M.W., Margarethe sometimes finds comfort in boredom, which is at least safe: “Wünschte sich eine Welt voll Langeweile. In der nichts Schlimmeres geschah, als daß der Spinat versalzen war” (349). This alteration in the traditional literary treatment of boredom reinforces that although the hierarchy of waiting still exists in Nachwelt, it assumes a different significance, particularly from a late twentieth-century, feminist viewpoint.

work, Mahler was known to have a tremendous tolerance for waiting, while in her personal life she had virtually none.

81 Cf. Laurie Langbauer’s article on Sherlock Holmes’s boredom. Langbauer asserts: “Far from being the empty and anonymous entity he appears to [some] theorists, the man on the street seems a privileged individual to those [...] who cannot aspire to his privileges, most notably his boredom: walking the streets is a much different activity for women, or for those racial groups increasingly defined as the urban underclass. Boredom can be a privilege and even a power” (89).

82 In an interview with Heinz-Norbert Jocks, Streeruwitz is quoted as saying, “Das Banale ist das einzige, was ist, und deshalb beschreibbar. [...] Das Banale hat Dauer, während das Heroische so schnell wie eine Sternschuppe vergeht” (Marlene Streeruwitz im Gespräch 44). A longing for such permanence and stability causes the protagonist Margarethe to cling to the banal and to boredom.

83 In an interview with Der Spiegel, Streeruwitz stated that she does not see herself as “ausschließlich feministisch” (Hacker and Höbel 262); nevertheless she addresses many pivotal feminist issues and themes, and sometimes uses frau for an indefinite pronoun rather than the standard man.
Margarethe's ambivalence toward waiting and boredom is demonstrated by her diverse reactions to the various physical symptoms and ailments that plague her. Sometimes she wants to do nothing to alleviate a situation, such as when she has an excruciating cramp. “Sie hatte gedacht, Regungslosigkeit wäre das richtige. Sie hatte in Polster gebissen und gewartet” (161). Her methods in dealing with non-physical dilemmas are often characterized by this degree of passivity (and like Hilbig's M.W., who waited for the onset of extreme “Müdigkeit,” sometimes Margarethe waits to submit to something that she perceives as inevitable—“Sie wartete auf die Wehmut,” 318). But at other times she feels a sense of urgency, for example in regard to her recently developed bladder control problems: “Es war schwieriger geworden zu warten. In letzter Zeit. Früher hatte sie halbe Tage nicht aufs Klo gehen müssen” (209). Similarly, she has the urge to deal with some social and emotional situations rashly and with great impatience.

An analysis of the waiting theme in Nachwelt would be remiss without a mention of the text's reference to a Los Angeles performance of Waiting for Godot, a play that Margarethe believes to have seen at least three times before (338). She remembers the impression she had during her first viewing of the play.


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84 Margarethe's frequent dwelling on physical problems corresponds with her mid-life crisis and her recurrent reflections on aging and dying. She finds out that dealing with members of the older generations requires considerable patience and waiting for answers to emerge slowly, as Manon explains to Margarethe, “Man müsse eben geduldig sein” (8) with the elderly Albrecht.
Already during this performance a couple of decades earlier, Margarethe had related to the play’s subject matter and its themes of pointlessness and unsubstantiated hope. She views the play as a key to life’s mysteries—"Und eigentlich in diesem Text alle Antworten finden hätte können" (341)—but since Godot himself remains elusive, the "answers" Margarethe avers to find consist only of waiting cycles upon waiting cycles. The inclusion of Beckett’s play in Streeruwitz’s novel becomes a conspicuous allusion on one level to the absurd futility yet compulsion of the protagonist’s waiting for word from Helmut. Margarethe tires quickly of the mundane activities which are supposed to help her pass the time while waiting for his phone call: watching television sit-coms, shopping, making shallow small-talk at parties. She never spends much time engaging in these pastimes, as she leaves parties early, cuts shopping trips short, and flips television channels abruptly. She grows easily bored even with that which is supposed to alleviate her boredom. Another association with Waiting for Godot thus emerges: although Beckett’s characters are “bored to death,” Vladimir remarks to Estragon, “A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste” (52). For these two figures as well as for Margarethe, mindless waiting might indeed be boring, but it provides them with at least a vague purpose. As such, they prefer to focus exclusively on the waiting—incessant as it may be—rather than to be diverted from it.

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85 Noticeable here is a feature common to Streeruwitz’s plays, which also display “affinities with the Absurd” (Fiddler 57).
86 In general, Margarethe has remarkably little patience, as she admits to herself in relation to taking too many laxatives, instead of waiting for them to take effect: “Es war ihre Ungeduld. Sie hatte keine Geduld. Sie mußte alles immer sofort haben. Sie hätte die ersten drei Tabletten nehmen sollen. Die vorgeschriebene Dosis. Und dann warten” (163-64). She also berates herself for her own impatience in taking the trip to LA without her partner, having given him an ultimatum rather than waiting until they could have made the journey together (204).
3.5.1. Waiting Hierarchies and Interpersonal Relationships

In the previous four novels, I have focused on waiting as a phenomenon intrinsic to hierarchical structures on both the public and private levels. In Nachwelt, the dynamics of waiting are concentrated primarily in Margarethe's personal life. While she is an outsider to her new geographical surroundings like Kafka's Karl Roßmann, the most agonizing waiting hierarchy to which Margarethe is subject actually exists in the context of her private life from back home, where she is an insider of sorts. The omnipresence of technology means she can spend hours waiting for her partner to call from Vienna.

The power hierarchies of waiting in Nachwelt are determined and ordered at least partially by the roles taken on by the figures in their relationships. Margarethe appears dependent on a man for her emotional stability, and her constant waiting for his phone calls is a sign of her subordinate status in the relationship, from the viewpoint of one or both partners. Her conscious decision to give up on waiting for his call is stated outright and proudly, bringing attention to his hold over her thoughts in spite of her attempts to maintain control. The narrator announces Margarethe's thoughts: "Und jetzt würde sie schlafen. Sie konnte nicht warten, bis er um elf Uhr anrief" (18). Waking up the next day and knowing that he did not call, Margarethe is relieved that she had not waited in his psychological clutches as in the past: "Sie hätte umsonst gewartet. Wäre dagesessen" (19). Her waiting is implicitly materialized through her claim that a call from Helmut could dissolve it: "Durch einen Anruf ihr Warten aufzulösen" (ibid.). Margarethe's dependence is also displayed when she finds out that he had called once while she was out, and she proceeds to compulsively replay his answering machine message over and over again (203). At times, though, she attempts to invert this hierarchy by making Helmut wait instead. For instance, Margarethe promptly hangs up after a woman answers...
when she phones him; when he calls her back immediately, she refuses to answer (285).\textsuperscript{87}

This type of interpersonal power structure differs substantially from the bureaucratic or governmental configurations of waiting outlined in \textit{Der Verschollene, Transit, Mutmassungen über Jakob}, or "Ich". Unlike the characters in those works, it seems that Margarethe should be able to break out of this intimate hierarchy altogether, or to permanently reverse it if she so desires. But she cannot find the strength to do so, even though she is not restricted by higher administrative or political powers, rather only by those in her personal realm.

Margarethe's ambivalence toward Helmut manifests itself in her imagined scenarios. She envisions telling him of her refusal to wait ever again:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

At the same time, though, she also imagines him on his way to join her in Los Angeles, with a promise that he would never keep her waiting again: "Er käme noch heute. Und er ließe sie nie wieder warten. Nie wieder, und sie solle es noch einmal versuchen mit ihm. Bitte!" (ibid.). The switch from the conditional sense of "if only" to a desperate plea is telling in respect to her mental state. In Margarethe's mind, her love for Helmut has been

\textsuperscript{87} The protagonist reveals her failure when she was on the other end of this hierarchy in the past. A teenage love was in an accident in which three of his friends died. "Sie hatte ihn nicht angerufen. Hatte ihn nicht anrufen können. Hatte gewartet. Er sollte sie anrufen" (378). He did not call, and the relationship subsequently dissolved. In another relationship, Margarethe lied that she was pregnant with the man's child. He assumed that she had opted for an abortion: "Er war zurückgekommen nach vier Monaten und hatte gedacht, sie würde mit dickem Bauch dasitzen und auf ihn warten" (302). She was willing to deceive someone into thinking that she refused to be his subordinate in the waiting hierarchy.
confirmed all the more strongly ever since the waiting for him was no longer to be overlooked (159-60). She echoes Barthes’s resignation, “The lover’s fatal identity is precisely: *I am the one who waits*” (“Waiting” 40). Streeruwitz’s protagonist is also aware that familial patterns tend to repeat themselves, and Helmut is eerily reminiscent of Margarethe’s father: “Und über die Mutter hatte er durch Abwesenheit regiert. Hatte sie allein gelassen. Sie warten lassen. Und sie. Sie war jedesmal erleichtert gewesen, wenn er zurückgekommen war” (292). Margarethe has spent her entire life waiting for men to return to her, missing them while they are gone and despising them while they are present.

Margarethe is convinced that Helmut knows the frequent waiting hurts her. “Er wollte sie verletzen. Er wußte ja, wie schwierig dieses Warten für sie war. In den zwei Jahren war das zu lernen gewesen” (19). It is possible that Margarethe’s partner does not appreciate the extent of his power over her, though. From so far away, he cannot coerce her to wait by the phone; she becomes absorbed in the waiting process on her own accord. As such, waiting in *Nachwelt* represents more of a one-sided preoccupation than a hierarchy per se, marking another distinction between the waiting dynamics here versus previous novels in this study. One person’s control over another is indeed intensified

through the dynamics of waiting, but it is not contingent on the knowledge or desire of
the influential party. In addition, Margarethe’s longing for the phone calls could just as
well signal her yearning for access back into her insider’s realm in Austria; in other
words, her current state of dependency could have less to do with the power structure
within her relationship and more to do with the homesickness referred to sporadically in
the novel.

Margarethe’s actual reason for being in Los Angeles, her research on the life of
Anna Mahler, often takes second stage to the protagonist’s emotions and personal
concerns. In the midst of an interview with the elderly Ernst Krenek, one of Mahler’s
several husbands, Margarethe’s thoughts slip away from the topic at hand: “Sie hätte ihn
fragen wollen, was er machte. Mit der Angst. Und hatte er Angst. Sie hätte sich hinsetzen
und mit ihm über dieses Warten auf das Sterben reden mögen” (286). Although the
narrator does not elaborate, this existential fear of mortality and the notion of waiting for
death—the most universal of all forms of waiting—apparently plagues Margarethe such
that it supersedes her academic interest in Krenek’s story. The insipidity that

89 In a similar instance of the less dominant person in a relationship waiting by the
telephone, Margarethe’s interviewee Christine Hershey had always waited for Anna
Mahler to call her, and never the other way around: “Ich war immer sehr froh, wenn ich
mit ihr sprechen oder bei ihr sein konnte, und ich habe mich nie aufgedrängt. Ich habe
immer gewartet, wenn sie mich ruft, und dann sind wir fortgegangen oder bei ihr
gewesen” (192). Mahler clearly had the upper hand in their friendship, although she did
not necessarily exploit this power and perhaps was not even cognizant of it.

90 In their book Waiting for Death, Ramona Cormier and Janis L. Pallister interpret
Estragon and Vladimir of Beckett’s Godot play as characters who “must await death,
which will bring an end to the tedium and meaninglessness of their existence. Only then
can the game stop and the waiting for Godot cease” (3). Yet this waiting for death seems
to have positive connotations in the play as the single thing of which we can be certain.
This is seen in Pozzo’s lecture on the coming of nightfall, which can be interpreted
metaphorically as death: we know night/death is imminent, yet it creeps in suddenly and
when we least expect it. Nevertheless, the certainty of its eventual arrival is all that
Estragon and Vladimir have. Estragon: So long as one knows; Vladimir: One can bide
characterizes Margarethe’s existence, then, extends beyond the usual literary representation of urban boredom, which according to Langbauer “can be seen as an apotropaic denial of the threat of mortality and the disintegration of the very body that seems to ground and give materiality to the individual self” (83). Margarethe is acutely aware on a conscious level that the monotony of her life, with which she often appears quite comfortable, will not continue ad infinitum. What Christopher Schwarz defines as Romantic “‘Zeitangst’: das Leben als langsames Sterben” (122) manifests itself in Margarethe’s thoughts here. She is also aware of her mid-life crisis, and marvels that it is one thing for which she has not had to wait: “Und sie hatte gar nicht bis 40 warten müssen. Auf die Krise. Sie war schon mit 39 da angelangt” (42).

Streeruwitz details even Margarethe’s most trivial moments of waiting, whether in boredom or in solace, for example when the protagonist calls Helmut: “Hielte den Hörer ans Ohr. Wartete auf das Läuten bei ihm. Sie nahm noch schnell einen Schluck aus der Flasche” (285). When a female voice answers the phone, Margarethe hangs up, and lets the answering machine handle his immediate call back to her: “Lag auf der Couch. Weinte nicht. Fühlte sich. Wartete auf das Abklingen. Dann würde sie wieder denken. Denken können” (285). Her life is dictated by such minute segments of waiting; in this situation, she puts her thoughts temporarily on hold until the moment of non-interaction has ended—the narrator provides no explanation of how she feels, just the uninformative “fühlte sich.” Waiting is a comforting defense mechanism for her during such times. Margarethe fantasizes about forgoing her obligations and parking herself in a comfortable chair to wait out the rest of her time until the return flight home:

one’s time; $E$: One knows what to expect; $V$: No further need to worry; $E$: Simply wait; $V$: We’re used to it (25).

Again Margarethe expresses a distinct longing to return to the familiar space where she is an “insider”—mundane as that life on the other side also may be. Waiting in a chair while doing absolutely nothing would seem less stressful to her than trying to fill the remaining time in the States. It is not boredom itself which unnerves Margarethe, but solitude and the unfamiliar. Although her trip is only ten days in duration, the dramaturg often displays impatience in getting back home to “her” theater scene. “In Wien wartete der Sommernachtstraum auf sie” (116).

3.5.2. The Stylistics of Waiting

A review of Nachwelt in Die Zeit (October 14, 1999; No. 42) indirectly addresses the theme of waiting and the form it takes in this novel.

Es ist ein Buch, das seine Wirkung langsam und lange entfaltet. Es verlangt ein Sichhineinlesen in das Stakkato der fragmentarischen Sätze, die sich um Syntax und Geschmeidigkeit nicht kümmern wollen und die von einem Widerspruch zum anderen springen, atemlos assozieren, wieder im Blick auf Banales an Ruhe gewinnen und sich entzünden an einem Gedanken, einem Gefühl. (3)

The contradictions in Margarethe’s life are reflected in Streeruwitz’s unconventional syntax, which conveys both the impatience that one experiences while waiting, as well as the accompanying boredom.91 The language of Nachwelt, with all of its abrupt stops and

starts and non-sequiturs, spotlights a person too impatient to complete a thought, while at
the same time potentially causing a reader’s impatience due to the frequent lack of
syntactic closure. While such syntax highlights the disjointed thoughts of the distraught
protagonist, the style of Nachwelt also points to a variety of impatience particular to the
later twentieth-century and its multi-tasking environments. Margarethe observes this
hubbub of activity when she peers into some office windows: “Menschen saßen an
The hectic pace of America has only intensified since Kafka’s Karl Roßmann witnessed
office life in New York at the beginning of the century. The staccato style of such
descriptions in Nachwelt gives the impression of simultaneity and of a possibly lacking
thoroughness—sundry tasks are performed, but like Margarethe’s thoughts, one wonders
whether they ever are brought to a meaningful completion.

At other times, Streeruwitz’s syntax and word choice work to slow down the
narration to the snail’s pace at which Margarethe perceives her time to pass. The strategic
placement of warten can signal the slower passing of time from her perspective. The
following passage finds the protagonist in a bookstore, waiting for a cashier: “Margarethe
holte das Buch herunter. H.D. Selected Poems stand da. Sie legte das Buch zu den
anderen. Sie sah sich um nach jemandem, bei dem sie zahlen konnte. Sie wartete. Ging
herum. Kam an den Krimis vorbei und nahm dann doch einen” (71). The inclusion of
“Sie wartete” stands out in this mundane scene since the verbs in the surrounding
sentences are active ones, denoting visualizable physical actions; its placement in the

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92 At least for Ulrike Baureithel, reviewer for Die Welt, who writes that the novel “zu
lesen mitunter aggressiv macht. Nicht wegen der feministischen Gemeinplätze, sondern
wegen der zerrissenen Sprache, den vorgeworfenen Brocken, in Punkte verkeilt, überall
Punkte” (October 30, 1999, No. 44; p. 5).
midst of those images conveys the anticipation, boredom, and other sentiments associated with waiting which seem to eclipse all else that she does. No matter how she tries to pass the time by fidgeting or otherwise, in the end the stagnation of waiting rules her days.

Lexical repetition is another means by which Streeruwitz controls the narrative pace to decelerate the psychological tempo in her text. In this way, she emphasizes her protagonist’s restlessness with pointless distractions and the subjectively slow passage of time for her. When Margarethe makes small talk with her acquaintance Betsy at the pool, for instance, the former’s impatience is expressed with the repetition of “Sie sah auf die Uhr” three times within as many pages (213-15). The conversation and other actions which are interspersed between these watch-checks come across as especially slow through the recurrence of this statement. As remarked on in regard to other characters in this study, the protagonist’s fidgety behavior underscores that the mindless or mundane activities, which are supposed to help the time pass more quickly, often achieve the exact opposite effect.

Both lexical and syntactical techniques in controlling narrative pace culminate in Streeruwitz’s description of Margarethe’s relationship to LA-traffic. The narrator comments on the effort that Margarethe must put into driving in the bumper-to-bumper traffic: “Das Dahinkriechen mehr Aufmerksamkeit brauchte, als schnell zu fahren” (262). Metaphorically speaking, this statement is also applicable to the passing of time. When time seems to be creeping by, the tendency is to notice every mundane detail of the

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93 Mendilow distinguishes between chronological and psychological tempo; the former has to do with the general “texture” of the novel—to what extent events in the novel are condensed, that is, how long it takes to read about them in relation to how much fictional time is being depicted—while the latter, psychological tempo, refers to the building of suspense or the eliciting of other effects through an acceleration or deceleration of the narrative pace at times, as fitting to the content at hand (125).

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quotidian experience. If time is passing relatively quickly, on the other hand, these more insignificant aspects of life fall to the wayside. With the substantivized verb “Dahinkriechen,” Streeruwitz is able to convey time as passing particularly slowly for her protagonist; the creeping forward is an all-consuming process. In addition, the stop-and-go traffic is mirrored in the stop-and-go language (“Der Verkehr dicht. Ungeduldig. Es wurde gehupt und überholt,” 317). The slow unfolding of sentences and sentence fragments suggests the sluggish and irregular movement on the highway at rush hour. For her part, the outsider Margarethe proceeds with caution, while those behind her are impatient with her motions toward self-preservation. “Sie fuhr langsam. Vor ihr ein weißer Buick. Breit. Die Bremslichter große, rote Scheiben. Der Wagen fuhr langsam. Sie hielt Abstand. Der Wagen hinter ihr ungeduldig” (216). Like the interrupted flow of Streeruwitz’s sentences, Margarethe sputters along toward her destination. She cannot fit in here because, by Los Angeles standards, in any given situation she is either too patient or too impatient, either all too willing to wait or completely reluctant to do so.94

3.5.3. Bridging or Filling the Waiting Time

Margarethe’s self-perceived mental imprisonment finds resonance in references to people who experience physical incarceration and the protracted waiting periods they must endure. While in Los Angeles, she reads that 270 people “warteten […] auf die

94 When she is having a minor emergency, she has absolutely no patience with other cars, and has no qualms with making others wait for her: “Sie fuhr dann rasch aus ihrer Parklücke. Zwang einen anderen Wagen zu warten. Sie brauchte diese Binden. Es war ein unbedeutendes Problem. Aber es war gerade ihr Problem. Und diese Yuppies konnten eine Sekunde warten, bis sie in ihre Büros fuhren und an der Weltarbeitslosenrate zu arbeiten begannen” (295). She directs her condescending attitude toward the “Yuppies” who seem to be in a hurry to go do nothing productive.
Hinrichtung. Wurden warten gelassen” (349). Because waiting and being made to wait weigh heavily on her mind during this research trip, Margarethe sometimes implicitly relates her own plight to much more extreme ones. She talks to an immigrant, Max, who was imprisoned during the war, after his schizophrenic mother denounced him as an “Enemy agent.” Max claims that the worst part of living in prison was “Die Zeit und nichts zu tun mit ihr” (236).95 This is precisely Margarethe’s main complaint during her long ten days in California; she asks herself, “wie die Los Angelinos Zeit überbrückten” (307). The metaphor of bridging the time portrays temporality as a gap extending between meaningful events that need to be joined mentally in some way (as in the aforementioned examples from Transit, the time “zwischen zwei Abenteuern,” 184; and “zwischen zwei Feuersbrünsten,” 190). Margarethe thinks likewise in terms of distance and space about a dreaded future appointment with the wayward Pete: “Und Dienstag war weit. Die Sache war verschoben” (147). As Seghers’s Seidler when he makes an appointment for eight days later (Transit 94)—a seeming eternity because of the uncertainty of his situation, as well as of the endless waiting periods—the following Tuesday seems far away to Margarethe because of the abundance of time on her hands. In this particular case, she is glad about the potentially frustrating gap between present and

95 A contrasting example to Margarethe’s general passivity and usual willingness to wait for things to resolve themselves is provided in Manon’s story of visiting the American consulate in Vienna when trying to flee Austria after the annexation: “Die Menschen waren weit rund um den Block angestellt. Es war sinnlos zu warten” (311). Reminiscent of Seghers’s Transit, the times did not afford her the luxury of waiting. Instead of standing with the immobile crowd, Manon used her cunning to escape illegally. In another instance of waiting, though, Anna Mahler received a punishment rather than a reward for acting independently on her convictions and not waiting around for the majority. Syd Francis explains Mahler’s political problems in Austria before World War II as a so-called “Premature Antifascist”: “Hätte sie gewartet, bis wir in den Krieg eingetreten waren, dann wäre alles in Ordnung gewesen. Aber sie hatte nicht auf uns gewartet” (330).
future because her undesired appointment with Pete seems eons away as a result. For this event, she has no problem waiting, nor does she need to find a way to bridge the time until then.

Usually, however, Margarethe does concern herself with somehow finding quicker access to the future from her present stance. This is expressed not only through the metaphor of bridged distance but also through the container metaphor, and again via variations of the verb *füllen* in particular. The narrator remarks on the varying degrees of fulfillment in the lives of the novel’s cast. Mahler’s friend Dr. Hansen “schien ein besonders ausgefülltes Leben zu führen” (55), whereas Manon claims that Mahler herself “war eine sehr unerfüllte Person” (247), despite having an ostensibly full life. Margarethe’s goal of having a filled and fulfilling life seems to be passing her by, as she has so many periods of waiting to fill: “Sie brauchte noch etwas, die Stunden zu füllen” (71).

### 3.5.4. The Physical Burden of Time Spent Waiting

Not only the future but also the past is conceived of by Margarethe in terms of distance. In regard to Anna Mahler’s relation to her famous father, for instance, Margarethe’s thought process runs as follows: “Die gegen die verhasste Vergangenheit auf die Vergangenheit davor zurückgegriffen. […] Nach vorne nichts weitergehen durfte. Der Vater nicht zu überholen war und nur der Griff zurück möglich. Weit zurück” (201). The repetition of *zurück* accentuates the protagonist’s tendency to conceptualize time spans as actual expanses with spatial dimensions, and as gaps which can be bridged figuratively with a reach back into time. Like a car on the LA highway, Gustav Mahler is not to be overtaken by the talents of his daughter, at least not in the mind of that child, whose only possibility is to look further back into the past for stability. A similar view backwards comes from Manon: “Mit 40 beginnen die Erfahrungen erst, weil man da auch nachdenkt über alles. Vorher läuft das alles so mit einem. Dann kann man erst sehen, was es ist” (248). Not until the 40-year mark, according to Manon, can a person see the bridge between past and present that has been erected, and in the meantime crossed.
In contrast to these prevalent metaphors of time as a gap that needs to be bridged, or as a container that should be filled up with activity, on other occasions Margarethe experiences time as a burden with metaphorical weight and physicality. The idle time on her hands weighs her down. “Ihre Zeit war es ja. Ihre Zeit wurde verschleudert. Ihre Zeit wurde in Warten zerbröselte” (75-76).\textsuperscript{97} The narration ticks off the unproductive seconds through the reiteration of “Ihre Zeit” at the start of each sentence, and the particular verbs here present time as something material that can be sold, squandered, or even crumbled into nothingness. Margarethe bemoans that this “possession,” namely her time—her life in essence—has been stolen from her, along with her self-worth, through numerous unhealthy relationships and through waiting. “Die Würde war verloren. Die Würde verbrauchte sich. Beim Warten auf ihn. Beim Warten riß die verlorene Zeit alles mit sich” (159). Her time has been wasted too often in an all-consuming pattern of waiting, and this time has sucked up with it everything of value.

One solution she ponders is to abstain from men altogether, “Sich nie mehr verlieren. Nie mehr die Zeit in eine Erwartung” (160). The verb is missing from the second statement, but this resembles in its sense the previous example of Margarethe’s time being “in Warten zerbröselte.” The difference in this implicit metaphor is that her time in the past has materialized into expectation, which then disintegrates into oblivion (taking with it the verb to complete the thought, perhaps). The protagonist has failed in bridging the gap of time, in filling the container of time, and in maintaining possession of metaphorically material time. Like Karl Roßmann in \textit{Der Verschollene}, who “wollte

\textsuperscript{97}Cf. Mann’s \textit{Zauberberg}, in a description of Hans Castorp’s perception of time “crumbling” as he is bed-ridden for days on end: “Der zerkleinerte und künstlich kurzweilig gemachte Tag war ihm buchstäblich unter den Händen zerbröckelt und zunichte geworden” (231).
endlich den Anfang einer anständigen Laufbahn finden” (388), the only choice remaining for Margarethe is to continue waiting for a more meaningful and independent segment of her life to begin. Margarethe’s time in Los Angeles fails in this respect—“Den Anfang eines neuen Lebensabschnitts hatte sie sich anders vorgestellt” (22).
CHAPTER 4

STORYTELLING

Daniel Schacter, one of the leading cognitive scientists in the field of memory today, poses the query: “How accurate are the tales we tell about our lives?” (9). Implicit in his question is the knowledge that memory has been proven unreliable in many respects. It follows then that the stories we tell based on the faculty of memory are inaccurate in some amount of their detail. Yet despite this realization, the role of telling stories never diminished in the twentieth century. This chapter outlines the struggles that literary characters display in regard to their own faulty but persistent memories while they try to tell their stories.

