Border Poetics: Contemporary German and Polish Literary Intersections

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Abstract

Borders can be both literal and figurative, but their effects are always real. The border between what is today known as Germany and Poland has been drawn and redrawn multiple times over the past centuries. While these changes frequently did not align with people's ethnic, local, or personal attachments, they did not necessarily generate animosities until the rise of nationalism in the modern period. Thus, for much of the twentieth century, the border was narratively constructed as a dividing line. This situation changed with the end of the Cold War, and narratives after 1989 often articulate the borderland as a site of contact and of mixing. However, at times writers and artists take this transnational perspective even further.

This dissertation argues that some German and Polish border narratives not only break down binaries or offer transnational perspectives but they also express entangled histories and "defocalized" identities by engaging in a practice of radical de-bordering and reshuffling of border constellations. To analyze such phenomena, I adapt the concept of "border poetics" to denote a narrative and cultural practice that places historically and socially situated borders and border experiences in relation with figurative boundaries. This means that "real" borderlands become staging grounds for symbolic border crossings that represent fundamentally human experiences or questions of identity, e.g., the border between life and death, dream and reality, and interrogations of gender, race, or ethnicity. Because border poetics rests on the same productive tension between the particular and the universal that also drives cosmopolitanism, I argue for viewing border poetics as an idiom of the cosmopolitan imagination.

My study stresses that border poetics is a practice, thus expanding a previous definition that foregrounds it as a tool of analysis. I develop the concept in five chapters that locate the practice in the broader history of German-Polish relations; describe the phenomenon of "border

poetics" in theoretical terms by drawing on scholarship in the fields of border studies, cosmopolitanism, and world literature; and interrogate and expand the theoretical framework by testing it on specific narratives. The analysis of select literary and cultural texts focuses on *story* in fictions of memory, *discourse* in magical realism or the fantastic mode, and *performance* in engaged art projects and community activities. I show that these narratives engage in transborder conversations that do not ignore or homogenize difference, but examine it critically and propose new ways of imagining border spaces. They can be read as responses to recurring German-Polish tensions and the reemergence of borders in Europe and beyond. By formulating counter narratives to the divisive rhetoric, they encourage us to think through the meaning and options of a cosmopolitan Europe.

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Introduction[1]

W trawie, która porosła
przyczyny i skutki,
musi ktoś sobie leżeć
z kłosem w zębach
i gapić się na chmury.

Someone must lie there,
in the grass that has grown over
the causes and the effects,
blade of grass in their mouth,
and stare at the clouds.

Im Gras, das über Ursachen
und Folgen wächst,
muß jemand ausgestreckt liegen,
einen Halm zwischen den Zähnen,
und in die Wolken starrn.

(Wisława Szymborska, "Koniec i Początek")[2]

An idiomatic expression in the English language suggests that when things calm down after a period of turbulence, the "dust settles." Both in German and in Polish, it is not dust that settles, but grass that grows over a matter and helps heal the disruptions of the past. The poem "Koniec i Początek" ("The End and the Beginning") by the late poet Wisława Szymborska (1923–2012) suggests that once the grass "has grown over the causes and the effects," there is an opportunity to shift attention away from the past and look into the future. Symbolized by a cloud, this future is transient and changeable: it is neither tied to particular spaces, nor is it constrained by rigid

[1] Note on translations: This study relies on sources in German, Polish, and English. Some of these sources have official translations in one or both of the other two languages. Other sources are multilingual, and they exist in several languages simultaneously. These sources include bilingual or trilingual print publications or websites. In order to facilitate readability, the main text will include the original German or Polish text, followed by its English translation. Translations are mine unless noted otherwise in the bibliographical entry. In some instances, modifications to an existing translation were necessary. This information is provided in the footnote.

[2] For the original Polish and the English translation, see Wisława Szymborska, "Koniec i Początek/The End and the Beginning," translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, lines 43-47, translation modified. For the German translation with the original Polish, see Wisława Szymborska, "Koniec i Początek/Ende und Anfang," translated by Karl Dedecius, lines 43-47.

boundaries. As Szymborska observes in another poem, clouds are not only free of firm boundaries that manage their contours, they also traverse borders with ease: "O, jakże są nieszczelne granice ludzkich państw!/Ile to chmur nad nimi bezkarnie przepływa" ["Oh, the leaky boundaries of man-made-states!/How many clouds float past them with impunity"] ("Psalm" 183, lines 1–2). Clouds simultaneously evoke flexible identities and freedom of movement: their shapes are just as ambiguous as their positions in the sky. With their inherent flexibility, clouds inspire the human imagination and foster alternative ways of seeing the world. Important for Szymborska, this refocusing of the lyrical I's gaze from the past to the future is not an option, but an imperative: "Someone *must* lie there […] and stare at the clouds" ("Koniec" lines 45 and 47, emphasis mine).

Szymborska's insistence on an alternate perspective strikes me as especially pertinent in the present political climate in which there is an ever-louder call for the reestablishment and fortification of boundaries between variously defined notions of "us" and "them." The strident rhetoric of current debates is particularly challenging to the prevalent notion of a globalized world. In this view, which has intensified significantly since the 1990s, the world is interconnected and everyone is able to move about freely—either in reality or virtually. It is true that this kind of freedom has never actually been granted to the majority of the world's population, but for many in North America, as well as in Europe, it may have seemed as if borders had been disappearing. In light of current military conflicts, large-scale movements of refugees across the globe, financial crises in various European countries, the resurgence of nationalism, and the popularity of parties with anti-globalization and anti-European Union sentiments, it is difficult to conceive of a disappearance or even a weakening of borders.

Yet, wherever borders exist, there has also always been a pushback against their divisiveness and a desire for more inclusive perspectives. Literary and other forms of artistic expressions are important venues for advocating transborder connections and critiquing exclusionary boundaries. In my view, these expressions are part of what sociologist Gerard Delanty has termed the "cosmopolitan imagination."[3] Building on Delanty, the cosmopolitan imagination is understood here as joining particular and universal experiences—including those shaped by disruption and division. The cosmopolitan imagination does not overcome exclusions, erase particularities, or aid in forgetting the past. Rather, it derives from a realization that borders are inherently contradictory, and that they divide and connect at the same time.

Using German-Polish literature as a case study,[4] this dissertation examines how borders and borderlands can serve as sites for exercising the cosmopolitan imagination. As the above epigraph illustrates, borderlands are the literal ground—the actual space that is marked by rifts and breaks—upon which the lyrical I must stand, even when staring at the clouds. Borders, whether they are literal or figurative, have real effects, and they do not simply disappear. The implications of historical events can still be felt, and memories of the past continue to impact the present. However, these particular experiences and attachments can be articulated in relation with more universal experiences and attachments. Reconsidered in this way, the particular can be made productive for new ways of imagining the world and the social relations within that world.

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[3] Chapter 2 explains in more detail Delanty's notion of the "cosmopolitan imagination" as an articulation of a "critical cosmopolitanism." It entails a view of "society as an ongoing process of self-constitution through the continuous opening up of new perspectives in light of the encounter with the Other" (*Cosmopolitan* 13).

[4] The reference to "German-Polish" or "Polish-German" literature is intended as a thematic orientation: it is literature about topics that pertain to Germany and Poland, mainly the German-Polish borderland in its different past and present variations or as a mental construct. This includes works originally written in German or in Polish, by authors who identify as German or Polish, or both. I am alternating the use of German-Polish and Polish-German, but the order of the adjectives indicates no hierarchy of any kind.

The border between Germany and Poland—or rather between what we today know as Germany and Poland—has been drawn and redrawn multiple times over the past centuries. These border movements frequently did not align with people's ethnic, local, or individual affiliations, and they have resulted in variously entangled histories and "defocalized" identities. Violent events such as Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 and the history and aftermath of the Second World War have made it difficult to come to terms with the notion of a shared past. For much of the twentieth century, the German-Polish border served as a point of contention, and the border was narratively constructed as a dividing line.

Given this history of violence, memories of traumatic events continue to impact Polish-German relations in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. At the same time, there have also been significant improvements in relations, especially with the end of the Cold War and Poland's accession to the European Union. Poles and Germans began to newly discover their intertwined histories and developed a greater interest in getting to know one another. As a consequence, narratives that articulate the borderland as a space of contact and of mixing are currently on the rise. Occasional setbacks in German-Polish relations and recurring disagreements on a variety of historical and political questions should not be ignored. Yet, at the risk of generalization, it might be stated that Germans and Poles have opened up towards one another, and they have begun to discuss their shared past, present, and future in new ways and within a larger European context.

In the literary and cultural imagination, this gradual development corresponds with the transformation of the border from a dividing line into a more porous boundary. Many of these narratives can be described using the language of transnational contact and exchange. However, for some narratives this analytical framework alone is insufficient, as the following example

from the novel *House of Day, House of Night* (1989) by renowned Polish author Olga Tokarczuk illustrates. The novel, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, is set in the southern Polish region of Silesia, and the following episode takes place in the 1990s, near the Polish-Czech border. As is true for most of Silesia, this area was part of Germany for the first part of the twentieth century. When borders were newly drawn after the Second World War, ethnic Germans were expelled from this region, which was also the case with Peter Dieter, the protagonist of the episode I am recounting here.

Peter Dieter is an elderly German, who has come to visit his former Silesian homeland one last time. The small village that he knew as a child is almost gone, and there is no trace of his parents' house. Hopeful that he may still be able to find some remnants of his past, he tries to reconcile his fragmentary memory with the landscape in front of him. He roams alone through the timbered mountains, just as he had done as a child. But the climb is strenuous and his heart is weak; as soon as he reaches the Polish-Czech border that runs along the mountains' ridge, he suffers a heart attack. He tries to rest, and in a last effort he drags himself to a boundary post nearby. He leans against the pole to gather strength, but he dies shortly thereafter with a melting piece of chocolate in his mouth—one leg rests on the Czech side, the other one on the Polish side. Before long, two Polish border guards find him. However, it is almost the end of their shift, and they realize that dealing with the body and the paperwork would simply take too long. To avoid overtime, they carry Peter Dieter to the Czech side of the border. Soon thereafter the scene repeats and the Czech border guards carry the dead man to the Polish side: "And this is how Peter Dieter remembered his death before his soul disappeared—as mechanical movement to the one side and to the other side, a balancing act on an edge, the pausing on a bridge" (*Dom* 132, my trans.).

The story of Peter Dieter is a story of several kinds of real and symbolic border crossings. There is the mountain range: a physical, natural border; but this natural border also coincides with a political border. The entire region can also be described as a borderland that throughout history has been claimed by various nations and ethnic groups. All these borders are porous and changeable, but they can be classified as “real” borders. At the same time, there is also a figurative border here, and that is the border between life and death. It is the transitory space in which Peter Dieter’s soul hovers as he is dying and from where he observes the fate of his body being moved back and forth. In my research, I found many narratives that treat borders and border experiences in similar ways. In these narratives, territorial and political borderlands are permeated with figurative and universal border crossings. It is the goal of this study to develop a critical vocabulary to analyze different kinds of entangled borders, and I focus here on literary and cultural texts that use the political border between Germany and Poland to imagine more flexible belongings and alternate social spaces. By constructing fictional worlds from the perspective of variously defined borderlands, the authors, artists, and activists that I discuss here imagine open spaces and solidarities that cut across established boundaries. Through this world-making, they offer a critique of exclusionary political and social boundaries and advance a cosmopolitan imagination.

Major Questions and Significance

Borders and borderlands figure in various ways in contemporary German- and Polish-language narratives, ranging from spaces of conflict and violence to sites of peaceful exchange and mixing. In many border narratives, these contradictory notions are used to create a complex and polyvalent picture of the borderland. This complexity and ambiguity is heightened when figurations of the border go beyond the border as a geographic or political demarcation to

include figurative border crossings. Yet, in the course of my research, I frequently felt that the existing vocabulary to describe and analyze these highly complex articulations of borders and border experiences was insufficient.

Existing interpretive frameworks of contact, exchange, and mixing, such as Marie Louise Pratt's geographically or ethnographically defined "contact zones," are crucial to today's understanding of borders but they leave little room for the highly figurative border crossings that I want to analyze here. According to Pratt, "contact zones" are "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (34).[5] Pratt's concept is instructive, not least because such contact zones unsettle the notion of community as "finite, sovereign, fraternal" (37) and produce transculturation and ethnography as particular "phenomena of the contact zone" (36). Transculturation, to draw on philosopher Wolfgang Welsch's definition, means that cultures do not exist in isolation from one another, but that they—in positive and in negative terms—are shaped by mutually influential processes of convergence and mixing (Welsch 27). I argue that there is much to gain from also considering how figurative boundaries and border experiences affect these "contact zones" as well as their diverse social constellations and processes of transculturation. Figurative boundaries can create different connections (or divisions) that run counter to the more visible political or territorial demarcations and power differentials. These new connections can also have an impact on existing boundaries. In order to account for such effects, I propose adapting the concept of "border poetics."

[5] Pratt's concept has inspired many other scholars to look at borders as expanded sites of interaction. With regard to literary and cultural works, the creation of new constellations across boundaries is, for example, discussed through the concept of "sites of exchange" (Ascari and Corrado) or the idea of a "World Republic of Letters" (Casanova).

In this study, I define border poetics as a literary and cultural practice that puts historically and geopolitically specific boundaries in relation with more universal and figurative border experiences, such as those of gender, ethnicity, or class, as well as ontological and epistemological boundaries. I ascribe this practice to narratives (understood broadly) that use "real" borderlands as staging grounds for symbolic border crossings to represent fundamentally human experiences, e.g., the border between life and death or dream and reality. As border poetics rests on the same productive tension between the particular and the universal that also drives contemporary notions of cosmopolitanism, I argue for viewing border poetics as an idiom of the cosmopolitan imagination. The term "border poetics" itself is not new. It has been casually deployed in scholarly articles and in book or project titles to refer broadly to aesthetic representations of fluid or porous boundaries. A first comprehensive theoretical reflection on the concept was put forth by the *Border Poetics/Border Culture Research Group* headed by Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, these scholars define border poetics primarily as a tool of analysis that is used to examine multiple and overlapping real and figurative border crossings (Schimanski and Wolfe 10). While I share in many of the research group's questions and considerations and their conceptualization of borders, I propose viewing border poetics as a narrative and cultural *practice* that significantly shapes the perception and construction of borders.[6]

The significance of border poetics can be measured against the revival of discussions on literal and figurative borders, both in Europe as well as in North America. Border poetics examines the contradictions between the dream of a borderless world in which people, things,

[6] Chapter 2 is devoted to a detailed exploration of the theoretical framework of border poetics, which draws on concepts from border studies, cosmopolitanism, and world literature.

and ideas move about freely and the reality of a highly compartmentalized world in which physical and ideological borders restrict free movement through violent acts, surveillance, and uneven access to resources. This inequality and highly contentious and complex border constellations have resulted in the desire for new social models. Through border poetics, authors, artists, and activists propose such alternatives and simultaneously explore their limits and opportunities.

Border poetics narratives articulate and draw attention to the contradictions of borders, but they also seek to place the particular in a more universal context. By reframing the particular in this way, they also (at least potentially) convey a sense of shared humanity and evoke feelings of solidarity and interconnectedness. In some narratives this connection of the particular with the universal even follows an explicitly political and activist agenda, which is especially evident in the performances examined in Chapter 5. A better understanding of the practice of border poetics can therefore shed additional light on the human dimension of borders, as sources of both of an aesthetic and a social imagination. The border narratives I examine draw attention to the interconnectedness of the world across variously defined boundaries. Being more aware of how actual, physical spaces and the borderlands of the imagination relate to one another can give us a better sense of the interplay of the historical and political borders that regulate human movement, on the one hand, and the figurative boundaries that structure human experience, on the other hand.

Sources and Approaches

This dissertation contributes to the ongoing expansion of the purview of German Studies by following a transnational and transcultural approach that regards "German culture" as a plural and flexible concept. The study is composed of three main building blocks: first, the historical,

social, and cultural context within which the practice of border poetics emerges in the German-Polish case; second, the theoretical framing of border poetics, which is informed by insights from the fields of border studies, cosmopolitanism, and world literary studies; and third, the analysis of select literary and other texts that pays attention to how border poetics is actually practiced. In this last section, I examine instances of border poetics that are convincing articulations of a cosmopolitan imagination but I also point to some of the pitfalls and limitations of these border narratives.

The first two building blocks require a targeted selection of topics and questions from very diverse fields of inquiry. First, I offer a brief overview of Polish-German literary relations and describe the entangled histories and influences in which they are embedded. Next, I frame border poetics as a narrative and cultural practice that is based on an understanding of borders as fluid and porous; a contemporary view of cosmopolitanism as a critical stance towards the universal and the particular;[7] and an approach to the imagination as a mode of world-making. In establishing an open theoretical frame that links borders, cosmopolitanism, and world literature, I strive to articulate questions and issues that connect these three diverse fields. This triangulation is in dialogue with previous scholarship that has explored some of these connections. These include for example the relationship between world literature and borders (Aamir Mufti); the link between cosmopolitanism and borders (Chris Rumford); and the connection between world literature and cosmopolitanism (Pheng Cheah, César Domínguez, B. Venkat Mani). Developing the concept of border poetics is a way of connecting all three fields to gain new insights into how literary and other narratives operate across differently constructed boundaries.

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[7] As explained in more detail in the next chapters, I am referring to the contemporary scholarly understanding of cosmopolitanism, especially as it is shaped by discussions in the North-American academy.

The analysis of literary, as well as some non-literary texts, is the third building block. The texts I have selected display an acute sense of the complex and fluid border constellations outlined in the first two chapters, and they all address constellations of literal and figurative boundaries. I selected and grouped texts based on their shared themes or narrative strategies, rather than the "home" of their authors or the language in which they were first published. Thus, I speak of German- or Polish-language texts, referring to the language in which they were first written. I examine texts in both languages alongside each other, and at times the discussion also draws on the official translations.

In considering the narratives together, I privilege a comparative approach. Comparison must be an open and flexible method, as called for by Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman in the introduction to their edited volume *Comparison* (2013). Felski and Friedman emphasize that objects of comparison are always subject to change over time, and this changeability is central to my study. This flexibility applies not only to the objects, but also the "grounds for comparison" (Melas). As is encapsulated in the epigraph above, the literal and the figurative grounds themselves are subject to change: it makes a difference whether figurative grass has grown over this ground or not, whether an observer is standing alertly and ready to take flight, or whether someone lies in the grass, relaxed and staring at the clouds. Changes in these conditions have an impact on what and how we compare. Thus, both the objects and the grounds of comparison must be regarded as fluid and flexible, and the following five chapters encapsulate this flexibility in different ways. In order to appreciate the complex and changing constellations, I apply close reading as well as context-based analysis.

Another fluid border is important for my analysis, and that is the border between fiction and non-fiction. While the majority of my sources are literary, and therefore "fiction," I have

also included creative non-fiction or hybrid texts. For example, traditionally non-fictional genres play a particular role with regard to performances of border poetics, and they include guidebooks, brochures, and organizational websites. However, these sources are unique in that they are also infused with a fair amount of "fiction." They relate not only to empirically given worlds, but they also imagine and present a variety of spaces as real that project a desire of more inclusive communities.

With regard to the temporal frame, this study is based on the premise that 1945 and 1989 present two major caesuras in the German-Polish relationship. Both years radically changed the nature of the actual political border between Poland and Germany, and they also had an impact on the literary and cultural imagination of this border and its history. As the next two chapters explain, these two years can serve as temporal markers in the development of border poetics, but the major impetus for the practice comes with the gradual decline of communism and the end of the Cold War in 1989. Accordingly, all narratives I examine here through the lens of a Polish-German border poetics were written and published after 1989, with the exception of Günter Grass's *Tin Drum* (1959), which I read as an early expression of border poetics.

As an idiom of the cosmopolitan imagination, border poetics differs from other, more one-sided or even divisive ways of engaging with borders. With the help of select texts and projects, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 illustrate, complicate, and expand the theoretical framework proposed in the second chapter. Because border poetics can be evident on various levels and in many different kinds of expression, the last three chapters are each devoted to one possible articulation of border poetics, namely "story" (*what* is narrated), "discourse" (*how* the story is narrated), and "performance" (the *enactment* of border poetics in the public sphere). This organization follows the premise that "[e]very narrative […] is a structure with a content plane

(called ‘story’) and an expression plane (called ‘discourse’)” (Chatman 146). The chapter on performance provides insights into how narratives unfold in lived reality—and how border poetics yields particular kinds of performances and experimentation.

German-Polish Literary and Cultural Relations

Current scholarship on literary and cultural relations between Germany and Poland increasingly focuses on the intertwined relations and multinodal networks that connect variously defined “German” and “Polish” cultures. The purpose of the following pages is to provide a broad overview of the field of German-Polish studies and some of the trends, methods, and foci that dominate the field today. Some of the mentioned scholarship applies only very broadly to the thematic focus of this dissertation, but by giving a general overview of the field, I also want to draw attention to the collaborative nature of knowledge production. The many joint projects, academic exchanges, international conferences, bilingual publications, etc., are an indicator that the Polish-German border today is also an academic contact zone with many opportunities for exchange and critical dialogue. Because I engage with border studies, world literature, and cosmopolitanism, my dissertation presents a novel intervention in this dialogue, and it seeks to further expand the purview of this field.

The study of German-Polish relations is not new, but linguistic, political, and ideological constraints have long hindered a transnational approach and impeded the open and flexible kind of comparison mentioned earlier. This approach has only been able to come to its full realization since the end of the Cold War, and collaboration and openness are indeed characteristic of much of the scholarship today. In the postwar period, academics and researchers tended to stay mainly on one side of the border, and cross-border examinations of shared questions and concerns were the exception. National spaces and identities served as the main interpretive frameworks, and

either the Polish or the German perspective dominated. Even in comparative studies, Polish and German spaces were constructed as separate and principally different. While such studies may still exist today, Friederike Eigler demonstrates in a review of some exemplary joint projects that since the 1990s, scholars have begun to dismantle such binary views, and they have focused more on connections rather than divisions in the German-Polish relationship ("Introduction" 3-11).

Historians have been especially active in examining these cross-border relations and in many ways have hastened the development of more transnational approaches. Many of these studies are of great relevance to the scholar of literature and culture, not only because they illuminate the intertwined nature of histories and cultures but also because questions of memory, cultural identity, and narrative cut across disciplinary boundaries. These boundaries have also become more porous when it comes to methods and approaches, as is, for example, encapsulated in the shift from studying nations as contained units to considering their "entangled history" (Werner and Zimmermann). This view resonates in literary scholar Annette Werberger's call for writing literary history as an entangled history as well, and she points out that the study of world literature provides important impulses for this reorientation (125–127). In this context, transculturation functions as a major creative force, and this entangled view of cultures and (literary) histories is crucial for border poetics (and the study thereof).

Whether the focus is on transculturation, transnational relations, or comparison, scholarship in Europe and in North America illustrates the general departure from using a single nation, or the national in general, as the primary frame of reference. Instead, many newer studies take a transnational comparative approach, and they also benefit from transdisciplinary perspectives. In many instances, historical analysis and literary history come together to produce

more comprehensive and multidimensional studies. Close readings and textual analysis, however, still remain mostly in the purview of literary studies.

Given this expanse of the field, most publications in German-Polish literary relations are multi-authored works. Collaborative approaches provide the opportunity to integrate multiple perspectives and cover a wider range of topics and time-periods. Consequently, many of the most important publications in the field are edited collections, such as the transnational and interdisciplinary volume *Erlebte Nachbarschaft: Aspekte der deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (1999), edited by cultural historian Jan-Pieter Barbian and literary scholar Marek Zybura. The diverse contributions come from Polish and German literary and cultural studies scholars, historians, and political scientists, as well as a musicologist, an art historian, a publicist, and a journalist. And while Poland is the point of departure in *Verflochtene Erinnerungen: Polen und seine Nachbarn im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (2009), edited by German and Polish historians Martin Aust, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, and Stefan Troebst, the contributions are evidence of a decidedly transnational approach that focuses on the "entangled" nature of memory.

Technological advances, especially the internet, have also made new kinds of collaborative projects possible. Due to the flexibility of the medium, content can be made public in stages, and it can be expanded and modified more quickly than in traditional media. Online encyclopedia projects have been particularly successful, and they allow for a collection of material on a vast array of topics from multiple perspectives, and with cross-references between entries. One excellent example of such a dynamic model of scholarly collaboration is the *Online Lexikon zur Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa* (*OME-Lexikon*), a joint project that began in 2011 and is hosted by the Institut für Germanistik at the Carl von Ossietzky

Universität Oldenburg and the Bundesinstitut für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa. The online encyclopedia currently features entries by 186 authors, predominantly from German institutions, but a sizeable number of other European countries are also represented. Broader in scope and containing many articles on German-Polish relations is *EGO – Europäische Geschichte Online*. The online project describes as its aim the writing of a "transcultural history of Europe on the Internet" ("EGO"). Although both websites offer information on cultural history, and even though the *OME-Lexikon* is hosted by a German Studies department, there is still a lack of articles on literary history and individual entries on specific literary works and authors.

For the time being, there is no comparable online source for European literatures or German-Polish literary relations. Here one must turn to traditional publications, most prominently the four edited volumes of the monumental English-language *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, which was published between 2004 and 2007, and which itself is part of the series *Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages*. The volumes examine East-Central European literature over the last two hundred years, focusing not on national literary traditions but rather on "junctures and disjunctures" regarding shared themes that cut across national lines. The contributions are not dictated by national frameworks, but rather by significant political events, literary periods and genres, cities and regions, literary institutions, and real and imaginary figures. While Werberger remarks that many contributions are "summative," she also notes that others are evidence of an "entangled" perspective (50), thus giving a good sense of how an entangled literary history can be written. The volumes also show

that any comprehensive and balanced approach relies on collaboration and exchange between scholars.

These kinds of collaborative and transnational approaches have been crucial in pushing the development of a shared Polish and German literary history. Scholarship that considers German and Polish literatures alongside one another has enjoyed an upsurge recently, and it too is evident predominantly in edited collections. Carsten Gansel at the University of Gießen and Monika Wolting at the University of Wrocław are model examples of this process, and they have collaborated on multiple conferences and edited collections, including *Zwischen Erinnerung und Fremdheit: Entwicklungen in der deutschen und polnischen Literatur nach 1989* (2015, coedited with Markus Joch) and *Deutschland- und Polenbilder in der Literatur nach 1989* (2015). Both volumes differ in focus, but their aim is a transnational approach to individual texts and literary history and they offer a wide range of perspectives and methods. The year 1989 is used as a starting point, and, looking both backward and forward from that moment, these volumes show how Germans and Poles have opened up towards one another since the end of the Cold War.

The first of the two mentioned publications explores the question whether the political turning point of 1989 is also a turning point for literature in Germany and Poland, especially when considering issues of remembering and forgetting and the engagement with the Other. Continuing this examination of the changes in Polish-German relations, *Deutschland- und Polenbilder in der Literatur nach 1989* asks how literature, theater, film, and other cultural representations reflect on and participate in revising established images of Self and Other. The contributors argue that literature serves as an archive of stereotypes, but it also plays an important role in their transformation. The studies focus on how texts represent, circulate, and deconstruct established narratives and map new in-between spaces.

Izabela Drozdowska-Broering's *Topographien der Begegnung: Untersuchungen zur jüngeren deutschen und polnischen Prosa der Grenzräume nach 1989* (2014) is an excellent example of a monograph that applies a more entangled approach to literary history. The book examines the German-Polish borderland (understood politically and culturally) as an in-between zone in which Self and Other are negotiated to create a transnational community. Conceptually, Drozdowska-Broering's study is structured around the philosophical and sociological notion of dialogue. She focuses especially on the role of memory, and she examines how notions of the homeland have changed in literature after 1989. Her concern is primarily with actual borderlands and their literary representation, and she examines whether these borderlands have become sites of transnational dialogue.

Entanglements are also central to Randall Halle's *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic* (2008) and *The Europeanization of Cinema: Interzones and Imaginative Communities* (2014). Both focus on transnational cinematic relations, and they also include discussions of German-Polish examples. I will return to Halle's work in Chapter 2, but especially his 2014 publication is relevant here for its theoretical reflections. Although a study of cinema, Halle's concept of the "interzone" as a "connecting zone" with its own "geopolitical relations" (*Europeanization* 4) resonates in part with how I conceptualize the borderland in this study, and Halle's reflections and critical vocabulary provide impulses for the examination of German-Polish border narratives in general, and border poetics in particular.

Jürgen Joachimsthaler's three-volume *Text-Ränder: Die kulturelle Vielfalt Ostmitteleuropas als Darstellungsproblem deutscher Literatur* (2011) is an example of a single-author study in the field of literary studies that has a large geographic scope and puts forth a decidedly open comparative approach. As the title already indicates, Joachimsthaler plays with

the idea of “margins” (Ränder) as the margins of a text, but he also shows how the shifting geographic margins (or borders) within east-central Europe have impacted German writing. Joachimsthaler diligently examines many connections and entanglements between German and other central European literatures, including Poland. He pays attention to literature as a unique cultural expression, and he includes close readings and textual analyses that explain how these connections are expressed on the textual level. Here, too, literary history is told as an entangled history, and the literary narratives bear the inscriptions of these entanglements.

Major Themes: Home, Memory, Identity, and Stereotypes

In this study, I propose that border poetics is a narrative and cultural practice that critically examines established borders and proposes alternative ways of conceptualizing and representing the experiences they generate. As such, border poetics is also an intellectual exercise in which theory and practice are deeply entwined. There are many parallels between the intellectual work and critique that is performed in narratives and cultural projects and the scholarship discussed here. This is not to say that literature is a reflection of theory, but rather that both literature and theory are concerned with similar phenomena and interrogate them, albeit in different languages. Among the themes that play an especially important role in both are conceptions of entangled histories and cross-border exchanges, as described above, as well as notions of home and memory, conceptualizations of Self and Other, and the significance of the particular experience within a wider European or global context.

Many of the literary texts and projects mentioned in this study approach notions of “home” and memory in differentiated ways, and they view them as informed but not contained by national categories. The home can be regarded as the ground upon which one stands, as described in the epigraph. At the same time, it can also be the place of loss and of longing, a

place that is revisited in memory. There are two notions of "home" in the German and the Polish context that emphasize regional and local connections over national affiliation, yet also stand in a complicated relationship with the national. "Małe ojczyzne" ("small fatherlands") and "Heimat," respectively, are both coupled with a sense of loss, especially when seen in their twentieth century context. At the same time, however, scholarship shows how contemporary authors have endowed these notions with new, more transnational meanings, especially in the decades after 1989.

In *Heimat, Space, Narrative: Toward a Transnational Approach to Flight and Expulsion* (2014), Friederike Eigler examines this transformation of the notion of Heimat and its transnationalization since the end of the Cold War. As she explains, the concept initially emerged in the 1800s and signified the "[contemplation of] the uprootedness of the modern individual" and a "loss of metaphysical rootedness" (2). In the late nineteenth century, Heimat became enmeshed with a growing national consciousness, which paved the way for its instrumentalization by National Socialists "for the ideology of racial purity and territorial expansion" (2). After the Second World War, expellee organizations used the idea of a "lost Heimat in the East" to propagate their revisionist worldview, which was based on a desire to return east and to regain a lost homeland (3).[8] This ideological charge played a significant role in

[8] Andrew Demshuk's study *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945-1970* reassess this uniform view and shows that unlike the leaders of expellee organizations, expellees themselves quickly gave up on a desire to return east and came to terms with the new political reality. In *Heimat, Space, Narrative* (2014), Friederike Eigler engages with Demshuk's findings and argues that "similar considerations of multiple voices and shifting perspectives" are still lacking in the study of expulsion literature (3-5, here 4). In the meantime, such a more nuanced view can be found in Karina Berger's 2015 study *Heimat, Loss and Identity*, which examines the centrality of the notion of Heimat in "expulsion literature" since the 1950s. Berger shows that not all such literature was necessarily revisionist, and her analysis focuses on the "aesthetic and perspectival shifts" as well as the "changing portrayal of flight and expulsion" from the 1950s to the present (17).

the postwar construction of the German-Polish border as a dividing line. In the decades since 1989, as Eigler shows through insightful analyses of multiple literary examples, the increasing awareness of entangled histories has led to a less territorial and more "virtual" understanding of Heimat that is viewed within a larger transnational European context.

In the Polish case, a similar transnationalization of the homeland can be observed in the idea of "małe ojczyzny" (literally: "small fatherlands") and its literary expressions. This so-called "Literature of the small fatherlands" focuses on regional and local identities and de-emphasizes the national as a frame of reference. One iteration of this literature looks to the "kresy," Poland's former Eastern territories (now in Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine), and it celebrates the cultural and linguistic diversity of these regions. According to Ewa Wampuszyc "*małe ojczyzny* literature is seen as constituting a literary return to the local or regional that cathartically resuscitates memory disrupted by historical trauma." However, she views this notion critically and argues further that "*małe ojczyzny* literature promotes a poetics of nostalgia and return, possibly a reflection of the Poles' own postimperial neurosis" (368).

The different iterations of home or homeland are closely tied to notions of memory. As Astrid Erll summarizes in her introductory history to the field of memory studies, Maurice Halbwachs and Aby Warburg first introduced the study of cultural memory in the 1920s, but it initially received only little attention. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the study of cultural memory gained prominence, owing largely to Pierre Nora's examination of "lieux de mémoire" (sites of memory) in connection with French collective identity (Erll 13–23). Hagen Schulze and Étienne François took up the focus on the spatial dimensions of memory, but they objected to Nora's application of the concept to a closed French space. In their 2001 publication *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, the scholars therefore expanded the notion and opened it up to more

broadly European influences (Erll 26). Schulze and François's work is crucial for considering the transnational networks that create sites of memory a well as the changing and fluid functions of collective memory. These concerns have also impacted scholarship on German and Polish memory.

A large-scale project focused on German-Polish memory as an entangled and relational concept is the five-volume *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*, edited mainly by Hans Henning Hahn and Robert Traba. It was published simultaneously as a German and a Polish language edition, and it contains essays by Polish and German scholars. As the editors explain in the introduction to the first volume (published after volumes 2 and 3), the term "sites of memory" pertains to real and imagined phenomena alike (20), and the contributions examine how these sites create an "entangled history" between Germany and Poland. An important reference point here is historian Klaus Zernack, who emphasized the importance of writing a "relational history" ("Beziehungsgeschichte") already in the 1970s, and whose work is foundational for the history of German-Polish relations. While *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte* refers explicitly to Nora's notion of "lieux de mémoire" as well as François and Schulze's work on German sites of memory, its declared aim is to go beyond national frameworks and to view memory as both dynamic and situated (Hahn and Traba 18-19). This approach is not a dismissal of national identity, but its integration with subnational and non-national forms of belonging that can be defined for example in religious, ethnic, local, social, or ideological terms (21).

The contributions to the volumes consider these subnational identities within the context of a German-Polish "Beziehungsgeschichte" and interrogate their capacity as transborder sites of memory ("grenzüberschreitende Erinnerungsorte") (21). Because European sites of memory are often shared in one way or another, they are also subject to contested and changing meanings,

and they can simultaneously fulfill different functions for different collectives. The first three volumes are conceptualized following the premise that in the Polish-German context, sites of memory can be categorized as "parallel," "divided," and "shared" ("parallel," "geteilt," "gemeinsam"), and hence the individual contributions consider both divergences and convergences in German-Polish memory.

Another important area in German-Polish studies is imagology, the critical study of images and stereotypes. The field examines how narratives about the Other are constructed and disseminated through national stereotypes, but also how these may be deconstructed or undermined. Imagology is most fruitful when it uses comparative methods combined with other approaches, e.g., historical analysis or narratology. For example, a special issue of *Seminar* is devoted to "Images of Poland in Postwar German Literature," and it illustrates how images of Self and Other operate in a dynamic relationship. In their introduction, the co-editors Petra Fachinger and Werner Nell argue that representations of Polish people in German literature are influenced by "century-old" stereotypes, on the one hand, and "recent political developments," namely the end of the Cold War, on the other hand (189).