Before Schacter’s question can be addressed, another one should be considered: what constitutes a story? In her ethnographic study *Storytelling Rights*, Amy Shuman defines stories in terms of their function, differentiating them from events and experiences:

Stories categorize experience. [...] Stories, experiences, and events are different entities. Roughly, experiences are the stream of overlapping activities that make up everyday life. Events, unlike experience, have potentially identifiable beginnings and endings. Events are a category of experience; stories are constructions of experience. Stories frame experiences as events. Stories are one of the forms that transform experiences into bounded units with beginnings, endings, and foci, and events are one kind of bounded unit. (20)
Shuman’s definitions reinforce the physical and spatial dimensions inherent in the way we conceptualize stories: they are “constructions of experience”; they have the ability to “frame experiences”; and they provide our experiences (and events) with mental boundaries. Experiences are thought to be stored within narrative spaces, which allow storytellers to anchor themselves and their stories within their own understanding of history.¹

Many twentieth-century theorists and philosophers recorded their views on the storytelling process. I will consider some of them, for example Walter Benjamin, specifically in relation to the themes and metaphors that are important to the works examined here. Other thinkers are significant to this study on a more general level, in that they convey various ways in which storytelling and narrative are understood metaphorically. One position that came forth in the last century was the view of narrative (or even philosophical discourse, as Richard Rorty has argued) as a conversation between the present and the past. For example, with his version of hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer understood textual interpretation as a dialogue between reader and text, leading to a new historical unit in the form of a “fusion of horizons.”² The implications of such ideas for storytelling are profound, whether history itself is conceived of as a teleological narrative, as a succession of monads, or otherwise. Gadamer and others have suggested

¹ In his work *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur “draws on a range of work to establish a transhistorical yet not atemporal sense of the narrative form. [...] In the spirit of the cultural geographer’s notion of place, as a fusion of space and experience and a context for action, Ricouer demonstrates the ubiquity of narrative understanding in social life. Narratives shape the logic of relations of contiguity in space and time and, in so doing, pattern the organization and meaning of our lives” (Friedland/Boden 24).

² Gadamer also speaks of literary reception in spatial terms: “What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships. Normative concepts such as the author’s meaning or the original reader’s understanding represent in fact only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding” (51).
that historical “truths” emerge only through a dialogue with the world. The ability to tell and retell history hinges on somehow speaking with history. This study examines various dimensions of the “horizons” cast by writers for their protagonists and narrators, and therefore each section concentrates first on the novels’ narrative voices, which imply particular spatial and temporal perspectives.

The figures in the novels of the twentieth century engage in dialogues with the past through their stories. Some are even consciously attuned to hearing the “voices” that emerge in their versions of history. Characters’ reflections on their individual pasts, or those of their forebears, prompt broader questions regarding historiography and authenticity: Who is “allowed” to tell the stories? Whose stories are to be trusted? How are stories to be told and transferred to later generations? The latter question begs deliberation on the oral versus the written mode of telling stories. The process of writing provides a tangible, physical means of “containing” and spatializing memory, by confining temporal experience permanently to the spatial boundaries of text. However, the characters of these novels rely most often on the oral mode of storytelling, which they cherish and trust even while they exhibit an awareness of its weaknesses. Indeed, Margarethe of Nachwelt gives up the idea of trying to capture a life in a biography, conceding ultimately that a transcription of the oral (rather than her written paraphrase) will have to suffice.

Storytelling, as discussed in this chapter, concerns not only oral and written dialogues with the past, but sometimes with the present or the future as well. By classifying rumors as types of stories, I am extending Shuman’s definition of stories as encapsulated experiences and events to include also imagined, anticipated, wished for, but in many cases altogether inaccurate or non-occurring experiences. Rumors, as the
following close readings show, also encompass the notion of spatiality and containment:
they are the spaces of hope and fantasy. This is evident in *Der Verschollene*, with its
gold-rush rumors, or in *Transit*, with its rumors about incoming ships to Marseilles.
Rumors, unsubstantiated tales that are posited as factual, are also spread about the past:
they originate either because of the natural workings of legend, or as a direct result of
flawed memory.

The container metaphor discussed in previous chapters underlies many
representations of memory in these works. Literary characters struggle with the
imperfections of human memory, as an awareness of their own weak memories is
juxtaposed with the expectation that they *should* be able to reach into this imagined
container and pull out an intact memory at will.3 (The polyperspectivism of Uwe
Johnson’s and Wolfgang Hilbig’s narratives intensifies this point, as the stories are drawn
from multiple “containers”). In addition, some of the writers studied here expand upon or
deviate from the container metaphor in significant ways: Johnson and Streeruwitz, for
instance, represent memory specifically as a storage area for intangibles like auras,
essences, and emotion, and not exclusively for the picture-like images that signify
traditional portrayals of memories.

Amidst such notable variations throughout twentieth-century literature, there
exists nonetheless some consistency in depicting memory through a written, oral, or other

3 These novels reinforce that memories are by no means immutable or constant. The
pictures stored as memories are retouched and glossed over, and fortunately so for people
like the stoker in *Der Verschollene*, whose final “Geschwätz würde man in ziemlich
freundlicher Erinnerung behalten” (47) after his previous tirade in the ship. The verb
*behalten* signals the container metaphor that is often used in conceptualizing memory as a
vast storehouse. The association of *behalten* to the noun form *Behälter* emphasizes the
physical connotations that uphold the metaphor of memory as an enclosed space. This
container is not airtight or leakproof, however, and this is emphasized through literary
figures’ processes of forgetting.
medium. That common ground is covered by metaphor, and by the spatial and material dimensions of memory (that is, both the faculty of memory and individual memories) as represented in art. Salvador Dali’s well-known painting from 1931, “The Persistence of Memory,” illustrates such conceptualizations. Visually displaying the cognitive metaphor of temporal fluidity, its title connects memory to this image and implies that, however distorted, memory is ever-present and seemingly tangible as it shapes the landscapes of our stories. The very title of Schacter’s study, *Searching for Memory*, also stresses the general conception of both memory and memories as concretes that can be lost and perhaps found again.

Memory’s perceived spatial structure takes metaphorical form in the houses and other architectural spaces lived in or remembered by the characters of these five novels, calling to mind Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*, in which the theorist expounds on how perceptions of human dwellings shape memory, thought, and dreams. As when touring a house, the path taken in remembering is not necessarily linear: one can go from room to room and then back, preventing any distinct beginning and end to such a visit. One can also choose to stay in a room for a longer period of time or may—inadvertently or not—avoid some rooms altogether. The immigrant Therese in Kafka’s novel claims to remember vividly going from apartment to apartment in a tenement building in a futile search for shelter as a child, but there are indications that her memory of this event is not necessarily accurate or complete; Seidler in *Transit* compares a barren room to his empty head, devoid of any picture of Marie; the characters in *Mutmassungen über Jakob* remember the cluttered details of furniture and buildings more precisely than they remember people and specific events; Hilbig’s main figure in “Ich” investigates the space underneath his apartment building, but he later cannot determine whether this time
is a memory or a dream; Streeruwitz’s Margarethe visits friends and acquaintances of Anna Mahler in their homes, as well as the sculptor’s former dwelling, in an attempt to examine the past. The characters’ battle with memory loss and unrecoverable memories is fought within the literal or figurative emptiness of the physical spaces they inhabit. In turn, this chapter is as much about stories’ absences, about the stories that remain untold, as it is about the actively implemented processes of storytelling.

4.1. Der Verschollene: “Was für Erinnerungen an vergangene Zeiten!”

Wir Juden sind eigentlich keine Maler. Wir können die Dinge nicht statisch darstellen. Wir sehen sie immer im Fluß, in der Bewegung, als Wandlung. Wir sind Erzähler. (Kafka, in Janouch 206)

The novel Der Verschollene confirms Kafka’s view of things being “im Fluß, in der Bewegung,” as it follows Karl Roßmann on his journey through America. Kafka’s self-identification as a storyteller (rather than as a novelist, for example) finds resonance less in the stories actually told in the novel and more in the sense of void when his figures’ storytelling is prohibited. Several passages suggest the special significance placed on the storytelling theme in Der Verschollene. To pass the time in an inn, for example, Karl

blätterte ein wenig in der Bibel, ohne etwas zu lesen. Dann nahm er die Photographie der Eltern zur Hand, auf der der kleine Vater hoch aufgerichtet stand, während die Mutter in dem Fauteuil vor ihm ein wenig eingesunken dasaß. Die eine Hand hielt der Vater auf der Rückenlehne des Fauteuils, die andere zur Faust geballt, auf einem illustrierten Buch, das aufgeschlagen auf einem schwachen Schmucktischchen ihm zur Seite lag. (134)

In Karl’s world, books are for ornamental purposes only. In this passage, storytelling takes place not through the written word, but only tenuously through the photograph.4

4 Barthes argues in his Camera Lucida that photographs serve as a type of evidence that someone or something existed, while at the same time offering no physical materiality in the present, and no explanation of what is behind the captured gaze—“the Photograph is 252
Karl flips through the Bible much the same way he would through a dull magazine—the Holy Book is nothing more than a place for Karl to store his memorabilia. The book in the picture lies open on a “Schmucktischchen” and serves merely as a resting spot for the clenched fist of Karl’s father.

While books do not serve more than a utilitarian purpose for Karl, stories and the age-old process of storytelling are indeed a significant, if not necessarily positive, force. In a novel dealing with early twentieth-century America, it is not surprising that the stories of immigrant children, hardened from miserable labor conditions in their new country, play a role. Telling of the cold, harsh reality in the land of promise and compromise, these stories differ greatly from the optimistic tales which Robinson spreads about gold prospects in the West. Stories told in Der Verschollene also contrast with the Bible parables that bore Karl in that the former do not claim to function as a saving grace, and sometimes remain untold altogether (the Head Cook refrains from telling Karl more stories about exploited immigrants, although she claims to have many of them, 175).

After Karl is fired from the hotel, a policeman on the street asks for his personal story. When Karl briefly discloses his past as an elevator operator, the policeman then asks if he had been fired abruptly from his job.

"Ja", sagte Karl und hob wie zur Entschuldigung die Hand. Die ganze Geschichte konnte er hier nicht erzählen und wenn es auch möglich gewesen wäre, so schien es doch ganz aussichtslos ein drohendes Unrecht durch Erzählung eines erlittenen Unrechtes abzuwehren. (277-78)

pure contingency and can be nothing else” (28). They teasingly begin to tell a story, as does this photograph in Der Verschollene, before falling flat. Indeed, Kafka often tells his stories through photograph-like character sketches: “Kafka’s characters emerge in vivid, sharp detail—often ‘present’ like photographic likenesses as they execute some striking gesture—but only as partial, flat surfaces without the depth of a past history or individual psychology” (Anderson 107).
Karl realizes that a story cannot redeem him now; he has faith neither in the power of an *Erzählung*, nor in his own storytelling abilities. Have stories become altogether useless in the twentieth century—when reality is often not believable and, in the process of being told, can become completely transformed anyway? In *Der Verschollene*, Kafka hints at possible answers to this and other questions about storytelling, and its absence.

4.1.1. The Stories Told (or Not)

The disconnect between Karl and his past is bridged on occasion by the narrative voice. For the most part, the narrator of *Der Verschollene* appears to be omniscient, ostensibly reporting events with an implicit objectivity. Anderson writes that Kafka “never overtly sentimentalizes [Karl’s] plight. The narrative voice remains impassive, seemingly non-judgmental, content to register and describe rather than condemn or celebrate—as if it had taken on something of the mechanical, depersonalized quality of *Verkehr* itself” (100-01).5 The novel does not produce the illusion of a mere retelling of past events, as might have been related to the narrator secondhand; instead the narrator is present alongside Karl, able to see and report minute details and gestures. This characterization is supported by interruptions in the narration such as, “(diese Erwähnung hatte eine gegenseitige Verbeugung zur Folge)” (38). A similar parenthetical shows the narrator correcting a character’s direct quotation: after the remark from the Head Cook, “Du siehst, auch Therese schweigt,” the narrator adds, “(Aber sie schwieg doch nicht, sie weinte.)” (247). In yet another such interjection, it becomes apparent that the narrator not only shares in Karl’s present, but that he is aware of incidents and figures from the

5 Anderson continues: “In this respect [Kafka] differs from the majority of his contemporaries, whose vision of the big city is filtered through an emotional, sentimental register or individual ‘loneliness’ or ‘alienation’” (101).
protagonist's past as well. Through the mode of erlebte Rede\(^6\) we witness Karl
reminiscing about his family, and reflecting on how his father would have reacted to his
bureaucratic dilemma at the Naturtheater: “(Wie hatte sein Vater bei der Beschaffung des
Reisepasses über die nutzlose Fragerei der Behörden sich ärgern müssen.)” (278). The
narrator reminds us here that even this far into his American adventure, Karl has by no
means lost sight of his past and the family which rejected him.\(^7\) However, except for
these brief narrative flashes, stories of the past remain conspicuously untold.

Through Karl, Kafka comments occasionally on the reliability of stories, which
become embellished and rumor-ridden over time, as a means of conveying history. For
instance, from Karl’s perspective, the story of the maid who seduced him was not of great
concern, “und doch verstand es der Onkel, daraus eine große Geschichte zu machen”
(43). Stories are stretched and manipulated to fit the situation at hand. When Karl meets
his uncle, this particular story is exaggerated such that Karl appears as a helpless victim,
an orphan who needs the protection of his American uncle, the powerful senator. Karl
protests this image of himself, however, gently reproaching his newfound relative.

> “Ich bin sehr froh daß ich Dich getroffen habe, aber Du irrst, wenn Du
glaubst, daß meine Eltern nur Schlechtes von Dir reden. Aber auch

\(^6\) Dorrit Cohn’s explanation of erlebte Rede, or “narrated monologue” as she terms it, is
interesting for its material imagery: “the moment when the thought-thread of a character
is most tightly woven into the texture of third-person narration” (111). She goes on to
summarize the metaphors that others have used to describe this literary phenomenon of
merging narrative perspectives as tangible, or somehow measurable, as “optic, acoustic,
geometric, textile, erotic” (112).

\(^7\) Karl Roßmann “does not fit the typical mold of figures without a past who live only in
the present moment” (Karst 554). In this respect, Karl differs from the characters with
whom he comes in contact, about whose past neither the protagonist nor the reader learn
about “in a way that would make their present situation, actions, and character
intelligible. The novel does not project them into the future, but into an endless present, a
temporal mode unorganized by any stable origin or destination. As a result, the reader
must judge these characters on the basis of extremely vivid but fragmented descriptions
that never turn into a cumulative history or story” (Anderson 106).

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abgesehen davon sind in Deiner Rede einige Fehler enthalten gewesen, d.h. ich meine, es hat sich in Wirklichkeit nicht alles so zugetragen. Du kannst aber auch wirklich von hier aus die Dinge nicht so gut beurteilen und ich glaube außerdem, daß es keinen besonderen Schaden bringen wird, wenn die Herren in Einzelheiten einer Sache, an der ihnen doch wirklich nicht viel liegen kann, ein wenig unrichtig informiert worden sind.” (43-44)

Not only does Karl object to the misrepresentation of his past, he also reminds his uncle that strangers do not need access to family history—he would rather they receive the story replete with fallacies, or preferably, not at all.

From this moment forward, Karl does not escape the burden of rumors that soil his reputation, such as when he is fired for alleged misconduct in the hotel. Through no fault of Karl, his acquaintance Robinson appears at the hotel drunk. The Head Porter then fibs to the Head Cook about Karl’s own improper behavior, “Ja ja Frau Oberkochin das ist durch Zeugen bewiesen, durch einwandfreie Zeugen, ja” (233). In fact, despite the excessive “ja”-affirmation in the porter’s affidavit, there were no reliable witnesses to confirm the rumor that Karl had neglected his duties. Nevertheless, he is relieved from his job, and Karl is not allowed his own version of the story. Fitting in the context of this stifling is Anderson’s observation that the etymological background of the label “Der Verschollene,” from the verb verschallen, involves a “progressive silencing” (104).

Stories become even less reliable when they cannot be traced to a specific source; the propagation of rumors based on stereotypes is facilitated many times in the novel when attribution is vague or even non-existent. Karl thinks he should be suspicious of the Irishman Robinson, based on a fuzzy memory about something he once read: “Karl wußte nicht mehr genau, in was für einem Buch er einmal zuhause gelesen hatte, daß

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8 Further commentary on the reliability of others’ words comes up elsewhere in the novel. For example, Uncle Jakob has to figure out whether Karl is really his nephew from the “natürlich nicht gerade detektivisch richtigen Beobachtungen” of the servant who had written to him (46).
man sich in Amerika vor den Irländern hüten solle" (133). He brings his preconceived notions across the ocean and applies those prejudices to his traveling companion. Kafka's story does not break down any of these cultural stereotypes: the Irishman is indeed the swindler and the liar, and the Frenchman Delamarche does not escape negative judgment either. Robinson spreads dubious stories of his own, telling of numerous acquaintances who struck it rich in the gold rush and who would be eager to help him do the same (146). He is conscious of his known untrustworthiness, and tries to compensate by affirming his honesty, such as when he interrupts his own story: "—das ist Wort für Wort wahr, ich kenne ihn selbst—" (305). These efforts at self-confirmation aside, Robinson never redeems his integrity and remains a shady character throughout. Karl is in any case discerning as to whose opinion he trusts; he does not believe the rumors being spread around him at the inn about Robinson and Delamarche: "Karl glaubte kein Wort von diesem Gerede schlecht unterrichteter übelwollender Leute" (147). He makes up his own mind, determining Delamarche to be only a "Lumpen"—although he sees evidence of the power of his own storytelling when Therese begins to consider the Frenchman dangerous, "denn so erschien er allerdings Therese nach Karls Erzählungen" (207).

At the end of the novel fragment, Karl's future is determined by his trust in the poster for Oklahoma's Naturtheater, whose statements may turn out to be nothing more than rumors themselves. The narrator concedes this concern in his generalization: "Es gab soviel Plakate, Plakaten glaubte niemand mehr" (387). The sheer quantity of written and aural media, and their ability to spread rumors far and wide at the beginning of the twentieth century, places credibility in serious question. Karl has become more adept at realizing these dangers (he understands the theater may turn out to be nothing but
a small travelling circus, for example), but now his only choice is to follow the as of yet untold story of the Naturtheater, in the hopes that it holds more substance than rumors.

4.1.2. Kafka’s Storytelling and Metaphorically Concrete Imagery

How does Karl perceive his own story, in all of its varying degrees of believability, as it unfolds around him? By personifying the intangible, Kafka frequently turns something with no defined boundaries or easily quantifiable spatial dimensions—such as noise, or silence—into an oppressive and confining force. Karl’s lack of control is thus reinforced further as his environment dominates over him instead. Often this is accomplished quite simply, for instance by the use of a verb like fahren. After Karl plays a song on the piano for Klara in Pollunder’s mansion, “fuhr die gestörte Stille des Hauses wie in großem Gedränge wieder an ihren Platz” (118). The silence is invasive in comparison to the sound he had been producing; the simile “wie in großem Gedränge” evokes images of the intrusive hustle and bustle of the big city that he had left behind when he came to the country manor. But now even the silence becomes an entity which encroaches on Karl’s surroundings, reinforcing to him that he is unwelcomed and out of place here too—his beautiful music is not received as such, rather as an intrusion that must be crushed by the “Gedränge” of silence.

Kafka uses spatial metaphors and concrete imagery time and again in order to highlight the contrast between a powerful, controlling environment and the impotence of his protagonist, as in the following description of traffic outside the Hotel occidental: “Noch immer fuhren draußen wenn auch schon in unterbrochener Folge Automobile, rascher aus der Ferne her anwachsend als bei Tag, tasteten mit den weißen Strahlen ihrer Laternen den Boden der Straße ab, kreuzten mit erblässenden Lichtern die Lichtzone des
Hotels und eilten aufleuchtend in das weitere Dunkel" (160). The cars take on a life of their own, as we will also see in Johnson's *Mutmassungen*; the relative novelty of this twentieth-century machinery in Kafka's novel, however, makes this representation especially noteworthy. Portrayed metaphorically as creatures with tactile abilities, they scatter across the street and into the entity of darkness as quickly as they appeared.

At other times, container and conduit metaphors accentuate the confining, trapping tendencies of language, for example when Therese quickly "fand sich [...] in die Frage hinein" (251), after Karl requests that she pack his bag. Stories too are personified as something which not only captivate, but which can capture or trap in a metaphorically physical sense, as Karl experiences when he is "von der Geschichte ganz gefangen genommen" (304) while listening to Delamarche and Robinson. In addition, stories tend to leave lasting and visible impressions on the faces of their recipients, enabling others to "read" the stories off their faces. After Karl's uncle tells his nephew's story to people on the ship, Karl turns around, "um den Eindruck der Erzählung von den Gesichtern der Anwesenden abzulesen" (39). Later at the Naturtheater, he realizes that this skill could be used against him: "Die guten Vorsätze drängten sich in seinem Kopf, als stehe sein

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*Anderson notes: "Kafka was fascinated by the movement of traffic in the modern city and more important, by the aesthetic spectacle and metaphysical dilemmas this movement implied. This fascination coincides with a general shift in European art, philosophy, and science that was taking place at the turn of the century: a shift away from the representation of people and things securely footed in a stable, constant environment, and toward a relativized perception of things in motion, of subtle or unconscious displacements of energy, fluctuating or ephemeral patterns of circulation and exchange. Increasingly, artists, philosophers, and scientists were turning to the analysis of phenomena that earlier generations would have avoided as too unstable, transitory, intangible or illogical to capture in a stable representation, be it artistic or scientific. [...] As cursory, almost random examples of this tendency—all of which Kafka had direct knowledge of—one might single out Einstein's theory of relativity; or Brentano's phenomenological analyses; or Freud's charting of the displacements of unconscious psychic energies; or Mach's use of statistical analysis to account for sense impressions and to refute the idea of a stable, unifying 'ego'" (99).*
künftiger Chef vor dem Kanapee und lese sie von seinem Gesicht ab" (354). This remark reveals Karl's apprehension about the borders between public and private which seem to be dissolving at this point. If his story is readable from his face, then he is less able to exert control over the impression he makes on others, a skill he thinks to be honing after dealing with so many difficult people in America. Any story however, presented here as having made a physical imprint in the present, is linked to the incredibly fallible faculty of memory, and thus its impression is hardly indelible.

4.1.3. Memory, the Past, and Spatial Metaphors

The types of metaphors discussed in the last section enhance the narration by providing vivid and material imagery. Beyond moving the narration along in an engaging way, the concretization of memories and past events points to the tendency of human cognition to conceptualize the past as a thing that can be left behind or pushed aside. Kafka and other twentieth-century writers call attention to this inclination through metaphor, and in so doing, can be critical of our facility in moving beyond past events, however influential and significant. For instance, when the stoker interrogates him about his blemished past in Europe, Karl responds with a sweeping hand gesture, implying that he can move beyond his personal history after his fresh start in America, "Ach was!" sagte Karl und warf die ganze Geschichte mit der Hand weg" (12). This tendency is

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10 Kafka's use of such gestures in Der Verschollene and other novels has been attributed in part to his influence by the Yiddish theater. Evelyn Torton Beck writes, for instance, of the possible effect of Prague's Café Savoy on Kafka's writing: "Kafka's reliance on gesture, exaggerated action, and 'significant glaring' may well be a reflection of the style of acting at the Savoy. Furthermore, the dark humor of Kafka's narratives brings to mind the tragicomic effects characteristic of the Yiddish theater" (28).

11 Cf. Mann's "Vorsatz" to the Zauberberg, "Im Handumdrehen also wird der Erzähler mit Hansens Geschichte nicht fertig werden" (2). The narrator of Der Verschollene would
also clear in the novel’s final scene, as Karl looks out a train window on his way to Oklahoma: “Alles was sich in dem kleinen, selbst bei offenem Fenster von Rauch überfüllten Coupe ereignete verging vor dem was draußen zu sehen war” (418). Not only past but also present experience is already fading into a memory with the vast promise of future beyond this confined space.

In another scene highlighting gesture, the employee at the Kanzlei asks Karl what he had hoped to study, an interrogation to which he appends, “In Europa, meine ich.’ Hiebei nahm er die Hand vom Kinn und machte eine schwache Bewegung, als wolle er damit gleichzeitig andeuten wie ferne Europa und wie bedeutungslos die dort einmal gefaßten Pläne seien” (408). After responding that he had wanted to become an engineer, Karl then reflects on how greatly his new “Laufbahn” in America diverged from the old one in Europe. The spatial-linear metaphoricization expressed by Laufbahn to indicate his two different career paths emphasizes that Karl conceives of his own life not as a linear, connected path, but as separate tracks or courses. He has left the previous course behind in favor of this supposedly more advantageous (and faster?) one in America.

Memories of Karl’s past are blocked off from his present experiences, which are related only in terms of complete contrast. He represses the negative memories more and more over time, a point which Kafka illustrates through spatial and material metaphors, such as in a description of Karl’s memory of the maid who had seduced him: “Im Gedränge einer immer mehr zurückgestoßenen Vergangenheit saß sie in ihrer Küche neben dem Küchenschrank, auf dessen Platte sie ihren Ellbogen [sic] stützte” (41). The notion of “Gedränge” returns here, pointing to the flurry of city life surrounding Karl in New York which makes it easy for his past to be pushed to the wayside. There is also an

likely say the same about Karl’s story, since his past is alluded to throughout the novel, even if Karl himself is ready to wave it off as if it were nothing.
implication of active repression in the expression “zurückgestoßenen Vergangenheit”; Karl constantly shoves his past further back in the field of his conscious thoughts—although the maid seems to maintain her presence in his memory, as she “sits” amidst everything that is being pushed away. Propping her elbows on the table (stützen) in the seemingly (but not actually) very distant past, her status as the embodiment of an Erinnerungsstütze for Karl is threatened. Another directionally-oriented metaphor is used by Karl’s uncle in explaining his resistance to revealing why he had cut himself off from his European relatives. He shies away from uttering the reasons for this because “die [...] zu erzählen mich wirklich zu sehr hemehmen würde” (38). The act of storytelling is once again abstained from, this time because the uncle does not want to take the backwards steps necessary for revisiting the past on this metaphorical path.

Kafka’s employment of ontological metaphors goes hand-in-hand with his tendency to place tangible objects or people in his characters’ paths as memory prompts. The compartmentalized desk in Karl’s room at the uncle’s house is a prime example. For reasons which are unclear to Karl himself, the desk with its particular type of handle reminds him strongly of the nativity plays at the Christmas markets back at home (58). In addition to objects, people are visible reminders of times past. At the Naturtheater, Karl sees his acquaintance Giacomo from the Hotel occidental, prompting an exclamation in narrated monologue: “Was für Erinnerungen an vergangene Zeiten!” (413). Karl then becomes lost in his memories of the past, in “den Anblick Giacomos verloren” (414). Even the memory of material objects triggers further journeys into the past. When Karl tells the Head Cook at the hotel that “Die Goldene Gans,” where she used to work in

12 Anderson asserts that this manner of referring to Johanna Brummer “confirms the effacement of Karl’s past” as the “result of sexual trauma and repression” (FN 7, 105-106).
Prague, had been torn down two years previously, she replies absentmindedly, “Ja, freilich” while remaining “ganz in Gedanken an vergangene Zeiten” (172). The place still stands in her memory as a concrete mental landmark of her experiences in Prague, and the conduit metaphor stresses how she becomes caught “in” her thoughts of the past.

Almost every character with whom Karl comes into contact is an immigrant from Europe who exposes his or her own memories of home at some point—memories which appear to have been concealed previously as the immigrants concentrated on building their present. The perceived distance between the immigrants’ present and past is quite pronounced, as if the temporal expanse had increased proportionately to the physical distance. Ultimately Kafka comments through these immigrants on the reliability or unreliability of memory and storytelling. For example, in Therese’s story about her childhood trauma, she tells Karl that her mother had kissed her daughter shortly before her death. Therese then reflects: “Wenn man nachher weiß, daß das die letzten Küss waren, begreift man nicht, daß man, und mag man ein kleiner Wurm gewesen sein, so blind sein konnte, das nicht einzusehn” (198). The maxim of 20/20 hindsight is called to mind here, but more significant to this chapter is that Therese’s story appears as a complete whole in retrospect—even if this is an unreliable picture of what really happened. Kafka paints Therese’s memories as potentially dark and murky, and thus less

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13 Language also elicits memories of Heimat for the Head Cook. As she talks to Karl, she becomes “wieder halb traurig, über diese alte Redensart aus der Heimat, die ihr da im Deutshsprechen eingefallen war” (173).

14 Schacter writes of this persistence of place within our mental spaces. He generalizes that “we carry in our minds the remains of distant experiences that tie us to the past in a special way. Places that have long ceased to exist and people who have disappeared from our lives continue to survive in our recollections, sometime as ghostlike phantoms we can barely fathom and sometimes as crystal-clear portraits with all the vibrancy of the here and now” (15).
than trustworthy: “Therese hatte wohl in dunkler Erinnerung, daß sie das Tor eines Hauses, das sie ewig durchsucht hatten, wieder verließen, aber ebenso schien es ihr, daß sie auf der Gasse gleich gewendet und wieder in dieses Haus sich gestürzt hätten” (199).

Yet as foggy as her memory might be, Therese believes in its dependability:

Sie wußte jede Kleinigkeit, die damals vorgefallen war jetzt nach zehn Jahren ganz genau, und weil der Anblick ihrer Mutter oben im halbfertigen Erdgeschoß das letzte Andenken an das Leben der Mutter war und sie es ihrem Freunde gar nicht genug deutlich überantworten konnte, wollte sie nach dem Schlusse ihrer Erzählung noch einmal darauf zurückkommen, stockte aber, legte das Gesicht in die Hände und sagte kein Wort mehr. (202-03)

At least, Therese wants to believe in her own abilities to remember. This passage displays indications of her doubts, though: her desire to linger on this last memory of her mother before it fades; her feeling of inadequacy in conveying her memory in words detailed enough to give Karl a clear picture; her inability to return to this image of her mother; her eventual surrender to silence rather than continuing with her storytelling. In Kafka’s novel, the link between story and memory proves inextricable, for better or for worse—obstacles in the one lead to embellishments in the other, and vice versa.

4.2. Transit: “Das letzte Sichtbare”

Books as objects are unimportant to Kafka’s Karl Rossmann, but stories and storytelling (even with sometimes questionable aims) play a role for him and the other immigrants in the novel. A similar phenomenon can be observed Seghers’s Transit.

15 Therese’s confidence in her own memory here, despite evidence that her memory might be distorted, marks a so-called “flashbulb memory,” the recollection of an incident characterized by novelty, shock, or trauma. Schacter writes of the general agreement among memory scholars that “high confidence is the hallmark of a flashbulb memory” (199). Despite the high confidence level of the person remembering, studies show that the details of flash-bulb memories often utterly contradict the facts of what actually happened.
Seidler informs the listener who sits at the table with him throughout the narration that he had never read books as a child, although stories had been read aloud to him.\textsuperscript{16} He has been entrusted with a book manuscript written by the dead novelist Weidel. Reading the manuscript triggers comforting childhood memories:

\begin{quote}
Ich stieß auf Worte, die meine arme Mutter gebraucht hatte, um mich zu besänftigen, wenn ich wütend und grausam geworden war, auf Worte, mit denen sie mich ermahnt hatte, wenn ich gelogen oder gerauft hatte. Ich stieß auch auf Worte, die ich schon selbst gebraucht hatte, aber wieder vergessen, weil ich nie mehr in meinem Leben dasselbe gefühlt hatte, wozu ich damals die Worte gebrauchte. (26)
\end{quote}

The expression of \textit{stoßen auf} provides material imagery here. Seidler paints the scene as if he has bumped into an old friend, and the words are a tangible orientation point for him in a disorienting situation. Seidler perceives Weidel’s story itself as a contemporary fairytale for adults, “eine ziemlich vertrackte Geschichte mit ziemlich vertrackten Menschen. [...] So hatte ich nur als Kind gelesen, nein, zugehört” (26). But Seidler’s newly discovered passion for reading and his reminiscing about the stories from his childhood are cut short upon discovering that Weidel’s novel remains a fragment, severed when the author committed suicide. A bitter Seidler takes this personally: “Er hätte mich nicht allein lassen dürfen. Er hätte seine Geschichte zu Ende schreiben sollen. Ich hätte bis zum Morgengrauen lesen können. Er hätte noch weiter schreiben sollen, zahllose

\begin{quote}
Seidler despised books as a child, and his adult self shares this preference for the freer oral tradition over the rigidity of hard-copy: “Ich spürte den alten Unwillen meiner Knabenzeit gegen Bücher, die Scham vor bloß erfundenem, gar nicht gültigem Leben. Wenn etwas erfunden werden mußte, wenn dieses zusammengeschusterte Leben gar zu dürftig war, dann wollte ich selbst der Erfinder sein, doch nicht auf Papier” (109). He has little regard for those writers who insist, “Verwickelungen auszuspinnen, mit denen verglichen die unseren kümmerlich waren” (269). At one point, someone he meets is suspicious of Seidler, suspecting that Seidler is a writer who only wants to hear his story in order to write about it. Seidler vehemently rejects the assumption that he is a writer, and reacts with indignation: “Ich? Nein! Keine Spurt!” (136). He resists the act of writing, which is highlighted by the fact that he narrates his own past orally to the person sitting across the table from him.
\end{quote}

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Geschichten, die mich bewahrt hätten vor dem Übel” (27). Although his manuscript reads for Seidel much like a familiar Erzählung or fairytale, and as a fragment lacks the closed form of a traditional novel, Weidel’s text is at its heart still a novel in the sense put forth by Walter Benjamin in “Der Erzähler”: like any Romancier, this author too “hat sich abgeschieden” (Illuminationen 389).17 Weidel’s absence is conspicuous; he is like the storyteller whom Benjamin describes as “in seiner lebendigen Wirksamkeit keineswegs durchaus gegenwärtig. Er ist uns etwas bereits Entferntes und weiter noch sich Entfernendes” (ibid. 385). He is no longer present to privilege his audience with the counsel that Walter Benjamin saw as a storyteller’s gift.18

Stories themselves nonetheless function as a space of refuge for Seidler, who searches for those stories which he can relate to his own life in some way (such as Weidel’s unfinished one). At the same time, he distances himself from the various rumors and sometimes exaggerated tales of his fellow refugees, stories which he claims to have heard “schon hundertmal” (88).19 Further, he scorns those writers who appear to value

17 Benjamin writes further: “Wer einer Geschichte zuhört, der ist in der Gesellschaft des Erzählers; selbst wer liest, hat an dieser Gesellschaft teil. Der Leser eines Romans ist aber einsam. Er ist es mehr als jeder andere Leser” (401).
18 It should be noted that Seidler’s view of Weidel as a storyteller who leaves his reader in the lurch is not left unopposed. Other figures in the novel see Weidel as having made great contributions to his contemporaries through his writing. For example, Achselroth’s friend says about Weidel: “Um jeden Satz, um jedes Wort seiner Muttersprache, damit seine kleinen, manchmal ein wenig verrückten Geschichten so fein wurden und so einfach, daß jedes sich an ihnen freuen konnte, ein Kind und ein ausgewachsener Mann. Heißt das nicht auch, etwas für sein Volk tun?” (276). The narrator’s references to the mother tongue are reminiscent of Seghers’s statements on Germany and the German language while in exile and after the war. In an article called “Deutschland und wir,” published in Freies Deutschland, November 1941 (7-8), Seghers wrote, “Deutschland: das ist die Sprache, die nicht nur für uns heute in der Fremde, sondern auch auf vielen Strecken der deutschen Geschichte die dichteste deutsche Wirklichkeit war” (cf. LaBahn 26).
19 Seidler also assumes that others do not want to hear his own tired life story, which prompts his surprise that the emigration official Rosalie is so attentive: “Ich wunderte mich. Niemand in den letzten Jahren hatte sich mehr meine alte, längst überholte, längst
life experiences only as potential topics for their writing, as if they were school essays:

"Und all diese Schreibenden, die mit mir in einem Lager steckten, die mit mir flohen, für
die sind plötzlich die furchtbarsten und die seltsamsten Strecken unseres Lebens bloß
durchgelebt, um darüber zu schreiben: das Lager, der Krieg, die Flucht" (240). The
stories which fascinate him most are instead those tested by time, and in fact by
considerable amounts of time—his preferred stories are from the Bible (as opposed to
Karl Roßmann), from mythologies, from the annals of legend—and which have been
passed on primarily through the oral tradition. In this respect, the narrator shares the
author’s own preference for reading her stories aloud (cf. Schlenstedt 319).

On yet another count, the narrative structure of Transit calls to mind Benjamin’s
famous essay “Der Erzähler,” in that it displays the type of interactive narration which
Benjamin sought between storyteller and recipient. Like Seghers herself, Seidler views
his role as this type of storyteller. Along with an implied listener sitting at the narrator’s
table, the reader is invited in the first paragraph to lend an ear as well. After some
introductory plot detail, the narrator asks:

Sie finden das alles ziemlich gleichgültig? Sie langweilen sich? –Ich mich
auch. Erlauben Sie mir, Sie einzuladen. Zu einem richtigen Abendessen
Setzen Sie sich bitte zu mir. Was möchten Sie am liebsten vor sich sehen?
Wie man die Pizza bäckt auf dem offenen Feuer? Dann setzen Sie sich
neben mich. –Den alten Hafen? –Dann besser mir gegenüber. Sie können
die Sonne untergehen sehen hinter dem Fort St. Nicolas. Das wird Sie
sicher nicht langweilen. (5)

übertrieffene Geschichte anhören wollen. Nur diese Frau, die doch von Amts wegen
täglich hundert solcher Geschichten hört, horchte noch immer mit Aufmerksamkeit, mit
einer Art von Ehrerbietung” (253).

20 Cf. Fehervary 123 ff, and 150: “Indeed, reading ‘The Storyteller’ today with Seghers’s
style and manner in mind, one could imagine that Benjamin might just as well have
written his famous essay about her.”

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The various questions posed to Seidler's listener could strike a chord in the reader as well. The reader is thus immediately summoned into this comfortable process of storytelling.

At times Seidler interrupts his own speech with inquiries for further details of his story, which he then proceeds to answer. In doing this, he seems to anticipate questions from his presumably silent listener. At other times, he uses the interrogative form to express his own impressions during the erzählten Zeit: "Das war das mexikanische Konsulat? Ein Stockwerk in einem Mietshaus, das sich durch nichts von anderen Häusern unterschied" (53). This technique bridges the gap between reader and narrator, as we are presented with his seemingly prereflected-upon perceptions. Because it does not develop further into a stream-of-consciousness or inner monologue, however, the reader continues to feel included in the storytelling process itself, rather than functioning as something of a voyeur who peeks at every intimate thought of the narrator. Seidler fills in for the deceased Weidel as a storyteller. He is sometimes a prophet—such as when he consoles a disparaged French soldier: "Das wird alles vorübergehen. [...] Das letzte Wort ist noch nicht gesprochen" (13). This storyteller seems to see beyond the present space and time as waves of history ebb and flow before him:

Meine Angst war völlig verflogen, das Hakenkreuz war mir ein Spuk, ich sah die mächtigsten Heere der Welt hinter meinem Gartenzaun aufmarschieren und abziehen, ich sah die frechsten Reiche zerfallen und junge und kühne sich aufrichten, ich sah die Herren der Welt hochkommen und verwesen, nur ich hatte unermäßiglich viel Zeit zu leben. (12)

21 E.g. "— Warum? — " in the middle of a story (74), which could suggest the narrator echoing his listener's question before answering, or which could be an isolated instance of the listener's interjection.
As a storyteller, Seidler finds a type of immortality that is expressed in an apparent metaphor for storytelling at the end of the novel, where he clarifies his rationale for remaining in Europe instead of fleeing when he had the chance: “Wenn man auf einem vertrauten Boden verblutet, wächst etwas dort von einem weiter, wie von den Sträuchern und Bäumen, die man zu roden versucht” (279). In a noteworthy and arguably risky stylistic move, Seghers reverses the *Blut-und-Boden* imagery associated with National Socialism so that it is no longer about faulty claims to a certain *Erbe*. Referring to Seidler’s tentative plans to join the resistance movement, this passage can also be interpreted as a comment on the undying tradition of storytelling, which the exiles will carry on perennially despite others’ attempts to “roden,” to clear it away and to dismiss it as “degenerate.”

The significance of storytelling in *Transit* goes further than Seidler’s subjective experience in Marseilles. The novel draws attention to the situations of the many refugees whose vast personal life stories were reduced to the concreteness of a dossier that could be presented to the immigration officials as their “Buch des Lebens.” The encapsulation

22 Despite their comparable self-identifications as storytellers, it is important not to fall into the trap of equating the narrator Seidler completely with the author Seghers, as Cernyak seems to do in an article titled “Anna Seghers: Between Judaism and Communism.” Remarking that *Transit* is motivated primarily by “Seghers’s obsessive nostalgia for her lost homeland,” Cernyak also criticizes Seghers for appearing “to have viewed all those who attempted to survive by leaving their homeland as deserters who evaded the responsibility of defending the land with which they were connected by ties of ‘blood and soil’” (284). The insistence that Seghers herself took a judgmental position toward those exiled persons who left Europe seems unfounded. Schlenstedt aptly differentiates author and narrator, who does at times appear judgmental of the refugees around him: “Die (von ihrer eigenen verschiedene) Lebenslage und durch Alter, Geschlecht und Biographie bedingte Ausstattung des Namenlosen ermöglicht Anna Seghers die Konstituierung eines Erzählers, der die Dinge anders erlebt, sieht und reflektiert als sie selbst” (326). Thus, it makes more sense to view the autobiographical *Transit* as “a diasporic work [...] of a survivor who no longer looks into the ‘open fire’ with her narrator, nor through the ‘seer’s eye’ as in *The Seventh Cross*, but as a chronicler writes testimony offered to the memory of the dead” (Fehervary 170-71).
of an entire life within the two covers of a file is obviously an impossible task. But with
time short and possibilities for emigration so limited, there were few other options for the
unfortunate need to "process" so many individual stories. The narrator expresses his
unsettledness with this procedure. When speaking to the seemingly omniscient Kanzler,
Seidler feels "ein leises Unbehagen, als hätte der kleine Kanzler, kaum daß er mit seinen
wachen Augen bei meinem ersten Besuch in das Dossier schaute, bereits meine ganze
Geschichte aus diesem Buche des Lebens herausgelesen" (278). Storytelling in the
bureaucratic realm becomes the process of relating "die Erzählung papierner Abenteuer,
den Durchbruch durch einen Urwald von Dossiers" (124). The "zusammengeschusterte
Leben" (109) of the refugees is documented in a jungle of dossiers, a metaphor which
accentuates the multitude of bureaucratic hindrances facing the exiles. A larger concern
for Seidler, however, is that this jungle precludes many refugees from reflecting on their
individual pasts and their unique life stories, as they are too focused on a future that their
dossiers cannot guarantee. This criticism can be sensed in Seidler's statement that Georg
Binnet was "der einzige Mensch, der mich nicht fragte, wohin ich wolle, sondern woher
ich kam" (59).23

23 Marie claims Seidler is guilty of the same misstep, never having asked her in detail
about her own past, and wrapping himself up in the details of her emigration papers in
order to help her escape Marseilles. She also laments: "In dieser Stadt fragt man die
Menschen nur: Wohin? –Nie: Woher?" (226). Marie confirms her spiritual connection to
the storyteller-narrator, though, for although he has never discussed his own past with
her, she feels that she has known him already her whole life, as she tells him: "mir
kommt es vor, du seiest nicht der letzte, den ich gekannt habe, sondern der erste. Als
seiest du schon damals dabei gewesen in meiner Kindheit, in unserem Land [...] . Doch
kenn ich gerade dich die kürzeste Zeit, am allerflüchtigsten. Ich weiß nicht, woher du
kommst und warum" (266). In this way, Seidler is indeed "geschichtslos" as Alexander
Stephan labels him (Die deutsche Exilliteratur 161; 175). Yet Seidler recalls his flight
from the camps on several occasions, and his remarks that people in Marseilles were
more focused on his Wohin than his Woher suggest that he actually wishes someone
would ask about his past. In addition, he is trying to secure his own place within history
and within the revered storytelling tradition.

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Seidler places priority on this *Woher* over the *Wohin*, implying through his remarks the belief that the past is only the known domain that can be talked about meaningfully and which can be left behind as a gift to others who might experience similar circumstances. This is reminiscent of Benjamin’s Angel of History who can only see the *Woher*, and turns his back on the *Wohin*—although he is clearly being forced in that direction (“Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft”; *Illuminationen* 255). The *Woher* exists as a defined mental space already, while the *Wohin* is, for the time being at least, a utopia. Seidler does not read memoirs or diaries of past storytellers, but instead takes note of the walls around him, in the cafés and pizzerias that are his waiting rooms, where countless people in the same position as the current refugees have been metaphorically registered:

Mir schien es das letzte Feuer, die letzte Herberge in der alten Welt, die uns Obdach gewährte, ja, und eine letzte Frist, um uns zu entscheiden, fortzugehen oder zu bleiben. Die Wände waren erfüllt von unzähligen solcher Fristen, die unzähligen Menschen hier gewährt worden waren, damit sie noch einmal vor dem Feuer das Wichtigste bedenken konnten: was sie festhielt. (129)

These walls document the time-tested storytelling traditions which Seidler cherishes: in the concrete architectural structures, he finds a connection to historical and mythical figures. Without exhibiting *Schadenfreude* or malice, Seidler gains some comfort and

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24 There is however an element of *Schadenfreude* in some of the stories told in Marseilles. The narrator overhears someone talking of a ship which failed to bring its passengers to safety: “Wie munter war der Berichterstatter! Wahrscheinlich weil diese Leute nicht ankamen, ebensowenig wie er selbst! Ich hatte auch diese Geschichte bereits unzählige Male anhören müssen. Ich sehnte mich nach einem einfachen Lied, nach Vögeln und Blumen, ich sehnte mich nach der Stimme der Mutter, die mich gescholten hatte, als ich ein Knabe gewesen war. Oh, tödliches Getratsche!” (89). While telling and retelling the fates of others, Seidler believes that people are neglecting the nuances of individual lives. For example, in an allusion to the real-life story of Walter Benjamin (cf. Schlenstedt 322; Fehervary 167-68), two elderly women in a café tell the story of a man who shot himself in a hotel “jenseits der spanischen Grenze” because he thought authorities were preparing to send him back to France. The two women “ergänzten
consolation from the grief of previous generations, which he relates to his own. He listens to the “uralten frischen Chor von Stimmen, die uns bis zum Grab begleiten, beschimpfen, verspotten, belehren, trösten, aber am meisten trösten” (275). This historical “chorus”—which is somehow both “uralt” and “frisch”—provides numerous storytellers who, unlike the novelist Weidel, are omnipresent with their advice, consolation, and empathetic support. Seidler sees himself within the tradition of this chorus, as a figure who keeps storytelling alive. From the reaction on Marie’s face when he relates some of the refugees’ overheard stories, he perceives the visible effects of storytelling as a powerful spirit-lifting process: “Ich erzählte Marie ihre Geschichten, ich merkte, wie gern sie zuhörte. Ich hörte nicht auf, zu erzählen, damit das Lächeln in ihrem Gesicht ja nicht verschwand und jener Ausdruck von finsterer Trauer in ihren Ziigen zurückkehre, den ich am meisten fürchtete” (173).

Storytelling is viewed as vital, even life-sustaining to Seidler. When he suddenly senses that he must reveal everything to Marie regarding his many lies, the search for the right words manifests itself in physical symptoms: “In einem furchtbaren Schweigen von vielen Sekunden begann ich, nach Worten zu suchen, so hart zu suchen, daß mir der Schweiß auf der Stirn stand” (172). Feverishly, he must hunt for the right tools to tell the story that will liberate him from his guilty conscience. Seidler also tells his listener of a foreign legion member who feels compelled to relate his story of fighting in the North African desert: “Ichfühlte, wie es ihm nottatt, alles von Anfang an zu erzählen” (214).

wechselweise diesen Bericht mit lebhaft klingenden Stimmen,” but for Seidler their authoritatively posited report raises many more questions than it ever answers: “Der Vorgang war ihnen weit klarer als mir, weit einleuchtender. Was hatte denn dieser Mann für unermeßliche Hoffnungen an sein Reiseziel geknüpft, daß ihm die Rückfahrt unerträglich dünkte? Höllisch, unbewohnbar mußte ihm das Land erschienen sein, in dem wir alle noch steckten, in das man ihn zwingen wollte, zurückzukehren” (196).
The directionally-oriented nature of storytelling and the conceptual spatiality of memory are made especially clear with Seidler's assessment of this man's need to recount his experiences from beginning to end: "Ich wußte, daß er erst jetzt, in dieser Minute, an diesem Tisch, sein vergangenes Leben abschloß. Denn abgeschlossen ist, was erzählt wird. Erst dann hat er diese Wüste für immer durchquert, wenn er seine Fahrt erzählt hat" (215). The nature of a Wüste as desolate, or at least as largely uninhabited and wild, should be considered at this point in relation to the storytelling theme. The desert is finally crossed and conquered when the experience has been shared through storytelling. The declaration "Denn abgeschlossen ist, was erzählt wird" has been cited often in scholarship on Transit as evidence of the narrator's take on the process of storytelling as a means of dealing with both past and present. Seghers's choice of the verb abschliessen to connote the closing of a chapter in a person’s life prompts further consideration in reference to spatial metaphors. Does this particular conceptualization of storytelling posit it implicitly as a means of locking up the harsh past behind us, as we would lock a door, for instance? When that door is still open, the pain is exposed clearly. But the idea of closing it behind could be construed positively: the story, like the Wüste, can be revisited later, learned from, and related to others who find themselves in a similar situation. The storyteller, as he is depicted in Transit, holds the key to that door. He may even have a map for the metaphorical desert.

25 Hans Mayer, for instance, expounds upon this statement: "Wenn es aber erzählt wurde, hat es auch eine neue Dauer erhalten, indem es in der Erzählung—unzerstört, unzerstörbar—weiterlebt" (124-25). Rilla generalizes with spatial-linear metaphors, "Darum handelt es sich in allen Büchern der Anna Seghers: daß abgeschlossen ist, was erzählt wird, abgeschlossen, indem es erzählt wird. Aber nicht so, daß nichts weiter folgt, weil das Lebendige zum Stillstand gekommen ist. Sondern so, daß nun erst das Weitere folgt, weil das Lebendige freie Bahn hat" (324).
4.2.1. The Stories Told—True and False

Seidler displays something of a contradiction: he claims to be bored with the life-and-death stories of the refugees around him, and in that sense seeks a new and engaging story; yet he has the urge to share his own experience, and in so doing, to become a part of the age-old storytelling tradition. He realizes that his story has been told and heard previously on many occasions, and he knows that his compulsion to tell it anyway risks boring his listener:


The narrator longs for the ordinary and the routine, while the nearly unbelievable but true tales of war and exile grate on him in their current preponderance. He craves the reports of laborers, the “stories” of those who are busy creating practical goods for the present generation.

Seidler clings tightly to stories that are so “tried and true” that they too could be considered commonplace: Bible stories, fairytales, and legends. The narrator speaks to his listener with the assumption that (s)he also knows exactly to which stories he alludes. For instance, the immigration officer Rosalie reminds him strongly “an den Hund im Märchen, an den Hund mit Augen wie Wagenräder” (251).26 He expresses this same

premise of familiarity when discussing the female baker in the pizzeria where he spends so much time:

Die Pizzabäckerin, ohne schön zu sein, glich doch den Schönsten der Schön. Sie glich allen Frauen der alten Sagen, die immer jung bleiben. Sie hatte immer auf diesem Hügel am Meer auf ihrem uralten Gerät die Pizza gebacken, als andere Völker dahergezogen waren, von denen man heute nichts mehr weiß und sie wird auch immer noch Pizza backen, wenn andere Völker kommen. (271)

The stories remain vague enough that they are not necessarily immediately identifiable, but still they exude a recognizable feel. Seidler imparts this kinship to the routines and permanence of the workers in the harbor city. In other cases, Seghers turns to more explicit and canonical allusions to weave even more familiarity into her characters’ storytelling. This is observed, for instance, when the French Foreign Legion member tells Seidler of his experiences: “Ich weiß nicht mehr, wie lange wir in die Wüste hineinzogen. Mir dünkte es vierzig Jahre lang wie in der Bibel” (216). The allusion to the book of Exodus, in which Moses leads from Egypt the liberated Israelites who are punished through forty years of wandering, conveys a sense of temporal disorientation within the vast space of the desert, seemingly endless when one is located somewhere in its midst.

Seidler reports on the old man in the crypt of Saint-Victor who alludes to the Bible with poetic anaphora: “Dreimal bin ich geschlagen worden, dreimal gesteinigt, dreimal habe ich Schiffbruch erlitten, Tag und Nacht zugebracht in der Tiefe des Meeres, in Gefahr gewesen durch Flüsse, Gefahr in den Städten, Gefahr in der Wüste, Gefahr auf dem Meere” (186). Seghers’s implicit reference to the storyteller Paul is significant, as one who was abused and rejected not only by Christ’s enemies but by some of his followers and countrymen as well. Seidler’s own home country has spurned him in the

most severe way, hence his focus on this part of the old man’s preachings in Marseilles. Seidler himself is apparently well-versed in Bible stories. This is observed, for example, when he speaks with Achselroth about the American consul’s “geistliche[n] Berater” who allegedly can influence him to pull some strings in this time of danger. Seidler tries in vain to interject Biblical parallels to the current situation: “Und hoffen wir auch, daß der Konsul auf den Mann Gottes hören wird. Es gibt in der Bibel Fälle –.’ Achselroth sagte kalt: ‘Wir haben es hier mit dem amerikanischen Konsul zu tun’” (235). Despite Seidler’s reverence for Biblical and mythical stories, there is no practical room for religious analogy and moral lesson in this secular empire of bureaucracy. As with Kafka’s Der Verschollene, the stories told orally in the present ultimately have much greater consequence than the Bible in Seghers’s novel.

4.2.2. Rumors in Exile

In another similarity to Kafka’s work, the reliability of memory, and of those who heavily base their judgments of the present on their recollection of the past, are challenged in Transit by the appearance of rumors which often turn out to be untrue. The role of rumors in the novel is a pivotal point for investigation, given that the work’s very first statement questions the lines between fact and rumor: “Die ‘Montreal’ soll untergegangen sein zwischen Dakar und Martinique. Auf eine Mine gelaufen. Die Schiffahrtsgesellschaft gibt keine Auskunft. Vielleicht ist auch alles nur ein Gerücht” (5). The speculative nature of this situation, conveyed through the modal sollen and the

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28 The reader is not required to wait in suspense for the ship along with the refugees, but instead finds out its probable fate immediately in the exterior of the frame narration. Other works by Seghers also commence by revealing the story’s conclusion in this way, such as her Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara: “Der Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara endete mit der verspäteten Ausfahrt zu den Bedingungen der vergangenen vier
adverb *vielleicht*, becomes all the more significant in the next sentences, when the reader discovers that the narrated time is wartime, and the ship was full of refugees—who might have suffered an equally terrible or even worse fate had they not boarded the *Montreal*—that is, “Wenn alles nicht wieder nur ein Gerücht ist” (5).