Images and stereotypes based on the oppositional construction of East and West are a frequent concern in imagology. This opposition and the othering of the East have existed at least since the eighteenth century, as historian Larry Wolff has famously argued in *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994). According to Wolff, "[...] it was the intellectual work of the Enlightenment to bring about that modern reorientation of the continent, which produced Western Europe and Eastern Europe." In the course of this reorientation, he continues, the lands of "barbarism and backwardness" shifted from northern Europe to the East (5). While such stereotypes have certainly subsided in Germany today, Polish and German identities and border spaces are still

frequently articulated in similarly oppositional terms. East and West continue to serve as shorthand for a plethora of preconceived notions that mark difference. As Fachinger and Nell have shown, old notions of a backward and disorganized Poland persist, for example, in the idea of a "polnische Wirtschaft" (literally meaning "Polish management" or "economy"). This stereotype includes a broad range of purported Polish incompetencies and a general sense of backwardness that have been examined by Hubert Orłowski (191). In his 1996 monograph *"Polnische Wirtschaft": zum deutschen Polendiskurs der Neuzeit*, Orłowski shows the insidious nature of this cliché throughout the ages. Its effects are also evident in some of the novels I discuss later.

Polish stereotypes of Germans, on the other hand, tend to use militarism as a reference point, calling upon images of the Teutonic Knights or Prussia (H. A. Winkler 67) as well as Germany's National Socialist past. Imagology generally also examines the transformation of stereotypes throughout history. Since the Cold War, many established stereotypes have changed significantly, and there are many instances in which they have been undermined or deconstructed, as Gansel and Wolting's work also makes clear. At the same time, notions of difference still figure prominently on German and Polish mental maps, on which old stereotypes are easily reactivated and new stereotypes are created.

Stereotypes also play an important role in scholarship that employs a postcolonial or postdependence framework. Todd Kontje's *German Orientalisms* (2004) and Kristin Kopp's *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (2012) are evidence of the transnational reorientation of German studies through an examination of Germany's relationship with an eastern Other. Kontje assesses the emergence of the German variant of Orientalism constructed in German-language literature from the Middle Ages to the contemporary period. He

traces it to various concepts of "the East" and shows that Poland, as Germany's "nearest East," was a significant part of this Orientalist discourse. Kopp examines how Germans constructed Poland as a colonial space and analyzes works such as Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben* (1855), Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1895), and Fritz Lang's film *Die Nibelungen* (1924) from the perspective of a postcolonial critique. She argues that the discursive colonialism expressed through literature, film, or map-making reflected and facilitated the actual colonization of Poland by Germans. Kontje and Kopp both examine from a postcolonial perspective different aspects of the German-Polish relationship. Yet, while both provide excellent explorations of German entanglements with the East, the focus is mainly on German perspectives and not on how Polish narratives dynamically responded to or resisted this othering or engaged in their own forms of othering.

The postcolonial discourse has had great resonance in a variety of geographical and social contexts that have gone well beyond the original purview of postcolonial studies. In recent years important discussions focusing on the applicability of postcolonial discourse to Eastern Europe and especially the Polish context have also taken place within the Polish academy. Opinions on this question vary greatly, ranging from an enthusiastic adoption of the concept to its cautious rejection. Some of those who practice a more critical distance have come together in the Post-Dependence Studies Centre, a research network with its seat at the University of Warsaw. It was established in 2009, and its aim is to develop a theoretical language that reflects Poland's situation between center and periphery without necessarily resorting to the concept of postcolonialism.

A special issue of the journal *Teksty Drugie* explores the applicability and usefulness of postcolonialism and post-dependence approaches in the Polish context. Here, Dorota

Kołodziejczyk describes "post-colonialism as a theory of a great, but still barely utilized, comparative potential." For her, it is a framework that is "not necessary to define the position and role of particular countries of Central-and-Eastern Europe with regards to the former empires or Western Europe […]." She does not dismiss postcolonialism, but she maintains that "the reflection over the condition of Central-and-Eastern Europe, i.e. the post-dependence condition" will be able to infuse postcolonial studies with the needed comparative perspective ("Post-Colonial" 125). Kołodziejczyk also views the post-dependence framework as suitable to establish an "independent research category" that is in conversation with postcolonial studies rather than an addendum to a theory "created somewhere, in the metropolis." As a theory it can "[enter] into the comparative, intersubjective area of translation as open, multi-directional space for a dialogue with post-colonial studies." (142).

In the same journal issue, Aleksander Fiut sees the benefits of adopting postcolonial theory to the Polish situation, but he also cautions against "replicating, [...] the worn out and exhausted image of Poland as martyr, unjustly persecuted and always crushed under the invader's heavy boot" (37). This warning resonates with Kołodziejczyk's assessment that the discourse of postcolonialism is frequently applied to "magically repair damages of history by means of describing a given territory as colonial," and she expresses doubts about using a new language to rehash "old debates" as it all too often "helps intensify national historicism of a vividly conservative ideological program" ("Post-Colonial" 139). Indeed, while postcolonialism is an important scholarly concept to critique power relations in situations of dominance, occupation, and subjugation, it has in some political and popular discourses become instrumentalized to advance an anti-German and anti-EU agenda through charges of neocolonialism ("Warnung").

This study is not the space to explore the advantages and shortcomings of postcolonialist vis-à-vis post-dependence frameworks in their application to the Polish-German relationship. In this study, I address issues discussed within both frameworks (e.g., marginalization and exclusion) and draw on the richness of concepts that derive from postcolonial discourse (e.g., hybridity and mimicry). My main focus, however, is on how otherness is deconstructed in order to practice a cosmopolitan imagination.

Chapter Descriptions

The following five chapters focus on the context, theory, and the application of border poetics. Chapter 1 offers an overview of literature and culture as a "contact zone" (Pratt) in the history of German-Polish relations. Taking a *longue durée* approach, the chapter considers both the divergences and convergences in the "thousand years" of shared history, and it brings into focus the broader historical context from which border poetics emerges and with which it continues to engage.

Chapter 2 describes the phenomenon of border poetics in theoretical terms. Border poetics is a practice that critiques borders in their various incarnations. Relevant theories come from the fields of border studies, cosmopolitanism, and world literature. I build connections between these fields by focusing on the literary imagination and its potential to inspire new forms of belonging, resistance, and social change. This contributes to discussions in border studies that, until recently, have marginalized questions of cosmopolitanism and that tend to pay little attention to literature and culture. To date, scholars have studied cosmopolitanism in literature, but these discussions typically do not reflect on the role of borders and borderlands as triggers for this literary cosmopolitanism. With few exceptions, cosmopolitanism and world

literature are also debated in separate contexts. My study intervenes in these diverse debates by drawing important connections among them.

The remaining chapters ask how border poetics is evident in literary and cultural texts. Here I engage with and expand the theoretical framework, and I examine how border poetics is articulated on the levels of story, discourse, and as performance. Chapter 3 focuses on story, and it is dedicated to fictions of memory that interrogate the unstable border between historical fact and subjective remembering. I argue that fictions of memory and border poetics form a symbiosis in which historically formed and particular borders as well as metaphorical borders (e.g., questions of remembering and forgetting) are articulated. In this chapter, I discuss three novels: Inga Iwasiów's *Bambino* (2008), Sabrina Janesch's *Katzenberge* (2010), and Tanja Dückers's *Himmelskörper* (2003). Chapter 4 looks at discourses of border poetics and places focalization, narrative voice, and narrative perspective at the center of the analysis. As border poetics is concerned with decentering established narratives, polyvocality and multiperspectivity are crucial narrative strategies. These feature prominently in the fantastic and magical realist modes that produce "defocalized" narratives. The chapter offers readings of Günter Grass's *Blechtrommel* (1959), Sabrina Janesch's *Ambra* (2012), and Olga Tokarczuk's *House of Day, House of Night* (1998). Chapter 5 argues that the practice of border poetics is not only evident in narrative texts but also in other forms of social and artistic expression that are *performed* in social spaces. In particular, I focus on enactments of border poetics in projects that occupy a space between art and community activism. I show how projects like "Słubfurt" and "Nowa Amerika" imaginatively merge disparate (German and Polish) spaces into one shared space.

This dissertation draws attention to the fluidity and hybridity of identities and to the interstitial spaces that have defied nationalizing processes. At the same time, it stresses that the

idea of the nation still has a considerable hold over individuals and communities. Therefore, the literary and cultural texts under analysis operate in a tension between the binary construction of belonging and identity and the notion that these concepts must be regarded as inherently mobile, transitional, and continuously generated through contact with external and internal Others. The concept of border poetics articulates this tension and thereby fosters transborder conversations. Such conversations are an important counterbalance to the often strident rhetoric in German-Polish relations and between nation-states in Europe more generally. They ask us to think through the meaning and options of a cosmopolitan Europe.

Chapter 1

Knotted Histories – Tied-Up Memories

People are like knots: nobody knows
what gets caught up inside and whether they can be untangled.
Whoever thinks that this is material for myths or sagas is mistaken.
Knots are knots. Nothing less, nothing more. Knots.

(Inga Iwaśiów, *Bambino* 66)

Individuals can feel tied to more than one group or cause, and they can have a variety of simultaneous attachments. According to the narrator in *Bambino*, a novel by Polish author Inga Iwasiów, such multiple and overlapping belongings are quite unremarkable.[1] They lead to entanglements within individuals as well as between them, and they wield their effects on many different aspects of life. Iwasiów explores these metaphorical knots, and she shows that even though they may be too ordinary for sagas or myths, they nevertheless shape the social environment and impact all forms of human interaction and aesthetic expression. These knots exemplify multiply entwined contact zones, and they function as metaphors for a broad range of variously conceived entanglements. They are indeed completely unremarkable, but in this way also universal: they can be regarded as trivial and banal because they apply, in one way or another, to every human being.

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of Polish-German literary and cultural entanglements, which often stand in relation to historical events and political developments. The chapter focuses on those aspects that can help better situate the practice of border poetics and

[1] For a more detailed description and analysis of the novel, see Chapter 3.

explain its gradual emergence from specific historical and social constellations. These constellations are often contradictory, and they include German-Polish reconciliation as well as persistent mistrust, disagreement, and conflict; a rise of global culture and the simultaneous reorientations towards the local and the regional; and a concern for building a stronger European Union alongside the strong national interests and anxieties of its member states. While these contradictions are not new, they are often ignored in one-sided narratives. As a narrative and cultural practice, border poetics strives to articulate these knotted histories.

Germany's invasion of Poland and the events and aftermath of the Second World War have defined German-Polish interactions in the postwar period, and they have also left distinctive traces in the literary and cultural works of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Even though the conditions for border poetics began to emerge with the first steps toward German-Polish reconciliation in the postwar period, the practice became more prominent after 1989. In this context, border poetics can be seen as a desire among certain artists, activists, and intellectuals to find less divisive narratives. These narratives draw on national, regional, local, and personal history as archives of particular experiences, but they also connect these histories across national borders by pointing to their underlying universally human experiences.

From the 1990s until recently, the relationship between Poland and Germany was widely hailed as a model for European cooperation and reconciliation. In this official narrative, both nations appear to have overcome their difficult histories in their journey toward an equal partnership. France had long been considered West Germany's closest partner within the EU in the postwar period. Yet, in light of the good relations between Poland and Germany, some political observers had proclaimed Poland to be the new France, and they predicted that the future of the European Union would be decided in Berlin and Warsaw (Gebert and Guérot). In

hindsight, it appears that such predictions may have been overly optimistic. Despite official and enthusiastic pronouncements of friendship, differences and tensions seem to grow stronger again. Many frictions that had seemed a thing of the past have resurfaced, especially since Poland's 2015 election of a government that makes no secret of its Euro-skepticism and its anti-German sentiments. It appears now that the hopefulness of the early 2000s had glossed over the continued presence of stereotypes and historical trauma, and that many related misunderstandings and tensions have not disappeared.

Already in 1994, German journalist Klaus Bachmann criticized this idealization of the German-Polish relationship in the newspaper *taz* when he argued that the official displays of friendship were superficial and therefore mere "reconciliation kitsch." For him, true reconciliation requires a better informed public and a more honest and open dialogue among people, not hollow gestures ("hohle Gesten") by politicians. Similarly, albeit in a different context, Berthold Schoene has criticized some narratives for their failure to use difference productively and producing mere "cosmo-kitsch."[2] Some of the novels and projects included here are evidence of such instances of "kitschiness" with regard to borders and borderlands. They can be said to display only a very limited border poetics or not practice border poetics at

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[2] Schoene examines the "cosmopolitan British novel," and he differentiates between the "clumsiest, least convincing yet also most popular" version of this "new cosmopolitanism," on the one hand, and its positive rendition and successful implementation, on the other hand. The former "consigns our fractured, closely interconnected life-world to the same hierarchies that have governed peoples' lives for centuries while paying lip service to the world's potential as a global village in continual convivial flux" (105). Cosmo-kitsch novels are "self-congratulatory" and mainly there to alleviate feelings of "guilt"; it is "not cosmopolitan literature at all (106). While Schoene criticizes such superficial engagements, he also acknowledges that there exists a more positive and earnest cosmopolitanism that is not self-interested but has (self-)critical potential: Thus, "[a]t its best […] the new cosmopolitan novel deconstructs the extant hegemonies by engaging in a cosmopoetic recasting of our ever-increasingly globalised condition. […] [it] must rise to the challenge of imagining humanity in its planetary entirety" (105–06).

all. While border poetics may exist in aspiration, its execution is “clumsy,” to use Schoene’s expression (105), and it follows a well-intentioned, but often superficial political correctness.

Still, the narrative of successful reconciliation was pervasive because it fit into the postwar dream of a peaceful Europe in which national self-interests would eventually dissolve into a more European sense of belonging. With this idea as its guiding vision, the European Union has often presented itself as a post-national political entity that could help overcome historical divisions and thrive on cultural diversity. Recent political developments, such as the actual or looming political shifts to the right in several EU-member states, various financial crises, and the 2016 BREXIT referendum, have seriously challenged any EU-related optimism, and they have also affected relations between Poland and Germany. By the same token, such fluctuations in diplomatic relations have always existed. Instead of trying to encapsulate this entire history in the course of a few pages, it will help to contextualize border poetics by spotlighting certain moments that underline these vacillations.

1000 Years of German-Polish Relations

The shared German-Polish history encompasses over one thousand years, even though one cannot speak of a “Germany” and “Poland” in the modern sense for most of this period. Germanic and Slavic tribes have had contact with one another since the early Middle Ages: Germanic settlers were present in what is today Poland, and Slavs, in turn, left their mark on territories that later became part of Germany. In the Early Modern period, too, relations between Germans and Poles were not shaped by national identity but rather by the interests of the nobility. On the one hand, one can say that throughout their pre-national and national histories, German-Polish relations have always gone through periods of peaceful coexistence and fruitful

political, economic, and cultural exchange; on the other hand, there were periods of intense conflict over territory and influence that was motivated by racial and ethnic group thinking.

German historian Klaus Zernack divides the history of German-Polish relations into three major stages: two periods of "normalcy" between 1000–1701 and then again after 1989, interrupted by a phase of intense hostility against Poland between 1701 and 1989. And even though German Chancellor Willy Brandt's politics of rapprochement with the East ("Ostpolitik") brought about a warming of relations in the 1970s, Zernack contends that it was not until 1989–1991 that the long period of negative politics towards Poland ("*longue durée* von 'negativer Polenpolitik'") (90), which lasted almost 300 years, ended. Only the end of the Cold War and united Germany's official recognition of the postwar border between Germany and Poland made it possible for the two countries to finally come together in their shared interest in Europe (90).

However, Zernack also explains that the description of German-Polish relations as "normal" does not mean that these periods were or are free of tension. Rather, "normal" must be understood as a relative term, meaning that the German-Polish relationship oscillated "normally" between periods of conflict and periods of agreement, which was entirely in line with other European constellations at the time (94). Yet, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this relative "normalcy" was severely disrupted when systematic hostility against Poland set this relationship on a course that led towards catastrophe ("katastrophale Zuspitzung") (94). Perhaps surprisingly, given Europe's conflict-rich history and twentieth-century German aggression against other nations, Zernack regards this hostility as a great exception in the history of relations among European nations ("[der] groß[e] Sonderfall in der Geschichte europäischer Nationalbeziehungen") (94). Whether or not the German-Polish case is indeed unique, it is beyond any doubt that past German aggression and murderous violence against Poland have

shaped and continue to impact German-Polish relations today; and that periods of "normalcy" have also resulted in positive transborder exchanges and interactions.

From the early beginnings to 1945

In the reconciliatory EU-narrative, Poland and Germany figure as old neighbors whose relationship dates back over a millennium.[3] The year 1000 is typically named as the beginning of German-Polish diplomatic relations. As historian Patrice Dabrowski explains, it was the year in which Holy Roman Emperor Otto III set out on a pilgrimage to Gniezno, the "cradle" of Poland, to meet with Polish Duke Bolesław Chrobry, who later became the first king of Poland. On this pilgrimage the Emperor recognized Poland as a Christian land and the independence of its church, but he also declared it an ally of the Holy Roman Empire (16–17). Yet, this hopeful beginning was followed by centuries of forged and then broken alliances, threats from pagan tribes and the religious order of the Teutonic Knights, attacks from Mongols and Ottoman forces, multiple territorial shifts, and various periods of internal and external instability.

The crusading Teutonic Knights in particular would prove to have a lasting impact on Polish-German relations, one that lives on in the popular imagination today. Invited initially in the early thirteenth century by Polish prince Konrad of Mazovia to help fight Prussian expansionism, by the end of the century, the Teutonic Knights had gained control over these and other lands, leading Poles to lose their influence in the region (Dabrowski 26–29). The century-

[3] The trope of the "neighbor," which invokes a very intimate relationship, is often used in the titles of books, documentaries, and exhibitions, e.g., the 2011–2012 exhibition "Obok. Polska – Niemcy. 1000 lat historii w sztuce / Tür an Tür. Polen-Deutschland 1000 Jahre Kunst und Geschichte" at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin. In 2016, a three-part documentary series "Die Deutschen und die Polen. Geschichte einer Nachbarschaft" was completed as a collaborative production. According to the website of the public television station 3sat, this series provided a new approach: "Bar jeglicher Fokussierung auf Ideologie und festgefahrene Stereotype wagen die Filme einen gemeinsamen, frischen Blick auf die 1000-jährige Nachbarschaft" ["Without focusing on ideology or old stereotypes, the films dare to take a joint, fresh view of the 1000-year neighborhood"].

long conflict reached a climax in 1410, when Polish and Lithuanian forces fought and defeated the Teutonic Knights in the Battle of Grunwald. While this defeat did not result in the end of the Teutonic Order in Europe, and Poles gained little territory, it did bring Poles and Lithuanians closer together (62–68). Today, the Teutonic Knights still figure prominently as a German stereotype, and the Polish victory at the Battle of Grunwald is present in many pop-cultural references.[4]

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a union that existed formally from 1569 to 1795, experienced its "Golden Age" and greatest territorial expansion in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (Müller 27). However, several Polish-Swedish-Russian wars significantly weakened the powerful union, and its decline began in the mid-seventeenth century. One last major victory was won in 1683, when Polish forces of the Holy Alliance under King Jan III Sobieski defeated the Ottomans at the gates of Vienna. Many believed that King Sobieski had saved European Christendom, and this idea came to play a key role in Polish national mythology. Despite this victory against the Ottomans, precarious economic conditions and domestic conflicts led to the Commonwealth's steady decline (Müller 26).

It is at this historical juncture that Zernack sees the beginning of the turn towards a systematic attempt to undermine Poland. When Frederick III of Brandenburg crowned himself as

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[4] For example, during the Euro 2008 soccer championship, German and Polish media engaged in a battle of stereotypes. In its course, the Polish daily tabloid *Fakt* boasted the following cover image just a few days before Germany and Poland were to face one another in a match: We see a sword-wielding knight in medieval armor, his large red shield with the white Polish eagle resting on the ground before him. Kneeling next to him is a young man donning a white cape with a large black cross, the symbol of the Order of the Teutonic Knights. Just in case this alone does not suffice to identify the young man as "German," he is also wearing a "Pickelhaube," the iconic spiked Prussian helmet. In his hands he is holding a soccer ball. The viewer can only guess that he is about to lose his head, and indeed, the headline demands: "Leo, repeat Grunwald." The gentleman swinging his sword is Leo Beenhakkler, a Dutch trainer and then acting-coach of the Polish national soccer team. The "Teuton" is soccer star Michael Ballack from the German national team. For a copy of the image, see, for example, the archive of the newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* (*Leo*).

King Frederick I in Prussia in 1701, this marked the beginning of the Kingdom of Prussia and its rise to a major European power (Zernack 94–95). By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had lost all its influence and was caught up in Russian, Austrian, and Prussian power politics that aimed to keep the Commonwealth as weak as possible (Müller 27–28). Poland's elites fought against this fate, but after a major uprising against Russian oppression, the country was partitioned for the first time in 1772. The Commonwealth lost about one fourth of its territory to Prussia, Russia, and Austria. A Second Partition followed in 1793 when, inspired by the French Revolution, Poland sought to implement necessary state reforms, and these attempts—just like previous ones—were blocked from the outside. Following another uprising, the three powers responded with a Third Partition in 1795, which effectively erased Poland from the map for the next 123 years. Against all odds, the period of the three partitions, during which Poland fought desperately to win back its sovereignty, was also a period of important reforms in the financial, military, and educational sectors. For example, the Constitution of May 3, 1791, which established Poland as a constitutional monarchy with a parliament, was the first written constitution in Europe (Müller 31–32).

While Prussia benefitted immensely from the partitions of Poland, there were also many who sympathized with the Polish cause. In an essay on German-Polish literary relations, translator Karl Dedecius describes how the partitions and, ultimately, the loss of Polish sovereignty triggered protests and proclamations of solidarity among poets, philosophers, and other intellectuals throughout Prussia and the German states (*Deutsche* 21–31). Polish uprisings against the partition powers inspired German liberals, and their support of Polish independence was especially high after a major uprising in 1830/31. Poems, songs, and letters by prominent authors such as Graf von Platen, Ludwig Börne, Adalbert von Chamisso, Gustav Schwab,

Christian Friedrich Hebbel, and Georg Büchner are testaments to the sympathies for Polish self-determination. Polish refugees who passed through Saxony, Franconia, Hesse, and the Palatinate were met with cheers and expressions of solidarity (*Deutsche* 25–27). Berlin coffee houses and literary salons, frequented by eminent literary figures, such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, Christian Dietrich Grabbe, and Adalbert Chamisso, cultivated a "Polenfreundschaft"—a friendship with Poland or the Poles (*Deutsche* 41). As Gabriela Brudzyńska-Němec explains in her entry on "Polenbegeisterung" in the online encyclopedia *EGO*, the 1830 uprising in Warsaw was followed by a wave of enthusiasm for Poland (the so-called "Polenschwärmerei"), which was reflected in about one thousand Poland songs ("Polenlieder"). However, this enthusiasm for the Polish cause never translated into any political action on the behalf of Poland amongst German liberals, and it came to an end in 1848 (Brudzyńska-Němec).

According to historian Manfred Alexander, the 123 years during which Poland was absent from the map of Europe can be summarized as a period in which "the history of Poland was a history of Poles in Europe" (163). This history varied according to the conditions and developments particular to each partition, but it also meant that Polish migrants formed *Polonia* communities all over the world (163). As historian Włodzimierz Borodziej explains in his history of Poland in the twentieth century, three million Poles fought against one another in the First World War as members of the Prussian-German, Russian, or Austrian armies. There was also no political or other organization that could claim to represent the voice of the Polish people until the Polish National Committee was established in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1917. This exile government moved to Paris soon after its formation and was officially recognized by the Allied Powers. When US President Woodrow Wilson presented the Fourteen Points that outlined the conditions for peace, the reestablishment of the Polish state was included as Point 13 in the

program. As a result, after 123 years of absence from the political map of Europe, Poland reemerged as an independent state in November 1918 (*Geschichte* 87–93).

Only the war on the Western Front was over in 1918, and for Poland the fighting continued in a series of wars and armed conflicts until 1921. In the end, Poland's initial western border was largely determined by the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918 and 1919 (when Poland won back much of its core territory around Poznania from the tenth century) as well as the Treaty of Versailles (which granted Poland additional territories). Borodziej notes that Germany and Poland could only be enemies in this new European order: Posen and large parts of West Prussia became part of Poland, East Prussia was cut off from Germany to grant Poland access to the Baltic Sea, parts of East Prussia and Upper Silesia held plebiscites to determine the course of the border, and Danzig became a free city under the protection of the League of Nations (*Geschichte* 97–110, esp. 109–110). In essence, the state's new borders were still in flux, and territorial disputes continued with Germany, the Soviet Union, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic. From its very beginning, the young Polish Republic therefore suffered from external pressures and internal instability. Meanwhile, the Weimar Republic was unable to stabilize politically, and the strong opposition to the Treaty of Versailles and Germany's territorial losses caused outrage among Germans of all political convictions (H. A. Winkler 65–67). These border issues and the desire to regain lost territories, helped bring the National Socialists to power in 1933 and set the nation on a path to the next war.

The Second World War began with the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, with one of its immediate aims being to win back Danzig for Germany. By the end of the war on May 8, 1945, five to six million Polish citizens had lost their lives (Borodziej, "Zweite" 68), among them at least 3 million Jews (Dabrowski 418). Germans established ghettos in

occupied Poland, and they created death camps in which Jews from all over Europe were systematically exterminated. Non-Jewish Poles also suffered greatly under German occupation and Nazi racial policies. The Polish intelligentsia was eliminated, and mass shootings, slave labor, deportation, and other forms of violence terrorized and instilled a continuous fear in the Polish population. Shortly after Germany's attack, the Soviet Army invaded Poland from the east on September 17, 1939, thereby putting the country under a double occupation. Here too, members of the intelligentsia and the military were murdered or deported to forced labor camps further east (e.g., Siberia), and Sovietization policies were pushed through with brutal measures.

At the end of the war, the Allies redrew the borders of Germany and Poland. Poland's borders were shifted westward, which meant a loss of about half of its previous state territory (about 70,000 square miles) to the Soviet Union. As compensation, Poland received about 40,000 square miles of Germany's eastern territories (Borodziej, "Zweite" 68). Changes in geographic place names accompanied these border shifts: Danzig became Gdańsk, Stettin was renamed Szczecin, and Breslau was henceforth Wrocław—to name especially those cities that are important for the novels I discuss later. The border changes went hand in hand with massive population shifts: Soviets expelled ethnic Poles from the eastern territories, and Germans were forced to leave the areas that had become part of Poland. These shifts added to the trauma and upheaval already caused by the war itself. The experience of war and the subsequent forced relocations and loss of homeland became long-lasting issues in Polish and German politics, and they have left their traces on postwar literature and culture.[5]

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[5] I address expulsions and loss of homeland as topics in literature in the next chapter, as well as in Chapter 3, which focuses on fictions of memory. These chapters draw on the work of scholars, such as Friederike Eigler, who argue that literature from the postwar period approaches the topic differently than texts written by younger authors and published in the past three decades.

After the war, Poland fell into the Soviet sphere of influence. The Soviets believed that political stability depended on creating the illusion that Poland was an ethnically homogenous state, as well as on the construction of a Polish tradition for those areas that had previously belonged to Germany. It appeared that an effective way of doing so was to erase the German past—street names were changed, inscriptions on buildings dismantled, German monuments removed, documents and books destroyed. Given the countless crimes and barbaric acts that Germans had committed on Polish soil and against the Polish population, few objected such measures (Chwin “Grenzlandliteratur” 7-8). Yet, while deep hatred of Prussia (“Preußenhass”) dominated in the postwar period (Zernack 97), it was difficult to remove all signs of a German past, and its traces were everywhere. In his essay on “Grenzlandliteratur,” Polish author Stefan Chwin, who was born in Gdańsk in 1949, describes how this reality influenced the writing of his novel *Hanemann*. Moreover, authors like Pawel Mossakowski and Paweł Huelle likewise explore the former German presence in their writing (7-8). Prominent journalist Adam Krzemiński reflects on similar experiences in postwar Wrocław (*Deutsch-polnische* 16). In Sabrina Janesch’s novel *Katzenberge* one part of the plot revolves around the discovery of German traces in a former German castle in the Silesian countryside (117-124).

From 1945 to today

German-Polish relations after the Second World War must be understood as separate sets of relations between Poland and West Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany, FRG) and between Poland and East Germany (the German Democratic Republic, GDR). West German political discourse after 1945 was dominated by border-related issues, including the loss of former German territories to Poland and the expulsion of ethnic Germans from those regions. While the Soviet Union recognized the border in 1950, West Germany refused to do so, thereby

feeding the view advanced by communist propaganda that West German politics was merely a continuation of Prussian interests (Zernack 97–98). Polish suspicions and fears were aided by the fact that German chancellor Konrad Adenauer, like much of his electorate at the time, did not accept Poland's western border. This stance played a major role in the lack of diplomatic relations between Poland and West Germany in the first two decades of the postwar period (Bingen).

Remarkably, a first major step towards reconciliation was taken not by Germans but by Poles, namely by Polish bishops in 1965. Borodziej explains that at the time of this gesture, the Polish Catholic church was already fighting against state oppression. When Polish bishops sent a letter to their German colleagues with the words "[p]rzebaczamy i prosimy o przebaczenie" ("[w]e forgive and we ask for forgiveness"), the letter outraged communist party officials and intensified the government's anti-clerical campaign. Many Polish Catholics were also irritated that the church had asked for forgiveness in their name, especially considering the fact that the German Catholic Bishops Conference responded to the gesture with a noncommittal letter that avoided any statement regarding the Polish-German border (*Geschichte* 310). These tensions between state and church in Poland, which Borodziej describes as a new "Kulturkampf," were intended to minimize the influence of the Catholic Church (*Geschichte* 309), and they lasted until political changes in Poland and West Germany at the end of the decade.

The reaching out from the Polish side, changes in the Polish government in 1970/71 following demonstrations and strikes, and a re-orientation in West German politics through social democratic chancellor Willy Brandt's "Ostpolitik" led to improved diplomatic relations between West Germany and Poland. During a historic visit to Warsaw on December 7, 1970, Chancellor Brandt paid his respects at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier followed by a visit to a

monument dedicated to the memory of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In an unscripted and highly symbolic gesture, Brandt knelt down at the memorial. This event of the "Kniefall" (literally "fall to the knees") is today seen as a powerful representation of the warming of West German-Polish relations. However, Corinna Felsch and Magdalena Latkowska demonstrate that contemporaries in Germany and Poland had little appreciation for the significance of Brandt's gesture (405-411). On the same notable day of the "Kniefall," Brandt also signed the Treaty of Warsaw in which the FRG officially recognized the Oder-Neisse border—although the treaty also made clear that this was a contract between West Germany and Poland, and that it did not speak on behalf of a possibly unified Germany of the future (Borodziej, "Zweite" 316–317).

Political scientist Andrea Genest examines how all these rapprochements took place on the stage of grand politics and within the constraints of Cold War power dynamics. When the Polish opposition, which had been growing over the previous decades, came together in the Solidarity movement in 1980, West Germany's official stance remained cautious and even distanced. It seems that *Solidarność*, the movement that was named after the first freely constituted trade union in the Soviet bloc, should have enjoyed the unequivocal support of West German Social Democrats. However, Genest argues that *Solidarność* activities were perceived as potentially destabilizing. Their activities also did not square well with Brandt's "Ostpolitik," which was based on the idea of working *with* the communist regime—especially the Soviet Union—to gradually instigate a change from above. In this equation, political opposition was an incalculable risk in an already volatile situation, and the West German government was cautious not to antagonize the Soviets or endanger diplomatic relations with East Germany (17–20). Nonetheless, there was important extra-governmental support, for example, in the form of care

packages sent by West German unions and individuals, especially during the period of Poland's martial law between 1981 and 1983 (19).

Even though the GDR (i.e., East Germany) and Poland were presumably connected by a shared political ideology, relations between the two states were strained, and until 1972, contact was mostly limited to official exchanges and political maneuvering.[6] While the GDR guaranteed the stability of the Oder-Neisse border—first, by officially recognizing the border in July 1950, and second, by providing a physical buffer zone between Poland and West Germany—this friendship, as historian Krzysztof Ruchniewicz emphasizes, was largely a propaganda tool over which the state had sole power (194): Constructed as a bulwark of anti-fascism and as a counter-model to West Germany, the GDR was always keen to show its loyalty to the Soviet Union. Dissent and protests, such as the 1953 uprising, made GDR officials anxious and reinforced the notion that the state's survival depended on strong ties with the Soviet Union. Accordingly, any liberalization attempts in the Eastern Bloc, including those in Poland in 1956 and 1980/81, were met with increased surveillance and security measures that were meant to bring down these movements and prevent them from spreading to the GDR (196–97).

While Stalin's death in 1953 had allowed for the development of some new contacts, it took until 1972 for the border between the GDR and Poland to be opened, at least temporarily. This change enabled a more direct exchange between citizens, including German expellees, who had settled in East Germany. Now they were able to travel to their former *Heimat* for the first

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[6] Relations between the GDR and Poland are illustrated for example by the fate of the Helmut-von-Gerlach-Gesellschaft. It was founded in 1948 and renamed "Deutsch-Polnische Gesellschaft für Frieden und gute Nachbarschaft" (German-Polish Society for Peace and Good Neighborly Relations) in 1950. The organization supported cultural diplomacy by arranging concerts and theater performances that sought to familiarize GDR citizens with their Eastern neighbor. Their journal "Blick nach Polen" as well as other publications shared this goal. Yet, such organizations and initiatives soon fell victim to the Stalinization of the GDR, and German-Polish contact was limited to official visits (Ruchniewicz 198–199).

time since the end of the war and visit the graves of relatives, although many of them had been destroyed (Ruchniewicz 202; Borodziej, *Geschichte* 346). Despite these contacts, flight and expulsion remained taboo topics in official GDR-discourse. When Christa Wolf fictionalized these Poland-visits in her 1976 novel *Kindheitsmuster* (Engl. *Patterns of Childhood,* translation originally published in 1980 as *A Model Childhood*), it was seen as an astonishing breach of this taboo (Ther 249).

As Ruchniewicz shows, already by the second half of the 1970s contact between Poland and the GDR was reduced due to the worsening economic situation in both countries. Product shortages in the GDR were blamed on Polish shoppers crossing the border, and negative stereotypes were on the rise. When the *Solidarność* movement gained momentum in Poland, the GDR leadership became increasingly worried about its own fate. In 1980 the GDR closed its borders in an attempt to prevent the contagion of ideas of democracy and freedom. Ruchniewicz details how closely *Solidarność* sympathizers were watched, and how the stereotype of the "lazy Pole" was used to discredit the striking workers (203).[7]

Zernack describes 1989 as an epochal change ("Epochenwandel") for German-Polish relations (98), but it was a change accompanied also by much unease and outright fear. While Germans celebrated the Fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, Poles were watching anxiously as the events unfolded. Memories of the Second World War still loomed large, and many Poles wondered how German unification might affect them and the rest of Europe.[8] Some

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[7] See the website "'Bazillus' Solidarność: Solidarität mit Polen" by the *Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig e.V.* for an online collection of documents that illustrate these anti-Polish and anti-Solidarność sentiments by GDR leadership.

[8] See Pierre-Frédéric Weber for an insightful exploration of how fear of Germany and the Germans impacted Polish foreign policy and German-Polish relations after the Second World War. See especially 143-145 on Polish fears of German unification and the gradual alleviation of these fears.

progress had been made since 1945 in easing the tensions between the two German states and Poland, but it seemed largely unclear what the position of a *united* Germany would be towards this process. Fears of Germany's cultural and economic dominance were coupled with residual doubts about the stability of the German-Polish border—an issue that was finally put to rest with the Border Treaty ("Grenzvertrag") of November 1990 in which united Germany once and for all recognized the current German-Polish border as the final border. In addition, in June 1991 German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Polish Prime Minister Jan Krzysztof Bielecki as well as the Foreign Ministers of both countries signed the "Nachbarschaftsvertrag," the "Treaty on Good Neighborly Relations."[9]

While Polish-German relations continued to warm, these official contracts and proclamations could hardly eliminate all fears or stereotypes on both sides. In fact, anxieties reached another climax on December 21, 2007, and this time Germans were worried. On this day Poland, which had already been a member of the European Union since 2004, joined the Schengen Zone. This meant that the policed borders between Germany and Poland would be removed and other restrictions (such as those regarding work and residency) would be eased or lifted. Underestimating the significant changes and economic growth that Poland had undergone since the end of the communist period and equipped with a rich arsenal of stereotypes about "the East," German news reporting shows how people braced themselves for an onslaught of cheap Polish labor and organized crime (Volkmann-Schluck; Messmer). Eigler describes similar fears

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[9] The full names of the treaty in German and in Polish are, respectively, "Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Republik Polen über gute Nachbarschaft und freundschaftliche Zusammenarbeit" and "Traktat między Rzecząpospolitą Polską a Republiką Federalną Niemiec o dobrym sąsiedztwie i przyjaznej współpracy."

of an “Eastern Flood” around 2011, the year when Poles gained “full rights to live and work anywhere in the European Union” (“Introduction” 2).