Hopes rose and fell with the tides of rumors regarding soon-to-arrive ships, and the possibility of available seats on these vessels that could transport them to safety. Countless stories were told and retold during the long waiting periods: “Die Menschen erzählten vor mir und hinter mir ihre Legenden von spanischen Transits, die zwar schließlich gekommen waren, aber so knapp vor der Abfahrt des Schiffes, daß man unmöglich rechtzeitig in Lissabon hatte ankommen können” (209). The term “Legenden” to refer to rumors carries a facetious tone here, considering Seidler’s passion for weathered legends, myths, and fairy tales.

Seghers relies on spatializations to communicate the great extent to which these and many other rumors permeated life for her and the refugees about whom she writes in Marseilles. A conversation between the legionary and the narrator about rumors of an approaching ship reveals the illusory transformation of a rumor into probability and then into certainty:


*Jahre. Man kann sagen, daß der Aufstand eigentlich schon zu Ende war, bevor Hull nach Port Sebastian eingeliefert wurde und Andreas auf der Flucht durch die Klippen umkam*” (5).
The metaphor “Dunst von Gerüchten” calls attention to the haziness of any presumed knowledge that is based on rumor, lending irony to the aforementioned notion of “Gewißheit.” Images such as “Phantom,” “Geistern,” and “gespenstige[s] Dock” further add to the elusiveness of certainty in a time that is saturated with rumor.²⁹

Toward the end of the novel, Seidler relates his decision to stay behind in France rather than leaving with Marie, although he was able to arrange for all of his visas and other necessary paperwork. According to his retelling of this scenario, the rumor of an available spot on the ship arose instantaneously after he whispered his decision to the emigration official:

"Obwohl ich nur mit ihm flüsterte, entstand, bevor er mich selbst noch richtig verstanden hatte, in dem wartenden Haufen das Gerücht, ein Billett sei zurückgegeben. Ja, dieses Gerücht mußte unglaublich schnell bis in die Stadt gedrungen sein. [...] Doch der Beamte hob nur seine Arme und fluchte, da legte sich das Gerücht. (269)"

The force and impact of this particular rumor is reinforced through the verb *dringen*—the rumor is portrayed as something material that presses its way through the anticipating crowds. The official, with gestures like those of a furious orchestra conductor, has the power to quell or to encourage such rumors by his bearing. In this particular case, the

²⁹ Seidler maintains an ambivalent relationship to the prevalent rumors and gossip that hang over the harbor city. On the one hand, he states with remorse that he was “vom düstersten Transitgeschwätz angesteckt worden” (106), and that the refugees’ “Geschwätz erfüllte die Luft, das unsinnige Gemisch verwickelter Ratschläge und blanker Ratlosigkeit” (121). On the other hand, the rumors and gossip—pertinent to the specific dangers at hand, but somehow still timeless in purpose and effect—seem to give Seidler the sense of connection to the past that he cherishes, as is evident in his more positive, melodic description of the “Geschwätz”: “Es war uraltes Hafengeschwätz, so alt wie der Alte Hafen selbst und noch älter. Wunderbarer uralter Hafentratsch, der nie verstummt ist, solang es ein Mittelländisches Meer gegeben hat, phönizischer Klatsch und kretischer, griechischer Tratsch und römischer, niemals waren die Tratscher alle geworden, die bange waren um ihre Schiffsplätze und um ihre Gelder, auf der Flucht vor allen wirklichen und eingebildeten Schrecken der Erde” (88-89).
rumor is extinguished ("legte sich"), and the refugees must continue to wait for the next
glimmer of optimism, however dim. Their peace of mind depends on these uncertainties.

Part of the narrator's disappointment is that the stories told in Marseilles generally
do not pertain to individuals' pasts; instead, the stories he hears (beyond the tales of
escape or of untimely death which have become tiresome to him) are rumors about what
might await the refugees: again the focus is on the Wohin and not on the Woher, to
Seidler's dismay. But the life-sustaining force of traditional stories applies in a strange
way to rumors as well—not only as a means of keeping hopes and optimism alive, but
possibly of keeping a person alive as well. For example, the narrator reports of a Spanish
refugee who had spread the rumor of her brother's death (262). He was actually on the
same ship with his sister, travelling toward freedom under false identification papers. The
woman could keep neither her excitement nor the secret to herself. The news of this
deception was revealed to the authorities, and her brother was sent back to Franco. In this
political climate, it was not always safe to tell a true story—rumors and lies were
sometimes preferable, or even necessary.

Seghers concretizes the frantic exilic existence in the following description of the
hasty words exchanged in passing between strangers of a common fate: "Wie flüchtig ist
das Geraschel von ein paar Worten, wie Geldscheine, die man in Eile wechselt. Nur
manchmal trifft einen ein einzelner Ausruf, ein Wort, was weiß ich, ein Gesicht. Das geht
einem durch und durch, rasch und flüchtig" (6). The exchange of utterances is like the
exchange of currency: even when time is momentarily all that one has, the precious
energy needed to expend on building trusting relationships cannot be squandered. The
verb treffen here in relation to an exclamation, a word, or a face emphasizes both the
haphazardness and sporadical appearance of such expressions of camaraderie, or at least
of human connection, and their weight and magnitude for the recipient—who can almost
sense them physically, if only fleetingly. The same concretization of the spoken word can
be observed in Seidler’s description of his odyssey to Marseilles amidst hordes of other
exiles: “Doch schlugen beständig einzelne Worte an mein Ohr, die schließlich auch ich
verstand, in einem bestimmten Rhythmus, als sollten sie mir eingeprägt werden: Cuba-
Visa und Martinique, Oran und Portugal, Siam und Casablanca, Transit und
Dreimeilenzone” (42). The harsh impact made by the vocabulary of exile rings clearly in
this passage.

The narrator often uses material metaphors to emphasize the intensity of his
situation, for example in his description of the looks he receives from a travel agent: “Ich
hatte wieder den Eindruck, als müßte ich seine Blicke von meinem Gesicht wegwischen”
(254).30 The metaphor of physical contact between the man’s stares and Seidler’s face
lends a concrete form to the narrator’s experience. To this end, synaesthetic imagery is
also used, such as in his depiction of the Mont Vertoux exile-gossip that he tries in vain
to avoid: “In vielen Sprachen schlug sein Geschwätz an mein Ohr” (273).31 Rather than
the faculty of hearing, the tactile sense is evoked here with the many languages that so
irritate the narrator. The people who “den Mont Vertoux mit Rauch und Geschwätz
erfüllten” (88) are, in Seidler’s view, invading the personal space which is already quite
limited in his temporary habitat. Drawing on physically connotated verbs like schlagen
and treffen, Seghers subtly reinforces Seidler’s annoyance at the foolish words,

30 Seghers turns to similar liquid imagery to describe the penetrating stare of the Corsican
official: “Ich hatte auf meinem Gesicht die Empfindung, als bestehe sein Blick aus einem
Tropfen Flüssigkeit, ja, ich wischte mein Gesicht ab” (117). In Johnson’s Mutmassungen,
expressive countenances are also depicted as making physical contact—Johnson writes of
Jakob and Rohlfs, “Ihre Blicke umklammerten sich” (156).
31 Another example of this imagery: “Die Stimme meines Begleiters schlug an mein Ohr”
(215).
unsubstantiated rumors, and the hard glances of others that he perceives as a form of
assault on his already limited autonomy as a refugee, as tangible blows to his senses.

4.2.3. How the Stories are Told: Memory, Storytelling, and Spatial Metaphors

Whether in regard to rumor, legend, or true stories, the question of memory’s
uncertainty is a recurring one in Transit, as conveyed by the frequent appearance of
vielleicht (e.g. 34). While in telling rumors or even legends, such doubts are often
suppressed for the sake of maintaining communicative authority, memory’s fallibility can
be more consequential in the recollection of a person’s individual history. Seidler is
conscious of the imperfect workings of memory and tries to rationalize his own
forgetfulness, for example regarding his friend Heinz, with whom he had fled from a
concentration camp:

In Marseille war er mir aus dem Kopf gekommen. Denn umgekehrt, wie
man gewöhnlich annimmt, vergißt man zuweilen das Wichtigste rasch,
doch es still in einen übergeht, weil es sich unmerkbar mit einem
vermischt, während einem unwichtige Dinge oft durch den Sinn gehen,
doch sie unvermischt an einem haften bleiben. (79)

In this form of spatial expression, thoughts grow limbs: through Seghers’s verb choice in
this passage, they have the mobility to come, to go, to remain—and more vividly, to cling

Seidler is envious of Achselroth, who remembers exact details of Marie: “Ich fühlte zu
meinem Erstaunen und meiner Beunruhigung, daß dieser Mensch in seinem Gedächtnis
ein klares Bild von Marie bewahrt hatte, so wie sie in Wirklichkeit beinahe war.
Wahrscheinlich war das Gehirn dieses Menschen so angelegt, daß es alles ganz klar
verzeichnete, auch das Zarteste und Stillste, so daß er es später aufschreiben konnte, so
wie auch ein Kurzsichtiger oder Halbblinder eine Apparatur bei sich tragen kann, die
alles scharf registriert, astronomische Photographie treibt, wo ein gesundäugiger Mensch
beirrt wird, von allerlei Nebel und Flecken, die sich dann doch auflösen. Er hatte sicher
mit diesem Gehirn die unwahrscheinlichsten und geheimsten Vorgänge registriert, und
jetzt war zufällig Marie an der Reihe und mir wurde bang” (233). Considering his
hypothesis that it is easier to remember the trivial details than important ones, Seidler
would deduce that Achselroth must not sincerely value Marie, since he has such a vivid
recollection of her.

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(haften bleiben) onto a person. The idiom *im Gedächtnis haftenbleiben* is altered here slightly such that the thought of trivial things does not only stick in one’s mind but becomes overbearing as it clings like a parasite “an einem.” Meanwhile, Seidler more easily forgets the significant thought of his dear friend Heinz because it silently “in einen übergeht,” becoming an unconsciously dormant part of him. In material terms, the trivial is more easily detachable and is somehow external, like a mental appendage, while the meaningful is incorporated and contained integrally within.

Memories, like some stories, take a visible form through their manifestation on the facial expressions of those who remember. A man whom Seidler meets had also travelled with his disabled friend Heinz; as they speak of him, the man’s expression changes:

> In seinem ruhigen Gesicht gab es einen Augenblick einen Zug von vergnügtem Spott, vielleicht die Erinnerung an eine Einzelheit ihrer Reise, einen Streich, eine Übertölpelung einer Hafengebühr. Er hatte wahrscheinlich vor unserem Besuch Heinz vergessen. Seine grauen Augen erwärmen sich jetzt noch einmal bei der Erinnerung, er sah ihn wahrscheinlich anstrenge verzogenen Mund, seinen hellen, über die eigene Gebrechlichkeit spottenden Augen. Dieser warme Schatten in den grauen Augen eines französischen Seemanns war auch das Letzte, das letzte Sichtbare, was von Heinz in diesem Erdteil zurückblieb. (187)

Memory in this representation implies materiality and spatiality: the past is concretized mentally to form something solid that can cast a shadow. I will discuss shadows shortly as negatively connoted metaphors; but here an unusually warm shadow brings hints of affection to the face of the otherwise stoic Frenchman. This memory that displays itself in the sailor’s eyes is all that remains of Heinz in this part of the world—and like the memory of Weidel, Seidler views it as something concrete, visible, and integral to the self as “das Letzte, das letzte Sichtbare.”
The tendency of human cognition to conceptualize memories as pictures or defined images becomes apparent in Seghers's metaphorizations. Her narrator expects to be able to recall neat images of his past. However, for various reasons, the memories are often frustratingly unclear: "In meinem Kopf entstand eine nebelhafte Erinnerung" (56). In some instances, Seidler has difficulties remembering aspects of his past, because so much has happened to him in such a short span of time; in other cases, it is his regular imbibing of alcohol which causes foggy memory: "Ich trank weiter, manche Teile meines Lebens waren mir klar, andere waren verdunkelt vom zarten, schwärzlich roten Rosénebel" (147). In either case, Seidler suggests his belief that an untarnished picture of the past could be recalled under better circumstances. The absence of this ideal is perceived as a loss, intensifying the emptiness in his life. He expresses his remorse, for instance, when he cannot recall the picture of Marie’s face: "Mein Zimmer erschien mir kahl und leer, als hätte man mich inzwischen beraubt. Auch mein Kopf war leer. Denn nicht einmal ein genaues Bild war mir in Gedächtnis zurückgeblieben. Selbst diese Spur war verloren" (95). The spatial imagery enhances the barrenness of both his temporary lodging and his life at this point. The container metaphor depicts the narrator's head as a space completely devoid of meaningful thought; neither an exact picture nor even a trace of Marie is to be found in this storehouse. Here Seghers uses spatial metaphors to indicate not what is concretely present, but what is conspicuously missing.

33 The narrator also describes his own mental state as foggy when he speaks with a man who, like him at the time, is interested in a woman named Nadine: "Mir jagten seine verliebten Worte einen eisigen Schrecken ein, als bliese ein Windstoß auch in den Nebel meiner eigenen Verzauberung" (111). Fog is naturally equivocal as a spatial metaphor because it is not concrete per se; instead, it is elusive, vaporous, and murky, just as the mysteries of the mind. Here it is curious in its connection with the wind, which has the (apparently unrealized) power to blow the fog away and bring clarity to the narrator’s mind. (Cf. also discussions of fog in relation to Mutmassungen über Jakob in Chapter 2).
The unreliability and imperfection of memory leads Seidler to become untrusting of its deceitfulness; he relates his faltering memory to shadows on the wall: “Bei einer Wendung der Lampe oder nur beim Schließen der Tür verblaßte der Schatten an der Wand wie das Trugbild in meinem Kopf” (280). Like fog, shadows also represent a middle-ground between presence and absence.\(^\text{34}\) Seidler is also haunted throughout the novel by shadows of the dead, and of Marie, and of all of those from his past whom he truly wants to remember but cannot. The Binnet boy, befriended by both Seidler and the doctor, reaches a point when he realizes the transitory status of the two men in Marseilles; from this time forward, he regards each as a “Schatten, an den zu klammern, mit dem zu reden, es keinen Zweck hatte” (190). Just like everyone around him, the child is looking for stability and permanence, but finds only the flicker of these shadows coming and going in the night. They are ubiquitous—the narrator forewarns his listener, “Sie werden dann sehen, wie manche Schatten durch alle Türen hereinschlüpfen” (59)—but at the same time they are fleeting. Unlike metaphorical fog, which clouds and hinders the faculty of memory, these shadows slip in wherever they can, providing sporadic mnemonic prompts amidst confusion and impermanence.

In an era of peace and stability, time at one’s disposal may be somewhat predictable and measurable, but is nonetheless subjectively experienced as far as its apparent rate. In times of uncertainty and threat, as depicted in *Transit*, the lack of an everyday, foreseeable routine causes time to be perceived and contemplated differently. Again spatial and material metaphors express quantities of time variously as a burden, as a relief, as frustration, or simply as wasted, such as in the following account of the

\(^\text{34}\) Of his own unrealized dreams of life beyond the current state of transit, the narrator wonders, “warfen sie denn nicht ihre echten Schatten auf die weißen Seiten der Dossiers?” (145).
narrator’s mental state: "Verzweiflung überkam mich, Verzweiflung und Heimweh. Mich jammerten meine siebenundzwanzig vertanen, in fremde Länder verschütteten Jahre" (89). Rather than time being represented as an empty container to be filled, in this case Seidler’s life itself is the container, out of which his forced nomadism has caused him to “spill” years—years which, based on the verbs chosen here, are assessed as wasted and ruined. He is left feeling fragmented and empty. Ideally, Seidler would like to leave a part of himself behind, but in a different sense: as a storyteller, he is concerned with his legacy, which should append to the legacy of those who came before him. As opposed to the transitory existence that marks his identity as an exile, he longs for the sense of permanence that he sees in Marseilles’ laborers— the fisherpeople, newspaper deliverers, pizza bakers, and even in Marie, who possesses a mythical quality which Seidler both puzzles over and reveres:

Sie mußte schon tausend Jahre an diesem Fenster gesessen haben, in kretischen und phonizischen Tagen, ein Mädchen, das vergebens nach seinem Geliebten späht, unter den Heeren der Völkerschaften, doch diese tausend Jahre waren vergangen wie ein Tag. Jetzt ging die Sonne unter.

Seidler plainly declares his inclination toward that which is permanent: “nur das gefällt mir, was immer vorhält. Denn immer hat hier ein offenes Feuer gebrannt, und seit Jahrhunderten hat man den Teig so geschlagen. Und wenn Sie mir vorwerfen, daß ich selbst immer wechsle, so antworte ich, das ist auch nur eine gründliche Suche nach dem, was für immer vorhält” (125). Haas expounds on Seidler’s affinity for the everyday life in Marseilles, and the effect this has on his conception of time: “Hier bezeichnet der gewöhnliche Tag, das gewöhnliche Leben nicht nur das Gewohnte in psychologisch motivierter Retrospektive, sondern darüber hinaus zugleich eine Seinsform. Im Rhythmus von Schlafen und Wachen, von Kochen und Essen, von Säen und Ernten, von Arbeiten und Feiern wird der Kreislauf des Lebens sichtbar. In dieser nie abreiBenden Kette der alltäglich sich wiederholenden Dinge wird die Zeit zur Wiederkehr des Gleichen und scheint darin still zu stehen. Damit aber ist der Bereich einer Dauer erreicht, in der die einzelnen Erscheinungen wechseln, in der sich jedoch stets dasselbe abspielt” (Haas 91).

Seidler senses an affinity between Marie and himself before he really even knows her: “Der Barbier fragte mich: ob ich mich mit ihr entzweit hätte. Die Worte trafen erstaunlich genau mein eigenes Gefühl, ich hätte sie längst gekannt, ein gemeinsames Leben läge
The gap between yesterday and today seems non-existent in Seidler’s view—a thousand years pass as one day, a compressed temporality conveyed through spatial and material metaphors. As such, the past becomes enveloped in the present, and the connection between the two is impossible to ignore.

By the same token, the past figure of Weidel is embodied within the narrator’s present. Seidler finds out that Weidel, whose identity he had assumed for immigration purposes, was not allowed into Spain because of his political (presumably anti-fascist) writings. This piece of knowledge gives Seidler a new respect for the dead writer:

Er ist also doch nicht nur Staub, dachte ich, nicht nur Asche, nicht nur eine schwache Erinnerung an irgendeine vertrackte Geschichte, die ich kaum wieder erzählen könnte, wie jene Geschichten in der Dämmerung, die man mir in alten Zeiten erzählt hat, als ich noch nicht ganz schlief, aber auch nicht mehr ganz wach war. Es bleibt noch etwas zurück, das genug lebt, das genug gefürchtet wird, damit man die Grenzen vor ihm sperrt, damit man ihm Länder verschließt. (210)

The Weidel whom Seidler once resented, as a novelist who had abandoned his audience through the seemingly selfish act of suicide, is now portrayed in an admirable and even heroic light when the narrator realizes that the dead writer had acted on his political convictions, thus leaving behind a tangible, post-mortem “etwas.” Indeed, through his own stories, guidance, and advice, Seidler tries to redeem the would-be storyteller Weidel.

hinter uns, dann hätten wir uns entzweit” (120). The spatial metaphors are plentiful here too—Seidler imagines that a shared history lies behind them, envisioned as a place where their common ground permanently remains and which is thus possible to revisit. In addition, the selection of *entzweien*, with its suggestion of two parts dividing, is more visual in nature than a morphemically less transparent alternative such as *trennen*. Seidler’s desire to be associated with the character Marie, whom he imagines as part of a greater legacy that manifests itself generation after generation, is enhanced through this type of spatial and visual imagery.

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4.3. *Mutmassungen über Jakob*: “Das kunstvolle Geflecht der erinnerten wiederhergestellten Vergangenheit”

Through both its subject matter and its narrative structure, Johnson’s novel *Mutmassungen über Jakob* points to the subjectiveness and inherent unreliability of storytelling. This is exemplified by figures like Cresspahl, who “erzählt viel und jedem was anderes” (77-78). In most cases, there are no claims that the stories told are remembered with precision; on the contrary, characters often preface their speech with disclaimers for their imperfect memories, for instance, the taxi driver’s “Wenn mir recht ist” (158). Various figures contradict each other in their recollections of the past, such as when the Stasi agent Rohlf’s tries to mesh the details of his story about Sabine with that of his partner (238). As in the novels of Kafka and Seghers, a significant role is occupied in Johnson’s work by rumors and gossip, such as that which is overheard by the 17-year old “Melderin” trainee:

> was man da so zu hören kriegt! wo sie gestern abend gewesen sind und wer Krach zu Hause hat und Mariechen kriegt ein Kind, sie weiss noch nicht von wem...nein. Aber davon kann ich natürlich nichts erzählen, ich bin nur zufällig da zur Ausbildung, sie reden ja nicht mit mir. (234)

The young woman’s eavesdropping highlights storytelling’s prominence in the everyday, often in the form of banal chitchat. Her simple addendum to the topic of office gossip is telling: “Aber erzählt wird viel” (235). These quotidian stories permeate both the personal and political realms, as Rohlf’s also speaks of rumors, lamenting constant “unzuverlässige unsichere Gerüchte” from the U.S. State Department (128).

With all its uncertainty of validity and utility, storytelling can be a burden—especially in its written form; Jonas believes this is like “ein mitgebrachter Vorrat, der am

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37 This liveliness of human communication, even if inconsequential or distorted, contrasts the “technische Störung” that prevents information from being passed on by telephone in the novel (226). Because of imperfect technology, communication is hindered altogether, whereas a flawed memory still might let through glimmers of a storyline’s basic “truth.”
Ende der Reise nicht mehr zu gebrauchen war" (174). At the same time, though, both storytelling and an intense questioning of the past are presented as natural and automatic human compulsions. Gesine displays this phenomenon as she recalls a conversation with Jakob when she was thirteen, as she began to question the past as it had been told to her:


Gesine’s formulation “es fragte plötzlich aus mir” points to an innate curiosity that operates automatically to prompt the storytelling mechanism in Jakob. The time passages with which the adult Gesine struggles have metaphorical substance, such that the figure believes to be able to “betrachten” the past from the standpoint of today.

In putting forth storytelling as a subjective process of representation, Johnson allows his characters to tell their own stories, in their own language or dialect. Various languages are interspersed throughout the narration: High German, Plattdeutsch, Russian, English. The assorted mother tongues and speech patterns stress the individuality of world views and the fact that everyone brings to bear his or her own personal language, which extends beyond words to include unique gestures and expressions. During the crisis regarding the Warsaw Pact troops coming through his station, Jonas notes that Jakob’s manner of speech had never seemed quite as “pommersch” as it did in that particular moment (251). Such observations, and the characters’ various dialects, highlight their humanness and also anchor excerpts of the text to a particular space: divisions between characters are simultaneously marked as personal/individual, and public/geographical. Gesine’s occupation as a translator makes a similar statement: she
“schrieb mit der Maschine eine Sprache um in die andere und vermittelte zwischen den einen und den anderen Rednern als sei sie wirklich am Mitreden; von wem konnte man so etwas nicht sagen?” (173). In interpreting the words of others, she inevitably changes the story somewhat—but this is not exclusive to her profession, as it applies to storytellers of all varieties.

Jakob seems the most sensitive to this mediation of languages, as he realizes that by being laconic, he can communicate more effectively than by being verbose; he prefers a story which “liess sich in drei Worten erzählen” (225). Exactly which three words—or even which story—is unimportant here. Jakob’s economy of words is consequential because the less one says, the less must be “translated.” This is a main difficulty a reader has in reconstructing Jakob’s story—the several voices relating it in their own languages are long-winded, and their story-fragments are not only convoluted but convoluting in respect to the larger picture.

4.3.1. Telling Jakob’s Story

Uwe Johnson maintained of Mutmassungen, “Ich habe das Buch so geschrieben, als würden die Leute es so langsam lesen, wie ich es geschrieben habe” (Neusüß 40). Johnson accomplishes this in part by setting up and then defying readers’ possible expectations. The structure of the first sentence of the novel—“Aber Jakob ist immer quer über die Gleise gegangen,” (7)—sets up several of these expectations. From the conjunction “aber” we immediately know to be dealing with a narrator who objects to an assumed truth. Further, instead of the conventional narrative preterite (“Jakob ging…”), the present-perfect tense in conjunction with the adverb “immer” indicates a repeated event that is no longer happening (cf. Born 62). With this opening sentence/paragraph,
the reader is thrust into either mid-conversation or mid-thought, that is, into a yet to be revealed time and space, in which one narrator refers to an indeterminate past time and a vaguely specified space ("die Gleise"). As Bom also notes, the suspense in Mutmassungen is due not to the provocation of the more customary question of "What will happen?" but "What must have happened here?" (ibid.). The chronological end of Johnson’s story—the death of Jakob—is continued in its beginning (cf. Bom 64). The implications of this technique for the process of storytelling are noteworthy: from the very start of Johnson’s novel, the reader participates in the act of reconstructing the final few days of Jakob’s life and the events leading up to his death. This feat can only be accomplished, if at all, through the piecing together of others’ memories. In that sense, the process of reading Mutmassungen is the reconstruction of reconstructions, such that it remains wholly unclear whether we can glean a “true” account of events.

What does become clear is the humanness of the many storytellers whom Johnson employs. Beyond the conflicting stories and apparent memory gaps among characters, the human element is displayed in the often conversational style of even the omniscient third-person narrator, the one narrator who apparently does not also function as a character in the novel. At some points this narrator is an imparter of geographical and historical background presented in a descriptive, seemingly objective manner. The narrator interjects into the story a lesson on Mecklenburg, for example:

Die Endung mancher Dorfnamen auf -hagen ist letzte Nachricht von den deutschen Siedlern, die diesen Wald rodeten am Anfang des gegenwärtigen Jahrtausends; Hagen hiess Wald; zu den Wasserläufen ist noch zu sagen die mittlere Höhenlage der Seenplatte ist etwa vierzig Meter höher gemessen als der Ostseespiegel, so dass sich die Wasserläufe gewaltsam einen Weg durch die Hügel der Endmoränen gebahnt haben in das Grundmoränenland ins Meer. (185)

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At other times the narrator is far less bookish and more informal. Conversational time approximations such as “fünf sechs Jahre” (42), or even more stylized statements such as “ihre Augen waren ganz schmal vor Sichbesinnen Spott Neugier” (214), exude a stream of consciousness through their absence of punctuation. The novel is also characterized by frequent parentheticals, such as the additional information provided by “(Darauf hat ja jeder gewartet)” (60). Certain parentheticals also lack a conventional usage of commas, conspicuous in a recounting of Jakob’s perceptions of Sabine, “(fühlte ihre Blicke in seinem Gesicht und fühlte den grossen trägen wehen Überdruss …)” (31). The row of adjectives uninterrupted by punctuation effects an immediacy that supersedes the past tense of the narration. The insertion of the following parenthetical interrupts the storytelling preterite with supplementary description that produces a present-time feel: “Bartsch (jetzt völlig ruhig rauchend vorgestützt mit der Stirn in die Hand) wies darauf hin […]” (248-49). These parenthetical asides create an illusion that the reader is being addressed directly—although here we do not have a consistent first-person narrator who addresses a second party, as in Seghers’s *Transit*—almost as if we are receiving stage directions.