Despite continued tensions and the persistence of certain stereotypes, the post-Cold War era has been a period of steady improvement in Polish-German relations both on the official and on the inter-personal level, and, as shown earlier, the process is generally hailed as a success story in reconciliation. This optimism was also expressed in 2011, when Germany and Poland celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the bilateral “Treaty of Good Neighborly Relations.” On the occasion of the anniversary, Minister of State Cornelia Pieper, who was at the time also the coordinator for German-Polish cooperation (“Koordinatorin für deutsch-polnische Zuammenarbeit”), emphasized in an interview how much closer Poland and Germany had become in the past twenty years. She underscored German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk’s assessments that Polish-German relations were “better than ever” (“so gut wie nie zuvor”). Pieper continued that it was now time to further develop these good relations “in and for Europe” with an orientation towards the future. Significantly, she also saw evidence of the excellent status of the relationship in the Polish presidential elections in 2010. According to the minister, the election had shown that Polish voters from “the middle of society” could not be persuaded by anti-German views and that most of them valued Germany as a reliable neighbor (Pieper).

Only five years later, some of this optimism was waning. By the Treaty’s twenty-fifth anniversary in 2016, the official German-Polish relationship had cooled considerably, and anti-

German and xenophobic sentiments are currently on the rise in Poland.[10] In recent years, Europe has undergone a general political shift to the right, and in Poland this trend was especially articulated since the country's parliamentary elections in 2015, which brought the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) to power. Poland's national-conservative leadership is critical of the European Union and of Germany. These political developments notwithstanding, on the personal level, as well as in scholarship, culture, and in the economy, collaborations continue to thrive. It may thus be more important than ever to pay attention to and preserve cultural and academic relationships independently of political fluctuations. After all, such relations have a long tradition, and they have survived against all odds.

German-Polish Literary and Cultural Relations

Border poetics gains particular significance when viewed within the larger postwar context described above and when contrasted with the predominantly divisive (if not necessarily always hostile) way in which borders were narrated during the Cold War. Literary works, translations, and cultural initiatives have articulated these divisions and made them visible, and they were in part able to communicate across them. Authors such as Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, Günter Grass, Christa Wolf, and translators such as Henryk Bereska and Karl Dedecius can serve

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[10] Hostility towards Others seems to be on the rise in Poland and elsewhere, including Germany and the USA. In Poland, this development is evident in the current political rhetoric and actions on the political stage. It is also observable in daily life and in a hostile atmosphere towards Others. For example, in September 2016, renowned Polish historian Jerzy Kochanowski was attacked on a Warsaw tram for speaking in German with a colleague. The attacker initially escaped, and Kochanowski required 5 stitches to the head (Zagner). The incident received coverage in the German and Polish media and was regarded as indicative of recent changes in Polish society. At the same time, there was also an outpouring of support for the professor, and it sparked initiatives against xenophobic aggression in many Polish cities, e.g., a "tram of tolerance" in Toruń in which people demonstratively spoke different languages ("Toruń"). On a personal note, when speaking German on a Warsaw tram in August 2016, I was told by a female passenger, who appeared inebriated, that German was a disgusting language ("obrzydliwy język") but that she was saying this only to warn me ("tylko ostrzegam").

as examples here. These individuals and their works have paved the way for a less divisive way of thinking about borders in the post-Cold War era. In order to situate border poetics in this development, I now provide a brief glimpse of German-Polish literary and cultural relations.

As can be expected, a thousand years of German-Polish relations have also led to literary and cultural contact, exchanges, and mutual influences. In 1971, the eminent translator of Polish literature in Germany Karl Dedecius (1921–2016) published an essay-length volume on German-Polish literary relations. In it, Dedecius follows the connections between "German" and "Polish" literature from the early Middle Ages to 1970; from the first songs, poems, and descriptions of the lives of saints to postwar exchanges between east and west. He describes the impact of Polish struggles for national independence on German liberal authors, the connection between the national bards Goethe and Mickiewicz, and the positive and fruitful literary exchanges that have taken place over the centuries. Dedecius not only wrote about these exchanges, he himself can be considered a seminal figure in Polish-German cultural diplomacy. In acknowledgement of his work, he received the Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels (Peace Prize of the German Book Trade), one of Germany's most prestigious awards, in 1990. Dedecius was an ethnic German who was born in the Polish city of Lódz,[11] and I introduce him here in greater detail because his life exemplifies the important work in the "contact zone." At the same time, his nationally focused ideas about world literature and the notion of "contact" also illustrate the need for new conceptual frameworks and practices, such as border poetics.

[11] The city also exemplifies multiple border shifts and illustrates the need for an entangled history: over the centuries it was part of various Polish states, annexed by the Kingdom of Prussia, became part of the Russian Empire, was occupied by German troops, became part of interwar Poland, was annexed by the German Reich, and became Polish after the Second World War (Chu, "Lodz/Łódź").

Dedecius was a cultural ambassador ("Kulturvermittler"), and he is credited with having contributed significantly to the warming of West German-Polish relations. After his release from Soviet captivity after the Second World War, he became one of the most important translators and editors of Polish literature as well as a tireless promoter of Polish literature and culture in Germany—it was a work of passion, which he did in the spare time that his career at the Allianz insurance company afforded him. Dedecius published the first anthology of Polish poetry in 1959; in 1979/80 he initiated and for many years served as the director of the Deutsches Polen-Institut Darmstadt; and in 1982 he established the "Polnische Bibliothek" ("Polish Library") at the Suhrkamp publishing company, a series that by the year 2000 had published fifty canonical works of Polish literature in German translation (completed by him as well as by other translators).

The positive and optimistic stance towards Poland that Dedecius promoted through his work as "bridge-builder" (a frequently repeated epithet) can be viewed as part of the cultural-diplomacy efforts of Willy Brandt's "Ostpolitik." Yet, recently historian Winson Chu has also noted that Dedecius's bridge-building took place within a national framework and was based on the notion that Germans and Poles are distinctly different and separate ("Germans" 170-171). In this view, a bridge would indeed be necessary to cross over a deep canyon between two static landmasses. This approach can help establish mutual contact and appreciation, but it also essentializes Self and Other and can lead to the exoticization and fetishization of "Otherness"—a point I return to when discussing Dedecius's notion of world literature.

Polish literature in Germany

Germanist Heinrich Olschowsky notes that Polish-German literary relations were always determined by the larger social conditions and political circumstances, and he takes the

availability of Polish literature in German translation as a good indicator of the intensity of these relations at any given moment (159). He argues that after the Second World War, literature had the ability to "detoxify" ("entgiften") (162) the German-Polish relationship, although this process occurred differently in the two Germanies. West Germans became interested in Polish literature and culture after 1956, when, inspired by changes in the Soviet Union, Poland relaxed its censorship laws and temporarily opened up to foreign audiences. West German readers were especially interested in Polish literature that was critical of the communist system, drama of the avant-garde, as well as works by authors who had emigrated. Literature written prior to the First World War, however, received very little attention. Dedecius's promotion of Polish literature and his translations of poetry contributed significantly to the general increase in popularity (163).

Olschowsky also explains that in East Germany, by contrast, the availability of literature was controlled by official cultural policies. Accordingly, works that conformed to socialist ideology were supported, but everything else was censored or banned. Works from the nineteenth century were deemed ideologically safe and therefore available, but contemporary writers were blocked until the mid 1960s because the GDR leadership feared that criticism hailing from Poland might destabilize the GDR's political system (164). Paradoxically, Olschowsky notes, Polish literature actually benefited from Germany's Cold War division: the existence of two different markets meant that a great variety of texts were available in German translation. In addition, some works were translated twice and therefore with greater care (166). However, the quality of East German translations could also suffer, i.e., when censors made sure that a text fit the desired ideological stance and thereby distorted the original (167).

The market conditions for literature and literary translations as well as literary and cultural relations more broadly changed dramatically after the end of communism in Eastern

Europe and the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Germanist Natasza Stelmaszyk examines these changes, and she come to the conclusion that the story of Polish literature in German-speaking countries after 1989 is a success story (153). She notes, for example, that Polish authors of a younger generation are regularly translated into German and are positively received by German readers. This success is remarkable, considering Matthias Kneip's assessment that the East German market for publishing and translation essentially collapsed after the end of the Cold War (Stelmaszyk 155). She argues that the demand for new books from Poland can be explained in part by a transformation that took place within Polish literature, which made it more accessible to western European audiences. Referring to Hedwig Nosbers's assessment of an easier readability and a turn to more broadly European topics in Polish prose, Stelmaszyk asks whether such a "worlding" ("Verweltlichung") of Polish literature has indeed taken place, and how it would be evident (156).

Stelmaszyk agrees with Nosbers that works by younger Polish authors are more "readable" for western audiences because they focus less on "Polish" themes and instead address issues that can be understood outside the Polish context (155). She regards this change as a shift from national literature to world literature (also in terms of marketing) (161). In a questionnaire that Stelmaszyk developed for her dissertation, translator and Polonist Hans-Christian Trepte responded in a similar vein that Polish literature after 1989 became more "European" as it turned to more universally human themes (157). Marketability and readability also increased because this new Polish literature is less steeped in the Polish literary tradition and more in dialogue with foreign literature ("Auslandsliteratur")—a dialogue owed in part to the fact that many of these works were written by Polish writers living abroad (Jan Tomkowski in Stelmaszyk 155–156).

Stelmaszyk's assessment of the character of contemporary Polish literature is insightful, not least because of the problematic equation of notions like "worlding" and "world literature" with marketability and readability, e.g., the successful circumvention of any "unreadable" national specificity. At least with regard to the works I analyze in this study, two qualifications must be made: while the authors address universal themes, this does not come at the cost of specificity. On the contrary, these works are deeply tied to a very specific historical and geographical context. This specificity is made accessible in connection with more universal concerns—it is not being replaced by them. Although Stelmaszyk poses the question whether "readability" also suggests a lack of literary quality (161), she does not explore it further. Here one would also need to consider whether it is a lack of complexity that makes a text more "readable" and what role translations might play in "normalizing" a complicated text. These questions cannot be answered here, but a complexity of narratives is what provides multiple points of access to the reader and it is therefore indispensible for border poetics. After all, "the variability of a work of world literature is one of its constitutive features" (Damrosch 5).

As Stelmaszyk herself notes, not everyone agrees with her optimistic assessment of the relative success of Polish literature in German-speaking countries after 1989. Renowned literary

critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki,[12] for example, points to the negative reception of Polish literature, and he argues that Polish prose continues to be inaccessible in form and content (Reich-Ranicki in Stelmaszyk 158). Stelmaszyk also mentions others who lament the limited and vanishing interest in Polish culture, for example P. Polsakiewicz who contends that even when there is some interest, it is in the universal themes and questions and not in Poland per se (159).

In short, the reception of Polish literature after 1989 is focused mainly on contemporary Polish authors; the reception of canonical works is mostly limited to academics and specialists (Stelmaszyk 163). The political changes of the late twentieth century as well as a generational shift have led to a change in themes, which appears to have had a positive impact on German reception (163). The Frankfurt Book Fair in 2000, at which Poland was the guest of honor, also contributed to the popularity of Polish literature in Germany (164). Heinrich Olschowsky is likewise encouraged by the significant attention (relatively speaking) that Polish authors receive in Germany (Olschowsky 168).

German literature in Poland

Historically, literature from the German-speaking lands has enjoyed only limited popularity in Poland. The issue, according to Tadeusz Namowicz, is that Poles have rarely thought of

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[12] Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1920–2013) was in himself an interesting example of the complex navigations of German-Jewish-Polish identity. He was born in 1920 in Włocławek into a Jewish German-Polish family. His family later moved to Berlin, but in 1938 they were deported to Warsaw. He and his wife survived the Holocaust in hiding but his parents and brother were murdered by the Nazis. After the war, Reich-Ranicki initially stayed in Poland, but he emigrated to Germany in 1958. In his autobiography he recounts a 1958 meeting with the young Günter Grass, who asked him, *what* he was: German or Pole. Reich-Ranicki responded: "[…] ein halber Pole, ein halber Deutscher und ein ganzer Jude" ["half Polish, half German, and completely Jewish"] (11). He immediately admits to the reader that this response was hardly truthful: "Nie war ich halber Pole, nie ein halber Deutscher—und ich hatte keinen Zweifel, daß ich es nie werden würde. Ich war auch nie in meinem Leben ein ganzer Jude, ich bin es auch heute nicht" [I was never half Polish, never half German—and I had no doubt that I would never be. I was also never in my life a complete Jew, and I am not one today either] (12).

Germans as producers of great literary works. Their talents in other arts such as painting and music have been appreciated, and Germans have generally been associated with excellence in science and technology. At the same time, German literature was considered neither aesthetically interesting nor particularly important, and Poles were never convinced by Germany's own self-image as the "country of poets and thinkers" ("Land der Dichter und Denker") ("Deutsche" 170–71). By contrast, German philosophy was held in much higher esteem, especially during the Enlightenment (177) and the Positivist period (179), mostly because philosophy was considered a science and was judged by different standards (171, 175).

Despite this limited appreciation, Namowicz names several periods during which German literature increased in popularity. In the nineteenth century, for example, Polish national bard and romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz expressed admiration for the writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller as well as Johann Gottfried Herder and the Schlegel brothers ("Deutsche" 177–178). In the twentieth century, too, interest in German literature increased, which included especially the writings of Thomas Mann, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Franz Kafka (179-184). Other canonical texts of German literature, however, enjoyed only a very small presence (181).

After 1945, German literature in Polish translation was first represented by antifascist literature from the GDR as well as German classics. In 1956, Poland experienced a brief political thaw, during which West German literature, i.e., works published after 1945, became available in Poland (Namowicz "Deutsche" 181; Dedecius, *Deutsche* 55–56).[13] Polish readers discovered

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[13] Following Stalin's death in 1953, many countries in the Eastern bloc experienced strikes and demonstrations. In Poland, demonstrations by Poznań factory workers against an increase in production quota quickly turned into wider protests against price hikes and low wages as well as anticommunist protests (Porter-Szűcs 233). The demonstrations were violently put down, but they led to a brief period of greater freedom and openness to the West (237-245).

authors such as Heinrich Böll, Erich Kästner, Egon Erwin Kisch, as well as Swiss writers Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Max Frisch and Austrian authors Franz Theodor Csokor, Robert Musil, and Joseph Roth (Dedecius, *Deutsche* 55–56).[14] Even though, relatively speaking, there was an increase in publications of German literature in Polish translation in the entire period between 1945 and 1989, German literature still lagged behind French and English literature. There was also no systematic translation program, which led to large gaps regarding the authors or the kinds of works that were being translated and published (Namowicz "Deutsche" 182).

During the Cold War, the Polish underground press, the so-called "drugi obieg" (literally "second circulation," in German "zweiter Umlauf") played an important role in filling some of these gaps. This was for example the case with Günter Grass, and especially his novel *Die Blechtrommel (The Tin Drum)*, which I discuss later as an important early example of border poetics. Grass's work has left a lasting impression on multiple generations of German and Polish writers and intellectuals, and its publication history merits a closer look here, as it also provides insights into the history of German-Polish literary relations and the ideological and political forces that usually ran counter to the interests of the general public.

When *The Tin Drum* was first published in Germany in 1959, officials in both Germanies and in Poland had strong reactions, as summarized by journalist and cultural critic Adam Krzemiński: Conservative politicians of the CDU/CSU in West Germany rejected the novel because they regarded it as pornographic and anti-Christian; in the GDR the novel did not meet the expectations of socialist realism; and in Poland it was criticized for the unfavorable depiction

[14] This interest was not necessarily mutual, as shown by these numbers of available translations: Between 1944–1961, only 282 Polish titles were translated into German; interest rose mostly after 1960. By contrast, between 1944–1963, 679 German language works were translated into Polish (Dedecius, *Deutsche* 57–58).

of Poles defending the Polish Post Office in Danzig (today Gdańsk) against the Nazis. Polish officials were also troubled by the characterization of Red Army soldiers as rapists and looters ("Blechtrommel"). These reactions may help explain the turbulent history of censorship, publication, and reception that, in itself, is a history of many border crossings in German-Polish cultural history.

Elsewhere, Krzemiński details the fascinating events that accompanied the publication of the *Tin Drum*. Already in 1958, the year before the novel's publication in West Germany, a first excerpt appeared in Polish translation in the weekly journal *Polityka*. Further chapter translations were published in 1959, 1960, and in the 1970s, but censorship barred the publication of the novel in its entirety. The Polish underground press circumvented this ban and published the book in 1979. Volker Schlöndorff's 1979 film adaptation was also banned, but as Krzemiński explains, much like the novel, it also made its way into the public and became an opportunity to practice opposition during the time of *Solidarność*. In 1981 one could view the film in student clubs, churches, and at Warsaw University ("Wie die Polen"). In 1983 a first, albeit still censored, official Polish publication was printed; the film was officially released in 1992 (Loew 277).[15] Over the following years, other works by Grass were published and became openly accessible to a Polish readership.[16]

After the end of the Cold War, Günter Grass became a popular and admired author in Poland, particularly in his hometown Gdańsk. When he acknowledged in 2006 that he had joined the Waffen-SS as a 17-year old in 1944, this late confession caused a major outcry in both

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[15] Izabela Surynt and Mirosława Zielińska show that about 12 pages were omitted in the 1983 publication. The first uncensored edition appeared only in 1991 (n.p., Footnote 52).

[16] With regard to the *Tin Drum*, Poland was ahead of East Germany, where the novel was not published until 1987.

Germany and Poland. Interestingly, Krzemiński notes, while Polish national conservatives railed against Grass, many citizens of Gdańsk came together in his support. They defended him, even guarding the bronze statue of the novel's protagonist, the drum-holding Oskar Matzerath. Gdańsk residents did so because they recognized

> […] dass er nicht nur sein Danzig, sondern auch ihr Gdańsk in die Weltliteratur eingeführt hatte und dass er als einer der ersten Deutschen offen für die Anerkennung der Oder-Neiße-Grenze durch die BRD […] eingetreten war. […] dass er auch auf ihre und nicht nur seine Stadt stolz war, auf ihren, der Polen Beitrag zur Öffnung der Berliner Mauer, kurzum, dass sie in Grass 'ihren Deutschen' haben, der kaschubische Wurzeln hat und die polnische Komponente seiner Kindheit nicht verdrängte, sondern mit sich trug wie den Schlüssel zu einer anderen Welt […]. ("Wie die Polen")
> [that he not only introduced his Danzig but also Gdańsk into world literature, and that he was one of the first Germans who stood up openly for the recognition of the Oder-Neiße border by the FRG […] that he was also proud of their and not only his city, of their, the Poles' contribution to the Fall of the Berlin Wall, in short, that in Grass they had 'their German,' who had Kaschubian roots and who did not deny the Polish component of his childhood, but carried it with himself like a key to a different world]

In the same article, Krzemiński notes that Grass speaks the language of German-Polish entanglement and contortion ("deutsch-polnische Verknotung und Verrenkung," with "Verknotung" referring to a state of being "knotted" together). He regards the Polish elements ("Brocken," literally "chunks") in Grass's works not as mere exotic ornamentation but as an integral part of this world and of the storyworld. This observation is key, for it is precisely the integration of Polish and German perspectives—and a serious engagement with these

perspectives—that is crucial for border poetics. I argue that all of the narratives analyzed here may have this intention, but certainly not all of them are able to implement it successfully. They may at times use the "Polish element" merely as ornamentation and slip into the kind of "kitsch" I referred to earlier in this chapter.

Several scholars have emphasized the importance of Grass's work in weaving a German-Polish net in which Poles could also find themselves. Maria Janion, one of Poland's most renowned literary scholars, critics, and public intellectuals has written and spoken extensively about Grass, and she has edited several volumes that highlight the "Polish plot" ("Polski wątek") in his work, in particular the *Tin Drum* (59). Similarly, literary scholar Tomasz Lewandowski describes the *Tin Drum* as the missing—but fortunately, recovered—link in Polish literature (240).[17] After the end of communism, Grass also became a reference point for authors who were in search of new identities in post-Cold War Europe and who were interested in exploring the regional and local histories of their immediate surroundings. As Peter Oliver Loew shows, many Poles discovered Gdańsk's past through his works, and writers and intellectuals took the *Tin Drum* as a motivation to dig deeper into the complex history of their city (*Danzig* 276–281). Here, authors like Stefan Chwin (born 1949) and Paweł Huelle (born 1957) are the most prominent representatives and, together with Grass, they form the "Prosa-Troika Grass-Huelle-Chwin" (288).

[17] Lewandowski also speaks of the novel's impact on Poland, and he argues that it can be read as "zapis doświadczenia niedostępnego z określonej narodową mentalnością perspektywy, ale w jakiś sposób ważnego dla naszej kultury" ["evidence of an experience that is inaccessible from the perspective of a specific national mentality, but somehow important to our culture"] (240). This observation is relevant for the framing of border poetics because it points to a temporary suspension of difference that allows a closer look at the Self.

When the Cold War ended, writers and anyone else who was interested were free to discover and write about the past including previously silenced aspects. While the end of censorship meant intellectual freedom, the termination of all state funding and subsidies for new publications also posed a new challenge. As the book market became driven by profit, presence of German literature on the Polish market decreased (Namowicz "Deutsche" 183). In fact, in his article from 2000, Namowicz expresses concern that only very few contemporary German authors were being translated and published in Poland. Polish readers, he worries, were more interested in transnational or broader European topics and discussions, and not in German literature. Polish lack of interest in specifically German topics seems to echo Germans' alleged lack of interest in particularly Polish topics that Stelmaszyk discusses. Namowicz regrets this development because literature is important to gauge one's neighbor's feelings ("Befindlichkeit") and therefore important for German-Polish relations in general (185).

German-Polish entanglements and world literature

In the introduction to his above-mentioned essay on German-Polish literary relations, Dedecius explicitly states that his goal is to chronicle only positive aspects. He wants to omit anything that is hurtful or divisive ("alles Trennende, Verletzende, Vergewaltigende") and thereby advance German-Polish reconciliation, which he describes as a process of healing "national syndromes" ("nationale Komplexe") (*Deutsche* 3). Dedecius's expressed aim is to tie "knots of friendship" ("Freundschaftsknoten") by focusing on "lines of connection" ("Verbindungslinien") (3). He finds these lines in the realm of literature from the early Middle Ages to 1970, but there is nothing "messy" about his knots: the lines are orderly and can be followed easily—and they can and have been tied into "knots of friendship." Such orderly knots, I argue, differ significantly from the multiply entangled internal and external knots that the epigraph to this chapter

describes. Unlike the former, the latter knots are often painfully entwined and cannot be detangled. There is also no way of omitting what is hurtful and divisive because those aspects are integral parts of these constellations. Border poetics works with these ambiguous, inextricably entwined knots—this ambiguity cannot be resolved but it can be articulated and become the grounds for new connections and transborder networks.

It appears that for Dedecius difference is something that could be contained within clear categories. Accordingly, he views literary and cultural relations through a national lens in which nationality is also unambiguous. In this view the two partners in the German-Polish reconciliation process each have their own national character and their own national syndromes. While he worked hard to transform the German-Polish border into a contact zone, he at the same time maintains this contact zone as a site of difference—a difference he treasures, but a difference nonetheless.[18] It is not my intention to diminish Dedecius's important contributions to the German-Polish dialogue. It is in no small measure owing to his tireless work that many West Germans were first introduced to Polish literature and culture. Nevertheless, his views of difference and national essence are mired in an understanding of national identity that no longer

[18] Dedecius also emphasizes the fundamental difference between Germans and Poles elsewhere in the essay. For him, this difference is crucial for good Polish-German relations and a hallmark of good literature. Thinking about "was uns verbindet" ("what connects us"), he proposes several theses that further essentialize and fetishize difference. He states, for example, that differences connect people and make them interesting to one another. These differences must be channeled appropriately to create "Synthese und Symbiose" ("synthesis and symbiosis"). Differences can be distilled down to "widerspruchsreiche[n], aber im Grunde verbindungsbereite[n] Essenzen" ("essences that are contradictory, but in principle ready to bond"). Literature can provide a model for this bonding. "Da wo sie sich auf der Höhe ihrer Aufgabe befindet, kreiert sie eine vielfältige Einigung von Kontrasten. Im Gegenteil [sic]: je größer diese Kontraste, die sie einbezieht, und je kleiner der Spielraum, den sie zur Verfügung hat, desto stärker, wirkungsvoller das Meisterstück" (Literature could set an example here. Where it is at its best, it creates a diverse unity of contrasts. On the contrary [sic]: the bigger the contrasts it includes, and the smaller the space it has at its disposal, the stronger and more effective the masterpiece) (Dedecius, *Deutsche* 59–60).

pertains. His celebration of difference in categories of "Germans" and "Poles" also leads to a problematic understanding of world literature that is worthy of a brief examination.

Dedecius's definition of world literature can be found in the afterword of *Panorama* (2000), his impressive literary history of twentieth century Polish literature. Here he lays out seven theses on the purportedly specifically Polish character of Polish literature that end in a characterization of "Weltliteratur." First he claims that Poles, unlike many other nations, have a strong "*national* literature" ("*National*literatur," partial emphasis original), in which real life and literary life are deeply intertwined, and in which reader and writer form a community. He also proposes that Polish literature is unique because it is built on the "interplay of eastern and western elements" ("*Wechselwirkung von Westlichem und Östlichem*"); it stands out with its "vitality and effectiveness" ("*Vitalität und Effektivität*"); and it is "intensely truthful" ("*wahrheitsintensiv*") (*Panorama* 836–837, all emphasis original).

After essentializing Polish literature in this way, Dedecius comes to his definition of world literature: In his fourth thesis, he describes Polish literature as a literature of "strong individualities" ("*von auffallend starken Individualitäten*"), and he asks readers to get used to the fact that nations ("Völker") differ from one another, and that they therefore also write differently. Poles, in particular, "laugh differently and about other things than we do, and their sadness, too, is a different one." Dedecius suggests that we can experience and learn about these differences through reading, and *this*, he concludes, is the meaning of "Weltliteratur." He then adds that we

need to stop engaging with others for the sole purpose of finding ourselves (*Panorama* 836).[19] Difference is to be celebrated, and for Dedecius this seems to be the underlying assumption and purpose of "Weltliteratur" (*Panorama* 836).

What is this essence, this difference that is supposedly embodied in various national literatures? What does it mean that Polish literature is made up of "strong individualities"? And how would German, or American, or any other literature score in this respect? These are not the kinds of questions I have set out to answer here, and neither is this the idea of world literature that I have in mind. Many of the authors I have included here have a more transnational and transcultural—an entangled—perspective on German-Polish "knots." They are not interested only in "knots of friendship," but also in exploring entanglements in all their contradictions, tensions, and unresolvable differences.

For example, in *Bambino*, the novel cited in the epigraph, Iwasiów draws attention to many kinds of knots within one individual: gender identity intertwines with history, memory with local and personal attachments and detachments, language with the sense of self. Many authors today share these concerns with multiple experiences of alterity. However, as previously mentioned, border poetics is not a given in all border narratives nor is it evident consistently throughout a single narrative. In fact, some texts are evidence of the struggle to articulate deep entanglements, and here binary or essentialist notions may still surface. Border poetics requires assuming and understanding the Other's perspective, the Other's entanglements. Where these

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[19] The original German reads: "Die polnische Literatur ist eine Literatur von auffallend starken Individualitäten. Wir müssen uns als Leser daran gewöhnen, dass andere Völker, die anders sind, auch anders schreiben. Die Polen lachen anders und an anderen Stellen als wir, und auch ihre Traurigkeit ist eine andere. Wir können das von Volk zu Volk, lesend, erfahren und lernen. Darin besteht der Sinn der Weltliteratur. (Wir sollten es uns abgewöhnen, bei den anderen immer nur uns selbst zu suchen.)" (*Panorama* 836).

narratives are situated on the scale from simple ties to entangled knots can be seen as an indicator of the degree to which border poetics is implemented.

In the German-Polish case, these more entangled perspectives were able to develop after 1989, not least due to increased interpersonal contact, educational exchanges, and many local, regional, or European collaborative projects and exchanges. For example, between 1995 and 1999, an annual 10-day literature cruise ("Poetendampfer" or "Statek Literacki") traveled between Szczecin and Görlitz or Wrocław, accompanied by readings and workshops with authors from both sides of the Oder-River (Drozdowska-Broering 25–27). The Kleistmuseum in Frankfurt/Oder initiated a similar project, and in 2004 organized two trips on the Oder and Rhine Rivers. This literature cruise resulted in a publication, the anthology *Oder – Rhein. Grenzen im Fluss* (2007) edited by Lothar Jordan und Regina Wyrwoll. Included in this anthology is an essay by Inga Iwasiów, "Ingeleine, du wirst groß sein," in which the author reflects on a former neighbor, a German who had remained in Szczecin after the war. This neighbor inspired one of the protagonists in the novel *Bambino*.

German-Polish relations and the connections that motivate them can no longer be framed solely in national terms, and neither are the resulting literary and cultural expressions national narratives. Even if the language of publication may limit their accessibility, these texts, images, and projects nevertheless draw on and contribute to a broad network of the human imagination. Awareness of and engagement with various entanglements produces specific kinds of world-making narratives, and I propose that we read them within the broader context of world literature. By world literature I do not mean "readability" or "marketability," as implied by Stelmaszyk. World literature is also not a cabinet in which every nation has its drawer. It is also not an additive concept—a collective term for all literature ever written by different nations

("Völker"), nor is it a canon of the best works ever written, nor, as some have criticized, a collective marketing term for easily translatable, accessible, and homogenous works that can be purchased at airports. Rather, in the context of border poetics, world literature is an opportunity to step outside binary constructions of difference and national frames of reference. National categories are not ignored, but they lose their interpretive stronghold and become one of many access points to the world. The world literature lens allows for an exploration of differences and connections, intersections, and the mobility of texts and ideas. Narratives of border poetics create worlds that go beyond assumed borders and limitations, and this aspect is what I foreground by using the concept of world literature.

David Damrosch has defined world literature as "a mode of circulation and of reading," (5) referring to literature that "[circulates] out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin" (6). I would add here that not only the borders that a text crosses are important, but there are also the borders crossed within a text that make it part of world literature. Border poetics narratives have a cosmopolitan orientation: they cross borders and produce a social imagination in which borders are not dissolved but are thought differently. As these narratives reflect on the particular, they also convey something about the universal human condition, and that in turn allows us—as readers or spectators—to connect to other particulars elsewhere.

Chapter 2

A Theoretical Framing of Border Poetics

In today's world, to be an inhabitant of a particular place means to become conscious that we exist on the pages of a palimpsest.

(Przemysław Czapliński, "The 'Mythic Homeland'" 364)

The objective space of a house—its corners, corridors, cellar, rooms—is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel; thus a house may be haunted or homelike, or prisonlike or magical. So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here.

(Edward Said, *Orientalism* 55)

[…] all stories require borders and border crossings […]

(Susan Stanford Friedman, "Spatial Poetics" 196)

What does it mean to "exist on the pages of a palimpsest"? Can we see the world as a manuscript whose pages are constantly being rewritten, but which still bears the traces of all inscriptions that came before it? Are there possible belongings hidden in these traces, and how do we—as those who exist on these pages—attach ourselves to them? Both Edward Said and Susan Stanford Friedman offer possible answers to these questions: one, we endow that which is distant and unfamiliar with meaning; and two, we cross the border into the pages of the palimpsest and tell stories. Such narratives help us imagine—and perhaps implement—global, national, regional, local, and personal connections. They are not detachments from reality but possible reattachments that allow us to connect with those beyond our temporal and spatial horizons.

In the epigraph, Said distinguishes between an objective and a subjective notion of space. Using the metaphor of a house, he argues that the objective space is made subjective through a poetic process that is both rational (reflected in the ability to name an object's "value") and

emotional (as the creation of emotional ties with an objective reality). This process of individual meaning-making can be extended to larger spaces that cannot be accessed as directly as the space of a house, including the rather abstract notion of "world" as a whole. While the entire "world" or "cosmos" lies outside any one individual's experience, it can be made more conceivable and acquire rational and emotional meaning through its connection with multiple smaller "worlds" that an individual inhabits and that have already been endowed with particular meanings.

Endowing the unfamiliar with meaning and giving it a narrative requires not only imaginative labor, such labor also does not eliminate disturbances, gaps, and disorientations. Said expresses this ambiguity when he says that the spaces of a house can be "homelike" or "magical" as much as they can be "haunted" or "prisonlike." Such emotional perceptions of the local space also come into play when trying to connect the particular, i.e., that which is grounded in individual experiences, with the universal, i.e., that which depends on abstraction and imagination to acquire meaning. As the imagination strives to relate the fractured particular experience to the universal, it must also devise strategies of dealing with such disruptions.

Drawing especially on Michel de Certau and Franco Moretti, Friedman demonstrates how intimately linked narrative is to borders. She aptly notes that "all stories require borders and border crossings" ("Spatial" 196), i.e., without a border and the transgression of that border, there would be no story to tell. Since borders simultaneously "separate but also connect" ("Migration" 273), stories are centrally about disruption and establishing connections—as tenuous or fleeting as they might be. The novels and projects under discussion here show that border crossings, both figurative and real, are rarely smooth and harmonious, and more often violent and painful. These narratives display a high level of negotiation of gaps, breaks, and discontinuities. Such breaks pose a challenge to the imagination: a challenge to negotiate

meaning by assembling or reassembling fragments, filling in the gaps, and devising alternative ways of imagining and creating meaning for a "world" perceived as fragmentary since modernity.

In the following pages, I develop a working definition of "border poetics" and frame it with theories from border studies, cosmopolitanism, world literature, and memory studies. After outlining previous uses and definitions of the concept, I explore the discourses and ideas that inform my understanding of border poetics. This general theoretical framework is then applied more specifically to the German-Polish case in the second half of this chapter. Here I argue that since 1945, literature that deals with the German-Polish border has moved from writing about the border as a dividing line to writing in which borders figure as spaces of connectivity, and finally to the narrative practice of border poetics in which real and figurative borders are entwined.

Border Poetics: Previous Definitions and Uses

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the term border poetics itself is not entirely new, and it has been used in various publications and projects.[1] Nonetheless, there has been only little discussion of border poetics as a theoretical concept. One important exception is the *Border*

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[1] Beyond the theoretical framework established by the Border Poetics/Border Culture research group, the term "border poetics" or related word formations such as "poetics of borders," "Grenzpoetik," or "Poetik der Grenze" do not seem to be firmly established critical terms. Instead, they appear sporadically in book or project titles, where they are often used without theorization or systematic reflection. For example, on the occasion of Graz being the "European City of Culture" in 2003, a project titled "Die Poetik der Grenze" was launched. Within the scope of this project were theater performances, music events, readings, video art installations, etc. In 2003, a collected volume with the same title was published. While the border is a topic of many of the contributions—essays by writers and intellectuals—the concept of poetics seems to be used more in the sense of borders creating a kind of poetry and aesthetic constellation (Karahasan and Jaroschka). Another example is the edited volume *The Borders of Europe: Hegemony, Aesthetics and Border Poetics* (Holm, Lægreid, and Skorgen). Here, contributions are connected through the shared concern with borders "not only as borders of territorial demarcation, but also […] as membranes for dialogue and exchange" (26). The contributions discuss intersections of territorial and figurative boundaries, but border poetics as a term is not systematically explored by the editors.

Poetics/Border Culture research group at the University of Tromsø, Norway, whose work has expanded considerably since their first symposium on the topic in 2004. Headed by project initiators Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe, the group has held international and interdisciplinary conferences, produced several publications, and has an active web presence that is used to discuss and further develop the concept.

The *Border Poetics/Border Culture* research group defines border poetics as a tool, a field of analysis, an approach, a strategy, and a method. First and foremost it appears to be a tool of analysis that is used to interrogate real and symbolic borders and their varying constellations. This analysis (i.e., border poetics) is based on three main assumptions about borders: "1) that narrative and symbolic representation is a central element in border formation and experience; 2) that textual or medial borders within or around aesthetic works are related to the borders represented in these works; 3) that figurations of borders in cultural expressions matter for social, political, and historical processes of bordering" ("Border Poetics"). Border poetics then, as it is defined on the group's continuously evolving website, is a "field of cultural analysis" that "investigates the ways in which borders are negotiated within medialized forms of production and examine [sic] the function of the forms of representation in the intersection between territorial borders and textual frames" ("Key Terms"). In Schimanski and Wolfe's edited volume *Border Poetics De-Limited*, border poetics is further defined as "a set of strategies for analyzing the successful or failed crossings of institutional, national or generic borders" (10) as well as a "set of practical strategies […] for examining the function of these forms of representation in the intersection between territorial borders and aesthetic works" (24).