In challenging traditional novel forms through a non-linear structure and a plethora of narrators, Johnson also incorporates elements from other genres into *Mutmassungen*, including Romantic, fairy-tale aspects that provide numerous fascinating examples of ontological metaphors which create atmosphere. Among these are allegorizations such as, “Hinter Jakob stand die Müdigkeit und beugte sich vor mit ihm und lächelte sein geringfügiges Lächeln und stimmte Jöches Anwesenheit bei in allem” (64). The animation of the inanimate is also common in the text, as in regard to Rohlfs’s

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38 When the narration is interrupted by multiple “Zwischenfragen”-parentheticals (121-22), it becomes ambiguous as to whether a dialogue or inner monologue is intended.
vehicle: “das lange gelenkige Tier von Auto vorwärtsriss in den Regen, der das
Motorgeräusch und die roten Rücklichter und den Schatten sofort verschluckte” (224-25).
Also prevalent are synaesthetic and onomatopoeic statements in fairy-tale style, such as
“Der Nebel knisterte” (207). The adult characters and narrators embrace this type of
imagery, lending literalness to the expression of having one’s head in the clouds: “die
Wolkengebirge erschienen dann ganz weiss, kunstreich waren die Grate gebaut mit ihren
Rändern, sie waren räumlich, betretbar” (296). A few lines later, set off with italics,
Gesine’s dream of climbing onto these materialized clouds is revealed: “Was ich hätte
sagen können war ich möchte auf die Wolken” (ibid.).

_Mutmassungen_ displays a pattern of intangibles that become metaphorically
tangible (or audible, visible, etc.), hanging in the air to create a mysterious but material
atmosphere that in turn seems to hang over the whole novel. This device is seen most
often in descriptions of surroundings: “vor dem Fenster in dem engen tiefen Hof hing das
Licht wie Blei” (71); “sehr entfernt begann ein Wald in verwischten Einzelheiten, über
allem hing der Himmel schwer und einförmig, das unmenschliche schweigsame Grau
quetschte einen glühenden Streifen Sonnenuntergang aus sich hervor” (74-75); “Über der
feuchten bemoosten Dachkehle hatte der Himmel zu strahlen begonnen, das Weiss wurde
immer härter” (208). At other times what hangs in the narrative space is a spatialized
abstract that deals with emotion or mood, such as in the following depiction of young
couples in the _Ratskeller_: “ihre Zufriedenheit hing unübersehbar im Raum und teilte sich
ihm heimlich mit” (181). The metaphorical presentation of satisfaction hanging
“unübersehbar” in the room enhances this scene’s particularly languid climate.

In addition to contributing to the novel’s storytelling landscapes, the ubiquity of
spatial and material metaphors also underscores the force of words as conceptual

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weapons. The ability to manipulate language for ideological aims is a thread that runs through the novel. For example, Cresspahl is able to defend himself, to ward off ("abzuschlagen") people with words (223). Such concretization establishes the weight and impact of words and their potentially threatening nature for the characters. Many such metaphors occur in interactions between Rohlfs and Jakob, for instance as Rohlfs reflects on his attempts to convince Jakob of socialism's worthiness: "Ich stellte mich auf den Boden der Tatsachen" (47). Rohlfs's task is to convince Jakob that there is some substance to this foundation of facts, and that it is solid enough to support Jakob as well. The conversations between the two become a give-and-take of control over ideological territory, a dynamic which is brought out by the spatially-oriented language that Johnson regularly utilizes to map out their disputes. Jakob does not allow himself to be contained within Rohlfs's empty rhetoric. Rohlfs states for example, "mir war es recht dass Jakob sich auskannte in meinem Gespräch und wusste wohin es lief; obwohl ich ja glaube er hat niemals Angst und bei nichts" (52). The conversation between the two in regard to the present and future of socialism is an area with which Jakob is familiar, in the sense of sich auskennen—expressed as such, Jakob is deemed in control, as someone who can navigate his way around within this "space," and who knows which direction the conversation is headed. The praxis of Marxism remains a space here in which one could feel comfortable, but which by its nature constricts a person, hindering the liberation toward which it aspires. The language Johnson employs enhances this sense of containment. Rohlfs also thinks that Jakob "mit Absicht danebenredete" (ibid.),

39 By contrast, the unfathomability of seemingly "bottomless" and incomprehensible words can be something a comfort as well. Sometimes people desire to rest on faith, and on the authority of others' words, for example the "sonntäglichen Kirchgänger, die in dieser Unbegreiflichkeit von Gesang und bodenlosen Worten und heiligem Orgelgeräusch ihr Leben erheben" (224).
supplying another example of spatial terms that are used to delineate conversational space. Jakob seems to exist outside of the coordinates that Rohlfs has plotted for their discussion; to Rohlfs's dismay, Jakob is adept at vying for space, and also at demonstrating that he will not be contained within the rigidity of the state’s precepts. In this particular conversation, Rohlfs encroaches on Jakob’s figurative space prematurely with the question, “Ja, kann aber einer für den Sozialismus je genug tun?” (53). Rohlfs turns to orientational spatial metaphors in describing his mistake retrospectively: “Da war es nicht zu ändern: ich war voreilig gewesen und halb hinterm Berg, da hatte er mich überrascht, ich war es der die Regeln überrannt hatte” (ibid.). Jakob, who “knows his way around” in such conversations, asserts his upper hand by refraining from any response.

Rohlfs notes that Jakob’s familiarity and competence in steering their debates extends beyond mere words to more of a silent, knowing presence: “alles was wir als Regel und Vorschrift auswendig wissen und hersagen wenn wir uns bewegen hatte er in sich war in ihm aufgesogen jenseits der Worte” (75). Jakob’s pragmatism and matter-of-factness translates into a quietly confident savoir-faire that intimidates the ideologue Rohlfs. Jakob’s cool and collected manner notwithstanding, Rohlfs maintains frequent presence in his mind: “Also jedes Mal, wenn Jakob einen dunkelroten schmutzigen bespritzen Pobjeda über die Straße kriechen sah...erinnerte er Herrn Rohlfs und wusste dass seine Hand über ihm war zu allen Zeiten” (272). Any sighting of this type of car triggers Jakob to think of the other man’s attempts to force his ideological map onto him. This passage marks another instance of Johnson’s use of metaphor to render a certain

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40 The third-person narrator uses spatial dimensions to remark on Jakob’s practical “side” after revealing how Jakob earned money for himself and his mother after the war through underground alcohol sales to the Soviet soldiers: “wenn die Sache mehrere Seiten hatte, so hielt er sich an diese Seite allein” (68). Jakob is uncontainable; he consistently pursues whichever angle he sees as most fit.

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atmosphere that “hangs” in the air, as he puts forth a critique of practiced socialism as stifling and incarcerating. This hand lurking over the independent but practically-minded Jakob, allegedly to protect him and guide him down the proper path, leads in part to his crisis of uncertainty and disorientation as discussed in Chapter 2, and possibly to death.

4.3.2. Uncertain Memories, Uncertain Stories

The aura of uncertainty surrounding the character Jakob is carried into, and indeed is enhanced by, the many stories told about him. The instability of storytelling and its questionable reliability hinge in great part on the imperfection of the faculty of memory. The capriciousness of this faculty is revealed for instance in a scene in which Rohlfs recalls his first meeting with Jakob:

Wenn ich mich recht erinnere, begann ich sogleich nach Worten zu suchen. Das Nächeste war dass ich ein Wort nach dem anderen wegwarf, sie meinten samtlich Eigenschaften, dieser schien keine zu haben. Es war so dass sein Aussehen sofort in mir unverwischbar sich abspiegelte, und wenn ich heute sage denke “er war gross und breit und kräftig, damals sah er ein bisschen schwermütig (nicht betrübt) aus für den Betrachter,” so ist er verwechselbar mit jedem der ihm nur ähnlich wäre. (74)

The irony of these reflections derives from the fact that Rohlfs’s occupation involves observation, notation, and investigation—processes which count on dependable memories. But Rohlfs is quite aware first of all that he might not be remembering accurately (“Wenn ich mich recht erinnere”), and second that he easily could have confused Jakob with anyone else remotely resembling him.

Memories of place in this novel are far more detailed than memories of people, a phenomenon demonstrated in a representative description by Jonas Blach:

Ich erinnere mich dass der Himmel wieder völlig weiss war als wir aus dem Haus kamen, es fing bald an zu regnen, der Himmel kam immer gewichtiger dichter lastend herab auf die schmalen Ränder von Land. Ich
erinnere mich an den harten Wind, der aus der See aufsprang und uns in
die Augen schlug und ihre Hände geklammert um meine Schultern und ihr
Kopf regennass unbeweglich neben mir hinunterstarrend auf die Brandung
auf die Wellen, die unter uns sich aufwälzten über die stählernen Bühnen
und schäumend sprühend erstarrten vor dem Zusammensturz, und sich
überschlugen, und quer ausliefen durch die schweren Pfahlreihen hindurch
und träge unhinderbar in ungebrochener Länge ausrollten auf dem Sand.

This authoritatively asserted report of the elements and environs stands in direct contrast
to the speculations on which Jakob’s legends are based. The quantifiable (if unstable)
measurements of geographical space tend to take precedence over the uncertain and even
less stable accounts of human action and existence. Jonas is conscious of his own
propensity to remember objects better than people, as is evident when he predicts what
will remain in his memory later: “Und erinnern werde ich mich an die schäbige
Vertraulichkeit des Barkellners und die auf zwei Dimensionen retouchierten Fotografien
der Staatsoberhäupter an der Wand über den Schnapsflaschen und an fremde
Gesprächsfetzen und an die grässliche Musik und das erhitzte schwüle Fleischgedränge
auf der Tanzfläche unter dem Krach der Lautsprecher” (256). The various ingredients
making up the atmosphere of this particular memory are tangible and audible things, with
the exceptions of the vague personal description, “schäbige Vertraulichkeit,” and the
sketchy “Gesprächsfetzen”—contextless fragments floating in the air, rather than
significant, fruitful exchange.41 Reflecting on his trip to Berlin, Blach thinks of the
“Möbeln, die alle er aus dem Gedächtnis hätte beschreiben können von ungezählten

41 Blach also demonstrates the close relationship of physical sensation to memories:
“Seine Zunge erinnerte den klaren bitteren Geschmack des Alkohols, vergangene
Rederegungen wiederholten sich unbeaufsichtigt in seinen Gedanken” (265). Memory’s
contextual quality is strong here, but also its uncontrollability (as indicated by
“unbeaufsichtigt”) and its lack of cohesiveness; again here it is not complete, meaningful
discussions that Blach remembers, but only “Rederegungen.” What is stored in the
container of memory can be arbitrary—the narrator notes that Jakob’s memory holds a
trivial event from the past, for instance: “Das war schon vier oder fünf Jahre her, aber
unwillkürlich behielt Jakob es in seinem Gedächtnis als sei es bedeutsam” (42).
Abenden der Gespräche und Freundschaft her” (265). Again, consequential discussions
and meaningful friendship are not what he recalls in detail, but instead the furniture from
the apartment clutters the spaces of his memory. Nonetheless, the memories of these
tangible fixtures provoke positive, if vague, images in Blach’s mind of countless
evenings of conversation and friendship. Such structures of remembrance seem to
confirm theories of Bachelard and others that “the most banal domestic objects and
structures are not simply physical entities, but are also routinely laden down with values
and symbolic meanings” (Morley 20).

Johnson’s narrator notes the precedence of objects over personalities in the
protagonist’s mind as well: “Jakob erinnerte sich nicht seines Vaters mehr, inzwischen
hatte das Bild der Uniform sich vorgedrängt in seinem Gedächtnis” (95). The dative case
is significant for calling up the spatial implications of the container metaphor of memory
here, as vordrängen would normally require the accusative to denote “into” rather than
“within.” The father’s military uniform is still contained and stored within Jakob’s
memory; as the most prominent memory within that container, the uniform pushes aside
most other memories of Jakob’s father. An account of Jakob’s daily routine also proves
that human interactions are often not what is retained in memory. He sleepily observes
the passengers around him during his commute after work, conscious that he will forget
them as quickly as he noticed them: “Er betrachtete die Fahrgaste in dem unmerklichen
Verhalten jener ermüdeten Vertrautheit, die schnellen schmerzlosen Vergessens gewiss

42 In Hilbig’s “Ich”, the proprietor Frau Falbe laments that her husband’s old armchair is
“ihre letzte Erinnerung, sie habe nicht einmal ein Bild von ihm” (332). Like in
Mutmassungen, furniture is a concrete anchor in one’s memory when a picture (also a
mental picture) is missing.
ist" (27). These are but strangers with no mnemonic anchors in the dispatcher’s mind.\textsuperscript{43} At least in the case of his father, Jakob’s memory container still holds the uniform as a remnant, something that Jakob can retain even when all other mental pictures of him are gone.

This kind of consciousness about the nature of memory in \textit{Mutmassungen} is connected to the theme of lost innocence, and to the understanding that memories from youth are often smoothed over in time, while people and events from childhood are idealized. Exemplifying such processes is Gesine, who finally comprehends that “Jakob nicht übriggeblieben sein konnte aus der Zeit unverändert als der Grosse Bruder: über alles sicher und aller Behilflichkeit mächtig” (194). Gesine also realizes that the town where she grew up will not appear the same to her through adult eyes: “Nun wollen wir gehen in die Stadt meines Vaters und ansehen wie sie abgefallen ist von meiner Erinnerung” (191). The verb \textit{abfallen} in this context signals material imagery: this aspect of her memory has decayed and fallen off, causing a deficiency in her picture of the past.

At the same time, fragmented memory-pieces are preferred in some instances to actual human contact, which is viewed as an intrusion in the characters’ daily lives. Blach, for instance, regrets being unable to leave Gesine behind in his memory container (“zurückbleiben in der Erinnerung”), “Sondern sie hineingezogen hatte in die Unzuverlässigkeit und Langeweile seines Tageslaufes als wäre auch sie eine bekannte benannte bewusste bewältigte Alltäglichkeit” (112). The realization that people are often

\textsuperscript{43} The secretary of the English department at Blach’s university is also wise to the forgetful aspect of human nature when it comes to the stories of strangers. In the middle of her story, she interjects that she will not bother to mention someone’s name: “(Ich sag ihn dir lieber nicht, dann brauchst du ihn nicht zu vergessen.)” (228-29).

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romanticized through later memories leads to resentment when the commemorated person is removed from the pedestal and placed back into the doldrums of the everyday.

4.3.3. Concrete Expressions of Memory

Along with the frequent use of spatial metaphor, Johnson returns repeatedly to visible expressions of remembering, discernible traces of the past which appear quite often on someone's countenance (similar to Seghers's Seidler, whose face reveals hints of the past when he sees old acquaintances in France). Blach's description of Cresspahl marks such an instance: “Die Augen waren sein Alter und seine entfernte Tochter und die dichte nasse Dunkelheit und seine Empörung und seine Fürsorge” (80). Another example is the description of Jöche, who had “ganz helle graue Augen, und sein Blick war wie sein Wesen eine schmale harte unbeugsame Brücke von Freundschaft und Erinnerung und Zuverlässigkeit” (258-59). Jakob accepts that it is not always possible to hide memories, and especially those which are emotionally charged. He uses this knowledge to his advantage when he tries at one point, “blickweise Gesines Erinnerung und Annäherung zu finden in dem achtsamen höflichen Gesicht von Blach, und bei diesen gelegentlichen genauen Augenscheinen blieb er, während er erzählte” (88). An interaction between Rohlfs and Gesine also makes clear the figures' search for evidence of the past on the faces of one another: “als er seine schweren Augenlider gegen Gesine aufhob, lächelte er freundlich. Guten Tag, auch sie deutete mit verzogenen Lippen die Erinnerung an den Abend im Elbehotel an, dann war es vorbei” (216). As noted earlier, memories involving people in Johnson's novel are often hazy, especially in contrast to the lengthy poetics of place descriptions. But at the same time, the recollection of specific
human interactions manifest themselves physically, on the visages of those involved.

Parts of their stories are told prediscursively in this way: words then become superfluous.

In Mutmassungen, the atmospheres, moods, and essences that are associated with memories of particular events keep the human element constantly in sight, even when the figures recall objects, visible and tangible items, more easily than the stories of individuals. For instance, Blach remarks on what remains stored in his memory after one seemingly trite incident: “behielt aber als Bild und Unbehagen in meinem Gedächtnis das betroffene einsame Kopfschütteln einer zusehenden Frau, die neben mir gestanden hatte und ihre Einkauftasche achtlos an sich zog” (114). The uneasy sensation of “Unbehagen” is an abstract that resides within the container of memory—again the metaphor is generated by *behalten*—and endures longer than the details of the person, who is described only by her gestures of head-shaking, of looking on, and of pulling her bag closer. Although a specific memory is depicted here in the conventional image of a “Bild,” as a picture of what has happened, this picture possesses an emotional dimension that cannot even be captured with visual or tangible imagery on the metaphorical canvas. The physical gestures that remain in Blach’s memory cue his past feeling of disquiet.

In at least one other instance, however, the memory/gesture/sentiment relationship has a positive connotation. Cresspahl commemorates Jakob’s presence as a gesture in itself:

> Als Cresspahl sich an Jakob erinnerte, lächelte er vor lauter Gegenwärtigkeit, denn Jakob erstarrte nicht in den Bildern des Abschieds sondern blieb im Gedächtnis als eine Wirklichkeit von Lächeln und Antworten und Spass und Leben überhaupt: wie eine Gebärd. (170)

Once again it is helpful to look at Johnson’s choice of verb: *erstarren*, which is negated here. Jakob is *not* petrified as a still-life in the minds of those who knew him, but remains alive as gesture and motion. As such, his image is human, if mutable, in individuals’
memories, and in their stories. Jakob’s posthumous omnipresence is dependent on the resistance of his story to the confines of still pictures—just as the boundaries inherent in Rohlfs’s version of socialism cannot contain Jakob’s essence, neither does this essence become reduced to a flat two-dimensional picture in the memories of those who knew him. But at the same time, it cannot be said that Jakob defies definition: the “überhaupt” that is tagged onto the end of the four substantives “Lächeln und Antworten und Spass und Leben” posits Jakob as the definitive, prototypical example of these otherwise indefinable concepts. In the end, then, Johnson portrays the faculty of memory positively: memory, while by no means flawless or all-encompassing, nevertheless captures the vastness of Jakob’s spirit without fossilizing him as a “dead” image—another facet of this theme that is brought out by the (negated) verb erstarren. Memory is depicted here as highly relative (hence the tentative nature of the title Mutmassungen über Jakob, rather than the more authoritative-sounding Erinnerungen or Berichte), but this relativity has the function of sustaining various aspects of a person’s spirit that have left their mark distinctly and uniquely on different people in different contexts.

After a close look at the way Johnson treats the theme of memory, then, two things become clear: first, he presents memory not as a passive recalling, but more as an active, creative reweaving—as the act of voices which construct “das kunstvolle Geflecht

44 Schacter notes, “Accumulating evidence suggests that we are usually correct about the general character of our pasts, but are susceptible to various kinds of biases and distortions when we recount specific experiences” (9). Accordingly, the aspect of memory that prevails in Mutmassungen deals with Jakob’s “general character” rather than the more easily distorted concrete details of events in his life.

45 Again here, a reference to Barthes’s Camera Lucida is appropriate: “Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of Tableau Vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead” (32). The memory of Jakob defies a simple analogy with the lifeless image of a photograph, as he maintains presence and does not become mummified in the “Bildern des Abschieds.”
der erinnerten wiederhergestellten Vergangenheit” (270); second, although memory, like storytelling, can never lay claim to a perfect rendition of objective reality, Johnson illustrates that memory brings with it elements essential to storytelling: the atmosphere and mood of a moment, and the lingering vestiges of personalities. Memory allows each person a personal running narrative, as becomes apparent with Jakob at one point too: “Nun war er völlig vom Benehmen des Erzählens abgekommen, er sah vor sich hin als habe er es erinnert für sich allein” (90). The act of remembering momentarily distances a person from the present, for better or for worse, such as in the moment when Jakob “besichtigte den lichtüberflackerten Giebel auch nicht mit besonderem Aufwand. Er erinnerte sich nur. Er fühlte sich entfernt” (141). Jakob can do nothing at this point except to remember, just as is the case with Blach in a later scene: “er hatte die Uhrzeit und die Gegenwart überhaupt verlassen und bewegte sich vollends in den Räumen und Zeiten der Vergangenheit, von der sein Geist voll war: die Erscheinung des Professors brachte Herrn Dr. Blach zurück in gewissen Zeitabläufe” (269-70). Both of these passages contain examples of spatial metaphors which stress that mentally we can take leave of the present, and move around within the spaces of the past, with as much ease as we sometimes can leave the past behind by simply not re-entering that “space.”

The memories recalled by the characters in Mutmassungen often become stories-within-stories. As such, the relationship between the narrated time and the narrative time is vital to its take on the storytelling theme. Blach relates the past moment of temporal standstill to his present at one point: “Ich fühlte wie jetzt die Bewegung der Uhr an meinem Handgelenk und begriff das Ticken nicht mehr” (110). Through the phrase wie jetzt,46 the past confronts the present directly. Memory erases or at least smudges the lines

46 This is reminiscent of a passage in Transit in which the narrator speaks of past experiences by relating them to the present through the repetition of “wie jetzt”: “Ich kam
between an individual's past and present, which allows for a storytelling process that not only revisits the past but that virtually reexperiences it, if in a modified way and from a different perspective. This imagined ability to step back into the spaces of a personal history also facilitates keeping alive the memories of the dead (arguably a main concern of Johnson's narrators), even if each individual's memory of the deceased is radically dissimilar.

From the limited point of view of Rohlfs, Jakob's death is final. Rohlfs thinks dialectically about "den folgenden Tag und dass dann wieder die Sonne aufgehen würde und dass sie die Zeit auch verbringen würden an einem anderen Ort und dass von Heute und Gestern nur Aktennotizen übrig sein würden" (306). This is not quite true, however. A message of the novel is that the memory of Jakob and the oral histories involving him will continue indefinitely, even while details have been lost already. The sketchy notes in Rohlfs's files cannot contain Jakob's spirit of "Lächeln und Antworten und Spass und Leben." Neither the exiles' dossiers in Seghers's Transit nor the Stasi files of Mutmassungen endure as "das letzte Sichtbare" (Transit 187); instead this is the warmth evident in the eyes of someone like Cresspahl as he remembers Jakob in a unique and individualized way.

4.4. "Ich": "Im Dunkel des Vergessens"

The narrator of "Ich" switches between first and third person, reversing spatial perspective and mimicking the structure of a Stasi report, which could contain either or

both viewpoints ("X did this" vs. "I observed X doing this"). This mode of polyperspectival storytelling differs from Mutmassungen in that fragments of the same self, rather than different characters altogether, are evidently narrating in "Ich".\footnote{Paul Cooke outlines the advantage to using an IM's point of view, as opposed to that of a non-complicit target of the Stasi: "This choice of perspective allows Hilbig to use the organisation as a polyvalent metaphorical landscape, through which he initially explores, not the role of the State Security Service, but the nature of writing, and the function of literature as a tool of identity formation, themes central to all his work" (Cooke, "The Stasi as Panopticon," forthcoming). In this particular way, it seems too that Hilbig's novel can be read as a reaction to Christa Wolf's Was bleibt of 1990.\footnote{The novel starts with the first-person narrator telling of his situation in the present tense, before he notes that he should start at the beginning, at which point he switches to the preterite.} The first-person narrator is at times reminiscent of Seghers's Seidler in his acknowledgment of deviating from the story at hand: "Lassen Sie mich zum Anfang zurückkehren" ("Ich" 8); "Wenn ich hier ein letztes Mal abschweifen darf" (10); "Aber lassen Sie mich die Dinge in ihrer Reihenfolge behandeln..." (344). Only on isolated occasions such as these does the first-person narrator address an unnamed party, to whom the third-person narrator also speaks, rarely, when he breaks away from his more distant position: "Ersparen Sie mir die Einzelheiten!" (105); and "Ersparen Sie mir, mehr darüber zu sagen!" (106). The process of storytelling in the oral tradition is highlighted in these instances and others, such as when the first-person narrator tells of his time underneath Reader's apartment, when he "deutete mit dem Zeigefinger in die Höhe" (29). This physical gesture becomes significant again when, after a long exposition on his thought process at that moment, the first-person narrator recounts, "Dann senkte ich den Zeigefinger wieder und stolperte weiter" (30). The effect at this point is visual, because of the pointing gesture, but also spatio-temporal, as if narrative time is momentarily...
frozen between his putting up and then lowering of the finger. These two actions frame
the narrator’s memory of what passed through his mind at that particular moment in time.

Large parenthetical passages are one means by which shifts in narrative
perspective are mediated. As in Mutmassungen, the parenthetical also plays a prominent
role in “Ich”, raising questions as to the narrators’ credibility while simultaneously
confirming them as human—paradoxically, they become more convincing as storytellers
when they display imperfections in remembering (even if their stories remain in doubt).

Narrative remarks interrupt the flow of reading, such as in the following example:

“Später im Jahr... (Ich greife vor, zeitliche Gründe zwingen mich, dem Ablauf
vorzugreifen.) ...wurde C. von diesen Gedankengängen abrupt abgeschnitten” (327). The
intrusion of this parenthetical in the narrative time parallels the concept of C.’s spatially
presented “Gedankengängen” being cut off in the narrated time. Another common device
is the narrator’s foggy musings on dates of events: “(im Frühling vorigen Jahres?)” (237);
“in jener Nacht vor drei Jahren (oder waren es schon vier Jahre?)” (369). The narrator(s)
also find other characters’ storytelling attempts to be less than credible. The
“unermüdlichen Berichte über die Gefängnisaufenthalte” of M.W.’s Doppelgänger Harry,
for instance, begin to wear on the jaded and skeptical narrator:

diese waren durch endlose Wiederholungen so in die Länge gezogen, daß
W. – anfangs waren sie ihm noch durch die intime Kenntnis aller nur
denkbar Anstalten interessant erschienen – sie inzwischen als

49 For instance, in the middle of a third-person narrative strand about M.W., a
parenthetical marks a sudden change to C., short for his code name Cambert (237). A
parenthetical switch from “ich” to “er” also occurs (289). One curious insertion of the
tentative “vermutlich” in the third-person narrator’s account of M.W. precludes us from
the equation er=ich: “vermutlich hatte er sogar seiner Mutter nichts gesagt von Berlin, er
hatte stets nur von Leipzig gesprochen” (140). The third-person narrator is not omniscient
regarding the details of the “Ich.” This is likewise demonstrated when the third-person
narrator tells of C. finding out about an event “[a]us ungenannter Quelle” (328).

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unerträglich empfand; außerdem war ihm der Verdacht gekommen, daß Harry aufgrund seines Alters nur den kleinsten Teil davon wirklich gesehen haben konnte. (90)

Here Hilbig makes a comment on the reliability and utility of stories that resembles what we have seen in other novels from the twentieth century. Contemporary stories are either forgotten or not believed anyway, and thus have less efficacy than time-tested myths and legends. Feuerbach clearly demonstrates this lost faith in the value of Erzählen when he remarks to M.W., “Ich weiß gar nicht, ob ich Ihnen das erzählen darf, Sie werden es sowieso vergessen, oder Sie werden es nicht glauben” (303).

The theme of unreliable and uncertain narrators or other sources of alleged information in “Ich” extends to a process of deep introspection on the narrator’s/ narrators’ parts. M.W. becomes suspicious that “alle verständigten sich mit den Mitteln der Sprache, nur er nicht” (131). M.W.’s inability to express himself in most any situation is not a simple case of writer’s block, but of thinker’s block caused by the pressure to write official observational reports: “Außerdem blockierte das Schreiben seine Gedanken” (117). Lacking official regulations in regard to the form of his reports for the Stasi, he pains himself to find just the right type of language: “Wie kindisch waren doch all diese Berichte in ihrer zwanghaften Suche nach einer exakten Sprache” (280). His self-imposed restrictions, as he struggles to write in the style he imagines the Stasi desires, become convenient excuses for his lack of imagination in creative-writing.

Hilbig writes of literary writing on the other hand as a way to combat such mental blocks: “Die Literatur bezweifelt das Unmögliche, das sprachlos ist, zumindest bezweifelte sie es, als sie begann; mit dem ihr eigenen Atem, der länger ist, zersetzt sie Sprachlosigkeit durch Sprache, unterwandert das Unmögliche mit ihren Negationen, widerspricht den Identitäten des Vorgegebenen. Die oft gehörte, gute Meinung, daß Literatur sich bis zu Grenzen vorwage, ist ein schlichtes Klischee: die Literatur beginnt auf der Grenze. Oft genug widerspricht sie auch noch solcher Festlegung; in ihren besten Beispielen verkörpert sie geradezu Grenzfälle” (“Über Jayne-Ann Igel” 295). In spatial terms Hilbig posits that because literature should begin on the “border,” it is quite naturally a means of escape in a potentially positive or negative sense.

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attempts as well. For M.W. the irony of an attempt to write with objectivity is that the missing human aspect creates even more distance from reality; this standpoint is comparable to the narrator’s thoughts on socialist realism in literature, which reflect Hilbig’s own: “Es war im Grunde ein den Realismus zerstörender Sprachgebrauch...einer ungewollt surrealistischen Methode ähnlich, die einen psychotischen Automatismus erzeugte. Vielleicht haben die wirklichen Surrealisten davon bloß phantasieren können” (23). In contrast to the didactic intentions of socialist realism, Hilbig himself sees the responsibility of the writer not to give overt advice, but to try “irgendwie unter der Oberfläche entlang Einfluss auszuüben.” The problem for M.W., the character who finds himself literally “unter der Oberfläche,” is determining whether his identity as a writer is legitimate, and whether he has any genuine influence at all, on anyone.

4.4.1. Finding the Author in an Authorless World

The heterologous narrator acts as an extended reference to Lacanian thought, which would see it as a symptom of the self’s fictionality and a decentralized ego. In general, the novel begs some sort of psychoanalytic interpretation—but due to its conspicuously exaggerated Freudian imagery and prominent references to a partitioned notion of self, it also appears to mock such readings. Indeed, Hilbig pokes fun at post-structuralism and deconstruction throughout the novel, in many cases through the character Feuerbach, who refers to Foucault with disdain as Le Fou (21). But postmodern and post-structuralist notions can also be considered in respect to “Ich” with some seriousness (cf. Cooke, Speaking the Taboo 35 ff.). Pertinent to the theme of storytelling,

51 In criticizing the GDR’s cultural policy, Hilbig has characterized it as a state in which “zunehmender Realitätsverlust das Gesetz des Handelns war” (Abriff der Kritik 31-32).
for example, are the underlying allusions to Roland Barthes's concept of the death of the author, which was picked up by post-structuralist theorists. These references shine through in M.W.'s perceived inability to produce anything original, and in his confusion about whether he has authored certain texts:

Waren die Texte wirklich von ihm? Wenn es noch stimmte, daß seine Hand sie zu Papier gebracht hatte, so waren sie doch von einem anderen als ihm autorisiert worden. [...] Nach und nach fand W. den Vorgang niederschmetternend... und er stellte fest, daß er schon gar nicht mehr wußte, wie es zu der Publikation seiner Texte gekommen war. (201-02)

The verb autorisieren here allows for an ambiguous word play: is the implication that someone else has authorized his works (to be published), or was someone else—his lost “Ich” perhaps—the author of his texts? In either case, this situation causes much self-doubt and bewilderment, as both the third-person and the first-person narrators reinforce respectively: “Seine Texte waren die Beschäftigungstheorie einer zweiten Person, oder die Schreibergebnisse eines Neurotikers, den es ungeheure Anstrengung kostete, sich für wenige Minuten am Tag in einen Schriftsteller zu verwandeln” (232); “Wann, so fragte ich mich, hörte ich dabei auf, der Autor meiner eigenen Texte zu sein?” (289). M.W.'s literary writing even becomes infused with the language of the state, a fact which he realizes but which does not allow him an easier mental distinction between the two genres.

In addition to muddling his narrators' writing realms in this way, Hilbig weaves into the novel quotations of quotations (and genitives of genitives) as allusions to

53 A citation from Barthes in the German translation has a tenor similar to some of Feuerbach's proclamations in Hilbig's novel: "Sicherlich gibt es keinen jungen Mensch mehr, der dieses Phantasma hätte: Schriftsteller sein!" (Über mich selbst 85).

54 In his uncertainty about his texts appearing in the underground literary anthology of "inoffizieller Literatur," the narrator is compelled to clarify which of his multiple selves he is referring to, deliberately displaying his attempt to differentiate his selfhood: "ich wußte nicht, ob Texte von mir—von M.W.—darin enthalten waren" (285).
postmodernism’s proclivity for citation and its claim toward the impossibility of
originality. His protagonist even reflects on the metalanguage, empty metaphors, and
prevalence of quotations in postmodern texts. This reflection is prompted by his visit to a
_Szene_ reading:

ich wußte, wer da vorn las, und auch der Text, der hier vorgestellt wurde, war mir, zumindest seinem Wesen nach, schon bekannt. Es war eine unaufhörliche Abfolge von Metaphern, Serien von Metaphern wurden miteinander verknüpft [...] So waren viele dieser Zitate womöglich erfundene Zitate, oder sie waren zumindest entstellt, verwandelt, unkenntlich gemacht. (13)

Hilbig plays on the notion that amidst all of the quotations, the author loses sight of his or her own writing, and of his or her own thoughts. At the same time, writing in this novel

55 A good example of this is found in a passage in which he paraquotes both Cervantes and Gorbachev, in reference to the latter’s famous quotation regarding the impending fall of Communism, “Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben,” from October 7, 1989: “Ich hatte dabei zunehmend das Gefühl, mit allem, was ich dachte, um Jahre (manchmal auch nur um ein Jahr!) hinterherzuhinken. [...] Und dieses Hinterherhinken (dieses Zuspätkommen im Leben...meiner Ansicht nach stammte der Ausdruck von _Cervantes_ und bezog sich auf den großen Don Quichotte), diese Angst, für das Zuspätkommen vom Leben bestraft zu werden wie ein Klippschüler, war der Grund für die Depression in der Stadt, die ich immer wieder spürte” (357). In addition, as Cooke points out, Reader’s work is actually not his own, but a never-ending series of metaphors, “lifted directly from the world of literature, that is, from other writers’ work. [...] Consequently, it is impossible to isolate Reader’s own identity, since it is merely the point of intersection of the identity of others; it is epigonal, second hand” (“The Stasi as Panopticon,” forthcoming).

56 In the present year of 2002, these issues can be connected to the current debate surrounding Stephen E. Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin, two prominent historians and best-selling authors who have been accused of “kidnapping the work of others” (New York Times, “History Is an Art, Not a Toaster,” Martin Arnold, February 28, 2002). While historiography is by its very nature a process of reevaluating and reformulating others’ conceptions, Ambrose and Goodwin have been charged with lifting entire passages without crediting the original authors. Their excuses have rested primarily on poor note-taking and an inordinate pressure to publish, and to do so quickly—which also relates directly to a prominent theme in “Ich”, the notion of pandering to the book market rather than maintaining personal integrity. Hilbig writes in “Ich” that such a mentality is damaging to the reception of literature, as the “Literaturbetrieb im Westen war ungeheuer abhängig von den Wellenbewegungen der Mode [...] die Folge davon war, daß die
is connected with legitimizing one’s own existence—“mit dem Nachweis von siebzehn Gedichten zur Untermauerung meiner tatsächlichen Existenz” (356). Frau Falbe’s refusal to believe that M.W. is a writer—“Ach nein, sagte sie, das sind Sie bestimmt nicht. Ich kann mir schon denken, was Sie schreiben müssen” (345)—prompts a moment of nostalgia for him:


If his identification as a writer no longer can be established and easily proven, what does this imply for M.W.’s sense of self and his sense of belonging? As Cooke points out about the protagonist, “writing had always isolated him from the other members of his class, who looked on his incessant scribbling with suspicion. Indeed, they suspect that he is writing about them before he ever becomes an IM” (“The Stasi as Panopticon,” forthcoming). At this point in his life, he seeks solidarity in those who are similarly wrapped up in spying for the state, only to find that they are mere puppets: “Wir waren der Schatten der Existenz, wir waren der Genitiv des Menschen […] , wir waren die Hand und der Kopf des Berichts der Berichte des Berichtens, wir waren die kurzen Bewegungen der unteren Gesichtshälfte” (372). M.W. comes to this conclusion despite his higher-ups’ efforts to include him as one of them, thereby giving him false hope that he might possess some power and control. His bosses, both in A. and in Berlin, tutor him
in the indifferent behavior of those “die von unserer Seite kommen.” Their recommendation sounds on first glance to serve as a security measure for M.W.: “Verhalten Sie sich undurchsichtig, wenn Sie ein klares Nein sagen, sind Sie drin in der Geschichte, und wenn Sie ein klares Ja sagen, sind Sie auch drin. Und das braucht wirklich niemand zu wissen, was ich Ihnen sage, auch von unserer Seite niemand” (163).

It has become clear in the meantime that M.W. is not guaranteed the security or solidarity of a team here, but rather quite the opposite, due to the covertness that is promoted even among members of one side or another. Plus, the conduit metaphor of being “drin in der Geschichte,” of existing “within” a story (or of history) at all costs, takes on tones here that are less about comfort and more about entrapment within the system.57

The recurring notion of existing on a certain “Seite” is reminiscent of the discussion in Chapter 2 about ambiguous deictic terms that refer to particular sides of the East-West border. The functionaries of the state, who feel their power rapidly waning in the time period covered by this novel, exploit the division into sides in order to strengthen their own positions. They do this both in the political-ideological realm and in the literary

57 In a formulation which highlights both this type of metaphorical spatiality and the theme of labyrinthine ensnarement, the main character asks himself, “gibt es überhaupt keinen Ausweg aus diesen Geschichten?” (95). M.W. is also intertwined with Reader’s story; the following passage displays various spatial elements that express this connection, as well as indications that M.W.’s own crisis is linked to this: “Seit gestern nun denke ich daran, aus der Geschichte mit diesem Reader auszusteigen...aber denke ich nicht schon seit einem Jahr daran? Seit einem Gestern vor einem Jahr? Seitdem bin ich vielleicht ausschließlich hinter dem her, was ‘ich’ in dieser Geschichte bin! [...] Einfach aufhören damit...manchmal starrte ich auf die Geschichte wie auf ein Tonband, das sich zum Schluß hin immer schneller abspulte...doch es wollte nicht aufhören zu spulen, es war ein Alptraum” (359-60). Rather than remaining “drin in der Geschichte,” the protagonist considers climbing out of the story. He claims to be able to stare at the story as it unravels here, but this visual is juxtaposed with the temporal as M.W. finds himself caught in an infinite loop and a never-ending story.
realm. The boss in the small town A. tries to convince M.W. that writers have legitimate function neither on the "other" side in the West nor, by extension, in a post-socialist East:

Was zum Beispiel ist ein Schreiber auf der anderen Seite? hatte er gefragt. Nehmen wir die Schreiber im Westen, was ist ein Schriftsteller dort? Marktabhängiger Zulieferer der Mediengesellschaft! Er ist dort etwas wie ein Friseur, nichts weiter...ein Friseur, der die Denktübungen seiner Kunden begleitet und sie gegebenfalls bestätigt. (325)58

Such discussions about literature and its relative worth are uninteresting to M.W., however, when they do not center around texts authored by his own hand ("Doch es waren keine eigenen Texte da...wären sie dagewesen, hätte ich Papier und Stift benötigt, mehr nicht," 315). Even when he does produce something which could be labeled as belonging to him, he is not allowed to keep it intact. Feuerbach commands M.W. to fragment his own reports (299), which he sees as too literary (while M.W. sees them as too inundated with official-ese). Hilbig adds irony to Feuerbach's critiques of fragmentary, postmodern literary forms by requesting that his subject literally tear his own whole text into small shreds.

In a further example of the blending between the clandestine world of the identity-less writer and that of the identity-eradicating state, the new Stasi boss in A. advises the protagonist at the end of the novel: "Denken Sie immer daran, die Geschichte arbeitet für uns, wir haben Zeit..." (378). With the double-meaning of Geschichte as

60 A similar lecture by Feuerbach displays noteworthy spatial-metaphorical language in regard to time and history: "was wäre denn ein Schreiber ohne uns...nach uns? Nach uns werden sie alle Zeitschriftenbesteller werden, die Herren Schriftsteller, um auf dem laufenden zu sein...ja, laufend werden sie der Zeit hinterherlaufen. Aber Zeit können Sie da drüben bestellen, soviel Sie wollen, Sie kriegen einfach keine, denn sie ist auf unserer Seite" (326). This passage, with its visual image of "der Zeit hinterherlaufen," is connected to M.W.'s feeling, "Jahre hinterherzuhinken" (357). From two conflicting standpoints, both Feuerbach and M.W. visualize being "behind the times," and being forced to run to catch up. For the former, this will occur after the dissolution of the GDR; for the latter, existence within the GDR necessitates the process of running to catch up with time that has seemed to pass around it, without regard to it.

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“history” as well as “story,” the supervisor attempts to groom M.W. to believe in the
“stories,” that is the lies, being upheld so that the state appears to maintain some authority
in these final days of the GDR. Even by this point, then, M.W.’s understanding of self is
tangled up in others’ stories. In this respect, he has come no further since earlier in the
work, when he tried without success to find himself through writing and reading:

In seinen “Fiktionen” war ihm sein Ich oftmals so weit in phantastische
Bereiche entwichen – in entlegene Zeiten oder ausgedachte Landschaften, 
 daß er es mit den Einschüben aus seiner langweiligen Wirklichkeit
zurückholen mußte: um es nicht gänzlich zu verlieren! – Es waren zumeist
Beschreibungen seiner Kneipenabende, der dabei konsumierte Alkohol
diente ihm zu dem Vorwand, unter dem er sein Ich der Wirklichkeit
entwickte. (86-87)

Writing does not legitimate identity in this case, but, in fact, only confuses matters
further. Martin Kane articulates this sentiment by contrasting it with Hilbig’s pre-Wende
work:

If, then, one of the main thrusts of Hilbig’s earlier prose was to propose
writing (creative, self-exploratory writing) as an affirmation of identity,
here in “Ich” the obverse is demonstrated. M.W.’s neglect of literature
and his dwindling ability to write poems as he becomes increasingly the
servant of other masters, the composer of prose to their order and taste,
place his in any case rather precarious sense of self increasingly under
threat. (79)

As he becomes more deeply involved with the Stasi, M.W.’s writing falls into the same
category as other aspects of M.W.’s life: beyond his own jurisdiction. The concept of the
self fading in and out of graspable reality can also be connected to M.W.’s bosses’
attempts to encourage the writer in the direction of socialist realism, as Hilbig writes in
typical tongue-in-cheek style:

Es sollte also hier um Alltagsprosa gehen, um realistische Geschichten, 
um den Realismus der Geschichten, in die er Einblick nehmen sollte. Um
den Realismus seiner eigenen Geschichte ging es nicht...folgerichtig war
diese draußen im Dunkel geblieben. – Genau dies, sagte sich W., war das
At this historical juncture, the cultural policy of Socialist Realism was experiencing its own identity crisis: it is “nichtexistierend” for Hilbig’s narrator, parodying the idea of the “realexistierenden Sozialismus” which socialist-realist writers were supposed to replicate in their works. It has been made clear to M.W. that his own reality, the realism of his own story and personal history, are irrelevant and remain out “in the dark,” obscured from himself as well.

Because of his muddled personal as well as professional identity, M.W. acts as a metaphor for the authorlessness that has been thought to plague the postmodern world. In the final remarks, in an “Anmerkung” on the novel’s last page of text, Hilbig gives thanks to two informants, “IM Maximilian” and “IM Gerhard,” as well as “einigen Unbekannten” (379). These informant names are real-world covers for Ibrahim Boehme, the late East German SPD leader, and the writer Rainer Schedlinski, both of whom were revealed eventually as working for the Stasi. So the last word of “Ich” is not one of finality, but of open-ended doubt. In addition to multiple narrators who in no way proclaim their omniscience, Hilbig leaves us with this hint of various “sources,” and thus of multiple yet undisclosed, uncredited origins as well. With this final touch of facetiousness, Hilbig’s novel parodies the notion of authorlessness to the very end.

4.4.2. Spatial Metaphors and Storytelling

The expression of M.W.’s futile attempts to find himself “mitten drin” in his story (352) is but one example of spatial metaphor in Hilbig’s literary portrayal of the late 1980s GDR. The novel also boasts countless instances of materializations that help characterize the atmosphere of this time as potentially explosive or torrential, for
example: "Würde es erneut ein Lauffeuer werden, das sich durch alle Kavernen der träge gewordenen Szene fraß? Oder etwas Fließendes, eine Überschwemmung! dachte ich. Schon einmal war ein solches Unternehmen für fast ein Jahr aufgegangen, doch dann hatte die Szene wieder durchgeatmet" (354). The Szene is personified as living and breathing—though gasping for air at this point of uncertainty. Ontological metaphors frame this literary realm in a way that lifts the distinctions between the concrete world of objects and the solitary life of the writer M.W. who burrows himself underground:

Eine Zeitlang war er der Patriarch der Unterwelt hier unten, der Alleinherrschter über ein unbekanntes halbdunkles Reich, unangefochten ruhte er, und alle Gedanken waren so ferne, ermüdende Gründe für das Leben oberhalb, daß er sie, kaum daß sie ihn berührten, leicht wieder fallenlassen konnte. (71)

The irony of this reified view of the world is that the primary type of satisfaction sought by M.W. is ultimately not material, but rather spiritual or emotional. However, in descriptions of M.W.’s environment, the focus is on the material: time is substance enough to be exhaled ("es war, als entatme er aus seinen Lungen auch die Zeit," ibid.), and thoughts can brush against the protagonist before he lets them fall carelessly to the ground. The presentation of concepts like time and thought as material while M.W. is underground highlights his temporary, inebriating feeling of control. He is under the impression that, finally, he can own the weary thoughts that rule his life up above; he has influence over whether they infiltrate his mind. On the other hand, spatial and material metaphors can serve to spotlight M.W.’s own frustration with himself as a failure—his conception of meaningful thoughts and original ideas as whole "pieces" that can be produced, gathered, and then stored, leads to his increased aggravation when such

thoughts continue to elude him. Thoughts loom over him intimidatingly; he claims they “wirkten tatsächlich mit einer gewissen Kraft auf mich ein, sie strömten über mich hinweg, trübten mir den Blick, und ich nickte unter ihnen mit dem Kopf, bis mir die Augen zufielen” (37). M.W. is subordinate to his own thoughts, as the orientational metaphors of control (über/unter) convey vividly.

As in Johnson’s Mutmassungen, spatial and material metaphors produce an atmosphere that the reader might imagine “hanging” perceptibly in the air; for instance, we read in “Ich” about the “eisige Atmosphäre” (116), and later about the “lauwarme Atmosphäre” in which one could “zusammenschwimmen” (224). The narrator reports that “die ganze Stadt befand sich im Würgegriff dieser lastenden und unbeweglichen Atmosphäre” (120). This allegorical representation of the atmosphere in the GDR as a strangler who holds the city in his clutches takes us beyond the individual situation of M.W., reminding of the novel’s historical backdrop: the standstill months preceding the Wende when there was much stagnation, but also a pervasive sense that the floodgates were likely to open soon.

In Hilbig’s novel, this in-limbo mood is represented often as a smell; M.W. notes that “ein unbestimmter Geruch von Zwecklosigkeit über die Stadt gekommen war”

60 In times of writer’s block, M.W. can take or leave particular thoughts easily enough, while at other times he tries to ward them off with a gesture: “er pflegte jeden Gedanken an irgendwelche Praxis mit weitgespreizten Fingern von sich weg zu halten” (37). In both cases, the abstraction of thought is materialized, revealing M.W.’s sense of dualism (complete possession or non-possession of individual thought entities, rather than understanding consciousness as something continuous). The protagonist views consciousness as something that can be recorded and captured: “Denn schließlich tun auch wir nichts anderes, dachte C., als Bewußtseinsformen aufzuzeichnen...und zu archivieren” (290). These reflections are applicable both to the writer and the Stasi informant in their ideal forms.
The explicit rumors which play such a large role in the previously discussed novels are not so important here. In the time and location of this novel’s plot, there is not even enough substance to form a “solid” rumor about the nature of the impending fall of the Berlin Wall. Instead Hilbig represents the niggling feeling in the air metaphorically, as an elusive odor—rather than “Gerüchte,” it is “Gerüche” that are spread:

\[
\text{er hatte das Gefühl, daß sich Gespräche nach Art von Gerüchen ausbreiteten – und überhaupt auch nur nach Art von Gerüchen zu unterscheiden waren [...] und W. ließ diese Gerüche nicht an sich heran, er brauchte eine gewisse Distanz, er brauchte eine Scheidewand zwischen sich und dem, was er wahrnahm, eine Wand aus Glas, oder Schatten, oder Nebel... (130)} \]

The emphasis on the sense of smell could be a play on M.W.’s dubious label as a scent hound: “es war ein Lieblingsausdruck in der Firma: er hatte gespurt, er war gut gewesen in der Spur, ein guter Spürhund! – Wenn er seine Katastrophe also kennenlernen wollte, so mußte er künftig ein bißchen gegensteuern, ein bißchen links und rechts von der Spur schnüffeln, nicht immer nur blind und geil in Richtung Ziel stürzen” (80). Feuerbach again shows his disdain of focusing on the goal rather than on the Weg itself. What M.W. is contracted to sniff out, though, is usually either non-existent or harmless, and leads him not to a productive story, but to the many dead ends discussed in Chapter 2.

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\[61\] Cf. Hilbig’s essay “Der Geruch der Bücher,” in which he connects smell with memory (“Ich kannte die Herkunft des Geruchs; deutlich glaubte ich mich seiner zu erinnern,” 5), as well as with the negative aromas of history—in this essay, books smell like death because they were banned and forbidden in their country of origin (9).

\[62\] Cf. the following passage, in which both taste and smell play a role: “Gerüche hatte er nicht wahrgenommen, aber sie waren in den Wörtern, die er benutzte, der gesamte Traum war erfüllt vom bitteren Geschmack unflätiger Wörter, die er glaubte wiederholen und wiederholen zu müssen, nicht nur, weil er sie augenblicklich vergaß, sondern auch, weil er alle öffentlichen und konformen Sprachregelungen damit zuschütten mußte” (250). Both smells and taste are encapsulated within words in “Ich”, giving them flavor and scent. The verb zuschütten signals a container metaphor: the narrator feels the need to fill in the conventional rules of language with these offensive words.
Since “Gerüche” have replaced “Gerichte” in the process of storytelling for Hilbig, it makes sense that an oddly perceivable silence dominates over noise: “Im Raum war eisiges Schweigen eingetreten” (307); “das undurchdringliche Schweigen, das hier unten zu einem Summen geworden war” (353). Silence is given various dimensions—impenetrable, it can march into a room and fill it with its own metaphorical space. At the same time, silence can be quite meaningful in this world where words are nothing but empty metaphor-labyrinths: “Harry hüllte sich in bedeutungswolles Schweigen” (91); “ich hüllte mich in Schweigen und fragte mich, ob in meinem starren Innern etwas wie Erleichterung gewesen war” (304). Silence is a comfort for the characters who are otherwise pressured to produce words in order to justify their identities and their very existence; the appearances of *sich hüllen* are telling in this respect.

If there is a predominant metaphorical sound to complement the silence in this work, it is that of water or other liquid moving at various speeds through the novel’s stifling atmosphere. This imagery takes the form of a stream, whether comprised of literal sounds of the city: “das Einstromen der Straßengeräusche abebbe” (102); or of thoughts: “der allabendliche Gedankenstrom verschleierte sich” (365); or of memories: “es verdrängte langsam den Redestrom seiner Erinnerungen” (170); or of frame of mind: “dieses Loch in der Mauer—dahinter war die dickste, giftigste Dunkelheit—war es, das mir besonderes Grauen einzflögte” (40). M.W.’s relationship to both the spoken and written word can also be characterized as famine or flood, as we see him producing a “Schwall unverständlicher Worte” (221) and struggling with the “vierten oder fünften Aufguß [s]eines letzten Berichts über den Vorgang: Reader” (295). The fluid properties given to words, mood, and thoughts extends to bodies of literature as well; although he realizes later the illusion of it all, M.W. had hoped at one point to follow in the steps of
the writer Reader, who “müsse die Welt mit seinem Werk überfluten” (309). Through the metaphor of the flood here, the success of the writer is depicted as fleeting and unstable, either an “Überschwemmung” (354) or a drought.

Like silence, emptiness also contributes to the ominous but indolent atmosphere painted in the novel. The spatiality inherent in the concept of emptiness, of physical and emotional “Leere,” lends it a visual quality that meshes naturally with other extended metaphors in “Ich”. We learn that the protagonist hauls emptiness around with him like an empty box: “Die Leere, die er mit sich herumtrug – er gebrauchte dafür das Wort Erschöpfung—, machte es ihm leicht, sich innerhalb kurzer Zeit dem Stil anzupassen, der hier vorherrschend war” (193). M.W. tells of the Stasi reports “die ins Leere hinein geschrieben worden waren” (208) after the Oberleutnant takes an unannounced vacation, leaving the increasingly dependent protagonist in the lurch. M.W. senses an inner emptiness both with and without his supervisor’s presence, but his utterance makes it clear that Feuerbach’s absence creates a void for him. The appearances of Leere remind of the barrenness in M.W.’s life, no matter which role he is currently playing. They also reinforce another of the novel’s primary themes: the potential emptiness of language, especially of official-ese and of the “Monstrosität der Abstraktionsreihe” (23) which M.W. has knowingly internalized: “Ich werde solchen Sprachgebrauch bis in alle Ewigkeit wiedererkennen, dachte ich, auch in mir selber” (ibid.). Considering this trope, the prominent spatial and material metaphors in the novel “Ich” can be seen as the protagonist-writer M.W.’s attempt at escaping the abstractness of bureaucratic language and its genitives-of-genitives. Hilbig handles the portrayal of this attempt with irony and wit, and through concretizations of the abstract, he puts forth many striking visual images, such as when M.W. erects a “Wand von Buchstaben” between himself and his
fellow workers, who prematurely assume M.W. is an informant (88); or when he jumps backward at the word *wichsen*, "als ihm der Ausdruck ins Gesicht fuhr" (216), as if the word had struck him in the face.