According to these definitions, border poetics can be applied to constellations in which territorial borders and their medialized iterations meet and overlap, but border poetics itself is

primarily defined as a tool of analysis. I am inspired by the research group's work and their theoretical reflections on borders, especially regarding the fruitful idea that border poetics is concerned with various types of entangled territorial and symbolic borders (including their translation into textual frames) (13), but my argument differs in two important ways. First, I argue for a shift in perspective from the outside to the inside—from focusing on border poetics as a "category of analysis" to regarding it as a "category of practice" (Brubaker), so to speak. Following this shift, border poetics is a narrative and cultural *practice*, not solely a strategy or tool for analyzing various constellations of borders and bordering practices that can be applied to narratives about borders. Secondly, I am in agreement with their theoretical reflection about borders, but I argue that it is through the practice of border poetics that these variously constellated forms of attachment and the shifts between such affiliations are articulated and made visible. Consequently, border poetics produces new constellations and thereby contributes to a re-imagination of established borders and bordering processes. In my understanding, if border poetics is to be viewed as a strategy or tool of analysis, it is already the narratives themselves that perform an analysis and critique of borders and translate this critique into aesthetic form.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of "border poetics" is also adapted here to account for aesthetic expressions of border experiences that cannot be fully grasped by notions of geographically or ethnographically defined "contact zones" (Pratt). I therefore propose using the concept to refer to a narrative and cultural practice that places historically and geopolitically specific boundaries in relation with universal and figurative border experiences. This means that "real" borderlands also become staging grounds for symbolic border crossings that represent fundamentally human experiences or questions of identity, e.g., the border between life and death, dream and reality, and interrogations of gender or ethnicity. The particular is thus made

accessible through the universal; the universal acquires relevance through its relationship to the particular. Or, put differently, border poetics endows abstract universals with meaning by linking them to a particular context and making them relatable in other contexts.

World-Making and the Cosmopolitan Imagination

"World," "Welt," or "świat" can have many meanings. Generally speaking, to perceive, experience, or even imagine "the world" as a totality is impossible for any one individual. In common parlance, "world" is therefore often used metaphorically to circumscribe something particular that is ordered according to certain criteria, and that in itself represents a totality: the world of art, of business, or fashion. World can also refer more specifically to the sphere constructed and occupied by an individual or community as a set of social and political relations. This world can be variously defined (e.g., as family, nation, or interest group), and each world is one of many simultaneously existing worlds that are experienced or imagined differently, depending on context and individual differences.

Each world also constitutes its own cosmos with its own boundaries—it is shaped by certain thought systems and emotions, attitudes and practices that lend it cohesion and make it a "world." Worlds maintain their cohesion by regulating access through real or figurative boundaries. While the gatekeepers are often invisible, worlds do not regulate themselves. Rather, worlds are policed by those who have a stake in managing and limiting exchanges with Others and in defining who is or is not part of that world. The process of world-maintenance relies on and creates boundaries that can be rigidly enforced, but they can also be more open and flexible and provide opportunity for interaction and exchange. Whether these worlds are ideational or material, they have explanatory power and provide a sense of orientation and belonging. In this sense, "world" is shorthand for a conceivable unit, a manageable fraction from the multitude of

possibilities. It stands in an obscure relation to the world as a whole—the orderly and highly complex system that is the cosmos or the universe, and that is so large that it is beyond the scope of an individual's experience. Nevertheless, humans generally perceive of themselves as belonging to both: the worlds of their immediate surroundings and the world as a whole.[2]

Cosmopolitanism, generally speaking, conceives of the world as a totality that is bound together by certain universal ideas and values. As detailed in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, over the centuries, the idea of cosmopolitanism has been discussed in light of various aspects (e.g. hospitality, human rights, ethics, religion, democracy, etc.). How this community is defined and how membership in that community is granted has been a matter of different viewpoints (Kleingeld and Brown). Cosmopolitanism refers to the ideal of a universal community of world citizens in which every person is considered an equal member. Cosmopolitans have their home not in a particular nation or state, but they have overcome such local attachments and parochialism and perceive themselves as "citizens of the world." Yet, how can the "worlds" listed above—those individual ones that are perceived as familiar and whole—and the "world" as an idea of all-encompassing totality be reconciled?

Recent scholarship offers at least two ways of approaching this conceptual gap: First, the concept of universalism as relating to a harmonious and unified whole has become a matter of debate and is being reexamined with regard to the diverse ideologies in which it has been implicated. Second, there is an emphasis on cosmopolitanism's dependence on the simultaneity of rootedness and belonging to a specific local, regional, or national setting, on the one hand, and the transcendence of that setting and the participation in a universally conceived community on

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[2] There is, of course a long philosophical tradition of thinking about the concept of "world" that cannot be reviewed within the scope of this study. For recent philosophical explorations of the concept of world in the context of world literature, see especially the scholarship of Eric Hayot and Pheng Cheah.

the other hand. These more diverse and flexible understandings of cosmopolitanism and universalism are crucial for the practice of border poetics.

The orientation towards the universal is one of the underlying principles of the cosmopolitan idea, but this very connection has also been the basis for staunch criticism of cosmopolitanism. In such critiques, universalism is faulted for imposing a western-centric normativity and for promoting homogenization by dismissing the particular. Scholars from various fields have engaged with such critiques. Daniel Chernilo, for example, examines the philosophical tradition of universalism as the basis of cosmopolitanism, and he makes three points that are especially relevant here. First, he shows that cosmopolitanism and universalism are not exclusive to "Western" thought, and that they also predate the emergence of what we today consider "the West" (49–51). Second, cosmopolitanism's universalism derives from an awareness of disintegration and crisis (initially of the Greek Polis) and the concurrent desire to overcome the disintegration. It is therefore "a way of imagining a strong sense of unity *because current situations precisely emphasise difference, conflict, and change*" (51, emphasis original). Chernilo underscores the concept's imaginative capacity and its foundation on the idea of unity through diversity (57). From this point follows a third, which is that universalism is not opposed to particularism but rather "creates the very framework that makes such recognition and acceptance possible" (57).

Chernilo's discussion is in conversation with other scholarship that emphasizes cosmopolitanism's inherent plurality, which he addresses by unpacking the idea of the universal. Similarly, Gerard Delanty focuses on diversity and proposes the notion of a "critical cosmopolitanism" as one that "is critical and dialogic, seeing as the goal alternative readings of history and the recognition of plurality" ("Cosmopolitan" 35). While Delanty dismisses the

universal and argues that critical cosmopolitanism is "post-universal," his focus on openness and a drive towards self-examination are significant here. Critical cosmopolitanism, he argues, is "[…] an open process by which the social world is made intelligible; it should be seen as the expression of new ideas, opening spaces of discourse, identifying possibilities for translation and the construction of the social world" ("Cosmopolitan" 42).

Current discussions of cosmopolitanism not only decenter the "universal," they also reflect on its dynamic relationship with various forms of the particular, including regionalism, patriotism, or nationalism (e.g., Brennan; Clifford; Nussbaum). The focus of such studies is on the integration of divergent concepts within the notion of cosmopolitanism, which has been variously expressed, for example, as "rooted cosmopolitanism" (Appiah, "Rooted"), "regional cosmopolitanism" (Berman), or a "situated" or "locally inflected" cosmopolitanism (Robbins).

In these studies cosmopolitanism does not represent an ahistorical ideal of a harmonious and detached humanity. Rather, they propose a critical cosmopolitanism, which means that being a citizen of the world and a citizen of one's locality not only mutually reinforce one another, but that these attachments are built through complex entanglements and negotiations between varied forms and levels of belonging. Timothy Brennan has argued that cosmopolitanism "[…] is *local* while denying its local character" ("Cosmo-Theory" 660, emphasis original). In the German-Polish context, historian Robert Traba has proposed a cosmopolitan constellation through the concept of "open regionalism" ("otwarty regionalizm"), which begins from the local and opens

up to a wider network. Open regionalism takes a practical stance: "Denke universell, handele lokal!" ["think universally, act locally!"] (Loew and Traba 100).[3]

In short, I argue that because borders express disruption and crisis (which give rise to cosmopolitan ideas) as well as connection and contact (which cosmopolitanism espouses), they must be considered as sites that can produce a "cosmopolitan imagination"—a self-critical practice with a universal orientation. For Delanty, the "cosmopolitan imagination" is tied to the idea of critical cosmopolitanism: it is "a condition of self-problematization, incompleteness and the awareness that certainty can never be established once and for all" ("Cosmopolitan" 25). My view of borders as potential sites of a cosmopolitan imagination is further inspired by sociologist Chris Rumford's insistence on the "centrality of borders to cosmopolitan thinking" (*Cosmopolitan* 3) and his conceptualization of borders as "cosmopolitan workshops." Rumford proposes vernacularization, multiperspectivalism, fixity/unfixity, and connectivities as cosmopolitan dimensions of borders (1). The examination of border poetics can deepen this understanding by adding important aesthetic and cultural dimensions.

The dual focus on self-criticism and a universal orientation both produces and is an outcome of the experience of the historically and socially specific. Furthermore, it is the cause and effect of the understanding that those experiences are also tied to global processes with possible parallels elsewhere. Thus, on the one hand, border poetics emphasizes a simultaneous

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[3] Traba promotes the concept of open regionalism through the journal *Borussia*, of which he is a founding editor, as well as through the annual meeting "forum otwartego regionalizmu," both of which promote interdisciplinary and transborder research and reflection. "Es ging darum, die universelle Wirklichkeit gleichzusetzen mit der Mikroperspektive, zu erklären durch den Ort, an dem wir uns mit allen positiven und negativen Aspekten befinden, sich dabei aber nicht abzugrenzen, sondern diese gesellschaftlichen Selbstdefinitionen im Kontext Polens, der Nachbarn, Europas zu verifizieren. […] Deshalb lautet unsere Parole auch: 'Denke universell, handele lokal!'" (Loew and Traba 100).

rootedness and belonging to a specific local, regional, or national setting, and, on the other hand, the transcendence of that setting and the participation in a universally conceived community.

European cosmopolitanism today

In complicating the notion of cosmopolitanism, some particular considerations come into play within the European context. Under the aegis of the EU, Europeans are challenged to think beyond local, regional, or national contexts, but many find it difficult to do so. They struggle to think of themselves as European at all, and there is little agreement on what kind of Europe they want to live in or who should or should not be included in this transnational community. This struggle for Europe and the European Union has become increasingly visible in recent years. And while the idea of Europe has always been a matter of intense debate, the recent financial crises, Great Britain's decision to leave the European Union, fear of terrorism, and the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons seeking refuge in Europe cast more and more doubt on the very nature and possibility of a shared European identity. Daniel Levy, Max Pensky, and John Torpey argue in the introduction to their edited volume that the complexity of perspectives, interests, and concerns has made it clear that a "utilitarian focus on economic cooperation" is insufficient for "creating a supra-national mode of identification" (xxii). In reference to Anthony D. Smith's argument that the search for a common cultural basis has been an important part of the European project since its inception, Levy, Pensky, and Torpey show that in seeking to establish this shared culture, "[...] Europe finds itself in a continuous tension between the desire to replicate the national experience that looks toward shared pasts […] and the recognition that binding such pasts into a unified frame of reference complicates matters" (xxii).

Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande address such tensions in *Cosmopolitan Europe* (2007), arguing that Europe still largely acts and thinks of itself in national terms (2). They further note

that Europe suffers from a “national self-misunderstanding” (4) in which the nation-state and European integration are pitted against one another. Such binary thinking preempts the emergence of any alternative models for Europe in which particulars might be reconciled with shared (European) universals (4). Here Beck and Grande propose a “cosmopolitan Europe” as an alternative conceptualization. This notion does not eliminate the nation state but rather calls for “its reinterpretation in light of the ideals and principles for which Europe in essence always stood and stands, that is, in light of a new conception of political cosmopolitanism” (5). This enterprise, however, brings forth the “boundary dilemma” that “the national must be both overcome *and* preserved” (261). Because the particular cannot be erased or eliminated, the universal and the particular must be held in suspension. This challenge is reflected in the definition of cosmopolitanism that Beck provides elsewhere: “cosmopolitanism, for me, is an idea and a reality—an idea and a reality of universalism that contains a particularistic dimension of meaning, an idea and a reality of globality that includes nationalism, and an idea and a reality of transnationalism that does not exclude a plurality of ethnicities and cultures” (“European” 642).

In practical terms, and in order to find a home in the equilibrium of universal and particular, one must find ways to cope with the gap between two very different types of affiliation: one is the belonging to the familiar worlds of everyday life that are anchored in a particular socio-political structure, and the other is a commitment to a more universal ideal—a world that not only encompasses but also conceptually unites all other worlds. Because the latter cannot exist without the former, many scholars of cosmopolitanism today refer to a “critical cosmopolitanism.” As discussed earlier, this approach is more attuned to the tension but also the connection between the particular and the universal. This critical stance is indispensible for a

more realistic and practically oriented cosmopolitanism, and it is a defining characteristic of border poetics, which displays an acute sense of the complex nature of borders. Because border poetics rest on the same productive tension between the particular and the universal that also drives critical cosmopolitanism, I argue for viewing border poetics as an idiom of the cosmopolitan imagination.

Memory between the national and the cosmopolitan

Critical cosmopolitanism demands transborder thinking not only in spatial but also in temporal terms. The latter requires a productive engagement with the past and the conflicting collective memories of the present. In the European context, many such memories are connected to the Second World War and the Holocaust, but due to the plurality of experience, they often compete across national or regional contexts. The resulting tensions and disconnects create a complex memory landscape, in which memories can be "shared" ("gemeinsam"), but are more often "parallel" or "divided" ("geteilt"), as proposed by Hahn and Traba in the context of German and Polish sites of memory. In the case of shared sites of memory, both the remembered content and the function of the site of memory are equivalent or very similar for both collectives. Parallel sites of memory refer to different actual objects of remembrance, but these fulfill the same function in a given society. Divided sites of memory are the most common ones: while the object of remembrance is the same in both societies, the event or person is remembered differently and fulfills a different function (Hahn and Traba 22-23).

The distinct character and function that most memories continue to have appears to stand in contrast to a perceived globalization of memory and the erasure of particularities. Yet, as Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider argue in their examination of Holocaust memory, the global circulation of historical accounts, images, and memories does not mean that collective memory is

disappearing ("Cosmopolitan" 25). Rather, the notion of a "collective," which was once primarily tied to the nation, needs to be rethought within an open and globally oriented framework (23–28). In thinking about and beyond contemporary Europe, historian, social theorist, and philosopher Obrad Savic has emphasized the urgency of a "Europeanization of national memories," which includes the recognition that "[…] Europe today, Europe here and now, comes as much from Auschwitz as from the Greek, Roman, and Christian traditions." Savic stresses the need for an open European framework, and he argues that the citizens of Europe have an ethical responsibility in the world, but "democratic solidarity" is dependent on "a people of Europe already transformed into a European world people." The sense of connection, he contends, must go beyond the national if they are to create a "European world people"—a cosmopolitan formation that binds Europeans to one another and to the rest of the world (Savic).

Savic focuses on the Europeanization of memory as the basis for the process of worlding, and Levy and Sznaider articulate similar concerns through the idea of a "cosmopolitanization of memory." They define "cosmopolitanization as a process in which universalism and particularism are no longer exclusive 'either/or' categories but instead a coexisting pair" ("Memories" 160). The term highlights a distinction from the "universalist enlightenment view of cosmopolitanism" associated with Eurocentrism and assumptions of moral superiority, which ignores "the persistence of particularism and exclusion as central features of Europeanness" (160). Holocaust memory is a paradigmatic case, and Levy and Sznaider argue elsewhere that "cosmopolitanized" memory is always in the making in a process of "[d]e- and [r]e-territorialization": it transcends the boundaries of nations and territories without denying the continued impact of these boundaries ("Cosmopolitan" 26–28). For Savic as well as for Levy

and Sznaider, the transformation and opening up of Holocaust memory has the potential for new forms of solidarity and the advancement of global human rights.[4]

My argument here is premised on the idea that collective memory, broadly speaking, is embedded in a cosmopolitan constellation in which the particular and the universal both play a role. In this constellation, different kinds of memory have the potential for new forms of solidarity. This leads to the question: How does memory relate to borders, bordering processes, and border crossings? Memory, as Azade Seyhan has poignantly expressed, is "a phenomenon of conceptual border zones" (31). It is both collective and individual, it circulates locally and globally, it responds to the particular and the universal, and "it dwells at the crossroads of the past and the present" (31). In the Polish-German context today, many memories are tied to the Second World War and its aftermath, especially experiences of flight and expulsion.

Narratives of Disruption and Entanglement

At the end of the Second World War, millions of people all over Europe were on the move, trying to find new homes. Germany and Poland's borders were shifted west, and the accompanying large-scale population exchanges had a significant impact on shaping German and Polish postwar societies, which were to become more ethnically homogenous. In this process, Poles were expelled from the eastern territories that were now part of the Soviet Union and many settled in the former German territories. In addition, Poles from other areas of Poland also relocated to these new lands, either because their homes had been destroyed during the war, or because they saw the opportunity to begin a new life elsewhere. In the areas where Germans had

[4] Chapter 3 asks how literary texts operate in this space in which memories are territorialized and specific to a certain space and at the same time widely accessible and universalized through their global circulation.

once lived and Poles were now settling, not only the infrastructure had to be rebuilt but new social and political institutions and hierarchies emerged.[5] Germans, in turn, were forced to leave the now Polish regions and resettle within the newly defined German borders. Like their Polish counterparts, they often faced hostility and had difficulty integrating into the new society.[6]

The war and its aftermath, the expulsions, resettlements, and migration movements brought about disruption at every level of society. People were forced to abandon their familiar surroundings and leave behind families and friends, houses, land, and personal belongings. This experience of a complete break only added to the trauma already experienced during the war itself. For expellees and refugees, the new surroundings were often strange and unfamiliar; they were inhabited by someone else's history and memory that was better left untouched. In this context, the German-Polish borderlands presented themselves to many as places without a narrative. They seemed to lack a connection with their current inhabitants and appeared alien and hostile. As I demonstrate below, many literary texts reflect on this sense of alienation among new arrivals.

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[5] Various scholars have examined the initially chaotic circumstances of these expulsions, the different stages of their implementation, their larger history in the eastern and the western territories, as well as the reception and social integration of expellees in Poland and in East and West Germany. See for example the work of Gregor Thum and Beata Halicka. Halicka describes the hierarchical relationships between the different groups who settled in the formerly German regions. Because they were the poorest, Poles from the "Kresy" were at bottom in this hierarchy. Silesians were under suspicion for being "Germans," and those from Central Poland placed themselves at the top of the new social order as the most advanced and entrepreneurial people (Halicka, see esp. 163 and 264–285). Gregor Thum also describes the tensions and conflicts among people of different classes, education levels, and ethnic backgrounds, who formed "a motley society" (*Uprooted*, see for example 178–180).

[6] The popular postwar German narrative had long been dominated by the myth of a smooth and swift process of integration of ethnic Germans from the Eastern territories. Scholars have been challenging this view since at least the 1980s. See for example historian Andreas Kossert's *Kalte Heimat* (2008), in which he argues that expellees were regarded as foreigners, and that they were often discriminated based on Nazi racial thinking, which deemed people from the East inferior.

The experience of a radical discontinuity of time and space led to a persistent feeling of insecurity. For many decades, the new inhabitants felt a sense of perpetual strangeness accompanied by the lingering awareness that these regions were not as "Polish" as the communist-led state insisted. As Matthias Weber explains in his entry to the *Online-Lexikon*, German expellee organizations, which long held revisionist positions and refused to recognize the German-Polish border, only intensified these anxieties. However, the multiple layers of meaning beneath the patina of homogeneity, i.e., the multiethnic reality and complex history of these places, were not addressed until the end of the Cold War. Only then could the borderland inhabitants, as well as scholars, activists, artists, and writers, begin to openly explore the multiethnic past and complex cultural memory embedded in these regions. As I show in the next chapters, the literary imagination plays an important role in filling the blank spots left in local and family histories. Many contemporary authors explore these borderlands and remap their complex landscapes by imagining new connections between people across different times and places.

At times, a sense of continuity can be achieved by connecting the literary imagination with actual people and places. As one of the most prominent and prolific Polish writers today, Olga Tokarczuk has contributed significantly to a (self-)critical reexamination of the borderlands and their role in Polish collective memory. She takes a new look at the sense of postwar alienation, the effect it has on the present, and what it might mean for the future. She insists on the necessity of interpersonal dialogue, which she fosters not only through her writing but also through participation in meetings and events. In her 2001 essay "Palec Stalina" ("Stalin's

Finger"), which was published in the multilingual quarterly *Kafka*,[7] Tokarczuk describes a gathering of former German and current Polish inhabitants in her hometown. She notes that in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War it became evident that memory had been split. However, she observes that this division of memories and its long-lasting effects can and must be ameliorated:

> […] pamięć tych kilku lat po wojnie jest pamięcią rozpękłą na pół, która może spotkać się jeszcze w miejscach takich jak świetlica w mojej wsi—spotkać i dopełnić, właśnie w miejscu dojścia, w miejscu wyjścia. Nie istnieje inne rozwiązanie, ponieważ nasi poprzednicy zabrali swoją pamięć ze sobą, a myśmy zostali wrzuceni w świat bez pamięci, a więc przez to w świat niezrozumiały, nie poddający się przyswojeniu, złożony z kawałków, jakie z wielu stron przynieśli ze sobą tutaj nowi mieszkańcy. ("Palec" 49)
> [the memory of those few years after the war is a memory that is burst in two. It can still meet again in places such as the community center in my village—meet and come together again, especially in the place of arrival, the place of departure. There is no other option. Our predecessors have taken their memory with them, and we were thrown into a world without memories, and thus into a world that is incomprehensible, that resists appropriation, composed of fragments that the new inhabitants have brought here from many places.]

This fragmentary and split memory is the result of experiences of trauma, disruption, and resettlement.

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[7] *Kafka* was a literary and cultural quarterly that existed from 2001 and 2005. It was published by the Goethe Institute Inter Nationes e.V. The journal was devoted to Central European literature and culture, and each issue was published in four languages simultaneously (German, Polish, Hungarian, and Czech/Slovak).

In a 2014 essay, Tokarczuk describes a psychological condition that derives from this experience and that afflicts the German-Polish borderland populations. “Syndrom Królewny Śnieżki,” or “Snow White syndrome” (“Schneewittchensyndrom”), stems from the moment of encounter with an unfamiliar space that resists appropriation. As the first phase of expulsions was often implemented with haste, new inhabitants at times entered houses which were still warm from the previous owners or in which meals had been left out on the table. Even under the best of circumstances, expellees had to leave most of their personal belongings behind.[8] “Snow White syndrome,” Tokarczuk explains,

> Polega on na dziwnej i nie do końca przyjemnej świadomości, że oto weszło się w czyjąś intymną przestrzeń. Zupełnie jak uciekająca przed złą macochą Królewna, która znalazła się w domu krasnoludków podczas ich nieobecności. Zobaczyła zastawione stoły, zaścielone łóżeczka, wszystko gotowe na przybycie swych właścicieli, nie zaś dla obcej królewny, intruza. Gdy próbowała odpocząć na łóżku, okazywało się że jest dla niej za krótkie. Gdy próbowała zjeść coś z ich talerzy, były zbyt małe. Niby więc wszystko było w porządku, ale nic nie pasowało, wszystko wydawało się obce i dziwne, jakby z innego wymiaru. W tej wersji bajki, w której my uczestniczymy po wojnie, krasnoludki odeszły i

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[8] Tokarczuk refers to the particular memory of still hot coals and warm soup on the table in her essay “Palec Stalina” (“Stalin’s Finger”) (48). Sabrina Janesch’s novel *Ambra* contains a similar scene in which two families are temporarily forced to live together and two women are cooking side by side. Such anecdotes are sometimes included in historical accounts. For example, Gregor Thum describes the political and social circumstances of this German-Polish cohabitation (*Die fremde Stadt* 134). Halicka shows that Germans and Poles who were forced to live together had little sympathy for one another (158–160) and instances of compassion were rare (161–162). However, Halicka also explains that Poles who had been expelled from the Eastern provinces were often more sympathetic to the Germans because they had suffered more under Soviet occupation and less under German rule (159). Ute Badura’s documentary film *Schlesiens wilder Westen* (2002) chronicles both positive and negative encounters and interpersonal contacts during the expulsion process.

nie wróciły, pozostawiając nam swoje pokoje i sprzęty, domy i ulice, wzgórza i ścieżki, a my musimy je teraz oswoić." ("Schneewittchensyndrom" 163)

[…is based on the strange and somewhat unpleasant awareness that one has just stepped into someone else's intimate space. This is Snow White's experience when she runs from her evil stepmother and finds herself in the dwarves' home while they are away. She saw the set tables, the made beds—everything prepared for the owners' return and not for a strange queen, an intruder. When she tried to rest on the bed, it turned out too short for her. When she tried to eat something from their plates, she found them quite small. Everything appeared fine, but nothing fit, things seemed foreign and strange, as if from a different dimension. In the version of the fairy tale in which we participate after the war, the dwarves went away and did not return. They left us with their rooms and appliances, houses and streets, hills and pathways, and we must make them our own.]

In the Grimm brothers' version of the fairy tale, Snow White exemplifies otherness; she is a border crosser par excellence, not least because she is unrelated by blood to the new matriarch of the family.[9] To escape from her stepmother's murderous jealousy, she flees beyond the mountains and into the woods, where she stumbles upon a secluded home that belongs to the seven dwarves. They themselves are outsiders, working underground and disconnected from the larger society. When they return from work, they find Snow White sleeping in one of their beds and invite her to stay. As Tokarczuk notes, the "dwarves" in the German-Polish story did not return, but they did leave many traces and objects that the new inhabitants had to make "their

[9] The fairy tales that were collected by the brothers Grimm and others are themselves evidence of multiple border crossings—from their oral transmission all over Europe, northern Africa, and Asia to their multiple migrations, translations, and adaptations in the modern period (Darnton esp. 11-12, 21).

own." However, this appropriation was hindered by a long-lasting and persistent fear that Germans would soon recover from the lost war and come back to reclaim what they had lost.[10] As indicated above, in the first months after the war, there were indeed frequent encounters with the previous owners. Often Germans were still living in the homes that were being taken over by Polish expellees. This resulted in arrangements in which Germans and Poles were forced to temporarily share the same living space and very similar struggles for survival.

Even after the Germans had left, and the fear of their return had receded into the background, for the current inhabitants there remained a disconnect between the place they occupied and the place they still perceived as belonging to the Other. Besides the physical devastation that served as constant reminder of the catastrophic war the Germans had waged, there was also material evidence of another kind of difference: the built environment looked different, buildings and household items bore German inscriptions, and one could find books, papers, and documents in the inaccessible German language. In this sense, both the destructive force and the productive, cultural traces of a German presence were inscribed into the landscape and visible in daily life. Thus, "Snow White" must have not only *felt* that things did not quite fit or that she had just entered another dimension, but she was also confronted with the physical evidence of the unintelligible stories and secrets in the place she had entered. These traces of a former presence could neither be fully appropriated nor denied.

The world, as many experienced it, and that Tokarczuk describes, was disrupted in so many ways that it resisted appropriation. I suggest that border poetics is a practice of rethinking affiliations in more cosmopolitan terms and it therefore constitutes a move from appropriation to claim in the sense proposed by B. Venkat Mani in the context of Turkish-German literature.

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[10] See also Pierre-Frédéric Weber's analysis of this residiual fear, esp. 134-135.

Mani argues that the negotiation of different identities needs to be reinscribed positively as "cosmopolitical claim," in which cosmopolitanism "does not manifest itself in the complete absence of identification with a nation, ethnicity, or culture and certainly not in declarations of absolute detachment or rootlessness." In fact, he continues, German-Turkish authors "[…] are astutely cognizant of the cultural and political geographies of their polis, but they are not hesitant to unsettle and radicalize the definition of belonging to that very cosmos and the polis through their writings" (*Cosmopolitical* 6). In my understanding, cosmopolitical claims are therefore also claims to agency; they are deeply political commitments and expressions of ethical responsibility that motivate interventions in the space one lives in. I return to the idea of also viewing such claims as expressions of resistance below, but first it is helpful to highlight some differences between appropriation and cosmopolitical claim.

In order to provide a more nuanced understanding of different processes of appropriation, historian Thomas Serrier has developed a typology of forms in which new spaces and material objects may be appropriated into a culture. Halicka applies this typology to her analysis of the postwar settlement of Poland's "wild west" (Halicka 183–185). According to Serrier, cultural appropriation ("kulturelle Aneignung") comes either in the form of exclusive or inclusive appropriation ("exkludierende" and "inkludierende Aneignung"). The former strives for a new beginning and attempts to symbolically, or in actuality, suppress or deny the previous presence of the Other. The latter acknowledges the Other's contribution to the space one now occupies and aims to establish a sense of continuity with the past (Serrier, "Formen" 20-22). Serrier shows elsewhere that the exclusive form of cultural appropriation of the formerly German areas was dominant in the first three decades after the war. This resulted in hard and divisive borders (political and mental) that were aimed at creating a stable and homogenous society

("Gedächtnistransfer" 158-159). As shown in my Introduction, these border became gradually more porous since the 1970s, but it was not until 1989/90 that Germans and Poles were able to discover their shared past.

According to Serrier, there are also two subforms of inclusive cultural appropriation: administrative appropriation ("verwaltende Aneignung") and creative appropriation ("schöpferische Aneignung"). Administrative appropriation entails the acknowledgment of a place's history and the realization that its cultural heritage must be preserved, even if it is not one's own. Creative appropriation goes one step further and refers to the recognition of cross-cultural connections, which brings about a sense of co-ownership, shared responsibility, and appreciation for the shared cultural heritage ("Formen" 22). These notions of the different forms and stages of appropriation can help trace the development from viewing the border as a dividing line to the emergence of a German-Polish transborder consciousness. Following this trajectory, creative appropriation has paved the way for border poetics because it supports narratives that challenge exclusionary discourses of the past. However, the appropriation narrative has its limitations because, at its core, it is still prefigured on difference. Border poetics grows out of a desire for a simultaneous maintenance and suspension of difference, and it therefore must go even beyond the last stage of creative appropriation.

Although it is still related to inclusive appropriation, I suggest that border poetics is conceptually closer to Mani's notion of the "cosmopolitical claim" mentioned above. Cosmopolitical claims more explicitly foreground processes of becoming and cosmopolitanization and the participation in an inclusive political process. Where the notion of appropriation may appear one-sided and forgo questions of agency, the expression of a cosmopolitical claim implies an opportunity for resistance—both of the thing that is being

claimed, because it maintains its difference, as well as of the one making the claim, who must both insist on and suspend their own difference in order to make the claim. At the same time, there are important differences to the German-Turkish claim-making Mani describes. These are due to the actual physical and political border between Germany and Poland, its history, and the related perceptions of one another. Halle points to this difference with regard to the notion of “interzones”: “Polish-German is spatially close yet understood only haltingly as a common place, while the Turkish-German is geographically distant […] but understood as connected and even continuous” (*Europeanization* 4). The distance is based in the fact that throughout the centuries, Germany and its predecessors have made various territorial and material claims on Poland and the east, and this negative association cannot be ignored when speaking of claim-making. Still, the “cosmopolitical claims” articulated through border poetics are quite different from the concrete claims of the past: they are mutual, and they express new and flexible forms of attachment and belonging, and they aim at integrating difference without dissolving it permanently.

Memory as cosmopolitan project

Memory plays an important role in this process of claim-making, and “Snow White syndrome” encapsulates the psychological impact of the past. Even today, more than seventy years after the end of the war, feelings of alienation and uncertainty as well as a desire to fill blank spots still matter. As described in the previous chapter, the end of the Cold War, the final recognition of the German-Polish border (1991), Poland’s entry into the European Union (2004), and accession to the Schengen Zone (2007) opened up new possibilities for dealing with the past. These opportunities included access to documents, collaborations and dialogue between German and

Polish scholars and communities, and a more open conversation among various civil society actors and across different generations.

Combined with a sense of urgency to redefine one's place in the new Europe and the world, the exploration and understanding of the past within a broader European context became important cornerstones in the search for a new identity. This examination also included questions about the possibility of a European or a cosmopolitan memory, as for example described by Beck and Grande, Levy and Sznaider, and Savic. Katharina Raabe, the editor for eastern European literature at the Suhrkamp publishing house, argues in a *Eurozine* article that books and libraries play an important role in developing a shared memory and sense of history. Indeed, authors in Germany and Poland have been responding to the new imperative in various ways, and according to Barbara Cöllen, interest in the literary exploration of a shared German-Polish history is still growing.

It comes with the territory—quite literally speaking—that these broader contexts are articulated through the lens of a specific locality or social unit. Many recent literary texts about the borderland therefore take stock of the past by critiquing the incomplete and contradictory narratives of family members. Such narratives often interrogate collective memory by showing how it is refracted through individuals and their relations with one another. Many Polish authors examine the multicultural past of the border regions and bring multiple, and often suppressed narratives into a conversation.[11] German-language authors, by contrast, frequently explore

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[11] Besides Olga Tokarczuk and Inga Iwasiów, who are prominently featured in this study, and Stefan Chwin, who is referenced multiple times, this is the case, for example, in the works of Wojciech Kuczok, Andrzej Stasiuk, Czesław Miłosz, Artur Daniel Liskowacki, Paweł Huelle, Artur Becker, Dariusz Muszer, and Szczepan Twardoch.

questions of guilt and responsibility across multiple generations and are invested in a critical examination of family histories that are often related to their own family.[12]

The (re)establishment of locally and regionally specific continuities entails the invention or recreation of a narrative, and the self-positioning within that narrative. The cosmopolitan imagination uses the “symbolic act” of storytelling (Seyhan) as an opportunity to create networks that go beyond the local and the regional and expand into wider networks of interdependencies and connections that form the basis of what Anthony Appiah has called a “rooted cosmopolitanism.” As Seyhan notes, memory is crucial for establishing continuity (4); border poetics then, more specifically strives to situate (disrupted) particular memories within wider networks.

Memory is “multidirectional,” according to Michael Rothberg. He argues that memories do not compete with one another but are in a mutually influential dialogue (3). Border poetics advances dialogues between different memory regimes in favor of creating a cosmopolitan imagination that unsettles hegemonic narratives. It facilitates claims to memories that are one’s own and not one’s own at the same time. To apply Mani’s description of cosmopolitan subjects to the phenomenon of “cosmopolitan memory,” it could be said that this type of memory is “anchored in multiple national frameworks without a complete identification with and investment in any one of them” (*Cosmopolitical* 117). In the German-Polish context, the manifold anchoring is an acknowledgment of one’s own position in a fractured narrative and at the same time affording the Other the opportunity to enter that narrative to jointly revisit and reimagine it. This kind of hospitality of the imagination also acknowledges the incompleteness of

[12] Tanja Dückers, Sabrina Janesch, and Günter Grass are discussed in more detail here. Other authors of interest include for example Ulrike Draesner, Jenny Erpenbeck, Julia Franck, Reinhard Jirgl, Per Leo, Stefan Wackwitz, and Christa Wolf,

any narrative that does not allow for a critical examination from within and without. Cosmopolitan memory can thus also be described as both, a disruption of old narratives and an investment in new ones.

Transdifference, Imagination, and World-Making

Border poetics draws on memory with its inherent tensions and contradictions, and it attempts at least temporarily to contain them within one narrative. In order to deal with contradictions, narratives must find ways to express difference without seeking to dissolve it. Articulated in terms of borders, it can be said that cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan memory both depend on the existence of borders and their simultaneous suspension and transcendence. Scholars of American literature and culture Helmbrecht Breinig and Klaus Lösch have described this instantaneous process whereby difference is maintained and temporarily suspended as "transdifference" (Lösch; Breinig and Lösch). Their non-linear and non-binary concept "refers to whatever runs 'through' the line of demarcation drawn by binary difference. It does not do away with the originary binary inscription of difference, but rather causes it to oscillate. The concept of transdifference interrogates the validity of binary constructions of difference without completely deconstructing them" (Breinig and Lösch 23). The notion of transdifference is illuminating with regard to border poetics, which likewise is not aimed at dissolving borders but at critiquing them and bringing them into oscillation.

The idea of variously oscillating borders and border constellations brings me to the following questions: What bearing do oscillating borders have on critical cosmopolitanism? Or, asked differently, how are the particular and the universal connected in the notion of transdifference? How can borders bridge the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar? How can breaks, disruptions, and absences be integrated into such a radically expanded understanding

of world that has no clearly defined boundaries? A possible response to such questions is: through the imagination.

In his study *Poetics of Imagining*, philosopher Richard Kearney summarizes the faculty of the imagination precisely in this vein when he defines it as “the human power to convert absence into presence, actuality into possibility, what-is into something-other-than-it-is.” Imagination, he continues, refers to the “[…] ability to transform the time and space of our world into a specifically human mode of existence (*Dasein*)” (4). I argue that this “specifically human mode of existence” can be articulated in cosmopolitan terms. Cosmopolitanism, as Pheng Cheah reminds us, is an act of imagining, i.e., it

> […] is about viewing oneself as part of a world, a circle of political belonging that transcends the limited ties of kinship and country to embrace the whole of deterritorialized humanity. However, since one cannot *see* the universe, the world, or humanity, the cosmopolitan optic is not one of perceptual experience. (3)

By defining “world literature as world-making activity,” (2) Cheah makes explicit the connection between world literature and cosmopolitanism. Both his emphasis of the link between world literature and cosmopolitanism and his definition of world as a dynamic spatial and temporal category are instructive for border poetics. Cheah examines the links between cosmopolitanism, world literature, and postcoloniality through the concept of world, and he shows that the process of world-making is an important vehicle for the cosmopolitan imagination.

World literature as well as world literary studies are centrally concerned with transdifference, even if this concern is articulated in different terms. World literature uncovers, articulates, and circulates familiar and unfamiliar patterns, genres, and themes; and it experiments with diverse constellations—from realist to fantastical—in which difference can be

temporarily suspended. The concept of world literature offers intriguing models to help us understand how texts mediate between the locally, regionally, or nationally specific and a universal imaginary. Such models include for example Martin Puchner's "worldly literature"; Eric Hayot's conceptualization of "literary worlds" and the "mechanisms of world-production in literature" (142) as well as his investigation into the meaning of *world* in world literature; Cheah's view of "world literature as world-making activity" (*What* 2); and Pascale Casanova's work on the "world literary space" as a "mediating area" ("Literature" 72) in which interconnected positions are constantly configured and reconfigured.

Even though real and figurative borderlands are major sites of conflict, negotiation, and contact—and therefore shape our experience of "world" in significant ways—the interplay between borderlands and the world literary space is rarely considered. Aamir Mufti has recently conceptualized world literature itself as a "border regime" that produces its own exclusions, mainly through the dominance of English and the cultural and social practices resulting from it (Mufti 9, 12-13). I am interested, however, in using the actual political border as a starting point and conceptualizing it as a site for developing a cosmopolitan idiom in literary and cultural texts. In the German-Polish case, translating and finding a shared language is a concern, but English does not typically enter into that equation.

Mufti's critical examination of world literature as a mechanism that reinforces borders is of crucial importance. However, just as necessary is a view from the actual border. By asking what borders and border experiences contribute to world literature, we can infuse the concept with new questions and map connections between a multitude of very diverse texts, apart from linguistic limitations. With few exceptions (e.g., Cheah; Domínguez; Mani "Kosmopolitismus"), little attention has also been paid to the relationship between cosmopolitanism and world

literature. Border poetics as an idiom of the cosmopolitan imagination constitutes an important intervention into varied views of world-making in literary texts and the definition of world literature.

How world is imagined both shapes material, physical, or psychological realities, and it is determined by them. Because the imagination is so embedded in a variety of social, political, and cultural contexts, it is inseparable from practice and perceptual experience. Moreover, while imagining may appear as an individual act, it is shaped by the larger social context and an individual's place in society, both of which it then also influences. Seen as such, the imagination is an important political and social force and a motor of change, as Arjun Appadurai explains in his seminal study *Modernity at Large*:

> The image, the imagined, the imaginary—these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is somewhere else), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. This unleashing of the imagination links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (31)

Appadurai's understanding of the imagination as a social practice and expression of agency, and Cheah's view of world literature as an important articulation of cosmopolitanism, as well as the concept of transdifference constitute important elements of the theoretical frame of border poetics, and they all have a particular relationship to the social world.

The relationship between "imagining" and "making," is at the very foundation of poetics, broadly conceived. The notion of poetics here is based on the translation of *poiesis* as "to make" or "to create" ("Poiesis"). In this definition, *poiesis* refers to the creation of new worlds and it includes the idea that "imagination and reality make and remake each other" (Kearney 97). As a form of the social imagination, poetics thus entails the production of meaning, and it constitutes a kind of "world-making" activity. Border poetics concerns a particular kind of world-making that derives its main impetus from the engagement with borders and their fluid and blurred nature, as discussed in more detail below.

Besides world-making, border poetics aims at "worlding" in the sense of educating others about the world and can at times contain a certain heavy-handed didacticism or paternalistic overtones. Nonetheless, the process of "worlding" also connects border poetics to the kind of critical cosmopolitanism I have described above: border poetics is a practice, i.e., a particular mode of producing narratives with and about borders that makes them conceivable as "cosmopolitan borders" and "cosmopolitan workshops" (Rumford). Whether this kind of transborder connectivity is articulated explicitly or implied through story, discourse, or performance of the narrative, border poetics aims at creating worlds that offer a (critical) cosmopolitan outlook. This view can have a "worlding" effect on the reader or recipient of these transborder narratives.

As a literary and cultural practice, border poetics is not entirely new, but it is gaining prominence as the awareness of diverse and intersecting borders and bordering practices increases. It advances a cosmopolitan imagination by proposing alternative modes of belonging—and according to Delanty, "some notion of an alternative society" is a crucial element of cosmopolitanism (*Cosmopolitan* 66). Border poetics challenges the reader or audience to imagine other worlds and to find access points that relate the unfamiliar to the familiar experience. There are three important points to be made. First, as an idiom of the cosmopolitan imagination, border poetics focuses on connections, transitions, and movement. It creates new connections as it oscillates between the particular and the universal, thereby practicing both worlding and world-making. Second, this definition of border poetics is based on a specific understanding of the role of the imagination as a social practice. In this sense, poetics is regarded as a "world-making" activity in which borders are concrete and figurative sites with their own histories and thus their own "worldliness." Third, as border poetics explores a destabilization of all kinds of borders, it also offers new questions for areas of study that are concerned with transnational or transdisciplinary approaches.

Borders, identity, and narrative

I now take a brief look at borders, their relationship to questions of identity, community, and difference, and identify points of intervention that borders offer and that allow for the emergence of border poetics. The variously defined particular worlds that humans create to manage the complexity of "the world" as a totality can be better conceptualized if we consider the communities that these worlds bind and the borders that exist around them. Here, too, the imagination plays a crucial role, and Benedict Anderson has famously argued for viewing nations as "imagined communities." The acts of imagining communities—be they nations or

other groups—and the creation of borders are instantaneous. As interdependent processes, communities and borders both aim at marking the distinctions that separate the collective Self from the Other. Borders delineate the outer limits of a unit of perceived sameness, thereby creating internal and external spaces and subjects at the same time.

Communities produce borders in two important and at times interdependent ways: On the one hand, they are political and legal demarcations that separate seemingly distinct spaces and control the movement between entities, such as nation states. Thus, the political unit that is represented on a map is also enforced physically in the landscape through checkpoints, border posts, and fences. Sometimes geographic features such as mountain ranges, valleys, or rivers are used and framed as "natural" borders. On the other hand, this physical and political reality of borders has its counterpart (or complement) in the border as an imaginative construct. By creating complex constellations of emotional, familial, political, and other affiliations, humans also create mental maps with figurative border posts and fences that can become real in various ways. Following Appadurai's notion of the imagination as a social practice, these imagined borders can be just as forceful as the "real" borders at keeping out difference and in determining and regulating the movement between here and there, between one's own space and the space of the Other. Bordering is therefore also always an attempt to create homogeneous spaces.

While borders transmit ideas of who and what should be included or excluded, the innumerable kinds of existing geopolitical and mental borders often overlap or are at odds with one another, which leads to temporary and situated (imagined) communities of affiliation. Recognizing the impact of such multiple and diverse mappings, border studies and border theory have expanded far beyond viewing borders and the spaces they create as fixed sites or geographical locations. Borders are also mental constructs and (mobile) concepts that separate

Self from Other. Questions of identity and identity formation, especially with regard to how the Self is constituted in ethnic, national, or subnational terms, but also determined by gender, class, race, etc., have thus become important areas of inquiry.

This expansion of border studies and the increasingly fluid understanding of borders notwithstanding, the link between identities and specific places with their social, cultural, and political realities remains a focal point of most such scholarship. In fact, many scholars have elaborated on the close connection between the social and the spatial, for example Edward Said with the notion of "imaginative geographies" (Said) that responds to Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities." Such theories show how constructions of Self and Other are superimposed on actually existing geographical spaces and are crucial for identity formation (Simmel; Said; Soja). In this sense, borders construct and are constructed by mental maps that become manifest politically, socially, and culturally in a variety of ways. It is also in this sense that borders "[…] are first and foremost ideational before they are material" (Halle, "Views" 77).

Territorial and mental borders may align, but that is not necessarily the case. They may also interfere with one another, as happens when minorities seek independence, or when political borders disrupt familial relations. No matter how forceful borders can be, they are never absolute—rather, they carry within themselves contradictions that unsettle the very unit of sameness they purportedly enclose. Borders therefore already contain the conditions for their own destabilization. Friedman points to these contradictions of border spaces by identifying a series of tensions that are always already included in the border:

> Borders are fixed and fluid, impermeable and porous. They separate but also connect, demarcate but also blend differences. Absolute at any moment in time, they are always changing over time. They promise safety, security, a sense of being at home; they also

> enforce exclusions, the state of being alien, foreign, and homeless. They protect but also confine. They materialize the law, policing separations; but as such, they are always being crossed, transgressed, subverted. Borders are used to exercise power over others but also to empower survival against others. They regulate migration, movement, travel—the flow of people, goods, ideas, and cultural formations of all kinds. They undermine regulatory practices by fostering intercultural encounter and the concomitant production of syncretic heterogeneities and hybridities. They insist on purity, distinction, difference but facilitate contamination, mixing, creolization. (“Migration” 273)

These contradictions are inscribed in real and figurative borders alike, and they make the border a rich trope for describing and analyzing the various expressions that emerge in the contact zones between places and people, and between figurative and “real” boundaries.

The in-between zones have also been described as borderlands, extended spaces of negotiation that result from the porousness of borders, their ambiguity, and the multiple contentious and peaceful contacts they facilitate. Understood in this way, “in-betweenness” of the borderland does not signify emptiness or motionlessness. The borderland is not a “no man’s land”—a desolate space between two separate worlds that is devoid of meaning, as Leslie Adelson has critiqued when addressing the proliferation of the “trope of ‘betweenness’” (245) in her manifesto “Against Between.”[13] Yet one need not see in-betweenness as a deficit or the indeterminacy as a lack. In his conceptualization of “interzones,” Randall Halle has responded to

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[13] This negotiation of the in-between connects in particular to the analyses in Chapter 4. There I discuss border narratives that draw on the fantastic to articulate various actual and physically experienced border crossings. These represent different ways of coping with the disruptions caused by such transgressions. Moreover, the fantastic mode holds in balance the real and the supernatural—it creates an indeterminate and fluctuating “in-between” space that echoes the simultaneous suspension and maintenance of difference that is conceptualized in the notion of transdifference.

Adelson's argument. He defines the "interzone" as an "ideational space, a sense of being somewhere that unites two places, even if only transitionally or temporarily" (*Europeanization* 5). Halle regards Adelson's critique as an important discussion of the essentialism that is often inscribed in the notion of in-betweenness. Nonetheless, he argues that it can also be a productive notion, and that these spaces are by no means empty in the cinematic works he examines. Rather, "[t]he 'neither, nor, and both' […] is presented as a privilege," and it is a "cultural space of 'more than'" (*Europeanization* 167).

Friedman also regards betweenness as productive, and she has criticized the "the fixation on 'difference' […] as a foundational principle in theorizing identity." She argues that this focus "tends to obscure the liminal space in between difference, the border space of encounter, interaction, and exchange, the space of relation and the narratives of identity such relations engender" ("'Border Talk'"). The notion of "between" that I am applying here implies not a space between two separate units (i.e., nations or cultures). Instead, I refer to productive in-betweenness as a space of "transdifference": It is a space of constant movement, negotiation, and renegotiation of various constellations of belonging. This indeterminacy can unsettle seemingly unchanging paradigms (such as center and periphery) and reveal that these constellations are in fact a matter of perspective and hence always subject to re-imagination and change.

This understanding of border spaces and borderlands as sites of transdifference is closely related to the notion of identity and concepts of Self and Other. Friedman describes the "dialectic between difference and sameness" as constitutive of identity and "embedded in the double meaning of the word *identity* itself." She explains that "[i]dentity is constructed relationally through difference from the other […] where difference from the other defines the group to which one belongs. Conversely, *identity* also suggests sameness, as in the word *identical*"

(Mappings 19). Self and Other are relational categories because “identity requires a perception of difference from others in order for the recognition of sameness to come into play” (75). They are also mobile categories: “all are produced in history and undergo change” (75). The understanding of identity as negotiation of sameness and difference also proves fundamental to border poetics because it means that the Self exists always in dynamic relation to the Other.

The relationship between Self and Other is a constant process of negotiation that crosses in and out of betweenness, exploring a space of transdifference. It is thereby also closely related to conceptualizations of the borderland. Borders not only demarcate the outer limits of a unit of supposed sameness, they also carry within themselves the very difference that they are trying to keep out. Thus, the purportedly bounded systems of reference that create a border at the places where they meet (or collide) are already “blurry” systems in and of themselves. Expressing this ambiguity in relation to the border between the United States and Mexico, Gloria Anzaldúa has described the borderland as a “third country” (25). However, she also makes a distinction between borders and borderlands: Borders are regulating mechanisms “[…] set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge” (25). Nevertheless, borders are porous, and they create extended between-spaces. For Anzaldúa this borderland “[…] is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition” (25).

One can extend this understanding of the borderland to any site where seemingly bounded systems meet, for example, to the notions of “German” or “Polish,” or “German culture” and “Polish culture.” These terms, while it is difficult to avoid their usage entirely, can only serve as shorthand because, as is widely acknowledged, homogeneous “cultures” do not exist, and any attempt to exclude the Other has devastating consequences. Border poetics

acknowledges this danger, explores the porousness of borders and the blurriness of borderlands, and imagines new ways of joining the particular with the universal. In this sense the borderland constructed through border poetics is not a no man's land but rather a space of excess and of potential "everythingness," or the "more than" (Halle, *Europeanization* 166). It is a realm of heightened blurriness, mobility, and transborder exchange. It may be illuminating here to read the phrase "no man's land" with a shift in emphasis: from a "no man's land" that belongs to no one to a "no *one* man's land" that has the *potential* of existing as a diverse and shared space, and that can be home to multiple identities. This space is not free of conflict and tension, but it is a space that insists on negotiation, resists particularist claims, and pushes against established boundaries and hard borders. Herein lies the cosmopolitan vision advanced by border poetics—and it is expressed in various kinds of narratives.

My view of border poetics as a narrative and cultural practice also resonates with Friedman's notion of a "narrative poetics of geopolitical identity" (*Mappings* 151).[14] She situates this poetics within the framework of James Clifford's theories on "roots" and "routes," and focuses on the central importance of mobility—including displacement and disruption—for identity to "come to consciousness" (*Mappings* 151). Clifford sees roots and routes as intertwined and mutually dependent concepts that advance an understanding "of human location as constituted by displacement as much as by stasis" (Clifford 2).

Friedman builds on the tension between dwelling and mobility, and she considers not only its effects on human location (understood literally and metaphorically), but she also shifts emphasis more explicitly to questions of identity. Her argument is that geopolitically defined

[14] This is also true for the Border Poetics/Border Culture research group, which draws on Friedman's conceptualization of borders and narratives for their understanding of borders (Schimanski and Wolfe 10).

identity depends on the very interplay between roots and routes: "roots, signifying identity based on stable cores and continuities; routes, suggesting identity based on travel, change, and disruption" (*Mappings* 153). It follows that identity must be understood as a process rather than as a fixed and stable entity—and Friedman refers here for example to the work of Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and Gayatri Spivak. Importantly, Clifford also highlights that "travel" includes disruptions, and he examines "human difference articulated in displacement, tangled cultural experiences, structures and possibilities of an increasingly connected but not homogeneous world" (Clifford 2).

Friedman refers to identity as a continuous process and "product of interdependent systems of alterity" (*Mappings* 21), which means that experiences of difference, questions of identity, and the crossing of borders are intertwined. Identity, she notes later, "often requires some form of displacement—literal or figurative—to come to consciousness" (151). For Friedman, this alterity is the basis of a geopolitically defined identity, which is not only constituted but also held in motion in and through narrative. Due to the processual nature of identity, the "narrative poetics of geopolitical identity" is likewise highly dynamic and constitutes "the symbiosis between roots and routes and the encounters they engender as they are mediated through other particularities based on gender, sexuality, class, religion, and so forth" (*Mappings* 152). This narrative poetics determines the process of identity formation in three major ways:

> First, identity is constructed through stories that communities and individuals tell about themselves. […] Second, the ongoing production of individual and communal identities constitutes a story itself, a psychological and cultural formation that is located in and moves through time and space. And third, cultural narratives of domination, resistance,

> desire, and their complex interplay constitute the intertextual web out of which individual and collective selves are woven within the context of asymmetrical power relations (153).

Friedman's point that narrative poetics includes the stories themselves, the processes and exchanges involved in their production and circulation, as well as the intertextual relations between stories is instructive for border poetics. Borders play an important role in the identity-narrative dynamic because "[i]dentity is […] unthinkable without some sort of imagined or literal boundary" (*Mappings* 3). Moreover, they create "the liminal space in between, the interstitial site of interaction, interconnection, and exchange" (3). This in-between space is crucial for identity formation and, as indicated earlier, it offers a broad range of affiliations and constellations that can be claimed.[15] Such claims also stand in relation to actual and imagined homelands. Making a place home means to poetically endow it with meaning and make the unfamiliar familiar, as Said describes in the epigraph to this chapter. Przemysław Czapliński articulates this sentiment more explicitly in terms of narratives and stories: "a place can be a homeland only on the condition that it can tell us a story; and it can speak only as text, plot, narration." This entails "narrative work" (364), which also requires the ability to read a palimpsest (365).

In border poetics, this kind of world-making and endowing a place with meaning can also be read as "claim-making" as discussed earlier. Jessica Berman's concept of "regional cosmopolitanism" reiterates that "[c]osmopolitans need not dream of an ahistorical unity of all

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[15] Identity formation is a process that is deliberate only to a certain extent because it is also tied to unconscious and inescapable processes. Border poetics, by contrast, is a deliberate practice of shaping the narrative along the borders of existing identities but is also a forceful push against these boundaries and a shift in attention to the creation and recreation of new constellations that enable cosmopolitan exchanges. It is a deliberate, conscious, and political practice.

peoples, a strict Kantian federation, or even the concentric identity, radiating out from the local to the universal that Nussbaum has described […]. Rather, they can begin from local loyalties and add experiences and commitments as they choose" (146–147). An important note is that this choice itself can also be understood as a "cosmopolitical claim." Furthermore, as hinted at by Berman in references to "poverty, social inequality, and the emotional effects of colonization" (145) these added experiences and commitments can also be involuntary and forceful.

Border poetics interrogates the interplay between different kinds of particulars and claims to universality. A cosmopolitan imaginary is woven where those particulars meet, intersect, and collide. In Appadurai's notion of the imagination as a social practice, these different particulars are attachments and affiliations, but as Mani shows, they are also claims to belonging. Shared claims can feed conflict but also foster alliances: In this context, differences and tensions do not need to be viewed as debilitating. Rather they should be recognized for their ethical and political power to instigate change. One may think here in particular of the potential for resistance already included in the notion of transdifference: Lösch argues that transdifference is generated within a specific system, and it can trigger resistance against binary structures of inclusion and exclusion. Such resistance can counter hegemonic social pressures ("gesellschaftlichen Normierungsdruck") and constitute the basis of social movements (31).

Cosmopolitanism then is not only the attachment to the particular, the connection between particulars, and the weaving of a universal network from these particulars, but also a claim. It is a claim to be part of a process and to shape that process by changing the content as well as the form of engagement. For narratives, these changes can include multilingual expressions, experimentation with language and form, and various methods of delivery and circulation. In other words, border poetics simultaneously explores the attachment (wanted or

unwanted) to a particular context but also the desire and ability to push against its borders and destabilize it.

As Rumford points out, the cosmopolitan potential of borders derives also from the proliferation of borders and bordering practices throughout society. He has argued that "the relationship between borders and cosmopolitanism assumes not borderlessness but a proliferation of borders" and that "cosmopolitan borders" depend on the border-mobility of individuals, i.e., their "ability […] to cross and re-cross borders" (Rumford, "Does Europe" 328). For him, this proliferation represents an opportunity for change and intervention in bordering processes. In his contribution "Seeing like a Border" to a multi-authored article in *Political Geography*, Rumford speaks of borders as "cosmopolitan workshops," and he argues for an alliance-based understanding of bordering. These alliances also emerge through processes of claim-making that are articulated through engagement with borders. Rumford contends that

> Borderwork can also be associated with a range of claims-making activity, not only claims to national belonging or citizenship, but also demands for transnational mobility, assertions of human rights, and demonstrations of political actorhood, all of which can comprise acts of citizenship. This leads to the possibility of viewing bordering not only in terms of securitization but also in terms of opportunities for humanitarian assistance targeted at those (refugees, migrants) who may coalesce at the borders. (Johnson et. al. 68)

The notion of a proliferation of borders applies not only to real but also to symbolic borders, and it impacts perceptions of Self and Other, of inclusion and exclusion, and of mobility, contact, and exchange. Reflecting on the proliferation of borders, Delanty has

described Europe as “a networked border system in which inside and outside are less clear-cut” (*Cosmopolitan* 232). Etienne Balibar observes that “borders are vacillating” (219) and that borders and borderlands have “multiplied and reduced in their localization and their function” (220)—they are dispersed throughout society and have come to signify much more than a state’s territorial boundaries. What Balibar describes here as “vacillating” borders is in my view also echoed in the idea that transdifference causes “binary inscription[s] of difference” to “oscillate” (Breinig and Lösch 23). The proliferation and dispersal of borders has negative consequences, but it also entails a multiplication of possible contact zones between people and places based on varying and ever-changing affiliations and belongings. Therefore, as Rumford argues “[b]orders can be prime sites for connection individuals to the world by creating cosmopolitan opportunities through the possibility of cultural encounters and negotiations of difference” (*Cosmopolitan* 3). Similarly, and applied to the notion of “European identity,” Delanty argues that this identity is “more diluted but also open to more interpretations” (*Cosmopolitan* 226). This type of “border-cosmopolitanism” is anchored in a locally and historically specific context, and it derives its “worldedness” from the multiplication of perspectives and exchanges of people tied to different such local contexts and the networks emerging from the contacts between them. It can therefore also advance a cosmopolitan imagination.

One may rightly caution here against an approach to borders and border spaces that is too broad and abstract, objecting that there is a risk of losing the ability to study borders in any meaningful way. Such objections can be countered with at least three important arguments: first, the study of borders in a broader sense should not, and largely does not, give up on a more narrow definition of borders. Rather, many studies, including many of those cited here, depend on establishing correspondences between more generally conceived border experiences (border-

making as mental mapping or as symbolic acts) and the historically and politically specific borders that are territorially bound. Second, the ubiquity of borders goes hand in hand with a multiplication of the contact zones between them, i.e., new meanings are produced at these intersections and contact zones. Such multiply constellated borders provide concrete sites for new studies and inquiries. Finally, the philosophical study of borders in their more abstract or figurative sense generates new questions that can challenge our view of "actual" borders, bordering practices and their material, cultural, and psychological effects. Thus, any examination of cosmopolitanism must take into consideration the intersections generated by literal and figurative borders and bordering processes.

The cosmopolitan imagination and its various forms of expression in literature, art, and culture in general provide many different critiques of the mechanisms of othering and exclusion, and they can make hidden and often abstract border networks and bordering practices visible. Nevertheless, the role of the imagination, fictionalization, abstraction, or experimentation in the dispersal and proliferation, and thus the cosmopolitanization of borders, is often omitted by scholars in the social sciences (including Rumford). On the other hand, scholars such as Schimanski and Wolfe, Friedman, Halle, or Cheah show that literature and culture have a great impact on how borders and border spaces are perceived in the social imaginary—and whether they are perceived at all.

Border poetics, as a literary and cultural practice, connects diverse and disparate border experiences. It involves a critical stance towards and a distancing from hegemonic borders that manifest themselves throughout society, thereby adding to their diffusion. Through cultural productions, border poetics contributes to making borders into expanded and complex contact zones or "cosmopolitan workshops," thereby advancing the cosmopolitan imagination. This

making may be pronounced most radically when there is a visible, material effect in the "real" world—an actual change in the border-landscape. This is the case in the cultural projects and performances discussed in Chapter 5. However, Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate the ways in which literary texts also make important interventions in established and homogenizing discourses, and, even though they tend to be less visible, they build new connections and contribute to new transborder conversations (e.g., through translation, reception, festivals, readings, etc.). Border poetics must not only be considered important to debates on critical cosmopolitanism, but it also adds to discussions on world literature as it focuses on the different ways in which texts as purveyors of ideas and as material artifacts cross borders and generate global connections across different times and spaces.

This study focuses on Polish and German border stories but is also driven by the desire to suggest a horizon that can be expanded into other contexts. Border poetics is one possible way of bringing locally situated texts, such as German-Polish borderlands literature, into a shared world literary space. German-Polish border poetics creates worlds that are crossed by borders but these worlds—encapsulated in narratives—also cross borders. Correspondences between different borderlands allow for connections between different times and places, thereby contributing to the world literary space. One can, for example, discover new constellations by looking at correspondences between the US/Mexican *Borderlands/La Frontera* and the German-Polish *Grenzland/Pogranicze*. Anzaldúa's work sheds light not only on various iterations of borders and border crossings within a narrative but the wide circulation and reception of her work also shows how literature can transmit ideas across borders and forge global alliances.

Border poetics: from borderlands/la frontera to Grenzland/pogranicze

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) is known far beyond the US-Mexico context, and I regard it as a prime example of border poetics in the world literary sphere.[16] The text is evidence of border poetics both with regard to story, i.e., what is being told, and discourse, i.e., how it is being told: It acknowledges, but at the same time transcends the locally and historically specific context to articulate global issues of gender-based oppression, social injustice, solidarity, and queer identity. The book transgresses multiple genre boundaries (e.g., history-writing, theoretical reflection, mythology, poetry, autobiography) and makes visible the psychological and corporal impact of a variety of border crossings. According to Friedman, Anzaldúa blends the exploration of "physical borderlands" with that of "historical, psychological, sexual, spiritual, and aesthetic borderlands" (*Mappings* 95) and connects the latter with the former in a kind of translation process that reveals different kinds of hybridity (96).

Borderlands/La Frontera exposes numerous intersecting systems of oppression, sources of agency, and frameworks of identification, such as nationhood, ethnicity, disability, and gender. It makes visible both their painful but also their empowering effects on Chicano/as in the United States. Anzaldúa describes the diversity and heterogeneity of those who inhabit the permanent borderland between the United States and Mexico. Their constant collision with visible and invisible borders has resulted in a particular consciousness that is shaped by the constant psychological and bodily injuries inflicted by the border. These wounds do not heal—they are markers of difference that are reminders of the injury. Anzaldúa's borderland is both a physical space and a mental state; it is an embodied infliction that is passed on through multiple

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[16] See for example *Comparative Perspectives Symposium: Gloria E. Anzaldúa, an International Perspective,* edited by Norma Cantú, which includes perspectives on Anzaldúa from Spain, the Canary Islands, the Czech Republic, and others (Cantú).

generations (25). At the same time, it is a place of continuous negotiation and engagement with contradictions and therefore has significant subversive and empowering potential. For Anzaldúa, the place where two worlds collide is an "open wound" (24), but it is also the homeland, a cultural borderland, and a "third country" (25).

In contrast to Homi Bhabha's "third spaces," difference is not dissolved in Anzaldúa's "third country." As Bhabha explains in an interview, cultural hybridization "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives […]. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (*Interview* 211). Anzaldúa's notion of the "third" is related more closely to that of transdifference and the maintenance of difference in the form of a permanent wound. This distinction is important, because just as betweenness in this study is not an empty space, it is likewise not a "third space" in the sense of "something new and unrecognisable." For Anzaldúa, the "third" may be a new constellation that offers opportunities for new alliances and affords agency, but it is not unrecognizable and relies heavily upon a rootedness in specific historical (as well as mythical), cultural, and political conditions.

Some scholars see correspondences between the USA-Mexico border and borders elsewhere. Referring to the disparities in the 1990s, especially with regard to border policing, political scientist Peter Andreas, for example, offers a comparison between the US-Mexican and the German-Polish borderlands. In an article on "Teaching Gloria Anzaldúa from a Polish Perspective," American Studies scholar Grażyna Zygadło has interrogated Anzaldúa's border experience in relation to the Polish experience. She applies Anzaldúa's ideas about the borderland and her poetic analysis of transnational and transcultural spaces to Poland and its

place in Europe. She argues that "[w]ith the collapse of communism in 1989 and the reunification of Germany in 1990, the Polish-German border became a territory similar to the U.S.-Mexican borderlands, at least in the economic sense, with industry and money in the West and cheap labor and services in the East, and with a distinct border identity" (30). She continues that in the 1990s, Poles became the Chicano/as of Europe and, citing Andreas, that the Oder and Neisse rivers were like the "the Rio Grande of Europe" (30).[17]

While Zygadło notes that some borders disappeared when Poland joined the European Union in 2004 and the border zone shifted east, she also stresses that new borders have taken their place. Here she points specifically to Poland's discovery of its internal Others (Sinti and Roma, Jews, homosexuals), as well as to gender-based discrimination and oppression (33). She remarks that suppression of difference and the promulgation of a homogeneity narrative was part of the communist ideology—to which many Poles generally showed resistance. Nevertheless, she continues, "this one somehow easily entered our collective mind-set" (32). This point on the emergence of internal Others is important, as it also relates to the rediscovery of German traces in Poland and the acknowledgment of a shared German-Polish past and a specific borderlands mentality.

Zygadło's primary focus is on the pedagogical aspects of teaching Anzaldúa, and she is interested in how Polish students can relate to this seemingly foreign text, and how she can

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[17] To support her argument, she refers to Peter Andreas's study *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide* (2008), in which Andreas analyzes the similarities and differences of policing efforts at the U.S.-Mexico border and those of the European Union. Andreas argues that globalization has made borders anything but irrelevant, and he points to the intensification in law enforcement as evidence of a reinforcement of borders. Before 2004, the German-Polish border was the last "line of defense" of "Fortress Europe," and it is largely in this context that Andreas compares the U.S.-Mexico border to the German-Polish one. At the same time, Andreas is very careful to emphasize the significant differences between the German-Polish and US-Mexican borders (115-126).

create a "worlding" experience for them. However, the essay does not fully live up to its declared aim "to analyze the transnational and transcultural spaces that Anzaldúa's theory offers" (30) This is largely due to two reasons: First, Zygadło's comparison highlights economic factors, and even though there were undeniably great disparities between Germany and Poland in the 1990s, it appears problematic to imply that the level of poverty and border violence was ever comparable to that of Mexico. Additionally, compared to the U.S.-Mexican borderland, these great inequalities were overcome rather quickly.[18] Second, she bases her call for solidarity, especially among women, mainly on a narrative of shared victimhood and subjugation. Zygadło sees the similarities between Chicanas and Polish women mostly with regard to "gender oppression and lack of power" (33). These points about economic imbalances and especially the situation of women are significant, but Zygadło largely misses the narrative of resistance, subversion, and creativity that Anzaldúa also tells. The power of Anzaldúa's work and her applicability beyond the U.S.-Mexico context lies in dismantling binaries and the destabilization of established power structures through interventions and reinventions of these structures. Border poetics goes beyond the victim narrative and helps articulate connections between different people and contexts without losing sight of their differences.

The cosmopolitan potential of the concepts borderland, la frontera, Grenzland, pogranicze, as well as other borderlands elsewhere, lies in their ability to create alternative spaces and find new ways of telling history that emphasizes shared experiences and transborder alliances. Border poetics draws attention to the narratives that result from liminal constellations

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[18] The United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) records "average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living." The numbers show that even in the 1990s, Poland scored significantly higher than Mexico, albeit numbers were far below Germany's HDI. ("Human Development").

and fleshes out the connections between and across them. Anzaldúa's text and the other works in this study share a border poetics—a concern for developing a cosmopolitan vision of the world and a desire to circulate ideas across multiple borders, thereby inscribing the world (literary) space with local stories. In this more comprehensive sense, the drawing of parallels between borderland/la frontera and Grenzland/pogranicze can be instructive for articulating the impact of a cosmopolitan imagination.

So far this chapter has focused on articulating borders, border practices, and border poetics largely in quite general and abstract terms. Since border poetics is a negotiation between the universal and the particular, it also entails developing a language with which to speak about the latter. In the German-Polish context, this must include a discussion of the terminology related to borders. German "Grenze," "Grenzland," "Grenzliteratur," and "Grenzlandliteratur," and Polish "literatura kresowa," "kresy," "granica," "pogranicze"—all these terms relate to borders and literature about borders in some way, but they also carry different (and often contested) meanings, depending on who uses them when and where. The last section of this chapter therefore provides a general overview of what could be termed "border literature" in Germany and Poland since 1945, how the meaning of "border" has changed over time, and how these differences and varied meanings continue to inform conversations about German-Polish border narratives. In this conversation, border poetics stands out as a critique of particular borders and borderlands. Yet, the discussions and divergent meanings that inform the concept are not necessarily visible in my use of the English terms "border" or "borderland."

The German-Polish Border in the Literary Imagination

The historical overview of the first chapter shows that the political borders between Germany and Poland have moved significantly over the centuries: from the three partitions of Poland in

the eighteenth century and the reemergence of the Polish state in 1918 to the shifting borders during, and then again as a result of the Second World War. In these shifts, borders were moved violently over people and places, cutting through communities, families, and individuals' lives. The people who were crossed in such multiple ways rarely chose their affiliations according to the current political boundaries. Rather, the idea of "their" nation state and a lost or regained homeland remained powerfully present in their imagination and self-identification. At the same time, they also expressed attachments that would be more adequately described in subnational or transnational terms.

Literature has been an important arena for articulating and exploring such attachments and their changing constellations, and it is not surprising that the increasing awareness of the inherent contradictions and dynamism of borders, border spaces, and border subjects has also left its mark on their narrative and literary representation. Looking at narratives of German-Polish contact in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, one can make out a non-linear and, at times, parallel shift of emphasis from literature about the border as a dividing line until 1989 (albeit with a significant break and change in perspective in 1945) to a new borderlands literature that emphasizes contact and exchange after 1989, to a border poetics that goes beyond "contact" since the early 2000s.

This tripartite categorization may appear oversimplified, as it hardly captures the heterogeneous narratives produced in Poland and Germany over the past century. Still, its purpose is to outline in broad strokes the different options for the narrative representation of borders—a model that can then be complicated, questioned, and destabilized by looking at specific texts. For the moment, these categories are a helpful starting point for highlighting how

border poetics comes out of but also differs qualitatively and in thematic orientation from other engagements with borders.

From literature about the border to "new borderlands literature"

In a 1997 essay, whose title can be translated into English as "Borderlands Literature and the Central European Dilemma," Stefan Chwin describes how Polish borderlands literature developed after the end of the Second World War and again after 1990. The essay was published simultaneously in German ("Grenzlandliteratur und das mitteleuropäische Dilemma") and in Polish ("'Literatura pogranicza' a dylematy Europy Środkowej") in the bilingual "information bulletin" *Transodra*.[19]

In the essay, Chwin explains that after 1945, Polish literature initially served as a medium to deal with the aftermath of the war, expulsions and relocation, lost homes in the East, and new places in the formerly German territories. The texts produced at the time fit into the then current political narrative: they often omitted sensitive subject matter (such as the expulsion of Poles in the eastern territories by the Soviets) and underscored the ethnic purity within—and hence the political stability of—the newly created Polish state. The silencing of dissenting narratives during the communist period underwent a drastic transformation with the great political and social changes of 1989/90. Apart from political tensions between Germany and Poland and Polish concerns over the stability of the present political border, an increased awareness of the long suppressed transcultural and multiethnic history of these border regions also emerged.