Relative to other writers in this study, Hilbig relies even more heavily on spatial and material metaphors to render concrete such abstracts as time, memory, consciousness, and the past. The protagonist’s personal history is put forth as fragments or pieces that he takes to be fictional:

> Früher...das war eine Zeit, die vollkommen unwirklich war, die ihm entglitten war wie ein unhaltbares Gespinst aus überspannten Vorstellungen und Selbsttäuschungen. Fetzen für Fetzen war sie aus seinem Bewusstsein geschwunden, es war eine Unzeit. Die Realität, die eines Tages begonnen hatte, die ihn nach und nach eingenommen und überwältigt hatte, war schließlich allein in ihm zurückgeblieben: und jene abgeschlossene, Stück für Stück ausgelöschte Zeit kam ihm nun wie eine Fiktion vor. (64)

The fragmentation of reality underlined by the phrases “Fetzen für Fetzen” and “Stück für Stück” implies a metaphorically material past that crumbles away piece by piece in the process of forgetting. As such, various elements of M.W.’s presumed past history are presented as possibly fictional. For example, the mysterious “Lange” from small-town A. who visits the main character in Berlin—“es war, als ob sein früheres Leben bei ihm anklingelte” (144)—is an apparent incarnation of M.W.’s past, but is also such a caricature that the reader wonders if he belongs only to the fable woven around the writer-protagonist’s life. Through metaphor, M.W.’s memories are called into question as potentially fictional, as mere shreds, *Fetzen*, of a story.
4.4.3. Memory and Loss

The theme of losing one’s memory, or of mentally losing track of certain events from the past, is introduced before the novel is underway, in the epigraph which cites the Romantic writer Ludwig Tieck: “Wie habe ich mein Leben in einem Traume verloren! // sagte er zu sich selbst; // Jahre sind verflossen, daß ich von hier herunterstieg...”. Hilbig later returns to the idea of “losing” years, as if they had slipped away from his grasp through the timelessness of dreaming (and “herunterstieg” foreshadows M.W.’s travels in the city’s underbelly, where he does indeed lose track of time). Hilbig’s narrator possesses a distorted sense of time as he recounts past events: “Lagen wirklich schon zwei Jahre dazwischen? fragte er sich plötzlich. – Nein, diese Jahre waren nicht mehr in seinem Kopf, sie waren verloren, und es hätten ebensogut drei oder vier gewesen sein können,—sie waren ihm wie in einem Traum vergangen, fortgehuscht, im Nu, wie man so sagte” (209). The connection between dream and memory pervades this novel, as years are portrayed less as temporal units and more as tangible articles, which can be kept but easily lost within the vast mental storehouse described by St. Augustine.\(^63\)

\(^63\) In addition to intertwining with his dream world, M.W.’s memory is also indistinguishable from fantasy and illusion at times: “Ein, zwei Jahre später war er auf den Gedanken gekommen, während seiner Schlafphase sei ihm ein unbezwingbares Mißtrauen jeder Wirklichkeit gegenüber beigebracht worden...oder hatte er es sich selbst beigebracht? Es war ein tiefes Mißtrauen gegen alle Wahrnehmungen und gleichzeitig seinem Gedächtnis gegenüber, das diese Wahrnehmungen speicherte: und alle Dinge, die er später in seinem Gedächtnis verankert glaubte, waren entweder solche, die tausend Zweifeln an ihrer Existenz widerstanden hatten, oder sie waren bloße Einbildungen...und so sollte es wohl sein, dachte er später” (125). The verb speichern brings out the idea of memory as a mental storehouse especially well, but here Hilbig calls into question what is actually being “gespeichert”—perceptions are anchored in memory, as are faulty memories of perceptions, as well as creations based on a composite of perceptions that pose as memories. In the following example, the term Bereich and the verb hervorziehen spatialize the realm of fantasy in which M.W.’s memories are thought to be located: “es war, als sei ihm diese Zeit nur in der Phantasie vergangen, als seien alle Erinnerungen daran nur aus einem Bereich seiner Phantasie hervorzu ziehen, der ziemlich absonderlich war, wenn nicht pervertiert [...]. Nichts aus den letzten zwei oder drei Jahren ließ den
The line between truth and fiction is even less clear in dreams, the frustratingly elusive keys to the consciousness. Dreams possess their own peculiar temporality and spatiality: their atemporality could be argued for, and they present a distorted form of reality in their immaterial images or mental pictures that are similar to memories. In "Ich" the categories of memory and dream merge, so that it is not always clear whether the narrator is remembering a real event or recounting a dream. The extreme subjectivity of dream and memory is related thematically and sometimes semantically to storytelling in this novel. More than once in "Ich", Hilbig emphasizes through italicization the spatialized concept of Berichtszeitraum—given Hilbig’s tendency to play with words and their sounds, this is a possible wordplay in that it contains, and almost entirely is, the phrase “Bericht sei Traum”; this would underscore the novel’s dream motif, and the subjunctive form “sei” in particular would also point to the subjectivity inherent in the mode of reporting (purportedly more “objective” than fiction), and to the impossibility of purely reporting events due to the fallibility of memory.

Schluß zu, daß er sein eigenes Leben gelebt hatte...nichts hatte er aus eigenem Antrieb getan!" (210). Again M.W.’s lack of control over his memory (among other aspects of his life) is emphasized.

For example: "und so hatte jene Viertelstunde, die ihre Finsternis in ein Amtszimmer gekippt hatte, den gesamten Berichtszeitraum ins Vergessen gestürzt, der davorgelegen hatte" (26).

M.W. believes only conditionally “an eine Kongruenz seiner Wahrnehmungen mit der Realität” and “zweifelte immer öfter an der Richtigkeit seiner Erinnerungen” (99). The third-person narrator calls attention to the protagonist’s memory lapses: “vom Abend zuvor war ihm fast alles aus dem Gedächtnis geschwunden” (209). Further narrative devices, such as the type of parenthetical that Johnson also uses in Mutmassungen to establish a human narrator with a humanly imperfect memory, also cast doubt on the dependability of memory, e.g.: “(Wenn ihn nicht alles täuschte, hatte das Gespräch um Weihnachten oder Neujahr stattgefunden...” ("Ich" 192); or even more blatant statements regarding his deficient memory such as, “Es gab also immer wieder Äußerungen (W. warf sie durcheinander, sein Erinnerungsvermögen war schlecht)” (154); and, “Aber ausgerechnet in diesen Tagen war der Oberleutnant nicht zu finden gewesen (und W. wußte zu dieser Zeit noch nicht, wo er ihn mit einiger Sicherheit hätte treffen können...zu dieser Zeit: es mußte gegen Ende April seines ersten Jahrs in Berlin...".

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The recurring theme of M.W.'s reality as constituting nothing more than a simulation relates to storytelling and memory as well: "Welch eine Simulation war doch diese Wirklichkeit! Wie lange schon waren mir ihre Zusammenhänge verloren: wie lange schon waren mir gerade die Dinge verlorengangen, über die ich nicht berichtet hatte" (56). As in other works in this study, significance is held not only by the stories told, but by those not told. Writing provides ostensible proof of the protagonist's experiences, and what is not written down is lost, not registered in his mind. Storytelling (or in the case of the Firma, the reporting of others' stories) is presented as the desperate attempt to keep memories fresh rather than losing them altogether, but this tautological reality of affirming one's own memory through one's own memories is nothing but a simulation, a simulacrum of authenticity and accountability.

Hilbig also presents memories as twice removed, and thus arguably even less reliable than usual, through his narrator who recalls the act of remembering something in the past: "einmal, ich erinnerte mich" (10; 47). A memory of a memory is analogous to the device of a story within a story: while it might have much relevance to the story at hand, it is nonetheless a diversion from the main thread and inserts more distance into the narrator-reader (or listener) relationship. Further, it recalls once again the "genitive-of-genitive" brand of futility. When M.W. believes to remember hiding in the bomb shelter with his mother as a child, the third-person narrator calls this into question:

> wahrscheinlich konnte er sich nicht wirklich an diese Zeit erinnern; es war dies in den ersten drei Jahren nach seiner Geburt gewesen...gut erinnerte er sich aber an das Ziel dieser Luftangriffe, an die zertrümmerten Industrieanlagen hinter der Kleinstadt, die der Spielplatz und das Forschungsgebiet seiner Kindheit gewesen waren.

gewesen sein, zu einer Zeit also, die in seiner Erinnerung immer lückenhafter geworden war)" (160).
Die Erinnerung an das Geräusch der Bombeneinschläge, dachte er, ist wahrscheinlich die Vorstellung von einer Erinnerung...oft ist die Vorstellung vom Inhalt eines Traums deutlicher als der Traum selbst. (139)

Again memory and dream are interrelated through the notion of "Vorstellung"—not only in the sense of imagination, but also in the sense of "Vor-Stellung": an anticipation of what a memory should be like shapes how it actually manifests itself. These types of statements challenge the validity of M.W.’s narration, as well as the general processes of narrative and of memory. In Hilbig’s novel, such questioning is presented in an exaggerated fashion, mocking contemporary versions of classic philosophical concerns regarding how anything at all can be known with certainty.

Control and intention are two related facets of the memory theme which warrant consideration here. The narrator protests in a conversation with the woman he is stalking that she must remember seeing him at Reader’s Szene-reading: “Aber von der Lesung wissen Sie doch! Wir haben uns dort gesehen, Sie müssen sich doch erinnern...Sie wollen sich nicht erinnern!” (53-54). M.W. demonstrates at this point his belief in control over one’s own memory, and in the potential to will something in and out of memory. This is also reflected in his intention to forget about his boss from Kleinstadt A. when he arrives in the metropolis of Berlin—“Hier konnte er den Chef vergessen” (133)—a hope that is deflated quite quickly when he becomes trapped in the déjà vu that is his relationship with Feuerbach. M.W. exemplifies the twentieth-century figure who struggles with the notion of memory as a storage container over which he has little guardianship. As M.W.’s quest for a sense of self falters, his awareness about his lack of memory control increases.

Womöglicher mußte er sich mit denen in Beziehung setzen, die gleich ihm hier unten anwesend waren, vielleicht mußte er sein Ich mit anderen vergleichen, die vielleicht ebenfalls ich sagten, hier unten. Vielleicht

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The repeated “maybes” of this passage communicate M.W.’s obsessive uncertainty and the various eventualities that haunt him as he searches for a stable sense of self. The substantivized aus dem Vergessen works with the verb heraufrufen to indicate the conceptualization of actively pulling memories out of a mental space—a process which M.W. does not always deem viable.

Numerous spatial and material metaphors are employed to elevate the role of memory and memories on many levels in the novel. The common conception of memories as pictures, which can become unfocused in one’s head, is especially pronounced in Hilbig’s novel:

W.s Erinnerungen verschwammen mehr und mehr; die Einzelheiten dieses Kleinkriegs mit Feuerbach, der um ihn warb, der ihn immer wieder zum Umzug in die andere Wohnung zu bewegen suchte, die einzelnen bruchstückhaften Gespräche mit diesem Menschen waren ihm nicht mehr in ordentliche Abläufe zu zwingen; sie verstreuten sich über den ganzen Sommer, in welchem er dem Oberleutnant manchmal schon entkommen schien... (151)

M.W.’s case of blurred memory is especially severe, because his life is filled with Doppelgänger (Feuerbach and the Chef from Kleinstadt A.; Harry Falbe and himself; his own ich and er). Amidst bouts of amnesia and his sleep phases, the pictures of his past interlock and become indistinguishable. At one point M.W.’s own face even

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66 By the same token, memories of people meld together into composite figures. This is apparent for instance when M.W. searches for the woman named Herta from his past: “An ihr Gesicht konnte ich mich nicht erinnern...wenn ich es mir vorzustellen versuchte, vermischte es sich mir wie selbstverständlich mit dem der Studentin. Auch diese Herta war dunkelhaarig und schmal, ihrer Gestalt haftete etwas ähnlichen Verschwindenes an. Ihr Gesicht erschien mir in der Erinnerung ebenso weiß und klein, es war von der gleichen merkwürdig offenen Ausdruckslosigkeit, für die mir nur das Wort nackt eingefallen war. Sie konnte noch geprägt werden, dachte ich, sie konnte noch verwandelt werden in ein Abbild der Studentin” (375).
“verschwamm im Hintergrund jedes Erinnerungs-Schnappschusses” (234), making it unclear whether he had really witnessed certain events. The narrator makes a strong connection between memory and M.W.’s warped reality (and by extension, the warped reality of the GDR that is presented in the novel). His superiors in the Stasi want him to remember his personal past in the way which benefits them the most (as seen in their attempts to make him believe he had fathered a child,67 and that he had written works for the dissident anthology), producing further fuel to the fire of M.W.’s internal crisis:

Dabei war mir in den Sinn gekommen, wie imaginär das Leben war, das ich führte...nach außen hin, oder vielleicht auch in meiner von der Außenwelt verborgenen Wirklichkeit? Immer wieder flossen mir Erinnerung und gegenwärtige Realität zu einem diffusen Zeitgemisch zusammen, und ich überlegte, ob dies nicht zu einer Gefahr für mich werden konnte: wann würde es geschehen, daß es auch meinen Informationen widerfuhr, die ich für meinen Dienstbereich auswählte? Vielleicht war es mir längst geschehen...ich mußte diesen Gedanken nur denken, um mich überhaupt nicht mehr auszukennen. —Das Licht über der Stadt wurde in der Tat immer schwächer...die Zeit, in der ich lebte, war verschwommen wie die Stadt selbst [...]. (55)

His loss of ability to distinguish past from present, and reality from dream, leads not only to blurred memory but also to a fuzzy sense of time. M.W. perceives an equally surreal aura over Berlin, the city that appeared to be operating normally in these pre-Wende months, the undefinable and unexplainable tension that M.W. recognizes notwithstanding.

The blurriness of memories as conveyed several times through the verb *verschwimmen* is accompanied by metaphors of fog and mist (142; 171). In addition, darkness represents the absence of memory: *Dunkel* appears often to express the act of forgetting (or even as an adverb or an adjective—“Dunkel...sagte ich, dunkel kann ich

67 In relation to this story, Feuerbach refers in material terms to M.W.’s shaky remembering capacity as a mere remnant of something that was once present: “ach, Sie haben doch noch einen Rest von Erinnerungsvermögen” (305).
mich erinnern, es war überhaupt eine dunkle Geschichte,” 61). The resulting spatial imagery relates to time as something which can slip away, into the dark space of forgetting: “Die Zeit vor Feuerbach lag für mich völlig im Dunkel des Vergessens... sie war mir ganz entglitten, so weit ins Abseits geraten, daß ich sie meinem wirklichen Leben kaum noch zurechnete” (62).68 And again here, memory (or its lack) is connected closely with the protagonist’s sense of reality. The stories that go untold parallel the memories that go missing.

Like the act of writing, the process of memory serves a sort of legitimizing function in this novel. But as with writing, M.W. fails in processes of remembering as well, remaining in the dark more often than not. He worries about having to provide an “Existenznachweis [...] für diese Zeit...als würde einmal einer kommen und fragen: Haben Sie einen Nachweis für diese Zeit?” (125). Ultimately, he has no proof to document his time in Berlin, and his time there fades and wanes in his memory like an old picture that has been over-exposed to light:


68 Cooke interprets “Ich” partially as M.W.’s attempt to break through this darkness and reunite with his past: “In narrating his story, he attempts to reconnect with this past life; the novel is an act of communication between Cambert and his pre-Stasi self, the man he terms as his ‘Ansprechpartner’. Through an engagement with this earlier identity he hopes to find an external point of reference, an ‘Other’ outside his consciousness, through which he can then discover a more authentic sense of self” (“The Stasi as Panopticon,” forthcoming).
Feuerbach’s enigmatic advice to look “aus dem Dunkeln ins Licht” takes on new meaning here in its metaphorical connection with memory and storytelling. During his homecoming trip, M.W. envisions himself as having been concealed from the view of others in Berlin, and from the other parts of his “Ich” as well, as he was completely wrapped (“umhüllt”) in the shadows of his past. The *Lichtraum* can be interpreted as the unattainable space of clarity and enlightenment reflected in the final chapter’s ironic title, “Aufklärung.” The truth of M.W.’s life and his sense of self lies in this *Lichtraum*, which stirs with movement and with storytelling in the form of past conversations, but which remains forever inaccessible to M.W. himself.

4.5. *Nachwelt*: “ein schreiendes Gefühl in der Erinnerung”

With her novel *Nachwelt*, Streeruwitz begins shortly after the point where Hilbig’s “Ich” leaves off: March 1, 1990. However, the novel pays only minimal attention to this historical time, referred to only briefly in newspaper articles about the watershed political events happening thousands of miles from the protagonist’s current location. The storytelling in this novel occurs on several levels: the political stories taking place in the “virtual geography” of Margarethe’s life, as they are broadcast on television and in newspapers; Margarethe’s personal stories, played out one-sidedly in her head and over her answering machine; and the story of Anna Mahler, the original impetus for the protagonist’s research trip to Los Angeles. The latter is comprised of eight stories (supplied with headings such as “Albrecht Joseph’s Geschichte”) told by people with

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69 Wark writes about “virtual geography” as “the terrain created by the television, the telephone, the telecommunications networks crisscrossing the globe. These ‘vectors’ produce in us a new kind of experience, the experience of telesthesia—perception at a distance” (viii).
varying degrees of proximity to Mahler. Margarethe plans to incorporate their stories into a biography, but she quickly grows weary of her role as a mediator between past and present, ultimately casting the project aside as both futile and mercenary, while she tries instead to figure out the complexities of her own life.\textsuperscript{70}

The stories told to Margarethe about Mahler, as well as the stories related to the reader about the protagonist’s own life, are presented through an extremely fragmented language that holds various functions. It conveys first and foremost the difficulties of expression for the individual storytellers. Many of Margarethe’s interviewees had immigrated to the United States, eventually falling into a disquieting linguistic middle ground: “Manon sprach mit Christine in einer Mischung aus Deutsch und Englisch. Manon sprach Deutsch umständlich aus. Zögernd. Sie bildete erst die amerikanischen Laute und fügte sie dann zu deutschen Worten zusammen. Wienerischen. Christine sprach ohne Akzent. Aber sie baute ihre Sätze nach der englischen Wortfolge” (199). The staccato-style of the stories designates these characters’ hesitation as they struggle to find the right words in one tongue or another.

The role of stories in Nachwelt extends to the literature that connects the immigrants with their childhood memories (somewhat reminiscent of Seidler in Seghers’s Transit, with his memories of stories read to him as a child). Manon, for example, still

\textsuperscript{70} The following, from a review of Nachwelt in Die Zeit, comments on Margarethe’s inward turn, and also on the relationship between Margarethe’s and Marlene Streurwitz’s abandoned biography projects: “Anna Mahler fungiert […] als Katalysator und Spiegelbild in Margarethes Selbsterkenntnisprozess; sie selbst gewinnt im Laufe des Buches keine Kontur. Am Ende ist das literarische Prozess gescheitert. Die Anna-Mahler-Biografie war Marlene Streurwitz’ eigenes Projekt, das sie fallen ließ, weil das Schreiben einer Biografie ihr als Anmaßung erschien. Zu groß ist offenbar ihr Respekt vor der Komplexität eines Lebens und zu klein auch ihr Glaube an die Möglichkeit umfassenden Verstehens. Doch die von ihr gesammelte Originaltöne der Freunde, Ehemänner, Nachbarn und Studenten Annas bleiben dem vorliegenden Buch erhalten—und damit auch Spuren von Annas Leben” (Die Zeit, 14. Oktober 1999, Nr. 42, p. 3).
knows by heart some of the “Max und Moritz” stories, which she tells in German with an American accent: “Fehlerlos hätte Manon das gekonnt. Und wie sie sich das merken hatte können” (89). Manon wants to hand down the stories of her childhood to her granddaughter as well, wishing to read Wilhelm Busch stories with her, for example (90). The emphasis is on the oral and not on the written form of these stories; the Können of telling them by heart is most important to Manon, as well as the Kennen (and implicitly the Hören, as Manon plans to read them out loud with her grandchild).

This precedence of the oral over the written story underlies the novel’s structure, with its interspersed transcripts of oral accounts. As such, the novel’s disjointed style is not only prompted by communication in a foreign or semi-foreign language. Sometimes the faithful representation of oral storytelling—that is, with natural stops and starts, pauses and interruptions—prevails over cohesion. For example, Albrecht cuts himself off during his story about Anna Mahler: “Die Intimität war” (83). This type of breakdown in continuity is mirrored in the narrator’s own language, which can often be interpreted as erlebte Rede (e.g. a conjunction such as “Aber,” that stands disconnected in its own sentence, 178). Margarethe’s distracted thoughts are left dangling as they interrupt each other in her unfocused mental state. Thus, the choppy language of the narration mimics both the protagonist’s silent interior monologue and the conversational style of the various storytellers.

It could be said that Streeruwitz, through her fragmented and jagged language, attempts to break out of the labyrinthine “Genitiv des Genitivs” that plagues Hilbig’s protagonist in “Ich”. Indeed, one does not get lost in Nachwelt’s language; it is not an intertwining web of alleys, but an accumulation of one-way streets. Perhaps Streeruwitz models her technique on that of Anna Mahler herself, who, according to Margarethe’s
interviewee Christine Hershey, wrote extremely short letters, “Aber sie hat das Talent gehabt, mit Stichworten. Sie konnte immer alles beschreiben” (197). The author of Nachwelt also communicates through uncomplicated, anti-labyrinthine Stichworten; however, the extreme fragmentation suggests not meaningful pithiness, but the protagonist’s lack of control over her own thoughts and means of expression, and in essence over her whole life. The latter is substantiated by Margarethe’s confession that she played no part in her own love stories: “Sie spielte in dem Ganzen ohnehin keine Rolle. Hatte in keiner ihrer Liebesgeschichten eine Rolle gespielt. War diesen Männern sowieso unbekannt geblieben. Und damit unverständlich. Das sagten die auch noch” (160). Margarethe’s lack of agency in her own stories attracts her to the job of managing others’ stories. She exerts a certain amount of control in this way, while remaining paralyzed and stammering when it comes to her own saga.

4.5.1. Historicizing the Stories

The goal of the biographer Margarethe is to chronicle on paper what others have stored only in their heads throughout the years, and as such, to establish as authoritative “fact” that which is essentially an artifact of inevitably imperfect memories. The genre of biography traditionally implies a factual basis that clashes starkly with the fallible human sources providing the stories to Margarethe. The collected anecdotes pertaining to

71 Siegfried Kracauer’s reflections in his 1930 article “Die Biographie als neubürgerliche Kunstform” still apply to the genre in this context today: “Die Biographie als Form der neubürgerlichen Literatur ist ein Zeichen der Flucht” (Ornament der Masse 78); “Die Geschichte, die sich uns eingebrockt hat, taucht als Festland aus dem Meer des Gestaltlosen, Nichtzugestaltenden auf. Sie verdichtet sich dem heutigen Schriftsteller, der sie nicht wie der Historiker unmittelbar anpacken kann und mag, im Leben ihrer weithin sichtbaren Helden. Nicht um des Heroenkults willen werden diese zum Gegenstand von Biographien; sondern aus dem Bedürfnis nach einer rechtmäßigen literarischen Form. In der Tat scheint der Ablauf eines historisch wirksames Lebens sämtliche Bestandteile zu
Mahler are to be incorporated into the biographical work in some way, a situation which distinguishes her book from a biography based on a personal relationship between author and historical subject, or one based solely on written documentation (diaries, archival records, etc.). Essentially, Margarethe’s task is to orchestrate a composite narrative, using the various oral accounts at her disposal. Streeruwitz hints at the unclear generic boundaries of this planned work when her protagonist finds herself trying to pass the time by reading Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*:


Margarethe’s reaction to this book is significant beyond her self-perception as perpetually victimized. Capote’s work shares a similarity with Margarethe’s endeavor: these two writers elicit first-hand stories about events which they themselves did not witness. The intention is to let these witnesses tell their own stories, which ultimately are destined to be filtered through the lens of the writer herself or himself (hence Capote’s self-labeled genre of the “nonfiction novel”). Even the most conscientious attempts to achieve a semblance of objectivity falter in this once-twice-thrice removed process of reporting. Margarethe comes to this realization herself eventually, causing her to bow out of the project.

Of course, Margarethe finds that this solid framework and hope for crystallizing history within a biography is illusory, as is absolution from the “subjektiven Willkür.”

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Contradictions between stories bolster Margarethe’s skepticism. Manon and Christine disagree with each other in regard to their individual speculations and opinions about Mahler’s life (e.g. 197), and not surprisingly, due to the nature of storytelling and memory, they also contradict each other with facts about which they claim to be quite certain (e.g. 190). Margarethe sums up the effect of these discrepancies on her compilation of stories: “Und die Anna Mahler von Manon eine ganze andere Person als die Anna Mahler von Christine Hershey” (200). Margarethe begins to see her role less as a reporter of facts, and more as a judge who must determine the accuracy levels of the conflicting stories she hears. But she finds it impossible to find a standpoint of objectivity: “Wie sollte sie einen Bericht anfertigen über eine Person? Wenn sie keinen objektiven Standpunkt einnahm und sich von einer Sympathie in eine nächste Antipathie fallen ließ. Sie war dem Gegenstand der Beschreibung immer viel zu nah. So war kein Urteil zu fällen” (212). She is hesitant to cross-examine the witnesses to Mahler’s life because her inclination is to let the storytellers speak for themselves, in the hope that history would emerge naturally and unmediated from within them. Still, she senses a moral obligation to probe deeper for an unbiased truth by questioning her sources further: “War es richtig von ihr, bei diesen Gesprächen die Personen einfach erzählen zu lassen. Müßte sie nicht auf Widersprüche hinweisen. Klärende Fragen stellen” (273). Her uncertain stance as a biographer, echoing Streeruwitz’s own hesitation, results in her giving up the project.

Sie würde diese Biografie nie schreiben. Konnte das nicht. Konnte die Frage, ob diese Frau geraucht hatte oder nicht. Sie konnte diese Frage

72 The storytellers also display their naturally faulty and uncertain memories, such as Ernst Krenek, who struggles to remember when exactly he and Mahler were at the Baltic Sea together: “Aber, wie gesagt. Moment. Moment. Wir waren auch zusammen. Welcher Sommer kann das gewesen sein. An der Ostsee. Warten Sie” (270).
Margarethe begins to feel protective of her subject, who is not present to defend her side of things. Even if she had dared to ask the “right” questions which might lead to illumination about Mahler’s life, the answers would have differed among sources, or would have not been available at all in some cases. Syd Francis, a student of Anna Mahler, notes that although he spoke with the artist often, he never found out much about her (327). And while the elderly storytellers provide far more detail than the younger ones, an implicit concern of Margarethe is whether their memories are further compromised due to age and a great temporal distance to the recounted events.\footnote{Schacter describes how the “storytelling function of old people is not fully appreciated in American and other contemporary Western societies, where negative stereotypes of aging are unfortunately all too common. It is far more prominent in many tribal societies with richly developed oral traditions, where the stories and knowledge of the elderly are seen as manifestations of wisdom that command special respect” (300-01). Despite her reverence for the oral stories of the elderly, Margarethe is constantly conscious of their advanced ages, which seems to make her even more leery of the stories’ credibility. In any case, the older adults cited in Nachwelt contribute much more than the younger to the piecework of Anna Mahler’s story. In direct contrast to the younger generation, they are more detailed in their accounts, and they also stay on the subject of Mahler more consistently (as opposed to, for example, the younger Matthew Francis, who is more concerned with sharing his own views on Cézanne than in telling Anna Mahler’s story, 359 ff.).}

Albrecht offers a solution to the many discrepancies and contradictions facing Margarethe in her research: written evidence. He has retained love letters between Mahler and himself, and presents them to Margarethe as tangible reference pieces for her project. He insists that she read them all before she leaves the States (369). Albrecht’s persistence suggests his wish that Mahler’s true story be told, at least in respect to his own personal involvement. But like Manon, who wants to see Mahler honored by posterity through a biography, Albrecht too can only be disappointed. This biography was
not meant to be written, and the letters—in Margarethe’s opinion—were not meant to be read: “Das ging sie nichts an” (370). The oral stories are unsettling to her in respect to their fragmentation and indeterminacy, but the more empirical approach of reading personal written documents feels like an invasion of privacy. While she notes more than once the closeness she feels to Mahler (212; 370), she nonetheless remains detached, not involving herself in Mahler’s story past a certain point of propriety—a point determined by Margarethe herself. Thus, leaving the biography behind, even for noble purposes, secures the reigns of control in the writer’s hands. She has the power to decide that the story will not be written after all; Mahler’s biography will, for the time being at least, remain absent from the records of history.