[19] *Transodra* was a German-Polish quarterly that existed between 1993 and 2001, published by the Deutsch-Polnische Gesellschaft Brandenburg (DPG e.V.) and the Polsko-Niemiecki Klub Dziennikarzy "Pod Stereotypami"/Deutsch-Polnischer Journalistenclub "Unter Stereotypen." Financial support came from the federal state of Brandenburg, among others. After publication was discontinued in 2001, the journal was transformed into a bilingual online German-Polish press review. The site informs readers about current events occurring along the German-Polish border. (*Transodra Online*)

According to Chwin, this transformation went hand in hand with the emergence of a new borderlands mentality ("Grenzlandmentalität"/"mentalność kresowa"), which includes the softening of previously defensive attitudes (5-6).

Thus, by the middle of the 1990s a literature gained prominence in Poland that Chwin terms "newest borderlands literature" ("neuste Grenzlandliteratur"/"najnowsza literatura pogranicza") (8). Works encompassed by this term were no longer just *about* the border in its divisive role, but they were now generated by the multiplicity of connecting experiences and exchanges that the same border also afforded. A new generation of authors began to explore the Polish-German past from a new perspective: They parted with stereotypical representations and a nostalgic view of a lost childhood in the east. Instead, they began to insist on mobile and defocalized identities ("unscharfe Identitäten"/ "nieostra tożsamość"). Chwin considers those who inhabit the German-Polish borderland "defocalized" because their regional or local affiliations do not align with the shifting borders of the nation. These inhabitants, he argues, came to understand the border space itself as dynamic and heterogeneous: it was German, Polish, regional, local, and global all at the same time. Chwin thus notes that after 1989, the term "borderlands" came to refer not only to the eastern and western borders of Poland but it also became a "metaphor for the meeting of different cultures" ("Metapher für das Zusammentreffen verschiedener Kulturen"/"metafora spotkania kultur") (8). A focus on the recovery of a hitherto silenced multicultural past of regions such as Pomerelia (Eastern Pomerania), Masuria, or Silesia was accompanied by a "general reflection on Europe's multicultural future" ("allgemeine[n] Reflexion über die multikulturelle Zukunft Europas"/ "ogólniejsz[a] refleksj[a] nad wielonarodową pryszłością Europy") (Chwin, 8).

According to the essay, Polish authors have not only "recovered" (7)[20] the formerly marginalized western borderlands as a central part of Polish identity but have also constructed and re-constructed them as a "general model" of European culture (Chwin speaks of a "ogólniejszy[m] model[em] kultury" / "besonderes Kulturmodell," which he then defines in European terms) (5-6). At times Chwin moves somewhat confusingly between Poland's eastern and western borderlands, but he establishes these "broadly understood 'western borderlands'" (i.e., referring to a ubiquitous non-territorial border) as the "symbol of a postulated value system" ("symboliczny obraz postulowanego systemu wartośći" / "Symbol eines postulierten Wertesystems") and cultural model (6). This conflation of different borders and the broad brushstrokes with which he paints the borderland as a beacon for a western-oriented and European "value system" is problematic but fits the essay's programmatic tone and provides many grounds for a critical reevaluation of various borderlands narratives.

Perhaps more striking is Chwin's emphasis on the diversity of the borderland, yet "Grenzlandliteratur" in his definition refers to *Polish* authors concerned with the *Polish* borderlands. Even though Chwin claims to look at the border as a "cultural model" for Europe, he does so from a single—a Polish—perspective. Consequently, he does not address the various and quite different connotations that even the very term borderlands literature has in German and

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[20] Chwin's choice of the word "recovered" ("odzyskane" / "wiedergewonnen") is telling here, as it plays on the term "ziemie odzyskane" or "wiedergewonnene Gebiete" used by communist authorities after the Second World War. The term refers to those territories that Poland "regained" or "recovered" from the Germans after the war, and it is controversial because it goes back to an idea of Poland as it existed in the Middle Ages. However, these territories had not been "Polish" in the modern understanding of the term. After the Second World War, the term was used to foster national unity and homogeneity by establishing a continuity with a long bygone past and to justify Poland's rightful claims to these territories (Porter-Szűcs 201). By using the term in this way, Chwin turns it on its head: instead of signifying national homogeneity, the term now means multicultural relations, contact, and exchange.

in Polish. Without these crucial steps, it is impossible to tell a story about borders as contact zones, or, as I am doing here, about the emergence of border poetics.

Lost in translation I: "Grenzlandliteratur"

Due to the scope of this study, I am only able to superficially touch on questions of translation and comparisons between original texts and their English/German/Polish translations—or often the lack of translations in the other language. Nevertheless, some of the terminology necessitates further exploration because the translated and (successfully or unsuccessfully) transferred political histories and fluctuating meanings of border-related concepts all inform the notion of border poetics. What follows is thus a cursory exploration of some of the different terms and their meanings.

Throughout the original Polish version of his essay, Chwin uses various terms for what appears in the German language version only as "Grenzland" (borderland) and compounds thereof. There are several Polish terms for borderland, and they are quite distinct, ranging from "pogranicze" to "kresy" to "granica." While "pogranicze," which also appears in the essay's title, can be understood as a fairly neutral term, meaning simply "borderland" (Czaplejewicz; Orłowski, "Grenzlandliteratur" 17), the other terms, "kresy" or "literatura kresowa," as well as their German equivalents "Grenzland" or "Grenzlandliteratur," carry different connotations.[21] The essay's German translator is cognizant that the different terms are charged quite differently in the Polish context, and he provides the corresponding original Polish expression in parentheses. Since Chwin does not elaborate on the differences in terminology, this fact goes

[21] For Krzysztof Kwaśniewski, "pogranicze" is a symmetrical term because it places no emphasis on either side of the border. By contrast, "literatura kresowa" designates for him a Polish perspective (cited in Czaplejewicz 1).

unexplained and perhaps remains even unnoticed by the German-language reader. Also problematic in German, the term “Grenzlandliteratur” has traditionally been used for nationalist and völkisch literature of the 1920s and 1930s, yet this context is completely omitted. Finally, the English expression “borderlands literature” that I use throughout this study, also runs the risk of obscuring the connotations of each expression. While it is an accurate translation, it does not reflect the particular context to which each of these terms refers.

Yet, not everything is a question of translation: Because Chwin focuses mainly on the period after 1989, he himself refers to what is traditionally understood as “literatura kresowa” only briefly. Likewise, as his focus is on Polish literature only, Grenzlandliteratur and its original meaning are not thematized at all. Nevertheless, there is a continuity (and discontinuity) between *new borderlands literature* (“neue Grenzlandliteratur”) and its different predecessors. In order to achieve transborder significance (let alone serve as a European “model of culture”), the concept of a new borderlands literature must reflect on this multinational, multiregional, and multilingual genealogy. Through this difference the progression of borderlands literature, from writing *about* the border (and treating it as a dividing line) to being generated by it (and acknowledging it as a contact zone), becomes visible.

Lost in translation II: “literatura kresowa”

The Polish term “Kresy” or “Kresy Wschodnie” refers mainly to the formerly Polish territories in the East that had been annexed by the Soviet Union following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the invasion of the eastern territories in 1939. Today these regions are part of Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania. The Kresy include as their major cities Lviv (formerly Lwów, German Lemberg) and Vilnius (formerly Wilno, German Wilna). The Bug River, which today forms a significant stretch of the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Ukrainian borders, occupies a central place in “kresy

mythology," and it plays an important role in the literature about this region. Expressions such as "from behind the Bug" ("zza Buga"), in reference to the Kresy region or the Poles who have come from there, also illustrate the river's role in mapping the region's mental geography.[22]

Many Poles who were forced to leave the eastern territories during and after the Second World War eventually settled in the newly Polish western areas that had previously been inhabited by Germans (Ther, Halicka). Despite their specific history, Chwin uses the term "kresy" mostly to mean borderlands generally, which reflects a newer and more universal application of the term (Handke 7). Even if the term's geographic and historical specificity may recede into the background in some instances, it remains an important context to consider when identifying a new, transnational, borderlands literature.

Testing the limits of "Grenzlandliteratur"

German literary production cannot be easily integrated into the concept of a new borderlands literature without a critical examination of the German term "Grenzlandliteratur." Germanist Hubert Orłowski explains that the term was established by National Socialist literary scholars to refer to texts that stage the defense of Germany's borders, particularly against a feared Slavic expansion from the east ("Grenzlandliteratur" 10-11). Karsten Rinas shows that in postwar scholarship, the term continued to be applied to German literature of the 1920s and 1930s that promoted strong anti-Slavic tendencies (5), but this type of literature itself declined after 1939 (when borders no longer had to be defended discursively) (13). Recent scholarship examines the

[22] In at least two of the works analyzed here, the Bug River represents an important border in different senses of the term. In Janesch's *Katzenberge* the main protagonist crosses the Bug to backtrack her grandfather's journey west some 60 years earlier. In Iwasiów's *Bambino*, "behind the Bug" refers to the homeland of one of the main protagonists, who carries the place within herself and has to contend with the stereotypes associated with it. Both novels are discussed in Chapter 3.

feasibility of applying the term to works written after 1945, and it complicates various assumptions about the genre.

Using the German-Czech case, Rinas shows that Grenzlandliteratur, with its aggressive nationalist and propagandistic tone, was not a specifically German phenomenon because discursive fights over the border took place on both sides (148-149). He argues for broadening the concept to include other nationalist literatures and to consider even earlier works (119). Most significantly, Rinas also argues that the term Grenzlandliteratur can be separated from its ideological usage by National-Socialist scholars, and indeed could be used to describe literature about the borderland that was not necessarily xenophobic or national-socialist (119). Similarly, in the three-volume work *Textränder*, Jürgen Joachimsthaler considers not only east and west German authors and their contributions to East Prussian literature ("Ostmarkenliteratur," a variation of Grenzlandliteratur), but he also looks at how literature written in Polish, e.g., by Bolesław Prus, contributed to a specific character he calls "Ostmarkentextur" (147–262). Rinas's and Joachimsthaler's positions underline the need for a more expansive and transborder view on seemingly established objects of study.

The second objection to some understandings of Grenzlandliteratur is a temporal one, and it concerns the notion in older German literary scholarship that Grenzlandliteratur ended by 1945 or lost its significance. More recently, scholars have pointed to the continuity of these types of literature after 1945, albeit with a very different focus and under changed conditions (Orłowski, "Grenzlandliteratur" 15). Thus, East Prussian literature did continue in West Germany as "neue Heimatliteratur" (Świątłowski 96), and a "Postheimatliteratur" also emerged (Namowicz "Zwischen" 78). Underlining the phenomenon's continuity, Orłowski also insists that there was a "neue Grenzlandliteratur" after 1945. Based on an entirely new set of premises, it developed not

only in the two German states but also in other East Central European national contexts, although it was especially pronounced in Germany and Poland ("Grenzlandliteratur" 15).

Thus, in contrast to Chwin, Orłowski places the beginning of a "neue Grenzlandliteratur" much earlier than 1989, but, like Rinas, he also understands it in geographically more comprehensive terms. The question of whether new borderlands literature begins in 1945 or in 1989 or if there is even a phase of "newest borderlands literature" requires a more thorough study of German and Polish language texts from different time periods and geographic regions. Suffice it here to say that borderland narratives were always updated in light of the changed political and social conditions under which they were written and to which they responded. Nevertheless, I agree with the scholars above that the borderland as a topic and motif holds a continuing relevance that must be reflected not only historically but also across borders. "New" and "newest" borderlands literature can therefore be conceptualized as narrative engagements with border spaces as zones of contact and exchange across borders.

Texts subsumed under these categories of new and newest borderlands literature seek an active engagement with the in-betweenness of the borderland, and they also have "subversive effects," as scholar of Polish-German literary and cultural relations Bożena Chołuj argues. In examining "Grenzliteratur," Chołuj emphasizes its connective and subversive effects and argues for the applicability of the term to contemporary texts. For her, borderlands produce a particular literary constellation and the border needs to be considered in its divisive but also in its connective qualities. Border literature itself is a cultural sphere ("Kulturraum") that only partially aligns with political borders and that represents and produces mixed cultures ("Mischkulturen") (57). Border literature is diverse and, just like borders themselves, can reflect division and connection. She also argues that border literatures are simultaneously about borders and produce

them performatively (84). It can be summarized that in such texts, borderzones are marked by multiplicity and dynamism and variously entangled border experiences. This understanding of borders is expressed in border poetics, and it makes border spaces visible as spaces of transdifference. This rethinking does not homogenize the historically and socially diverse spaces. Rather, differences, including the conflicts resulting from them, are brought into contact with one another and are temporarily suspended to imagine new social models.

In sum, due to the complex histories, there are varied uses of the term Grenzliteratur and Grenzlandliteratur in the German context, and these different usages are at times unclear and contradictory. While some use "Grenzlandliteratur" to reflect but also go beyond the term's nationalist and völkisch associations, others employ alternative formulations such as "Literatur der Grenze" (Lamping) or "Grenzliteratur" (which can also refer to literature about divided Germany), and still others use the term "Grenzlandliteratur" simply to refer to contemporary phenomena, without reflecting on the term's nationalist history (Peter). In English, the decision over terminology is less urgent, as "borderland" and "borderlands literature" do not carry the same problematic connotations as their German counterparts. These terms, as they appear in this study, are intended to refer to the historical context of "Grenzlandliteratur" but they also serve as more neutral terms that allow us to focus the discussion of contemporary borderlands literature as a transborder phenomenon.

Towards a poetics of the German-Polish borderland

When Stefan Chwin described the emergence of a "neueste Grenzlandliteratur," i.e., a newest borderlands literature since the 1990s in the Polish context, he referred to a type of literature that is more cognizant of Poland's multiethnic past and that tries to uncover the traces of this past in the present. This means that Polish literature about borders has undergone significant changes in

the decades following the end of the Cold War. Such dramatic changes have also been observed in German literature owing in particular to a new generation of writers often referred to as the "Enkelgeneration" (generation of grandchildren).

In October 1999, journalist and literary critic Volker Hage announced the arrival of the grandchildren of postwar literature in the magazine *Der Spiegel*. He characterized these authors as less burdened with the past than the previous generation ("Enkel" 245). This transformation must be seen within the context of broader historical, political, and social changes since the 1990s, which have not only affected the way in which Germans remember and interpret East and West German history. The "Wende," or the "Turn" of 1989/90, has also triggered a "Wende des Erinnerns," a turn with regard to how Germans remember their country's National Socialist past (Beßlich et al.). In literary works this paradigmatic change is evident in a shift in focus to the perspective of bystanders and perpetrators ("Mitläufer und Täter") as a critical and often irritating probe into German history (Beßlich et al. 7-8). At the same time, interest in topics of flight and expulsion led to a new debate on the question of German victimhood but also a differentiated view of collective and individual memory (12-13). Naturally, this general reorientation in writing about the past has also affected the way in which German-Polish topics are discussed.

Referring mostly to contemporary German literature, Fachinger and Nell point out that a new generation of writers has emerged in both countries that deals differently and in a more conciliatory tone with the complicated German-Polish past. German authors are no longer seeking to "legitimize political or even racist claims," and they explore German-Polish history through the lens of the individual or the family (192). It has also become more common to explore the issue of "suffering on both sides" without questioning German guilt and

responsibility (192-193). The scholars argue that for this generation of writers, there has been a transformation in collective memory (192), which is evident in the desire "to escape the traumatic legacy of the past, as seen through the specifically German, Polish, or Jewish lens, by attempting to offer a new set of individual experiences and ways of dealing with them. The texts that are influenced by current theories of memory [...] especially express discomfort with the old stereotypes and narratives to which they gave rise" (192). However, even though these texts aim to deconstruct old narratives, "they sometimes seem also to express a certain fascination for the alleged 'otherness' of Poland and the Poles" (192).

The political and social changes have also led Polish and German scholars and cultural actors to consider their individual national and local histories within a more broadly European context (Eigler, "Introduction" 3). According to the editors, the literary texts discussed in the special issue of s*eminar*, seem to be concerned with overcoming the traumatic past that has so long stood between Germany and Poland. Even if they do not always succeed, these authors want to break with stereotypical representations and, rather than showcasing "German," "Polish," or "Jewish" identities, seek to present a variability of experiences and actions (Fachinger and Nell 192). In the German context, these young authors are often subsumed under the category of "Enkelgeneration" regardless of their very different experiences, attitudes, and writing styles. Furthermore, this concept does not apply to Polish literature. Border poetics may therefore also be a more suitable lens for viewing from a transborder perspective a specific body of literature while allowing the generational question to be less dominant in the discussion.

Even new or newest borderlands literature, defined as a kind of "transborder" literature in the sense outlined above, is oriented primarily along topographic notions of borders. As such it can only do insufficient justice to narratives that complicate these spatial relations even further

through other, more figurative kinds of border crossings that push against ontic and epistemic boundaries. Originating from the transcultural impulse of the newest borderlands literature, border poetics takes the proliferation of borders one step further. As narrative and cultural practice, border poetics is centrally determined by a particular situation, location, and context, but it also transcends these affiliations. General theoretical reflections necessarily have their limits and need to be tested and expanded in relation to the actual products of this practice.

Border poetics is a multidimensional approach to borders and possible or impossible border crossings, their mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and their conditions of establishment, existence, and maintenance. I turn now to the analysis of those texts that have informed my theoretical framing of border poetics. While the first chapter examined the changes in the German-Polish relationship and the move from borders as dividing lines to spaces of contact and transit, and this chapter offered some theoretical considerations for a framing of border poetics. The following three chapters interrogate and expand this theoretical framework by looking at specific outcomes of this border poetics practice—the literary and cultural texts themselves.

Chapter 3

Story: Border Poetics in Fictions of Memory

Heute weiß ich, daß alles zuguckt, daß nichts unbesehen bleibt,
daß selbst Tapeten ein besseres Gedächtnis als die Menschen haben.
Es ist nicht etwa der liebe Gott, der alles sieht! Ein Küchenstuhl, Kleiderbügel,
halbvoller Aschenbecher oder das hölzerne Abbild einer Frau, genannt Niobe,
reichen aus, um jeder Tat den unvergeßlichen Zeugen liefern zu können.
(Günter Grass *Die Blechtrommel* 247) [1]

According to the narrator in the *Tin Drum*, all things are watching; they record everything; they have a memory. Although the novel is not discussed here but in the next chapter, this epigraph nonetheless seems fitting. Not only does it pose questions of memory, it also speaks about storytelling: storytelling as the task to elicit memories from people and things, to re-record what has been previously recorded or what has been forgotten, to resubmit to the present what would otherwise be locked in the past. Yet drawing out these memories from inanimate objects or even people is not an easy task. It requires deciphering, translating, interpreting, creating relations between previously unrelated memories, and filling gaps with imagination. Memory is about creating stories, and the stories in this chapter are about memory.

Following literary theorist Gerard Genette's distinction between story (content) and discourse (form), this chapter focuses primarily on how border poetics unfolds on the content plane of narratives. More specifically, I demonstrate how border poetics is especially well suited

[1] "Today I know that all things are watching, that nothing goes unseen, that even wallpaper has a better memory than human beings. It's not God in his heaven who sees everything. A kitchen chair, a clothes hanger, a half-filled ashtray, or the wooden replica of a woman named Niobe can serve perfectly well as an unforgetting witness to our every deed." (*Tin Drum* 177)

for so-called "fictions of memory" because of the way in which memory operates. As discussed earlier, Azade Seyhan notes that "[m]emory is a phenomenon of conceptual border zones. […] It dwells at the crossroads between the past and the present" (31). Texts that explore questions of memory also investigate this ambiguity and the changing nature of memory itself, both as individual and collective phenomenon.

Because memory inhabits the space between the past and the present, Seyhan argues, it also connects memory and culture: both share a diachronic structure in which the past provides the framework and the point of origin for the imagined community (15–16). Referring to an argument put forth by semioticians Yurij Lotman and B. A. Uspensky, Seyhan speaks of culture as "a record of community memory" and argues that "[i]nsofar as culture is memory, it is embedded in the past and will have to be retrieved in symbolic action" (16). In her comparative study, this symbolic action is manifest in the diasporic and transnational narratives produced by Chicano/a authors in the United States and authors of Turkish descent in Germany. Their fictional narratives are acts of remembrance that lend "[…] coherence and integrity to a history interrupted, divided, or compromised by instances of loss" (4).

The authors I discuss here are not necessarily writers in exile or diaspora, although moments in the lives of some, such as Günter Grass, might qualify them to be. Nevertheless, their belonging is not always clear: even though their passports may mark them as either "German" or "Polish," these writers navigate real and fictional spaces in which such generalizations hold little explanatory power. Their writings, according to Seyhan, "originate at border crossings" (4) in the most literal sense. They stand out with a strong "metanarrative impulse," which produces narratives that are "both creative and experimental and self-reflexive and theoretical. In other words, questions of speech and writing, fiction versus nonfiction, history

and story, and official history and communal memory themselves become subjects of 'fiction'" (13). Similarly, the authors in my study have in one way or another personally experienced German-Polish border crossings, but they have also taken them as starting points for creating narratives of figurative boundaries and the transgression of these boundaries.

Narrative, expressed in the simplest of terms in the Oxford English Dictionary, is "[a]n account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them" ("Narrative, N."). In this sense, remembering is crucial for creating narratives and lending meaning to the past—be this remembering in the form of written texts or cultural artifacts, including memorials, exhibitions, and different kinds of media. The term "fictions of memory" has been proposed to refer to "literary, non-referential narratives that depict the workings of memory" but it has also been applied more broadly to "[…] the stories that individuals or cultures tell about their past to answer the question 'who am I?', or, collectively, 'who are we?'" (Neumann 334).

I am operating here primarily with the first, more restricted meaning as it pertains to literature, but it is important to note that literary fictions and the broader social discourses are also connected and impact one another. In reference to Paul Ricoeur's writing on mimesis, Birgit Neumann agrees that "literary representations of memory are always prefigured by culture-specific configurations of memory and current discourses about the operation of memory." At the same time, she emphasizes that literary texts also "create new models of memory" because they "[…] select and edit elements of culturally given discourse: They combine the real and the imaginary, the remembered and the forgotten, and, by means of narrative devices, imaginatively explore the workings of memory, thus offering new perspectives on the past" (334).

The "fictions of memory" I discuss in this chapter explore past events and various aspects of memory, such as processes of remembering and forgetting, competing and countervailing memories within one generation, as well as the transmission of memories across multiple generations. The stories unfold either from one individual's perspective or through multiple voices and views. The recovery of the past usually involves interactions with and among several social units (e.g., families, friends, neighbors), as well as the narrator's evaluation of their actions across different times and places. Through this interaction, memories and how they are evaluated also changes. Memory is thus presented as a "multi-directional" phenomenon (Rothberg) that must be negotiated. The construction of characters, plot lines, and relationships reflects an intention to undermine stereotypical and one-sided representations by providing unconventional viewpoints and narrative perspectives that are variously interpolated and intertwined.

At times, some of the texts I discuss in this and the following chapters appear to work towards overcoming disruptions by ignoring past conflicts, differences, or particularities. Such harmonization may put them on the verge of "cosmo-kitsch" (Schoene), and it also runs counter to border poetics as an idiom of the cosmopolitan imagination. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, border poetics strives for a space of transdifference that fosters the articulation and accommodation of disruptions. It suspends difference long enough to allow for the imagination of an alternative mode of being and a more inclusive memory. Birgit Neumann argues, "[l]iterature is […] never a simple reflection of pre-existing cultural discourses; rather, it proactively contributes to the negotiation of cultural memory" (335). Following this argument, border poetics, too, must therefore be considered in its impact on actual borders and the cultural construction and memory of border experiences.

As “a phenomenon of conceptual border zones” (Seyhan 31), memory also carries the inscriptions of various border crossings. These resurface through “the labor of remembrance that reclaims the lost experience of another time and place in language and imagination” (3-4). Because fictions of memory articulate and reenact these border crossings, and thereby potentially destabilize the borders of existing discourse, they are particularly well suited to express border poetics. Fictions of memory and border poetics stand in a symbiotic relationship because they share a conceptual connection to topographical, temporal, and symbolic borders and border experiences. They are also connected via their relationship to the particular and the universal. On the one hand, fictions of memory are anchored in historically, politically, or socially specific border experiences. On the other hand, border poetics expands such border experiences beyond their particular contexts by complicating them with universally articulated questions. This expansion of the particular may be understood as the “symbolic action” (Seyhan) that can help recover and articulate what has been lost or disrupted in the past. In addition, the fractured memory that is made accessible within a larger context can then help open up connections between different particulars.

Border poetics translates into aesthetic form the complex and often contradictory constellations of different identities, allegiances, and affiliations that are present within individuals and societies. This diversity is articulated through ambiguous narrators and protagonists, unconventional viewpoints, and narrative perspectives that are multiply interpolated and intertwined. By exploring the diversity of perspectives, the practice also contributes to the emergence of alternative and changing perspectives on the past (in the sense described by Neumann above). This expanded view of the past supports a critical cosmopolitanism in the present. Within these alternative times and spaces, discontinuities can be

temporarily suspended in an effort to overcome the blank spots in personal, regional, or local transborder histories that have resulted from forced and voluntary migrations alike.

Border poetics addresses many of these discontinuities, as I illustrate through my reading of three novels. I examine the nature and significance of border poetics as an engaged practice that connects the world of the text (world-making) with the world outside the text (worlding). These new connections challenge the reader's imagination to advance a cosmopolitan re-imagination of past and present border spaces. The analysis explains whether and how the worlds constructed in and by these texts pose a challenge to hegemonic border narratives. The main focus in this chapter is on *Bambino* by Inga Iwaśiów, *Katzenberge* by Sabrina Janesch, and *Himmelskörper* by Tanja Dückers. In each of these novels, the protagonists struggle to negotiate a field of conflicting meanings. They either strive to confront the burdens of the past or they try to ignore it, all in order to better orient their lives toward the present and the future. Either strategy makes visible the transborder connections in their lives. Returning to Szymborska's poem cited in the introductory chapter, these narratives are both inescapably tied to the ground, but at the same time turned towards the clouds. Yet how far do these novels take border poetics, and how far does border poetics take their stories? Do they indeed achieve a broadening of perspectives that can effectuate the worlding of the reader and thereby set in motion a process of cosmopolitanization?

The following readings ask to what extent the narratives advance a cosmopolitan imagination, and in which areas they may be lacking a truly critical transborder perspective. Within the same text, border poetics may be practiced in one area but still be lacking in another due to the author's own blind spots or subconscious stereotypes. In my analysis, I take a closer look at this tension and highlight instances of border poetics. This examination contributes to a

better understanding of how a cosmopolitan imaginary is created and how borders and border experiences can be made productive as sites of transborder mobility and exchange.

Inga Iwasiów: *Bambino* (2008)

Inga Iwasiów was born in Szczecin in 1963. She is a professor at the Institute of Polish Studies and Cultural Studies at the University of Szczecin and a renowned scholar and critic. Known especially for her work in gender studies, she is an important voice in Polish feminist literary scholarship. Her broad interest in borders and the transgression of borders is evident in her scholarly and literary activities as well as in her work as a publicist. From 1999 to 2012 she was a member of the editorial board of the bi-monthly literary and cultural journal *Pogranicza* (*Borderlands*), which was published in Szczecin from 1994 to 2012.

The 1998 publication of the prose collection *Miasto-ja-miasto* marks the beginning of Iwasiów's literary career. Since then she has published poetry, short prose, and several novels. Her first novel *Bambino* appeared in 2008, and it earned her a nomination for the *Nike* award—Poland's most prestigious literary prize. Set in the Polish city Szczecin, it spans the period from the 1950s to August 1981, that historical moment when the *Solidarność* movement had gained momentum and only a few months before the Polish government put the country under martial law to quell the movement. *Bambino* is the first in a very loosely connected trilogy. It was followed in 2010 by the novel *Ku słoncu* (*Towards the Sun*), which covers the 1980s and 1990s, and in 2012 by *Na krótko* (*For a Short While*), which begins in the early 2000s and continues

into the near future. Even though Iwasiów's work is regarded highly in Poland, none of her novels have appeared in German or English translation.[2]

Bambino tells the story of Maria, Janek, Ulrike, and Anna, who meet in a milkbar ("bar mleczny")[3] with the name "Bambino" in 1950s Szczecin. When the four main protagonists come to this northwestern port city from different parts of Poland, they do so in part because they want to get away from their families, and they hope to have a better life in the city. After their chance meeting at the milk bar, their very different biographies become intertwined and entangled over the following three decades. These entanglements are told in a non-linear way over forty-two chapters that explore how the past, including suppressed traumatic experiences, secrets, and blank spots, affects human relations. *Bambino*'s first four chapters reveal the background and the family history of the protagonists, and they explain why, how, and when each of them came to Szczecin. Throughout the remaining chapters, the reader learns more about their very different personal histories and how these differences come to impede their ability to create a shared space in which to overcome the burdensome aspects of their pasts. More and more, these differences resurface in the present and determine the protagonists' thoughts, desires, and fears.

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[2] This statement is true for all of Iwasiów's major works, including her poetry. To my knowledge, only few of her essays has been published in German. For example, included in the *Oder/Rhein Anthology*, "Ingeleine" is an autobiographical essay that centers on a German woman who remained in Szczecin after the war. This woman was a real life family friend, and she was the inspiration for Ula, one of *Bambino*'s main protagonists. This essay is also a reflection on the human need to tell stories in the face of past sufferings, claiming that these narratives often run counter to the official reconciliation narratives and the official "Versöhnungskitsch," but they must be told regardless (Iwasiów, "Ingeleine").

[3] A "bar mleczny" is a small and affordable Polish eatery known in the past for serving mainly flour-based dishes. During communist times, milk bars offered subsidized food to the general working public and often also functioned as a kind of cafeteria. Today milk bars continue to provide affordable meals, and some are still subsidized by the city to feed the poor. They have remained very popular with the wider Polish population, but they have also become popular tourist destinations for those who are looking for traditional Polish cuisine. When Tanja Dückers describes a milk bar as "a kind of soup kitchen" ("eine Art von Almosenküchen," 151) in her novel *Himmelskörper* that is discussed later, she elides this broader social and cultural context of the institution.

By bringing together the lives of these four individuals, the novel weaves an intricate web of human connectivity that reveals how personal histories and affiliations, as well as forms of intimacy, feelings of belonging, and solidarity are influenced by global events and the resulting border changes. And while the ideological and social structures inevitably shape these protagonists' lives, translator and scholar of Polish literature Ursula Phillips rightly points out that *Bambino*'s main focus "is much more on the internal, emotional and existential experiences of individuals and their intimate relationships, on the private rather than the public […]" (20). By exploring the inner life of each character as well as the social relations between them, *Bambino* shows how past experiences, pain, and trauma have a deep impact on personal lives, bodies, and relationships.

Through the theme of the ever-present past, Iwasiów explores many different types of borders and border crossings. The myth of Poland's "recovered territories" that was promulgated from above in the service of building a homogeneous Polish society, applied also to Szczecin. *Bambino* makes clear that this myth could hardly reflect the national, ethnic, and regional heterogeneity on the ground. Even more so, the prescribed collective memory further suppressed and silenced traumas and disturbances of the past, which eventually led to conflicts in the present. Disruptions caused by geopolitical or territorial border crossings are complicated by figurative boundaries, especially those of class, language, gender, and religion. The multiply intersecting and shifting geopolitical and symbolic processes of bordering and border transgression are inscribed into the novel's leitmotifs of the thread, both large and small ("nić" and "nitka") and the knot, also large and small ("węzeł" and "węzełek").

Each "thread," i.e., each life or storyline, delineates an individual's boundaries and defines his or her identity. In the novel, two instances participate in this narrative process: the

protagonists themselves and the narrator. The protagonists struggle to gain or maintain control over the narrative of their own lives. The narrator comments on this struggle and provides further information and insights to the reader, showing that there are no firm boundaries or simple threads, no linear narratives. Rather, each individual is already a complicated conglomeration of threads—a knot that is shaped by many past and present experiences, relations, and circumstances. Threads and knots thus reflect both the form and structure of the novel. As discussed earlier, the metaphor of the knot describes a contact zone—a messy and intertwined structure in which the individual threads do not disappear but become inseparable from other threads.

Flashbacks, foreshadowing, changing focalizations, narrator commentary, and meta reflection enhance the "knotty" structure and provide insights into the protagonists' feelings and motivations as well as into the narrative's constructedness. When the lives of Maria, Janek, Ulrike, and Anna come together in the milkbar, the narrator for example introduces the leitmotif of knots, reflecting on different kinds of conflicting and intersecting attachments:

> Dla Anny i Uli miejscem pracy jest bar "Bambino", gdzie trafiają po zaliczeniu kilku innych barów. Bambino, bambino, bambino. Janek, też słodki na pierwszy rzut oka, ale i mężczyzna, jest ich konsumentem, Marysia lokatorką Uli. Bambini, bambino. Oto przypadkowy układ. Komplet poszerzy się później. O niezbędny element. Do życia. Mają z sobą coś wspólnego: nie mają tu, w mieście, rodzin. Uklepują swoje życie, stykając się naskórkami z ludźmi stąd, zawierają przymierza, składają przysięgi.
>
> Są jednym z węzełków, które można próbować rozsupłać. Każde z nich wewnątrz, w sobie. Oni pomiędzy sobą. Oni z innymi ludźmi. Oni i ci, których pozostawili. Ludzie są jak węzełki: nie wiadomo, co się w nie zabierze i czy dadzą się rozplątać. Kto myśli ze

> można z tego zrobić mit lub sagę, jest w błędzie. Węzełki są węzełkami. Ni mniej, ni więcej. Węzełki. (Bambino 66)
>
> [“Bambino” is Anna and Ula’s workplace; they end up here after several other milk bars. Bambino, bambino, bambino. Janek, sweet upon first sight, but also a man, is their customer; Marysia is Ula’s tenant. Bambini, bambino. It is a chance arrangement. The set will expand later. By an essential element. Of life. They have something in common: they don’t have, here in this city, any family. They build their lives, connecting only skin-deep with the people from here, making covenants, swearing oaths.
>
> They are one of the little knots one can try to untangle. Each one of them inside, within themselves. Between one another. With other people. They and those they left behind. People are like knots: nobody knows what gets caught up inside and whether they can be untangled. Whoever thinks that this is material for myths or sagas is mistaken. Knots are knots. Nothing less, nothing more. Knots.]

Knots appear here as default modes of human existence. The novel’s border poetics derives from this premise, which also includes the idea that these knots cannot be disentangled. The narrator’s suggestion that incoherence and disruption are indelible parts of the human narrative is central for the plot. I suggest that *Bambino*’s border poetics lies primarily in opening up transborder connections through this knotted structure and the inherent entanglements of the main protagonists. These knots are articulated not to create meaning or coherence but to open up new points of entry for other, more figurative border experiences and other kinds of difference.

Borders and borderlands—past and present, those of the mind and those physically crossed—are spaces of continuous knitting, weaving, and unraveling of these entangled knots. The novel’s critical cosmopolitanism arises both within the storyworld and external to it: within

the story, there are brief moments of realization and unraveling, when the protagonists discover their connectedness to others—but any clarity that is gained is only brief. In fact, each of the novel's protagonists tries but ultimately fails to suspend difference, to blend in, and to forget. However, something else happens outside these individuals and their failed relationships. While the protagonists are unable to reach out to one another and overcome their isolation, the narrator makes the connections and universal nature of the struggles apparent and shares her insights with the reader.

The place of the borderland/pogranicze

The setting of the story aids in the unfolding of border poetics as well. Szczecin is a port city near the Baltic Sea in northwestern Poland with currently about 400,000 inhabitants. With its own complicated and multilayered border-history, the city is an ideal setting for the negotiation of geopolitical and figurative border experiences and the relations and disruptions between different identities, times, and places. Szczecin was crossed by new borders in 1945, when the once German city Stettin became part of Poland. The border river Oder flows through the city, but just south of Szczecin, the German-Polish border deviates from the course of the river, running a few miles west so that Szczecin itself was not divided (unlike Frankfurt/Oder; see Chapter 5). Those who settled here after the war brought their multiethnic, linguistically, religiously, and culturally diverse attachments and affiliations with them along with myriad strategies to balance contesting identities both within themselves and in their relations with others.

As was true for other formerly German areas, there was a lingering fear in Szczecin that Germans would eventually return and reclaim what they had to leave behind (Weber 136). This led to a phenomenon that historian Gregor Thum described as "impermanence syndrome"

(*Uprooted* 171) or "psychosis of impermanence" (*Uprooted* 189) in his study about Wrocław. Jan Musekamp applies the term to the situation in Szczecin (122), and he also shows the multiple processes of resignification that Szczecin has undergone. In medical terminology, both the "*psychosis* of impermanence" (emphasis mine) and the "Snow White *syndrome*" mentioned previously, describe related kinds of disruption with a psychological impact. While the first focuses more specifically on disruption in time, the latter is related to spatial disorientation and discomfort. For *Bambino*'s protagonists, both conditions impact their ability or inability to navigate the city, and they shape the literal and figurative spaces they are claiming for themselves. Szczecin appears as a microcosm of postwar Polish society and a borderland in many different senses of the word.

The memories of others

Bambino explores questions of memory and remembering on two levels: by the protagonists themselves, who remember the past and are shaped by it, and through the narrator's interjections that delve further into those aspects of the past that the protagonists are unwilling or unable to articulate or remember. Other times and places in former and current Poland come to play an important role in the novel, and they are "brought" into the city by the protagonists, who cannot detach themselves from their previous lives. While each of the first four chapters tells the story of one protagonist, their family, their experiences during the war, and how they came to Szczecin after the war, these stories begin to approach one another until they meet in the seventh chapter, titled "Little Knots" ("Węzełki"). Maria, Anna, Ula, and Janek are like knots: "Within themselves, each one of them. With each other. With other people. With the ones they left behind" (*Bambino* 66). The narrative thus begins by situating each protagonist in a very precise moment, place, and social situation. Initially, postwar Szczecin appears as a place where these

particularities lose their significance, yet differences resurface and become so divisive that they disrupt the friends' lives and social ties. The protagonists are unable to let go of their entangled pasts, and this causes further knots in the present. To make these knots more visible, I want to spend some time introducing the individual characters.

Anna was born in 1930, and she is from the southern Polish town Wysowa-Zdrój in the Beskidy Mountains, an area that was formerly part of Austrian Galicia. Anna's father was a Polish bookbinder who completed some orders for the Nazis and was murdered during the war. It remains unresolved whether the Nazis murdered him because he was Polish or whether the Poles killed him because they viewed him as a Nazi collaborator. As the circumstances of his death are unknown, and his body was never found, there is no death certificate. Anna and her mother therefore have no legal right to the property on which they lived. Instead, after the war their house is passed on to the eldest son from the father's previous marriage, and he forces Anna and her mother off the property. The patriarchal social and legal structure leaves the widow and her unmarried daughter with no rights or protections. When Anna's mother remarries, Anna moves to Szczecin to pursue an education and begin a new life. She finds employment in the milkbar.

Maria was born in 1940 near Drohobycz in the eastern territories (present-day Ukraine) that were formerly part of Poland but incorporated into the Soviet Union after the war. Maria's family is of mixed ethnic origin, and after the war, they had considered going west. However, they were indecisive and lacking the proper paperwork, and they were forced to stay when the Soviet Union eventually closed its borders. They lived in extreme poverty and were eventually allowed to leave during a second expatriation wave in 1957. However, by then the "best" places in Poland had been taken, and the family is forced to settle in an economically deprived rural area in Western Poland. At this point, Maria decides to go to Szczecin to live her own life and

get an education. She comes to the city with an overwhelming sense of responsibility for her younger siblings and with a deeply felt guilt about having left behind her family. She is also homesick, a feeling embodied in Maria's relationship to language. She struggles with learning Polish and has difficulty finding a new home in the language, which seems to continuously reject her. She loves to read, and language and literature facilitate border crossing for her, but in many ways they are also impermeable borders—or "border regimes" (Mufti)—that reinforce visible and invisible social boundaries.

Maria rents a room from Ula, who works at the "Bambino" milkbar. Here she eventually meets Janek, the two fall in love, get married, and have a child. Like Maria, Janek was born in 1940. He is from a village near Poznań, in the comparatively wealthy region of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska). Despite his gender and the relative economic advantage, Janek also has low standing in the social hierarchy. He is a "bastard" child ("bękart") and grows up without knowing his father's identity. Janek's very existence is therefore considered a scandal in the traditional, Catholic community in which he lives, and he is an outsider at school and in the larger family. When his mother is forced to leave home to find work in the city, Janek grows up with his grandparents, who were "Volksdeutsche" (ethnic Germans) and had worked for the Germans in various capacities. After his grandmother's passing, Janek goes to Szczecin to find work and "become a man." Here no one cares whether he knows his father or not, and he seizes the opportunity to make a career by cooperating with the Polish secret police. At first, Maria and Jan appear to have a perfect marriage and comfortable life. Jan's collaboration with the communist regime allows the couple to join the privileged class. Yet over time, their pasts catch up to them: Jan develops an increasing sense of superiority over his wife and her family from the

East. Maria becomes an alcoholic, and, after she dies, her friend Ulrike takes in Jan and Maria's daughter.

Like Anna, Ulrike is ten years older than Jan and Maria, and she was born in German Stettin in 1930. Her father was an engineer and had become an ardent Nazi and Wehrmacht member. When he does not return after the war, Ulrike and her mother presume him dead. Ulrike's mother is of mixed German-Polish descent, though she had long tried to forget her Polish side and had quietly gone along with the Nazi regime. With nowhere else to go, Ulrike and her mother manage to avoid the expulsions and stay in Szczecin after the war. When her mother falls ill and dies in 1947, Ulrike stays and hides her German background, also by changing her name to Ula. Ula works in the milkbar, and when she is looking for someone to share her apartment, Maria becomes her tenant. Later, Ula meets Stefan, a Jewish Holocaust survivor. Like all relationships in the novel, Ula and Stefan's relationship is also dominated by silences and omissions: she does not mention to him that she is German, and he never speaks about his experiences during the Holocaust. Ula also learns that her father did not die in the war, but that he had settled in West Germany.

These four threads, or individual knots, are laid out for the reader at the novel's beginning and are developed and complicated in the remaining chapters. Guided and inhibited by their secrets, their feelings of loneliness, pain, and desire, the protagonists struggle to build their lives and find themselves. The space in which they hope for a better future is itself marked by disruptions: Everyone in Szczecin suffers from "Snow White syndrome." If they came here after the war, as most did, they had to adapt to a strange place. This can include having to learn a new language, as is the case for Maria. If they were here before or during the war, like Ula, they must

unlearn what they know and reconfigure the space in accordance with the new reality, which in Ula's case means hiding her Germanness.

Shedding her German identity is all the more important for Ula because a permanent feeling of "ours-not-ours" ("nasze-nie-nasze") (139) saturates the city. The "psychosis of impermanence" (Thum, *Uprooted* 189) is bolstered by the fear that one day the Germans will return and reclaim the city, which the novel shows to be part of the communist propaganda (*Bambino* 139). The city has been culturally appropriated and appears in a "German-now-Polish version" ("w wersji niemiecko-teraz-polskiej") (11), but because the appropriation is imperfect, the city triggers different memories of the past that all four protagonists came here to forget. Ruins from the war are still all around in the 1960s, and Maria's affirmation "To hell with the past!" ("Przeszłość niech idzie w cholerę!") (97) proves to be wishful thinking more than an attainable reality.

The narrative emphasizes that Maria, Ula, Anna, Janek, and the people they meet have crossed, have *been* crossed, and *continue to be* crossed by political, gendered, ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic, and class borders. These border-crossings have complicated the threads of their lives, and they have left visible and invisible scars in their psyche and on their bodies. Ula, for example, who insists fiercely on her independence from everyone, particularly from men, gives herself up entirely in a relationship to Stefan. Stefan never speaks of his experiences during the Holocaust or his previous life. When he finds out that Ula is German, he tries hard not to be bothered by it. Similarly, Ula tries to detach herself from her German past and wants to push aside her feelings of guilt and shame. Yet these feelings are reawakened when Ula receives a letter from West Germany, from her father, whom she had presumed dead. Ula initially hides this news from Stefan, who in turn is silent about his wife, who now lives in Switzerland. Like

Stefan, his wife survived the Holocaust, but she never wants to return to Poland, sending Stefan packages instead.

Ula and Stefan's life together is shrouded in secrecy and silence, and as much as they try to overcome their differences, their relationship is unable to withstand the heavy burden of the past. Even more than Ula, Stefan embodies the notion of a disrupted narrative and the blank spots in collective memory. He is the fifth main protagonist, but he is even more of an outsider than the others. The reader learns relatively little about him, and he joins the four friends after their "knot" has already been tied. Stefan's presence in the story is therefore also an absence and a reminder of what was lost during the Holocaust. Iwasiów articulates this powerfully through obvious omissions, silences, and ellipses. Stefan is symbolic for the difficulty of coming to terms with the past and for the absence of Jewish life in postwar constellations.

While the primary focus of this chapter is on story, the border poetics of the novel is expressed both on the levels of story and discourse, and one could also examine its discursive strategies of knitting and weaving more closely. The visible and invisible knots and entanglements and their accompanying secrets and lies are evident on the level of narrative structure through multiperspectivity and polyvocality. Throughout the novel, the reader encounters many different voices. The voice of the narrator, who feels closest to Maria but expresses uncertainty whether this position can be upheld (66), is interwoven with the protagonists' voices. Their intimately personal, internal perspectives shine through in their actions and behaviors, and they lay bare their fears, anxieties, and hidden motivations. The reverberations of the many voices from the past that have impacted and scarred the protagonists in conscious or subconscious ways, resurface in the present. This includes the propaganda heard at home or in school, the lessons and restrictive values inherited from mother or father, the social

norms and oppressive mores transmitted by the church and the grandparents, and the protagonists' rebellion against, yet inescapable immersion in these various voices and influences. Inner monologues and streams of consciousness reveal how worldviews, beliefs, and norms, especially gender norms, are transmitted and internalized, how they shape relationships, create patterns and traditions, and have a powerful and often damaging grip on the individual.

These multiple borders intersect as the disparate narratives of the protagonists' lives meet and collide in this borderland Szczecin. *Bambino*'s protagonists are citizens of the cosmopolitan "border world" that is Szczecin, but there are only unfulfilled promises in this kind of cosmopolitanism. The protagonists can suspend difference for brief moments but it always reinforces itself in new and often unexpected ways. The reader, however, gains a deep insight into the multiply layered ways in which human identity, belonging, and desire are entangled and connected with one another. Creating new forms of belonging relies in part on the suspension of difference, but the novel paints a dark vision of cosmopolitanism here by showing the difficulty of attaining this suspension and creating a space of transdifference.

Sabrina Janesch: *Katzenberge* (2010)

Whereas Iwasiów's border poetics generates a starkly realist and fleeting cosmopolitan vision, in which difference always comes back to reassert itself, Sabrina Janesch's *Katzenberge* can be read as a more optimistic outlook from a dark and violent past. Janesch was born in West Germany in 1985 and is of mixed German and Polish heritage. *Katzenberge* is her debut novel, and she continued to work on the German-Polish theme in her second novel, *Ambra* (2012) (see Chapter 4). Like Iwasiów's *Bambino*, Janesch's *Katzenberge* constructs "world" from the perspective of the borderland; it is locally bound and globally situated at the same time, linking historically and geographically specific events with universally recognizable liminal experiences.

Katzenberge offers access to history and memory through different times and spaces, and it destabilizes multiple kinds of boundaries through story and narrative discourse. Whereas *Bambino* is written in the realist mode, *Katzenberge* also includes fantastic elements. As the next chapter shows, I consider the use of the fantastic as a discursive strategy that is particularly well-suited for border poetics. In the following discussion, I focus again on the expression of border poetics through plot and story.

The world of *Katzenberge* is constructed from the double vantage points of the German-Polish and the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, i.e., two borders that changed when Poland's eastern and western borders were shifted west after the Second World War. The protagonists at the center of *Katzenberge* are directly or indirectly caught up in the resulting population shifts. As previous discussions of the novel show, *Katzenberge*'s borderlands are both geographical sites—places that one can experience perceptually—and delocalized, symbolic spaces that hold contested and painful memories. These memories cannot be contained within nationally oriented frameworks, and Eigler argues that Janesch maps a transnational contemporary memory landscape by integrating different perspectives and spaces (*Heimat* 155). The main protagonist is of German-Polish heritage, and she is also a representative of the young and globally oriented

generation. She is a border crosser in a literal as well as in an allegorical sense, which fundamentally informs her storytelling (Eigler, *Heimat* 170–171).[4]

Physical places provide helpful points of orientation for the novel's three main plot lines. The frame narrative introduces the reader to the first-person narrator Nele Leibert, who lives in Berlin and is of mixed Polish-German descent.[5] The year is 2007, and Nele has come to the formerly German region of Lower Silesia in southwestern Poland to visit the cemetery where her grandparents Stanisław and Maria Janeczko are buried. She has just returned from her grandfather's birthplace in present-day Ukraine (formerly Polish Galicia), and she has brought back some soil from his homeland to spread on the graves. As Nele bikes to the cemetery, two inner narratives unfold. These narratives are assembled in the form of a non-chronological montage, and they offer a more detailed account of Nele's travels east to collect the soil, as well as the violent circumstances of her grandparents' settlement in Silesia. Nele's travels are triggered by her grandfather's passing some months earlier, and she hopes to find out who Stanisław Janeczko "really was" and preserve his story.

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[4] Scholars have also analyzed *Katzenberge* within the context of transformations of "Heimat" or identity into more fluid and deterritorialized concepts. Friederike Eigler argues that by exploring different forms of belonging, the novel contributes to a "discursive transformation of formerly highly contested European border regions" (*Heimat* 9). The novel takes a transnational perspective and reveals the interrelatedness of German and Polish collective and individual histories. Importantly, historical disruption is not erased but rearticulated with the help of magical realism (151–176). Claudia Winkler's reading reveals the discursive and spatial strategies that transform Heimat into the symbolic realm that can be claimed through stories and memories. Sabine Egger focuses on Janesch's use of magical realism to articulate fluid identities and a transnational and transgenerational perspective on historical trauma. The re-imagined past articulates both a "familial postmemory" but also a much broader transnational Polish-German memory (71).

[5] Although not explicitly, Nele has some connections with Nelly, the main protagonist in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*. Wolf's Nelly investigates her past by uncovering its different layers of memory in a kind of archaeological process. Nele proceeds in much the same way when she literally digs in the ground to find evidence of the past.

Nele's journey takes her first to Wydrza in eastern Poland, where some members of her remote family still live, and then to Janeczko's birthplace and home for the first 24 years of his life: Zastavne and Zdżary Wielkie, two villages located in the *kresy*, Poland's eastern borderlands. Nele's eastward journey is the counter movement to Janeczko's forced westward movement more than 60 years earlier, when he was driven out of his village by a wave of violence from Ukrainian nationalists against the Polish population in 1943. He flees across the Bug River (which is today in large part the border between Poland and Ukraine), first to Lwów (today Lviv, German Lemberg) and then to Wydrza, where he reunites with his family. When return to the Galician homeland becomes impossible after 1945, Janeczko, his wife Maria, and others from their village continue further west to Silesia, and they settle in the homes that have just been vacated by expelled Germans. They too become affected by "Snow White syndrome," and they have a hard time feeling at home in the new and strange place.

Katzenberge is written in a realist style, but there are elements of the fantastic that are related to the workings of an ominous beast that appears throughout the story. The beast is at once a symbol of past horrors and an unquestioned material presence. It appears in different forms, for example as a wolf-like creature (27) or owl (173), and it haunts the places in which Janeczko and his wife Maria try to rest or settle. The beast lurks in the distance, its footsteps are audible (68), and it attacks Janeczko and his first-born son, leaving physical marks on their bodies (104). On two occasions Maria performs a ritual to expel the beast from their house. Nele's sprinkling of earth on her grandparents' grave is also meant as a third and final expulsion ritual to banish the beast forever.

However, the beast is not constrained to the past. Nele herself encounters it on two occasions: on her way to the cemetery in the frame narrative and as a child many years earlier.

Nele recounts this childhood memory and her grandfather's reaction to it: from the window of a train Nele sees a large, black wolf-like creature. Janeczko responds to his granddaughter's report, "[…] es ist also wieder da" ["so it is back"], and Nele remembers his speculation "[…] dass es sich vielleicht deshalb ausgerechnet mir gezeigt hätte, weil ich beide Teile vereinte, von drüben, von jenseits der Oder, und von hier" ["that perhaps it had shown itself to me because I unite both parts, from over there, from beyond the Oder, and from here"] (27). Janeczko himself had last encountered the beast when his son was born: "Großvater sagte, als der Schrei seines zweiten Sohnes über die Felder hallte, sei das Biest in der Erde verschwunden. Geöffnet habe sie sich und es mit Haut und Haaren verschlungen. Innerhalb weniger Sekunden habe sich die Krume geteilt und wieder geschlossen" ["Grandfather said that when the cry of his second son echoed across the fields, the beast vanished into the earth. The earth parted and swallowed it completely. Within a few seconds the crust had opened and closed again"] (146).

Maria tries to make sense of her husband's experience: "Das kann vieles bedeuten […]. Wer wisse schon, was diese Erde in sich trüge, mit wem sie verbündet sei und mit wem nicht. Ohne die dritte Bannung ließe sich nichts weiter unternehmen. Wir müssen damit rechnen, […] dass es jederzeit zurückkehren kann. Jetzt oder in fünfzig Jahren" ["It could mean a lot of things […]. Who knows what this earth is carrying inside itself, who is its ally and who isn't. Without a third expulsion ritual nothing could be done. We have to be prepared for its return […]. Now or in fifty years"] (148). Maria, like later her husband, comes to the conclusion that the border-crossers in the family have a special relationship with the beast. She believes that for the time being their newborn son would provide them with the "[…] Schutz des ersten polnischen Schlesiers, der in diesem Haus geboren wurde" ["the protection of the first Polish Silesian born in this house"] (148). She concludes: "[…] Wir sind frei, Stanisław. Für viele Jahre. Janeczko

atmete auf. Sein Kopf schmerzte. Zusammen schauten sie aus dem Fenster. Der Himmel war kornblumenblau, es würde ein guter Tag werden" ["We are free, Stanisław. For many years. Janeczko was relieved. His head hurt. They looked out the window together. The sky was cornflower blue, it was going to be a good day"] (148).

Katzenberge's beast is a border-crosser between worlds, and it stands as a symbol for a past that is not completely past. It serves as a stand-in for traumatic experiences and painful memories intimately connected to earth or soil. Not only does the beast come from and disappear into the earth, earth is also used to expel the beast. In the novel, earth is a symbol that connects different times and places as well as different conceptions of what constitutes reality. The novel plays with the multiple meanings of earth: as world or planet; the cultivable soil that forms the upper crust of that planet; or that portion of land to which one has an emotional attachment, a homeland. These various meanings are also contained in the German word "Erde" and its Polish equivalent "ziemia." *Erde* as material object and symbol exemplifies the universal and the particular, and it can yield familiarity and strangeness (which at times reveals itself as "beast").

I am reminded here of James Clifford's conceptualization of roots and routes, which is intimately connected to such notions of earth: It is the place to which humans are connected, where they have put down roots; where they thrive and grow. At the same time humans are voluntarily or involuntarily mobile and experience the world always while "en route" from one location to the next—literally or symbolically, as travel, migration, or virtual or imagined movement. Stanisław Janeczko experiences this sense of rootedness, and the disruption of that sense in a corporeal way when he is forced to flee from his village. During the massacres he hides for hours in his wheat fields before he dares to continue. He feels "[k]ühle, feuchte Erde, die durch das Hemd an seinen Bauch drang. […] Janeczko rührte sich nicht, er war Teil seines

Weizens, stimm- und reglose Wucherung des czarnoziem, der ölig schimmernden galizischen Schwarzerde" ["Cool, moist earth that penetrated his shirt and touched his stomach. […] Janeczko did not move, he was part of his wheat, a silent and motionless growth of the czarnoziem, of the oily and shimmering Galician black earth"] (238). This traumatic experience has also forever altered his relationship to the earth and shaken his belief in the organic and enduring unit of people and their homeland: "Als Kind hatte Janeczko gedacht, dass sein Körper mit der Erde, auf der er lebte, untrennbar verbunden sei. Es hatte nicht lange gedauert, bis er feststellte, dass dies zwar sein mochte, dass man aber trotzdem die Erde verlassen und weiterleben konnte; unter Schmerzen zwar, aber es ging" ["As a child Janeczko had believed that his body was insolubly connected with the soil on which he lived. It did not take long for him to find out that this may be the case, but that one could nevertheless leave this soil and go on living; with great pains perhaps, but it was possible"] (29).

Due to the violent amputation from his homeland, Janeczko's sense of the world's wholeness is broken and replaced with a phantom pain that feeds on past memories. Nele, as part of a globally oriented generation and because of her mixed German and Polish origin, feels less of a connection to a particular and clearly defined homeland. Although Nele can be thought of as a border crosser with conciliatory powers, she experiences again and again how persistent real and imagined borders are, and how stereotypes, beliefs, and memories map the earth, shape convictions, and motivate actions. I want to draw attention again to Beck and Grande's argument that the most challenging paradox for a cosmopolitan recasting of Europe is that "the national must be both overcome *and* preserved" (*Cosmopolitan* 261). *Katzenberge* navigates this paradox: Nele's power lies not in resolving difference but in bringing multiple perspectives into a

conversation across spatial and temporal divides. This creates a sense of world in which multiple local or situational affiliations are connected to form a more cosmopolitan vision of the future.

As is also true for Tokarczuk's and Iwasiów's work, the "cosmopolitan vision" of *Katzenberge* is not to be misunderstood as a vision of harmonious coexistence, but rather as the creative tension of persisting difference. There is, for example a significant disparity between Nele's and her grandfather's connection to earth: In order to travel to Janeczko's birthplace, Nele has to cross the same river (the Bug) that Janeczko had crossed to save his life. But Nele's perception of the borderland is infused with a naïve romanticism that is possible because *her* journey is voluntary and, despite some logistic difficulties, leisurely. However, demystification sets in quickly as the borderland reasserts itself and literally grounds her:

> Der Bug, sagte ich leise. Dann stieg ich aus. Schwarzes Wasser. Sonnenspiel auf Wellen, Strudel, die ihnen entgegenliefen, Sandbänke, die wie Finger in den Fluss hineingriffen. Dichte Weidenwände umgaben das Wasser, noch wenige Meter davor war nichts vom Bug und seinen Steilufern zu sehen gewesen. Ich verließ die Brücke und versuchte, mich seitlich ins Dickicht zu schlagen. Der Boden war feucht, und als mir einfiel, dass ich mich an den Zweigen der Weiden entlanghangeln könnte, rutschte ich aus, fiel auf die Seite, schlitterte einige Meter nach unten und prallte gegen einen Baumstamm. Ein hellbrauner Streifen Lehm zog sich dort, wo ich ausgerutscht war, durch die Erde. […] Meine ganze rechte Seite war bedeckt mit ukrainischem Lehm. (*Katzenberge* 234–235)
> [The Bug River, I said quietly. Then I got out [of the car]. Black water. Rays of sunshine playing on the waves, water swirling against them, sandbanks reaching into the river like fingers. Thick walls of willows surrounded the water, just a few meters earlier one had been unable to see anything of the Bug and its bluffs. I left the bridge and tried to enter

> the thicket sideways. The ground was moist, and just when I thought that I could hold on to the branches of the willows, I slipped, fell on my side, skidded several meters downward, and crashed into the trunk of a tree. A light brown streak of clay cut through the earth from where I had fallen. […] My entire right side was covered in Ukrainian clay.]

To make her embarrassment even greater, Nele is immediately chastised by her Polish travel companion for provoking the attention of the Ukrainian border guards, who then must be paid off with an additional bribe. Despite such interruptions along the way, she finds the ruins of her grandfather's house and brings some soil back to Silesia.

According to Claudia Winkler, this "almost slapstick moment" (94) encapsulates the novel's demystification of the lost homeland in the East (93–95) in exchange for more symbolic claims through memories and stories (88). I argue that this kind of remaking can also open up the borderland for a cosmopolitan re-imagination, and Nele needs this kind of imagination in order to complete her mission. With Nele's help, the Galician soil, just as its people, has become mobile and is transplanted to Silesia. Under the prying eyes of the beast, she bikes to the cemetery to reunite her grandparents with the earth they had come from. However, the road is bumpy, and by the time Nele is ready to spread the soil on the graves and ban the beast forever, she realizes that she has lost most of it along the way. Nele cannot make borders disappear or reconcile the past but must embrace the imperfect moment, use her imagination, and spread only the remaining fragments of dried earth on the graves.

Despite its limitations, Nele's endeavor is important: she searches for the past, discovers the many interpretations of the story, senses its implications for the present, and finds a symbol—earth—to embody all of it and feel real at the same time (and thus be part of the

perceptual experience crucial for cosmopolitanism). In doing all of these things, and by admitting that myths, gossip, beliefs, customs, and so-called "small" histories have an impact on world-making, Nele contributes to a "memory culture that spans borders" (Beck, "Re-Inventing"). The borders in *Katzenberge* are manifold, for example between Germany, Poland, and Ukraine today, between Silesia and Galicia of the past, between 2007 and 1943, between and through generations, and between different conceptions of reality.

Katzenberge puts forth a cosmopolitan vision of Europe: the novel's border poetics lies in recovering and keeping alive the memories of a traumatic past but it does so with a gesture towards the future.[6] In *Katzenberge*, there is the timid hope that the past may be a good place to begin practicing the cosmopolitan imagination by paying attention to the smaller and marginalized but interconnected histories. This possibility is also hinted at in the novel's concluding paragraphs. After completing her mission, Nele returns to her aunt's house, shakes out the dust from her grandmother's headscarf in which she had transported the soil, and hangs the cloth out to dry. The novel's final sentences are reminiscent of Maria and Janeczko's feelings after the last sighting of the beast—a moment of hope, peace, and a new beginning. Nele says: "Auf der größten Blüte des Tuches landet eine Biene und wärmt sich in der Sonne. Der Himmel ist kornblumenblau, es wird ein guter Tag werden" ["A bee lands on the headscarf's largest flower and warms itself in the sun. The sky is cornflower blue, it will be a good day"] (272).

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[6] See also Amir Eshel, who calls this practical engagement with the past "futurity." Such literature examines the political, cultural, and ethical implications of past events for the present and the future, and it imagines alternatives. While my reading focuses on the novel's somewhat utopian, future-oriented gesture, Friederike Eigler has also noted that Katzenberge represents a "post-memorial space" that is firmly grounded in the European present. Magical realism is used to make "specters of the past" visible and reimagine space as transnational (*Heimat* 176).

Janesch and Iwasiów both lay bare the threads that simultaneously connect and separate people. In both novels, material objects and real places matter greatly, but just as important are ideational borders and imagined boundaries. The same is true for the next novel in the discussion, albeit some of the difficulties of articulating a cosmopolitan imagination also become visible.

Tanja Dückers: *Himmelskörper* (2003)

Tanja Dückers was born in West Berlin in 1968. She is a writer and freelance journalist, and her long list of publications includes essays, poetry, children's and young adult fiction, short prose and several novels. In her journalistic work, Dückers engages with diverse aspects of German politics and society, and her articles have appeared in *Die Zeit*, *Der Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *taz*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Berliner Zeitung*, and *Berliner Morgenpost*.

Himmelskörper (Celestial Bodies) is Dückers's second novel, published in 2003, one year after Günter Grass's novella *Im Krebsgang* (*Crabwalk*) reignited the debate about whether Germans could be portrayed not only as perpetrators but also as victims of the Nazi regime. *Im Krebsgang* and *Himmelskörper* both tell a story related to the events of January 1945 and the sinking of the "Wilhelm Gustloff" by the Soviets. The ship had carried mainly German refugees but also some military personnel. When Dückers learned that Günter Grass was writing on the same topic, she was shocked. However, as she explains in an interview in the *Berliner Zeitung*, she was relieved when she saw that Grass had approached the topic quite differently. Even though Dückers admits that two versions of an event are not necessarily mutually exclusive, she does go on to criticize Grass for being partial and too emotionally involved. While this "makes sense" for someone of his generation, Dückers insists that she possesses "the necessary historical distance" and is able to "see the facts." Further trying to distinguish herself from Grass, Dückers

adds that she feels (“empfinde”) her version to be “more correct and more historically accurate” (“Tanja”).[7]

It is not without irony that Dückers deems Grass’s approach somehow inappropriate because of his emotional involvement in the subject matter, and at the same time she *feels* her version to be the more appropriate one. In addition, her claim to the historical truth and her idea of being at a safe historical distance to see the emotionally unencumbered facts, seems to be somewhat at odds both with the general idea of fiction as well as with her own concept of “sensual historiography” (“sinnliche Geschichtsschreibung”). This kind of historiography relies precisely on shrinking the distance between historical fact and personal experience and on a more intimate look at the entanglements of individual and collective memory.[8] Dückers’s strident claim to the truth, I argue, has repercussions for the plausibility of some of her characters and plot lines, and the novel’s border poetics.

While the “Gustloff” tragedy serves as the background to *Himmelskörper*, the novel’s primary focus is on processes of remembering and forgetting, and it brings up questions of responsibility, denial, and the transmission of trauma across multiple generations.

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[7] In the interview, Dückers says: “Sein Blick ist der seiner Generation. Es macht schon Sinn, dass Grass parteiischer, pathetischer und emotionaler ist, weil er involvierter war. Ich dagegen habe die nötige historische Distanz und sehe die Fakten. […] ich empfinde meine Version als richtiger und historisch treffender.” [His view is that of his generation. It makes sense that Grass is more partisan, dramatic, and emotional because he was more involved. I, on the other hand, have the necessary historical distance and see the facts. […] I feel that my version is more correct and more historically accurate.]

[8] Norman Ächtler cites an interview by Sabrina Ortmann, in which Dückers says: “Schreiben bedeutet für mich eine Art von [...] sinnlicher Geschichtsschreibung. Ich glaube, dass es wichtig ist, dass man als Autor auf seine Gegenwart reagiert, sie in Kunst transformiert und sie damit kommentiert. Das sollte man nicht nur Historikern und Medienleuten überlassen. Schreiben ist für mich eine Form von in der Welt sein, eben die Umgebung beobachten und dann im Schreiben einfangen.” [“For me, writing is a kind of […] sensual historiography. I believe that it is important for an author to respond to the present, transform it into art, and thereby comment on it. One should not leave that to historians and people in the media alone. Writing is for me a form of being in the world, to observe the environment, and to capture it in writing.”] (Ortmann cited in Ächtler 295).

Himmelskörper lends itself to a reading that applies the framework of memory theory, such as Maurice Halbwachs's differentiation between collective and individual memory, Aleida and Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory and its distinction from communicative memory, or Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* as sites of memory that have taken the place of "real environments of memory" (Erll 23). Read in this way, *Himmelskörper* can offer insights into numerous memory studies concepts, including narrative and emplotment, forgetting and re-collecting, rituals and cues, media of memory, and processes of transformation and remediation of memory. With regard to the discussion on the changes in memory culture in the "Enkelgeneration," the generation of grandchildren, Harald Welzer has credited Dückers for refraining from the problematic "mild consent" ("mildes Einverständnis") that he observes in writers of the second generation. According to Welzer, the latter have grown soft and now wish to reconcile with their parents (63). Such frameworks are helpful in locating the novel within certain discourses, such as changes in collective memory or "Enkelliteratur." However, a closer look at its engagement with borders reveals several inconsistencies and problems in how the novel approaches its subject.

Himmelskörper is told in first person from the perspective of Freia (whose real name is Eva Maria Sandmann). At the beginning of the novel Freia, who is working on a dissertation in the field of meteorology, is on her way to an academic conference. There she will give a presentation on cloud classification models and issue a call to international scientists to join her in creating a new and comprehensive cloud atlas. At the time of this trip, Freia's personal life has been in turmoil for several weeks. Her grandfather recently passed away and her grandmother is very sick. Moreover, Freia is pregnant, and this has triggered in her a desire to know "[…] in was für einen Zusammenhang, in was für ein Nest ich da mein Kind setze…" ["into what kind of

context, into what kind of nest I am placing my child…"] (26). She thus embarks on a mental journey into her family's past and reviews her childhood and youth and the role the past has played in her family's life.

The reader learns that Freia grew up in a middle-class family in a West Berlin suburb with her twin brother Paul and her parents Renate and Peter. Johanna (Jo) and Maximilian (Mäxchen), her grandparents on the mother's side, visit the family frequently. Jo and Mäxchen met in Gotenhafen (today Gdynia, Poland) on the Baltic coast, where they lived from 1939 until they were expelled in 1945. While Mäxchen was still at war, Johanna, with her young daughter Renate, and Johanna's sister fled the advancing Soviet troops. They left Gdynia on a mine sweeper called "Theodor" on January 30, 1945—the same day on which the "Wilhelm Gustloff" also departed from there. While Soviet torpedoes sank the "Gustloff," leading to the death of around 9,000 people, the "Theodor" arrived at its destination.[9] The sinking of the "Gustloff" serves here as a point of crystallization that allows for a reflection on guilt, silence, and forgetting, as well as on processes of memory and the transgenerational transmission of trauma. It is also the red flag that draws attention to a family secret and the novel's central question: Why were Jo, Lena, and Renate not on the "Gustloff"? How did the three manage to get a coveted spot on the smaller, much safer, and better equipped mine sweeper "Theodor"? In short, how did they manage to survive?

As Freia grows up, she slowly realizes that her grandparents could not have been, and in fact were not, the innocent bystanders of their own stories. Instead, they were ardent Nazis, and it

[9] As Volker Hage explains in a dossier on Grass's novel in the magazine *Der Spiegel*, the sinking of the "Gustloff" is today known as the one of the most deadly maritime disaster in history. For a long time the "Wilhelm Gustloff" was a taboo topic in German public discourse as it also embodied the problematic notion of speaking of Germans as victims. Grass broke this taboo with his novel *Im Krebsgang* ("Sterben" 185).

was their privileged position and their ties to the National Socialist party that had granted them a spot on the "Theodor." However, in the chaos of advancing Soviet troops, of quick retreat and fast evacuation, even their pre-arranged journey was no longer guaranteed. The two women and the child arrive late on the overcrowded dock, and the barely 5-year old Renate secures for the family the last spots on the "Theodor" by denouncing a neighbor and her young son, who were attempting to board the same vessel. According to Renate, the neighbors were then sent to the "Gustloff," while Johanna, Lena, and Renate gained access to the "Theodor."

While Jo and Mäxchen are proud of their daughter for having saved their lives, Renate is plagued by a lifelong feeling of her own and her parents' guilt, as well as a sense of shame over their continued inability to accept responsibility and critically examine their Nazi past. Renate rejects her parents for having subjected her to the ideological indoctrination that made it possible for a small child to become guilty.[10] This constellation of generations, their different deeds and silences, their acknowledgement and denial of guilt, and their varied ways of dealing with the past, are shown to have an effect on the present, where they cause resentments, lead to suppressed feelings, miscommunication, and, in the case of Renate, mental problems, depression, and, ultimately, suicide.

Intertwined with this plot that investigates an individual family's history and historical responsibility within a larger historical context is a love story in which Wieland, Freia's first boyfriend at the age of 17, subsequently falls in love and begins a relationship with her twin-

[10] While evidence surfaces at different times throughout the novel that points to the grandparents' involvement with the Nazi regime, Renate's secret is not revealed until grandmother Jo is severely ill and begins to suffer from dementia. Only then, when she is no longer able to control the narrative of her life and comply with her daughter's request to never talk about this incident, does the truth come out. This moment of revelation, provoked by Freia's suggestive questioning, is also a moment when Freia begins to worry about her mother.

brother Paul. While this part of the plot, where questions of gender identity and sexuality are at the center, situates Freia firmly in the present and makes her come to life as a more complex character, it also connects back to questions of remembering and engaging with the past in two ways: First, it turns out that Wieland's elderly father is a one-legged war veteran and Wagner-loving Nazi (110), and second, during their relationship, Freia and Wieland travel to Warsaw, Poland, together (151–176) where Freia tries to investigate her favorite uncle's suicide.

The story ends about two and a half years after Freia's trip to the conference with which the novel began. In the meantime both grandparents have passed away, Freia has given birth to a daughter, and Renate has committed suicide shortly thereafter. Now, two years after the mother's suicide and the sale of their childhood home in Berlin, Freia and her brother are in Paris and decide to write a book together which would contain the family's memories (315-318). Their idea is to transform the vast amount of stories and inherited material objects (including photos, entrance tickets, and even Freia's ponytail) into a more manageable format ("Transformationsarbeit," 270), and they resolve to archive their memories in the form of a book that will be titled "Himmelskörper."