After recusing herself from the case of Anna Mahler, the protagonist expresses a sense of liberation from her assumed duty.

In this passage of narrated monologue, Margarethe’s image of the would-be biographer as a judge comes forth through terminology such as “Urteile” and “Entscheidet, was glaubhaft, was nicht.” In addition, the narrator reveals Margarethe’s own struggles with language as a means of expressing the realities of a person’s life, realities (conspicuously in the plural in her thoughts) which she cannot force into her preferred spaces of short
sentences and sentence-fragments. At the end of her research trip, Margarethe balks at the simplicity of the project that she had presumed at its beginnings, and of her naïveté regarding the responsibility of acting as the ultimate judge for someone else’s story, constructed and reconstructed through the vehicle of memory.

4.5.2. Memory, Commemoration, and Legacy

Memory in Nachwelt has to do not only with personal memories of individuals’ pasts, but also with commemoration and with the issue of how past generations are remembered by present and future ones. This novel’s title immediately calls to mind the notions of posterity, legacy, as well as the post-mortem memory of a person and the events of this individual’s life, or of an entire generation. “Nachwelt” also works as an extended metaphor for the historical space which Margarethe attempts to carve out for Anna Mahler. Margarethe wonders whether anyone in Anna Mahler’s life really cared enough about her work to be a “guardian” of the artist’s personal memories (“Hüterin der Erinnerungen,” 144). Margarethe’s urge to fill that role is encouraged by those who were close to Mahler, who fear that otherwise her legacy will die after they do (“Anna

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74 Elsewhere Streeruwitz uses similar conduit imagery of words being squeezed unnaturally into a set form. In reference to a book written in English that Margarethe tries to read, the author writes: “Komplizierte Wörter in strenge Formen gefügt. Gepreßt. In Zeilen gedrängt” (126).

75 As “Hüterin” can also signify a herdswoman, this expression hints at the notion of guarding something within a conceivably contained or fenced-in area. Such terminology points to an imagined ownership of memories, as if they were possessions kept in a vault that needs to be protected against theft or loss. This phrase also raises the kinds of questions that characterize current debates on historiography: who is the “guardian” of collective memory? Cf. most recently Who owns history?, in which the historian Eric Foner writes of the naturalness of such debates: “There is nothing unusual or sinister in the fact that each generation rewrites history to suit its own needs, or about disagreements within the profession and among the public at large about how history should best be taught and studied” (xi).
wäre ihre beste und liebste Freundin gewesen, sagte Manon. Und sie wolle, daß die Welt
sie nicht vergäße," 30). But Streeruwitz leaves it open as to whether Mahler was herself
centered with remembrance by posterity. In Pete’s story, he claims that Anna Mahler
was indeed motivated in this way to tell stories about her famous parents, Gustav and
Alma:

Wenn Anna sprach, dann war das wie ein Vortrag. Wenn sie mir von
ihrem Vater erzählte. Oder ihrer Mutter. Oder von einer Diskussion mit
Freud als kleinem Mädchen. Oder von der Literatur, die sie las. Oder von
dem, was sie versuchte, für sich zu tun. – Alles, was Anna wollte, das war
nicht Geld. Sie wollte für etwas anerkannt werden, was sie gemacht hatte.
Sie wollte von der Nachwelt erinnert werden als jemand, der etwas getan
hatte. Was verständlich ist, wenn man bedenkt, was ihr Vater getan hat.
[...] Ich erzähle Ihnen das als Geschichte, weil Sie darüber schreiben
wollen. Aber der persönliche Aspekt ist so schwierig, weil. – (137)

Pete projects the attitude that he is doing the researcher-writer Margarethe a great favor
by telling this story, and he interrupts himself here presumably out of sensitivity for
Mahler. However, Margarethe strongly questions the impetuous Pete’s sincerity and
credibility as a storyteller, and is disgusted by his claim that Mahler loved him. She
complains, “Aber jeder konnte sagen, was er wollte über sie. Die Tote. Konnte eine
Liebesgeschichte herbeireiten” (144).76 By extension, Anna Mahler’s alleged wish to be
“anerkannt” cannot be substantiated yet, through Pete’s story alone.

In fact, Manon directly contradicts Pete on this point later in the novel, reiterating
that she wants to see a tangible tribute to her friend Mahler.

76 While Margarethe takes offense when she believes Pete to be lying about his
relationship with Mahler, she does not feign honesty regarding her own life stories,
evident for example as she envisions spinning details about her trip to impress people
Reisen ohnehin immer nur Erfundenes erzählt wurde” (300). The difference seems to be
one of possession: Margarethe sees herself as holding the “rights” to her own stories and
to determining how they are told, whereas the living cannot own the stories of the dead.
When I talked to Anna about a biography after her death I said after you die I am going to tell them all this and she said: "Oh go. Nobody should write a sentence about me." Die Anna wollte es wirklich nicht, und dann habe ich mir gedacht, falls es der Anna irgendwie hilft. Daß sie ein bissel mehr berühmt wird und daß jemand anderer mehr weiß über sie, dann o.k. Nur daß der Name berühmt wird. Daß sie nicht nur die Tochter war. (189)

Faced with these contradictory, unsubstantiated claims or rumors from Pete and Manon as to what the subject of her biography had really wanted for her own legend, Margarethe turns to the tangibility of Anna Mahler’s own sculptures for answers. She is repulsed by the style of Anna Mahler’s artwork (“Aber das Realistische an diesem Werk. Ihr kam das faschistisch vor. Und diese Frau hatte den Expressionismus in Berlin miterlebt,” 171). Margarethe can come up with only one explanation for this conservative style, namely, Mahler’s desire to anchor herself concretely and eternally in the world after her death: “Hatte sie die Wirklichkeit nur im Sinn der Klassiker interpretieren können. War darin die Hoffnung auf eine Ewigkeit in der Nachwelt verborgen” (171). Margarethe, despite her dislike for the sculpture, reads it as Mahler’s attempt to leave behind a legacy, and to concretize, literally, her own story for eternity."

Nachwelt revolves around a question that dominates many historical debates today, namely: who has the “right” to tell a particular story? Margarethe finds an

77 In the introduction to Anna Mahler. Her Work, Ernst Gombrich defends Mahler’s style by arguing (reminiscent of Lessing’s remarks in Laocoon) that sculpture is an art form possessing an “inherent conservatism” bound by certain conventions, and by asserting that “the Expressionists were no less bound to conventions than were the canonic works of classical art which they wished to dethrone” (7).

78 In Shuman’s ethnographic study Storytelling Rights, the author puts forth a notion of entitlement that can be applied to the situation depicted in Nachwelt: “Entitlement is a way of talking about the relationship between authors and audiences at the same time as one considers the relationship between messages and their referents, texts and their contexts, narratives and events. Essentially, entitlement is a way of understanding communication with respect to ownership of experience—both the experience referred to in the message and the experience of the communication itself” (18). The idea of entitlement or story ownership, which has proven to play a significant role in group dynamics, shapes how a culture records (or chooses not to record) history. Schacter also
answer to this query in the library: “Ein Recht zu reden hatten doch nur die Toten. Hier durften doch nur die Toten ihre Stimme heben. Und weil sie es nicht konnten, durfte keiner etwas sagen. Wie konnte sich einer da hinstellen und ‘Vergessen’ sagen. Und vergessen wohin” (170). The directional “wohin,” placed with an implicit question mark in conjunction with the concept of forgetting, implies that legacy is there for eternity by its nature—it is a matter of wo, and not wohin. Thus, the living have no right to give voice to the stories of the dead, nor do they have a right to forget them on the pretense that these stories have disappeared. Rather, their task is to rediscover them by listening out for the voices of the dead. The connotation of “afterworld” in the novel’s title is evoked in this context, as the departed are portrayed as maintaining their voices from beyond the mortal realm.

Pursuing the legacy of the deceased also forces Margarethe to turn inward and face her own fears about death, and to contemplate the way in which she might be remembered later: “Sie hatte denken müssen, wie es nach ihrem eigenen Tod aussehen

explains why people tend to feel possessive of their memories and thus of their own particular version of stories: “Our memories belong to us. They are uniquely ours, not quite like those of anybody else. We feel this way in part because our memories are rooted in the ongoing series of episodes and incidents that uniquely constitute our everyday lives” (15-16). Even an event experienced by more than one person will always be perceived and then remembered in an individualized way, because the memory cannot be isolated from the context of what came before and after it in the rememberer’s mind. The rights of the dead to the stories told about them is an issue raised at least implicitly in other contemporary German-language literature, for instance in Bernhard Schlink’s *Der Vorleser*, in which the former SS-guard Hanna claims that the living have no right to an explanation of her behavior: “Auch das Gericht konnte nicht Rechenschaft von mir fordern. Aber die Toten können es. Sie verstehen. Dafür müssen sie gar nicht dabei gewesen sein, aber wenn sie es waren, verstehen sie besonders gut. Hier im Gefängnis waren sie viel bei mir. Sie kamen jede Nacht, ob ich sie haben wollte oder nicht” (187). Hanna’s problematic means of escaping moral and legal liability, in her own head at least, is noteworthy in the value that she places on dialogues with the victims of the Holocaust—only they have the right to demand anything from her, she believes, because it is *their* story after all.

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wäre. Wo sie dann gerade sein würde. An keinen fremden Tod zu denken. Es war immer der eigene, der sich in den Vordergrund schob. Und hier. In L.A. fast immer ans Sterben denken hatte müssen” (372). Obsessed with thoughts of death, Margarethe cannot comprehend how the elderly Ernst Krenek can tell his stories in such a calm and deliberate manner: “Diese Ruhe. Wie er eine solche Geschichte erzählen konnte. Während das Ende so sicher” (286). Her deep concern with her own mortality during her LA trip suggests that Margarethe, in authoring a biography, is at least unconsciously trying to reserve her own place in history, more than trying to preserve one for Anna Mahler. Margarethe is certain that she will leave behind no legacy, and will be forgotten after her own life is over, in any case (‘‘War das Vergessenwerden eines Unzureichenden grausamer als das eines Unwichtigen. Irgend eines Lebens. So eines wie dem ihren. Sie würde vergessen werden in einem normalen Leben. Sie hatte nichts versucht, und sie würde nicht,’’ 201). Still, the protagonist attempts to use her trip to Los Angeles to put this suspicion into perspective. She thinks with some derision about her ex-partner Wagenberger, who “[k]onnte es nicht ertragen, die Nachwelt nichts von ihm wissen lassen zu können. Aber hier interessierte das niemanden. Einfach niemanden. Und was war so schlimm daran, nicht erinnert zu sein” (175). What she sees around her in California is life—people living their lives, far too busy to worry about remembering the dead.

Margarethe, on the other hand, occasionally takes time away from her own concerns to commemorate those who have suffered in the past, both in Europe and in America. Thoughts about the Salem witch burnings float in her stream of consciousness:

Und die Unvorstellbarkeit des Vorgangs. Verbrannt werden, wenn schon die kleinste Brandwunde so schrecklich geschmerzt. Sie hatte dann gedacht, wenn diese vielen Frauen es überstanden. Dann würde sie es auch

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Margarethe laments the legacy which she, in Streeruwitz’s metaphorically weighty terms, has burdened upon her child⁸⁰ (and in particular, a female child who will have it better than females of previous generations, but in Margarethe’s view is still a probable victim). The torture experienced by others comforts her, perhaps as a relativizing force for her own personal pain. In this sense, Margarethe’s intimate thoughts regarding the stories she has heard about the past are brutally honest. This is evident when she tries to put herself in the shoes of an émigré to America during World War II:


In her process of commemorating, Margarethe imagines the survivor’s guilt that she might have had if she had escaped the Nazi wrath, as did the many émigrés with whom she has contact in Los Angeles.

Margarethe’s imaginary walks through the past include events from her home continent as well as from America. She contemplates her parents’ antisemitism, and their implicit accusations that Margarethe would have acted similarly if she had experienced what they had:

⁸⁰ Using similar terminology, Margarethe presents the silent burden of guilt from the Nazi past on her own generation as something so all-encompassing that she cannot break free from it, “Die Schuld an der Niederlage. Die hatten sie kleinen Mädchen wie ihr aufgeladen. Sprachlos war ihnen klargemacht worden, daß sie schuld waren” (291). The weight of this guilt-load is also posited through the collocation of entschlagen in the following: “Wie entschlug man sich dieser Erbschaft. Wie das ertragen” (382).

In addition to their post-war antisemitism, Margarethe portrays her parents’ denial and their state of forgetfulness (“Und worin anders hatte die Ökonomie dieses Vergessens liegen können als in der Aufbewahrung im Vergessen,” 172). Along with maintaining this storage space allotted to forgetting, her parents have become immune to the types of emotions that Margarethe assumes they should be experiencing. Her parents were “wie betäubt gewesen in diesem Punkt. Zu ihrem Vorteil,” as opposed to her uncle, who left the country “Wegen der Schande. Nachher,” (ibid.). The substantivized temporal “Nachher” has multiple effects. First, it demonstrates Margarethe’s mental tendency to think in terms of pre- and post-war. In this respect, she and her generation overlap with those directly before and after her, as they would likely all understand the point of reference for this “Nachher” without further explanation. Second, deviating historically from Seidler’s concern for the Woher in his attempt to find meaning as a persecuted refugee, Margarethe’s internal searching near the end of the century leads her to this post-war space of Nachher, where she knows her roots were firmly planted even before her arrival in the world. In her view, shame inundates this historical space that she too must occupy.81

81 This topic has been taken up by both literary writers and scholars for some time now. In her recent study, Elizabeth Snyder Hook remarks on the focus of many post-war generation writers from German-speaking countries since the 1980s: “Although these novels, like the father books, are steeped in an awareness of National Socialism and of its continuing impact on contemporary German life, their authors are less intent on assigning blame for the Third Reich to their parents than on investigating the more personal question of inherited guilt. Did their generation, as declared in the Old Testament, share in the sins of their fathers? And if so, were its members fated to perpetuate a legacy they
Thus, the focus of the Los Angeles trip turns away from Mahler and turns again to Margarethe, whose own personal traumas and repressions often take center stage. She remembers in particular the lack of support of her partner, who was in a drunken stupor while she was having a miscarriage. His weak excuses were strong enough to drive the reality of this situation out of her consciousness for a year. "Wie hätte sie die Wirklichkeit ertragen sollen. Das Kind tot. Und er betrunken. Sie allein gelassen. Die Wirklichkeit damals von seinen Entschuldigungen verdrängt hatte werden müssen. Aber jetzt. Jetzt konnte sie sich erinnern. Ein Jahr später ging das. Irgendwie mußte das gehen" (78). Her trauma from this experience leads to nightmares and repressions of various sorts: "Ein schlimmer Traum hatte sie hochschrecken lassen. Sie hatte versucht, wieder einzuschlafen. Den Traum zu einem guten Ende zu träumen. Es hatte nicht funktioniert. Sie wußte schon nichts mehr von dem Traum" (384).  

Like in "Ich", dreams and memory—or memory loss—are intimately connected here. The defense mechanisms of dreams and repressions also cause great frustration when they allow glimpses of past pain.

The common phenomenon of forgetting dreams bothers Margarethe, who associates this specifically with the nightmare of her miscarriage, a personal tragedy that she has been unable to put into words.


themselves despised? For contemporary German and Austrian writers, this incriminating, destabilizing aspect of the Third Reich finds expression not only in the content of their stories, but in the structure and language of their narratives" (4).

82 Other examples of forgotten dreams are found earlier in the text: "Der Schlaf eine angenehme Erinnerung. Irgendwelche Träume. Aber schon vergessen" (61); "Sie hatte geträumt. Etwas Schreckliches. Etwas Zerreißendes. Aber sie konnte sich nicht erinnern" (95).

Still at the end of the century, often the story that cannot be told says more than the one that is told. Like for Johnson in Mutmassungen, memory for Streeruwitz is more than merely a container that houses inaccessible images from the past; it can also contain emotion that is connected neither to words nor to a concrete picture—in this case, it is the negative residual sentiment of trauma, “ein schreiendes Gefühl.”

4.5.3. Spatialized and Fragmented Memories

The haunting evidence of Margarethe’s repression of the painful past is accompanied by her conscious attempts to suppress the present hurt of her failing dependent relationship with Helmut: “Wenn er dagewesen wäre, das alles wäre nicht passiert. Aber sie schob den Gedanken weg. Verbot sich den Gedanken” (162); “Und das Wissen, daß alles vorbei. Und weiterleben und der Gedanke an ihn weggeschoben werden mußte. Zur Seite” (204). The deliberate partitioning off (“Zur Seite”) emphasizes the material conception of pushing away (wegschieben) a distressing thought.


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83 A memory is also something that can completely consume Margarethe, overshadowing the present. When Margarethe sees a production of Waiting for Godot in Los Angeles, for example, she cannot enjoy the moment of the evening: “Ein wunderbarer Theaterabend. Aber währenddessen erfüllte sie die Erinnerung. An sich in der Aufführung damals” (341). She persists in remembering the first performance of Beckett’s play that she saw in Austria during the 60s or 70s (she cannot remember which decade). The verb erfüllen lends memory a metaphorically spatial quality here and stresses how the memories from her past utterly fill her thoughts.
away and trying to wrestle the pain into submission is only one level of repression represented in the novel. Margarethe tries to generalize the immigrant experience of others, relying at this point on the idea of individual memories as pictures, or as photographs which will fade inevitably with time. She imagines that if she were to stay in America, then she would eventually lose the contours of her Heimat-memory: "Blieb diese Erinnerung. Sie würde verblassen. Wahrscheinlich. Es verblaßte ja alles. Irgendwie. Und was nicht verblaßte, wurde abgestoßen. So wie die Mutter der Tante Hilda ungeduldig gesagt hatte, daß man die Toten begraben müsse. Endlich" (298). The first utterance here, "Blieb diese Erinnerung" (plausibly to be taken as a question, since Streeruwitz rarely utilizes question marks), introduces Margarethe’s ponderings on fading memories— if the memory of home remains, then it would fade or, following her mother’s footsteps, she would perhaps push it away, burying it as something dead. Her mother would suppress the voices of the dead which Margarethe tries to hear and to respect. Here the spatial metaphor elicited by abstossen points to the inclination of conceptually pushing away the past. The mother’s remark that the dead need to be buried points to broader issues of repressed memory and of the forgotten history which the protagonist wants to uncover.

While Margarethe rebels against her mother’s tendency toward burying and forgetting the past, she begins to wonder if she has gone too far toward the other extreme. That is, in excavating the lives of those before her, she is able to forget—or at least is better able to bear—her own misery: "Was machte sie hier. Was hatte sie sich vorgestellt. Andere Leute ausfragen. Schlimmere Schicksale ausgraben, um das eigene ertragen zu können" (96). She begins to question her own motivations for digging up the past, a self-examination which manifests itself as well when she reads archived writings by her
mother’s second husband Franz Werfel: “Sie mochte die Schrift dieses Mannes nicht mehr entziffern. Und sie wollte diese Reste von einem Leben nicht länger durchstöbern” (169). The verb *durchstöbern* evokes a physical image of Margarethe rummaging through the tangible remnants of Werfel’s existence—while she actually searches for the intangibles of a life—and particularly through the component *stöbern*, it also points back to the trope of digging that runs through the novel.\(^{84}\)

Particularly distressing to Margarethe as she pokes around in the lives of others is the attempted reduction of rich individual stories to flimsy pieces of paper. Margarethe relates this lament to death certificates in particular: “Und wie sollte das nun begriffen werden, daß aus Millionen Menschen solche Formulare gemacht worden waren. Die Körper in Totenscheine verwandelt. Scheine. Scheine in Briefen. Listen. Die Leiber benutzt, die Bürokratie zu nähren” (125). The statement alludes to the Holocaust and to the atrocious lists upon lists of concentration camp victims, while further challenging Margarethe’s own work as a researcher, which requires her to sift through documents that say little to nothing about a human life. This sentiment is repeated when she visits the tiny museum of the Santa Monica Historical Society: “Es war sicher das traurigste Museum. Die Exponate Gerümpel. Wie man es auf Dachböden finden konnte. Oder in Kellern. Oder in Alteleutewohnungen. Ärmlich. Alles zusammengestoppelt. […] Alles staubig. Alles angeschlagen. Zerschlagen. Zerkratzt. Angekratzt” (395). The museum culture that characterizes the late twentieth century is depicted as shabby, dusty, and disloyal to the memories of life which the museums are intended to house and to commemorate.

\(^{84}\) Manon relies on such imagery to illustrate to Margarethe that hardships had buried themselves deep within her: “Das Leben wäre zu hart zu ihr gewesen. Hätte sich tief eingegraben” (310).
The protagonist’s thoughts on the preservation of memory can be related to a scene in which Margarethe picks up fragments of tail-light glass in a parking lot:

“Margarethe hob die Splitter auf. Steckte sie in die Seitentasche ihrer Handtasche. Die Splitter waren bunt und glitzerd. Hatten kostbar ausgesehen. Im Staub” (238). At first glance, this looks like a conspicuous and clichéd metaphor for Margarethe picking up the pieces of her disjointed and shattered personal life, and for her making sense of—and even finding beauty in—the fragmented world around her. However, in the context of the storytelling theme, this scene can also be interpreted as Margarethe’s epiphany about her responsibility in the process of synthesizing fragments of others’ memories, of digging them out of the dust and polishing them: she comes to understand that this role is superfluous. Just like the stuffy museum that attempts to preserve the past artificially, the biographer too can only fail in encapsulating life. The fragmented relics left behind in the minds of those who knew Anna Mahler stand on their own as worthwhile and striking stories in their own right, and this is exactly how they are left in the book: untouched and dusty, not one further step removed through the interference of a biographer.
CONCLUSION

Referring to Benjamin’s essay “Der Erzähler,” Paul Ricoeur speculates, “Perhaps, indeed, we are the witnesses—and the artisans—of a certain death, that of the art of telling stories, from which proceeds the art of narrating in all its forms. Perhaps the novel too is in the process of dying as a form of narration” (28). Regardless of the genre’s future plight, the ever-changing form of the novel held a major role in the storytelling of the twentieth century, flourishing from one end to the other. Whether or not we accept the notion of the death of the author, or the death of the novel referred to by Ricoeur, narrative itself lives on, maintaining a continuous presence no matter what shape it might take. Ricoeur concedes in any case, “we have no idea of what a culture would be where no one any longer knew what it meant to narrate things” (ibid.).

Although their origins span the twentieth century, the novels examined in this study overlap significantly with one another in terms of theme (including but not limited to the labyrinth, waiting, and storytelling) and in how they tell their stories. In addition, each of these works addresses critically the codified identity-constructions that became prevalent in the bureaucracies of twentieth-century life. As such, a common thread in the novels is their representation of faltering attempts to capture and store dynamic individual histories on static two-dimensional documents and records: the passports and identification papers in Der Verschollene; the immigration files in Transit; the Stasi files and informants’ reports in “Ich” and Mutmassungen; Anna Mahler’s FBI-file in

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Nachwelt. Through the external society’s desire for simplicity and regulation, the characters in these novels are threatened to be reduced to only superficialities by the urge to essentialize. This symptom of modernity, along with others discussed in this study, leaves twentieth-century protagonists desperate to exert some semblance of control over the time and space of their domains.

Beyond the treatment of such common problems and themes, the previous century of German literature saw some stylistic continuity as well. As this study demonstrates, such continuity is evident in the means for controlling the pace of narrative temporality, for instance, and in the types of metaphors utilized to express the abstractions of human experience. As such, some of the divisions that are convenient for the categorization and periodicization of literature, but which ultimately fall flat in their generality, begin to break down further. While it would be impossible to pinpoint a list of stylistic devices to be labeled as “typical” for the entire twentieth century, the pronounced status of orientational and ontological metaphors provides a significant link between literary and historical periods within that broader era. Even the most fragmented of literary forms rely on the basic units of these metaphors, affirming spatiality as an indispensable component of conceptualizations and representations of the abstract. Spatial and material metaphors have functioned to bestow conceptual boundaries onto the intangible, and have offered readers at least a small amount of certainty in times when there was precious little of that in the world around them.

The abstract concept of history has been conceived of and represented frequently in spatial or material terms, often understood to consist of blocks or points from which we can distance ourselves as we move teleologically through time. These sorts of metaphors arguably allow for simplified encapsulations of history and memory—like a
monument to a past event, memories can be venerated, but also walked away from at will when they become too painful. The debates on whether and how to construct monuments in remembrance of the Holocaust in recent years illustrate the problems inherent in this type of approach to the past. On the other hand, literary spatializations and materializations provide a frame of reference that can connect writer with reader in storytelling, as they render aspects of the incomprehensible at least somewhat more graspable and, ideally, promote the elasticity of stories across generations. While I have argued that the last century saw an intensification and increase in frequency of spatial and material metaphors in storytelling, probably attributable to the estranging effects of modernity as well as to unprecedented tragedy and trauma, they are by no means restricted to this time frame. Therefore, the possibilities are countless for similar studies of literature from earlier and later eras.

The early twenty-first century will undoubtedly see many endeavors to make some sense out of the previous century, now that we have assumed a standpoint that enables us to “look back” on its entirety. But it also marks an opportunity to consider what could be yet to come in respect to temporal and spatial representations in art. Edward Soja asserted in the last decade of the twentieth century,

Space still tends to be treated as fixed, dead, undialectical; time as richness, life, dialectic, the revealing context for critical social theorization. As we move closer to the end of the twentieth century, however, Foucault’s premonitory observations on the emergence of an ‘epoch of space’ are beginning to take on a more reasonable cast. (128)

Soja refers here to recent work on developing a “postmodern and critical human geography”—the mapping of human experience onto historical landscapes. It remains to be seen whether we will witness a full-fledged philosophical or literary “epoch of space” as Foucault and Soja predict, or what exactly would constitute such an age. The ultimate
effect of "virtual" time and space on metaphor in everyday cognition and in literature is a mystery for the time being as well. Despite the vast unknowns, the endurance of some universal phenomena seems assured: attempts to embrace temporal events through stories will persist; metaphorical spatializations and materializations, often revealing much about a culture’s prevailing understandings of temporality and spatiality, will persevere as fundamental tools in the process of storytelling; and narrative spaces will continue to be created and recreated in efforts toward coming to grips with the human condition, past and present. Whichever shape these narrative spaces might take, they will likely be far removed from Thomas Mann’s Magic Mountain, with its luxury of abundant, unregulated time and space.


---. “Über den Begriff der Geschichte.” *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften 1.* 352


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---. *Der Verschollene. Kritische Ausgabe*. Ibid.


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