Clouded memories and untold stories

Through Freia's eyes, the reader gets an intimate and personal view of her growing understanding of memory as a fraught process. She begins to question certain details of her grandparents' stories, she tries to understand what has been forgotten and left out, and she learns that subjective versions of events do not always measure up against historical facts and evidence. This journey into her family's past and her scientific research into clouds are intimately connected. In particular, "Cirrus Perlucidus," an extremely rare and hardly visible cloud (11–12), appears as a leitmotif and main metaphor. Freia searches all over the world for Cirrus Perlucidus,

which she wants to include in the international cloud atlas. This cloud "[ist] eigentlich nicht mehr Objekt und doch noch nicht ganz entmaterialisiert […]" ["is actually no longer an object, yet not quite dematerialized"] (24).

The cloud is so translucent that it is barely visible as a cloud, and with its frayed and fleeting borders it stands here for the volatility of memory and the intangible connections between different generations—an interpretation that the novel conveniently provides for the reader: Freia's desire to understand these connections and to make sense of her family history is accompanied by several actual journeys, one of which brings Freia and her mother to Gdynia. Unsurprisingly, it is here, standing in the harbor from which her family fled in 1945, that Freia finds the long sought Cirrus Perlucidus. As if to ensure that the cloud-metaphor is not lost on the reader, Freia contemplates a colleague's idea about an academic conference on clouds as medium of storage ("Geschichtsspeicher") for history ("Geschichte") and for stories ("Geschichten"), respectively (307).[11]

Like the motif of knots and threads in *Bambino*, the discussion of Cirrus Perlucidus serves as a metareflection on processes of remembering and the nature of memory that provides insights into what Freia describes as the "unstable border between subjective and objective history, between fact and perception […]" (*Himmelskörper* 307). The statement can be read as an expression of Dückers's aforementioned belief in literature as a kind of "sensual historiography," as a combination of "subjective" and "objective" history. This concept and the implied fluidity of boundaries, as well as the intertwining of different kinds of history, seems to support a reading of *Himmelskörper* as an example of border poetics. This is enhanced by the fact that Freia's identity is not solely determined by the historical burden of being German or by revisiting the past. She is

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[11] See Jens Stüben for a thorough analysis of clouds as metaphors in *Himmelskörper* (182-185).

also very much situated in the present moment, and she has to negotiate spaces that are universally related to growing up, her relationship with her twin brother, questions of intimacy, love, and loyalty, as well as the pressure to conform to gender expectations and define her sexual identity. Nevertheless, there are several aspects that inhibit the novel's border poetics.

Dagmar Wienroeder-Skinner has argued that "the inclusive character of the literature written by younger authors is one step towards reconciliation" (277), and she counts Dückers among those young authors whose writing exhibits a "genuine and very personal interest in their Polish neighbors" (276). Although *Himmelskörper* offers many insights into questions of memory and identity and thematizes the fluidity of various figurative boundaries, the novel falls short in convincingly connecting these universally inflected ideas to the particularity of the German-Polish borderland. Often the German-Polish plot-lines appear superficial, and the binary treatment of Polish and German spaces diminishes the novel's intended openness. Interpreted from a narratological perspective, Norman Ächtler has credited *Himmelskörper* for its artistic complexity (276). He argues that German and Polish spaces are represented as diametrically opposed and that this aids in the establishment of Poland as a space of counter memory (*Gegengedächtnis*) (277), which he interprets positively. While Ächtler acknowledges that the "cartographic polarity" on the structural level cannot do without certain stereotypes and schematic depictions, he values Dückers's attempt to establish "a new, genuinely literary form of historiography" ("eine neue, genuin literarische Form der Geschichtsschreibung") (296).

However, when I examine the novel with a focus on border poetics, I find that the promise of inclusivity remains at least partially unfulfilled, and that the polarity of spaces must be regarded as problematic. First, the dualism with which Polish and German spaces are posited may create an alternative realm, a "counter memory," as Ächtler has shown, but it also reinforces

existing boundaries and constructs Poland as the space of the Other. As Eigler notes in disagreement with Ächtler, this construction essentially favors “a (albeit critical) German perspective” (*Heimat* 150). Second, the novel’s spatial composition is not only comprised of polar opposites, but the spaces are also developed unevenly. Freia’s family history as well as her and her mother’s connections to Poland do not provide any unexpected insights nor do they challenge the imagination. The novel’s focus stays on Freia, who sees herself as part of a long chain (26) and network (254), but this network remains elusive and limited.

The asymmetry is not least due to the fact that Freia and Renate’s seemingly intimate connections to Poland and the Polish language lack plausibility. This makes the novel’s cosmopolitan aspirations feel more like “reconciliation kitsch” (Bachmann) or “cosmo-kitsch” (Schoene). With regard to the Polish-German theme, there is little true engagement with alternative perspectives and spaces, and Poles are conspicuously absent from the narrative. Poland is introduced via two main plot lines: the first one involves Gotenhafen, today Gdynia, where Renate was born and from where she and her mother fled in 1945. Renate spent the first four years of her life here, and shortly before Renate’s suicide, she and Freia visit the city together. The second way in which the novel relates to Poland is through one central but absent character: uncle Kazimierz. He is the reason why the family visits Poland often during the 1970s and 1980s and why Freia travels to Warsaw at the age of 18.

Renate is fluent in Polish, and her daughter Freia seems to have some proficiency in the language as well. However, why or how they know Polish is unknown. The Polish language appears added on as an attribute to make Freia and her mother appear less “German” and thus more multicultural and cosmopolitan. The intention was perhaps to support a reconciliatory stance towards Poland and to remind the reader of the immense suffering that Germans brought

upon the Poles. Yet for the informed reader, the lack of any proper engagement with the Polish language or an explanation of why the two women speak Polish at all does more to underline how firmly rooted this novel is in the German viewpoint and how little it actually engages with Poland.

Places matter greatly for my assessment of the novel's superficial interest in Poland. Freia's grandmother Johanna was originally from Königsberg, but her father had sold the family business there in 1938 to join the merchant marine. The family then moves to Gotenhafen already at the end of 1939, where Johanna meets and marries Maximilian (123). In 1940, they have a child: Freia's mother Renate. Even though the reader learns in passing that Maximilian's last name is Bonitzky (78), there is no indication of the Polish connection in his family nor that Polish was spoken at home.[12] It can be construed with some effort that Maximilian's sister married a Polish man and they had a son named Kazimierz. Kazimierz is introduced to the reader as Freia's "Lieblingsonkel" of German-Polish background. However, the family relations are never explicit. The reader learns only that Kazimierz and his parents go to Warsaw after the war, where his parents die soon thereafter. Kazimierz then grows up with an aunt in Warsaw. [13]

After fleeing Gotenhafen, Renate and her parents settle in Minden, in West Germany. Maximilian and Johanna had been members of the National Socialist party, and while they insist that they were not "Nazis," Freia observes critically that they have no qualms identifying as

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[12] In addition, Renate does not even meet her father until she is 4 years old. It is also very unlikely that the mother spoke any Polish, coming from a German city like Königsberg.

[13] Not much is known about Kazimierz: Scattered throughout the novel is the information that he was a distant relative from Warsaw and of German-Polish heritage (168); the son of Freia's "Großtante" and "Großonkel" (i.e., one of them being the sibling of one of her grandparents) (152); and the son of Renate's second cousin Lila and her husband Józef (153), who both passed away in the late 1940s due to the abominable living conditions in postwar Warsaw (156-157). Kazimierz, who was only twelve when his parents died, grew up with another aunt in Warsaw (157).

“treudeutsch” (126) even 50 years after the war. Throughout their lives, Johanna and Maximilian harbor anti-Polish sentiments that are expressed in their talk of Poles as thieves (246) or of “Polen-Wirtschaft” (155).[14] Despite her parent’s hostility towards Poles, Renate is able to keep in touch with Kazimierz (yet it is unclear how and when this contact was reestablished and how it was maintained). She also takes several trips to Poland, which she keeps secret from her parents.

All these circumstances notwithstanding, the reader learns that Renate is fluent in Polish (154). Even more so, Renate possesses native fluency and during the trip to Gdynia she converses with everyone in accent-free Polish that even makes Freia wonder whether it made her mother happy when people thought of her as Polish (292). Renate’s native proficiency in Polish is highly implausible and would at least require some explanation, but none is given or even implied in the novel. It is also revealed that uncle Kazimierz, who is six years older than Renate, loved the German language, which he had learned from Renate as a child (167), yet the reader learns nothing about the family’s life in Gotenhafen or how a barely five-year old Renate instructed ten-year old Kazimierz in German.

Freia’s knowledge of Polish is also dubious, and her precise level of fluency is unclear. As a child, she clearly does not know Polish: during a visit to Warsaw, Kazimierz takes the family to a theater, and he provides the children with a simultaneous translation into German so that they can follow the plot. And when Freia visits Gdynia with her mother as an adult in the 1990s, she is unable to read even a small commemorative plaque, except for the year 1944 (297). Nevertheless, when Freia travels to Warsaw four years prior (1986) to investigate uncle Kazimierz’s suicide, she insists that she knows “a little” Polish (154) and that she had to brush

[14] See the Introduction for a brief explanation of this stereotype.

up on her apparently marginal but existing Polish skills (173). These skills are sufficient to interview some of the people who knew Kazimierz in "broken Polish" (164). The reader never finds out anything about Freia's effort to learn Polish or when and how she might have picked up enough to carry on a conversation. Freia and Renate's ability to communicate in Polish could cast both women as border-crossers with mixed identities. This option, however, is never explored in any meaningful way, and neither Renate's nor Freia's Polish proficiency explains itself through their biographies—on the contrary, it even seems highly unlikely.

Because none of the German-Polish connections in the novel are explained plausibly, they remain flat. While it is of course entirely credible that Freia does not have insights into all aspects of the past, and while the narrative perspective limits what the reader can know, Freia also shows no sign of having to negotiate a conflicted (or even a non-conflicted) German-Polish identity. She never says that she is of German-Polish descent, nor does she in any way think about her personal role in the Polish-German border story. Throughout the novel Freia's Polish side of the family and the connection to Poland remain elusive: "[…] diese und jene entfernte Großtante oder -cousine, denen meine Mutter sporadisch schrieb, diesen oder jenen alten Kumpel, mit dem wir in Warschau mal ein Bier trinken gewesen waren" ["here and there a distant great-aunt or cousin, to whom my mother wrote sporadically; here and there an old friend with whom we had once met up for a beer in Warsaw"] (159).

The plot does little to explain Renate and Freia's connection to Poland. Instead, it is their "Slavic looks" that are meant to convince the reader. Freia's mother is "sehr schlank und hübsch mit ihrem feingeschnittenen slawischen Gesicht, den blonden Haaren und den blauen Augen" ["slender and pretty with her delicate Slavic face, her long, blond hair, and blue eyes"] (14), and she also has a "blasse[s] slawische[s] Gesicht" ["pale Slavic face"] (167). Freia characterizes

herself in a similar way: "Ich entsprach eher dem östlichen Typ mit puppenhaftem Gesicht, hohen Wangenknochen und bleicher Haut […]." ["I looked more like the eastern type with a doll face, high cheekbones and pale skin"] (156). While the racism that is embedded in the grandparent's language is continuously problematized throughout the novel, Freia never critiques her own racialized assumptions nor are they critically examined through other instances in the text. Freia's blindness to her own stereotypes not only weakens the main protagonist as a character, but it also puts serious limitations on the persuasiveness of the German-Polish transborder network that Dückers aims to create.

Places also matter as travel destinations and often serve as "containers" for ideas of Poland and the East more generally. Altogether, there are three visits to Poland that Freia remembers in more detail, and each of these visits represents a specific stereotype about Poland and the east. The first stereotype is that of the "wild East": Freia's first memory of Poland is of a family trip to Silesia when Freia was a child. During the visit, her mother disappeared for two hours. The family had gone horse-back-riding, and Renate, who throughout the novel is portrayed as very quiet, rides off on a white horse, with her red scarf blowing in the wind—the red and white colors symbolic of the Polish national flag. In this childhood memory, Poland appears as a place where one can be free and escape the constraints of civilization and familial obligations. Freia is fascinated by this memory because it is here that her mother asserts herself and emerges as an individual (Ächtler 288).

This romanticized image of Poland stands in stark contrast to Freia's perception of Warsaw on her trip around 1986 (when she tries to solve the mystery of Kazimierz's suicide). The city appears depressing and gray, a place of victims and absences. Freia is overwhelmed by the abundance of reminders of the Second World War through memorials, buildings, and empty

spaces, and she notices everywhere the traces of German atrocities. Ächtler demonstrates how Freia experiences Warsaw as an assemblage of what Marc Augé has described as "non-places" (290–91). She observes, for example "[…] das Denkmal ersetzt als Erklärung, als Hinweis, als Zeichen den wirklichen Ort. Ein Denkmal ist geradezu der sichere Beweis dafür, daß hier kein Ort mehr ist" ["the memorial is an explanation, a reference, a sign—it is a replacement of the actual place. A memorial is almost proof for the fact that there is no place here anymore"] (*Himmelskörper* 170). While this trip is an opportunity for Freia to contemplate German responsibility and guilt, she also replaces the "Klischee des freien, wilden Ostens" ["cliché of a free and wild East"] (Ächtler 288) with the stereotype of Poland as gray, backward, and depressing.[15] Drozdowska-Broering notes this as well and analyzes several instances in which the stereotype of "Polen-Wirtschaft" is employed (126).

Her experience in 1986 differs significantly from the final trip in the 1990s during which Freia and Renate visit post-communist Gdynia together. Yet, even here Freia perceives the city as an exaggerated and outdated version of the West. She is struck by the bright colors and speculates that they must have been introduced after the opening of the borders. The color palette is quite opposite to the gray tones she encountered during her earlier journey to Warsaw, and she now surmises that this is what an "LSD-trip" must be like (293). Stereotypes of a formerly gray and now overbearingly colorful and glaring east notwithstanding, Freia notes that the town has a global and vibrant flair and that she feels as if she were in a "Polish Mallorca" (295). Renate remarks that the place seems to have overcome its traumatic past: "Eigentlich ist es doch schön,

[15] For example, Freia remembers the milk bars from her trips to Poland, misqualifying them as "eine Art von Almosenküchen" (*Himmelskörper* 151). Dückers misses entirely the social and political complexity of the milk bar that Iwasiów describes so well. Freia's superficial remark, read in combination with her other characterizations of the city, only reaffirm stereotypes of a poverty-ridden and depressing Eastern Europe.

dass die Leute hier so fröhlich sind und dass man alles vergessen zu haben scheint. Man kann sich doch nichts Besseres für diesen Ort wünschen, oder?" ["It's actually nice that people here are so happy and that they seem to have forgotten everything. One can't really wish for anything better for this place, don't you think?"] (306). Freia's discovery of "Cirrus Perlucidus" during this trip appears like a confirmation of her mother's assessment: memory of a traumatic past is still present here but only as a faint trace.

The missed opportunity of integrating a Polish voice in the novel is especially apparent with regard to uncle Kazimierz. Freia's memories of her uncle set him up as a chaotic and drunk, but lovable, Pole: "Ich musste an meinen letzten Besuch bei Onkel Kazimierz denken. Ich war fast fünfzehn Jahre alt […]. Gleich am ersten Abend schleppte mein Onkel mich in eine zweifelhafte Kneipe, in der wir viel zuviel Wodka Wyborowa (was soviel heißt wie 'ausgezeichneter Wodka') hinunterkippten […]." ["I had to think of my last visit to uncle Kazimierz's. I was almost fifteen […]. On the first evening my uncle dragged me to a dubious bar, where we drank too much Vodka Wyborowa (which means something like 'outstanding Vodka')"] (166). This memory of her favorite uncle ("Lieblingsonkel," 154, 185) comes to Freia during her 1986 trip to Warsaw during which she hopes to solve the mystery of her uncle's suicide some months earlier. Her plan is to speak to people who knew him and thus to understand why he took his own life (157). Throughout his life, Kazimierz has been affected by political border shifts and was forced to transgress various borders. Even after the war Kazimierz was an outsider in Polish society due to his German-Polish heritage. However, by cooperating closely with the communist regime, he managed to have a career as a TV-moderator (169), which granted him some fame and privileges.

Kazimierz's biography would lend itself well to explorations of national, ethnic, or regional identities and the complicated ways in which they overlap. Yet, as a character, Kazimierz remains underdeveloped, and, in fact, absent. He does not appear in the novel except as part of Freia's memories as well as doubly removed when Freia's recalls what other people told her about him.[16] In Freia's memories, he is drunk and chaotic but still a fun uncle because he does not reprimand the children for playing in his disorderly office (154–155). As an adult, Freia tries to understand the dislike that her grandparents and Kazimierz had for one another, even though the grandparents are quite open about their racism and prejudice against Poland and the Poles. Nevertheless, Freia longs for a rational explanation, and Renate later reveals that Kazimierz knew why and how the family got on the "Theodor" and that her parents feared he might incite their daughter against them. For Renate, the relationship to Kazimierz has a healing function; she sees in him an older brother (*Himmelskörper* 301), she can talk to him. Because he is Polish and a victim of the Germans, his forgiveness can also alleviate the guilt she feels (Ächtler 289)

Lost in translation or absent in the original?

While there was a mixed popular reception of the novel, scholarly discussions of *Himmelskörper* have largely focused on Dückers's exploration of the difficult and flawed processes of remembering and forgetting, the transgenerational transmission of memory and trauma, and Dückers's particular contribution as an author of the third generation (e.g., Welzer; Ächtler; Stüben). Only few scholars and critics have drawn attention to the novel's deficiencies regarding

[16] When Freia is in Warsaw, she talks to eleven people who knew Kazimierz, yet none of them have anything new to tell her (173), and most of them appear as unpleasant and stereotypical characters, such as a cleaning lady with greasy hair and dirty clothes. The only Polish person who gains a bit more depth is Kazimierz's ex-girlfriend. She is also the only one who provides some more information about him.

the Polish plot. Eigler has commented that Dückers's "[…] fledgling orientation toward the East does not result in any substantive engagement with Germany's eastern neighbor. Rather, the narrator's trips to Poland seem to render the country and its people even more opaque" (*Heimat* 149–50). Generally speaking, most press reviews also did not mention the role of Poland in the novel, except for one reviewer from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), cited on the review website "Perlentaucher," who criticized the book's "slawophile Klischees und geläufige postsozialistische Tristesse" ["Slavophile clichés and familiar post-socialist tristesse"] ("Tanja Dückers").

While it is certainly not my intention to deny Dückers's "genuine and very personal interest" in Poland (Wienroeder-Skinner 276), the engagement with Poland's history and culture, as it is displayed in *Himmelskörper*, remains superficial. Drozdowska-Broering also criticizes Dückers's half-hearted and predictable engagement with Poland, which may be in part due to Dückers's lack of Polish language skills (119). Dückers's novel is filled with clichés and shows no genuine engagement with Poland and the Poles, and an open dialogue with the Other is forgone in favor of political correctness (125-129). Interestingly, in a personal interview with the author that can be found in the appendix to the study (211-226), Drozdowska-Broering even addresses the topic of "reconciliation kitsch" and "kitsch" more generally. Understandably, Dückers rejects the notion that her novel might be read as "kitsch" (220-221).

It would be insightful to find out how the novel would be received in Poland, and indeed, in fall 2014, *Himmelskörper* was published in Polish translation by Świat Książki under the title *Ciała Niebieskie*.[17] It has not been reviewed widely or by major journals or newspapers, but it

[17] Interestingly, this publisher was established in 1994 by Bertelsmann, an originally German and today multinational publishing house and media company. In 2011 Świat Książki was sold to Weltbild, a major German publishing company that has its headquarters in Augsburg.

has nevertheless been noticed by readers (who reviewed it in personal blogs) as well as by some critics. Kinga Dunin, a renowned literary critic and writer, for example, notes in a brief online review that the book is "not bad" ("nieźle"), but she remarks that the Polish plot "seems artificial, but perhaps it had to be there for the sake of completeness—readers here, however, will find it irritating."[18] In the less than 250 words that Dunin dedicates to reviewing *Himmelskörper*, she does not explain the basis of her irritation, but it may stem precisely from the inconsistencies described above.

In my view, the binary construction of Germany and Poland stands in the way of border poetics and the creation of a space of transdifference. Rather than imagining a shared European or cosmopolitan memory, even if it can only be temporarily sustained, the novel promotes a politically correct but superficial engagement with one strand of Polish memory. While it articulates the intricacies of individual memory, it does not engage with the complexity of contemporary Polish memory discourses. Dückers emphasizes Polish suffering under German occupation and the destruction of Polish cities, but the novel nevertheless remains steeped in a purely German perspective, as Eigler has also noted (150). The impression that the novel does not question established boundaries, at least with regard to German-Polish themes, is enhanced by the fact that the only voice in the novel is Freia's and that any other perspective is always refracted through her. Indeed, Poles are largely absent in the story, and the narrative about the "Polish side of the family" and Freia's connections to Poland appear implausible. The lack of voice or agency in effect means that the Other, once posited as such, has no means of disrupting

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[18] Dunin writes: "Jest tu też wątek polski – który wydaje się sztuczny, ale może dla dopełnienia musiał się pojawiać, dla tutejszego czytelnika będzie jednak szeleścił papierem" ["There is also a Polish plot here – which seems artificial, but perhaps it had to be there for the sake of completeness. For the reader here, however, it will be irritating"] (Dunin).

and challenging the privileged German narrative. Thus, while Freia's scientific cloud atlas is a universal project that depends on the collaboration of international scientists, the memorial space remains cordoned off from challenging perspectives and additional voices. Paradoxically, while the novel emphasizes that memory and processes of remembering are communal efforts, the narrative itself is locked in on itself and remains safely on its side of the border.

Stories of Border Poetics

This chapter focused on examining how border poetics is expressed in stories—in the progression of events, their temporal and spatial coordinates, in the way in which stories establish coherences between places and people, and the way in which they respond to breaks and disruptions. *Himmelskörper*, *Bambino*, and *Katzenberge* represent three very different approaches to borders and bordering practices, but they are all centrally organized around the issues of memory.

The fictions of memory I have discussed here as examples of border poetics make visible how people have crossed literal political and territorial borders, how they have been crossed by them, but also how these border crossings contain figurative border crossings. All these crossings are impulses for stories—stories that articulate the border both as a dividing line and as a zone of contact and exchange. This means that these stories negotiate the breaks and disruptions that characterize the German-Polish past. By not smoothing out or resolving such breaks, the novels—some more successfully than others—reveal the knotting, threading, unraveling of stories and memories across literal and figurative boundaries.

Chapter 4

Discourse: Border Poetics as a Question of Perspective

... I was pure sight, without a body or a name. I was suspended high above a valley at some undefined point from which I could see everything... It seemed as if the world below was yielding to me as I looked at it, constantly moving towards me, and then away, so first I could see everything, then only tiny details.

(Olga Tokarczuk, *House of Day, House of Night* 1)[1]

Who is the narrator in this epigraph? How can we conceive of this bodiless, nameless being that tells us a story? How can it have an overview of everything but also perceive every tiny detail? It turns out that the scene belongs in a dream, but Olga Tokarczuk's novel, which is discussed below, and which begins with this episode, implements this peculiar narrative perspective. In fact, all three novels discussed in this chapter are simultaneously told as broad overviews granted by an omniscient perspective and small, detailed, and personalized views of the world that are a privilege of the I-narrator. In all three novels, magic makes this view of the world possible.

Border poetics is concerned with the figurative and literal border as a site where meaning is negotiated, and this chapter examines some discursive practices that allow for a multiplication of perspectives and voices. Specifically, I focus on writing that transcends the boundaries of a traditional realist framework, and I argue that there is an affinity between border poetics and modes of narration that incorporate fantastic elements. In contrast to the previous chapter, which

[1] "[…] jestem czystym patrzeniem, czystym wzrokiem i nie mam ciała ani imienia. Tkwię wysoko nad doliną w jakimś nieokreślonym punkcie, z którego widzę wszystko lub prawie wszystko. Poruszam się w tym patrzeniu, ale pozostaję w miejscu. To raczej widziany świat poddaje mi się, kiedy na niego patrzę, przysuwa się i odsuwa tak, że mogę zobaczyć wszystko naraz albo tylko najdrobniejsze szczegóły." (Tokarczuk, *Dom* 7)

focused on the story-plane of a narrative and traced border poetics in plot and story, I now shift attention to the expression-plane and to narrative discourse as medium of border poetics. While the narrated events remain important, this chapter makes clear that narrative structure and formal choices play a significant role in staging actual and figurative boundaries and their multiple and variegated transgressions. With the main focus of the analysis being on the expression-plane, the analysis is concerned less with the *what* of the story, and more with *how* the story is told to articulate intersecting, overlapping, competing, or simultaneously existing perspectives. More specifically, my argument is that certain choices in perspective and focalization foster border poetics because they draw attention to ambiguity, defocalization, and resistance to hegemonic discourses—and these choices can challenge the reader to think of alternative forms of belonging, as indicated in the epigraph. Through my reading of Günter Grass's *Blechtrommel* (1959), Sabrina Janesch's *Ambra* (2012), and Olga Tokarczuk's *House of Day, House of Night* (1998), I show how in non-realist fiction narrative perspective(s) contributes to border poetics.

When considering the "locus" (or multiple loci) from which a narrative is presented to the reader, I draw on several possible terms and concepts: "point of view" or "perspective" refers to a protagonist's perception or interpretation of events, while "focalization" follows Genette's definition and describes the degree and quality of insight a narrator has into the workings of the

storyworld and its inhabitants.[2] Additionally, "voice" is applied when it is important to emphasize who "speaks."[3] Thus, the three main questions guiding the analysis are *who sees* (point of view), *through* whom does the reader perceive the events by way of the narrator (focalization), and *who speaks* (voice).

In practice, and especially in the practice of border poetics, point of view, focalization, and voice cannot always be clearly distinguished, and they all impact what the reader perceives as the position(s) from which a narrative is presented. It may also be difficult to identify *who exactly* sees, focalizes, or speaks. As border poetics questions boundaries and allows for mobile and flexible expressions of affiliation, it seems to make sense that the blurriness and indeterminacy of perspective would be one of its most effective discursive strategies. I thus examine the ways in which certainty is avoided or at least limited by opting for ambiguous (or unreliable) narrators and protagonists; unusual points of view and frequent changes in

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[2] Two main paradigms are in use when it comes to the "position" from which a narrative approaches the reader. One is that of "point of view" or "perspective" while the other is "focalization," a term introduced by Gerard Genette. In the *Living Handbook of Narratology*, Burkhard Niederhoff explores the semantic and conceptual differences between these paradigms as well as their critical development and use. The difference between focalization and point of view is perhaps best summarized as a difference between access to and transmission of knowledge (focalization), on the one hand, and emotive or cognitive involvement with that knowledge (point of view), on the other hand. Referring to Genette's definition, Niederhoff explains focalization as "a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters or other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld." Point of view, by contrast, conveys how "events [...] are perceived, felt, interpreted and evaluated by [a character] at a particular moment." Ultimately Niederhoff proposes a model in which both paradigms coexist and have their place. He concludes that "[...] focalization is hardly so much superior to point of view that the old term can be discarded. [...] There is room for both because each highlights different aspects of a complex and elusive phenomenon. *Point of view* seems to be the more powerful metaphor when it comes to narratives that attempt to render the subjective experience of a character [...]. *Focalization* is a more fitting term when one analyses selections of narrative information that are not designed to render the subjective experience of a character but to create other effects such as suspense, mystery, puzzlement, etc." (Niederhoff). With regard to border poetics, it is productive to think of these paradigms together, and therefore I refer to both terms here.

[3] Gerard Genette introduced the category of voice to distinguish between a narrator who is also the protagonist (i.e., a narrative that is focalized *through* the protagonist) and a protagonist *on* whom the story is focalized, and who has a "voice," but who is not the narrator (Genette 198–99).

perspective; and the articulation of multiple and often contradicting voices and narrative perspectives.[4] In addition, when examining focalization, the storyworld's conditions and rules also need to be considered. I therefore ask how the narrator's and the protagonist's knowledge may be determined: *how* do they know what they know; what restricts or facilitates their knowledge; how is it possible for them to see what they see? Asking these questions in addition to those pertaining to the identity of the narrator or protagonist can reveal further layers of narrative ambiguity—and provide insights into the extent of multiple border crossings.

Ambiguity in content and form can be found across the literary field—it is expressed in myriad ways in all genres and time periods. The texts I examine here share at least one characteristic regarding the source of this ambiguity: they provide no rational explanations for the narrator's or the protagonist's access to the knowledge they claim to be privy to. These storyworlds lack rational explanations because they are created in the narrative modes of the fantastic or magical realism.[5] Thus, the overarching question in this chapter is how do the fantastic and the magical realist mode of narration foster border poetics and how do they create multiple forms of attachment and detachment?

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[4] Multiperspectivity, according to Vera and Ansgar Nünning, is not merely a summative addition of perspectives. Rather, it means that the same event is presented from different perspectives, without one perspective being the authoritative one (375–377). For further details and typologies and the different forms of multiperspectivity in narration, see Nünning and Nünning's two related articles from 1999 and 2000 titled "'Multiperspektivität" – Lego oder Playmobil, Malkasten oder Puzzle?' Grundlagen, Kategorien und Modelle zur Analyse der Perspektivenstruktur narrativer Texte."

[5] Even though there are important differences between magical realism and the fantastic, in this study I consider these two concepts jointly, based primarily on how they relate to border poetics. Further explanations of this conceptual blending are provided later in the chapter.

Magical Realism and the Fantastic

The fantastic and magical realism are modes of narration that create distinctive fictional worlds in a variety of genres. Mode, according to narratologists Matias Martinez and Michael Scheffel, is a category that describes a narrator's distance from the narrated events ("Mittelbarkeit") and the perspective that is given to a narrative ("Perspektivierung des Erzählten") (47). Claudia Pinkas regards mode as a structural principle of narratives that can be present across different genres, periods, and media, and that can interact and mix with other narrative modes (93). Treating the fantastic and magical realism as modes of narration stresses their flexibility and applicability to different genres. Narratives that draw on this mode create connections across times, genres, and languages, and they produce effects that support border poetics.

Regarding the fantastic and magical realism as modes rather than as genres also means that they can be present in a text to varying degrees. The main point here is not the exact differentiation between magical realism and the fantastic but a characterization of the ambiguity created when supernatural or irrational events and elements are incorporated in a narrative.[6] Referring in particular to magical realism, Wendy Faris notes the sources of this ambiguity:

> In magical realism, the focalization—the perspective from which events are presented—is indeterminate; the kinds of perceptions it presents are indefinable and the origins of those perceptions are unlocatable. That indeterminacy results from the fact that magical realism includes two conflicting kinds of perception that perceive two different kinds of event: magical events and images not normally reported to the reader of realistic fiction

[6] There is extensive scholarship concerning magical realism and a broad range of texts to which this label is applied. At the most basic level, scholars agree that in magical realism, fantastic elements are treated as natural (i.e., unquestioned) parts of a world that otherwise follows the conventions of realism. Narratives that are constructed in the magical realist or fantastic modes thus enact multiple crossings of diverse literal and figurative borders.

> because they are not empirically verifiable, and verifiable (if not always ordinary) ones that are realism's characteristic domain. Thus magical realism modifies the conventions of realism based in empirical evidence, incorporating other kinds of perception. In other words, the narrative is "defocalized" because it seems to come from two radically different perspectives at once. (43)

What Faris describes as "defocalization" invites correspondences to Chwin's notion of the "defocalized" identities that inhabit the German-Polish borderland. In both instances, the term refers to a blending of different perspectives as well as a concern with the transgression of borders and the destabilization of boundaries.

I have discussed Stefan Chwin's notion of "defocalized identities" and their significance for "a new borderlands literature" in detail in Chapter 2, but I want to add here my reasons for translating the adjective in Chwin's expression "unscharfe Identität" ("nieostra tożsamość") (5) as "defocalized." I did so in part to echo Faris's word choice and to account for the parallels I see between the border-crossing potential of certain modes of narration (such as magical realism) and the condition that Chwin regards as a result of the particular constellation of the (Polish-German) borderland. The novels I discuss in the second part of this chapter illustrate how narrative perspective reflects the ambiguity and indeterminacy of those who inhabit these spaces. This strategy is central to narratives of border poetics, and magical realism and the fantastic seem to be particularly effective in articulating variously understood types of indeterminacy within different borderlands.

Although there are important differences between the fantastic and magical realism, I am using both to refer to narratives with elements or phenomena that cannot be explained rationally. This conceptual blending does not obscure the idiosyncrasies and separate histories of magical

realism and the fantastic, but rather emphasizes that border poetics focuses on multiple and simultaneous forms of affiliation, and that these can be expressed equally well through the fantastic and through magical realism. In particular, there are three major points of connection between fantastic or magical realist modes of narration and the practice of border poetics: First, both emphasize ambiguity, and this ambiguity is maintained by the continuous subversion and transgression of multiple boundaries; second, they prioritize defocalized forms of existence and knowledge, which is expressed through multiple or unusual perspectives and polyvocality; and third, they resist established boundaries and support the creation of new forms of belonging. Before I examine how this connection manifests itself in particular texts, I want to briefly elaborate on these points of connection.

Ambiguity, defocalization, and belonging

Ambiguity and doubt play a crucial role in magical realism and the fantastic. In his writings on the fantastic, philosopher and literary critic Tzvetan Todorov elucidates the sources and the effects of this ambiguity. He argues that the fantastic emerges in narratives at a particular moment of insecurity and indeterminacy: an event occurs that cannot be explained by the laws that govern the familiar world. Confronted with such an event, the protagonist, narrator, or reader must decide whether the occurrence can be explained rationally (if it is, for example, an illusion, a dream, or a sign of a particular mental state), or whether there are supernatural causes of the event. The answer to this question determines whether the fantastic transforms into the uncanny or into the marvelous. In the case of the uncanny, the rationally established conception of the world and its laws remains intact and a rational explanation can be found for the occurrence. If a supernatural occurrence is the explanation, then a transformation into the marvelous takes place. In the marvelous, a new and different reality must exist that is governed by its own logic and that

has made the event possible. In a fantastic narrative, however, no such conclusive assessment can be made. There are no clear answers, and both a rational and a supernatural explanation remain equally likely (25–26). Todorov argues that because the fantastic mode unsettles conventional conceptions of reality and questions what is considered normal and normative, it "requires doubt" (83).

Some scholars, such as Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, have argued that an important difference between magical realism and the fantastic lies precisely in their relationship to the issue of doubt. While the fantastic mode is suspended in a state of uncertainty and ambiguity over the occurrences, as described by Todorov, Chanady contends that this kind of doubt is unknown to magical realism because the mode takes for granted the simultaneous existence of the natural and the supernatural.[7] However, Faris insists that it is entirely possible that "the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events […]." Faris continues that doubt may also derive from the fact that "magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity" (7). Thus, drawing a clear distinction between the fantastic and magical realism according to an ambiguity/non-ambiguity binary has limitations, especially when considering that doubt, disruption, or indeterminacy can manifest itself on various levels within a narrative but also in their relationship to the extradiegetic world, for example, in a reader's response to a text.

[7] Chanady criticizes, for example, that the difference between the fantastic and magical realism is frequently not taken seriously enough. Her work focuses not on the notion of doubt per se but rather describes that which precedes or may trigger this insecurity, which she calls "antinomy." With regard to the fantastic, antinomy is "the simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes in the text. Since neither can be accepted in the presence of the other, the apparently supernatural phenomenon remains inexplicable" (12). In magical realism, by contrast, such a conflict does not exist. The fundamental difference between magical realism and the fantastic is therefore whether the crossing of a commonly accepted ontic boundary is perceived as problematic (the fantastic) or not (magical realism) (23).

Borders are at their very core about belonging and about inhibiting and facilitating the ability to practice a subjectively felt sense of belonging. As is evident from my previous discussion, belonging is often problematic in border spaces. The connection (and more often the disconnect) between borders and belonging is articulated in fictions of memory as disruption and defocalization. This nexus also plays a major role in the fantastic mode. Faris has noted that magical realist narratives are "defocalized" because they result from two simultaneous and radically different kinds of perception (43). These varying perceptions mean that a narrative is presented from different positions, and these positions can be understood to denote two different kinds of belonging.

Understood as a reflection on belonging, Faris's notion of defocalization has parallels to Chwin's view of the defocalized identities of those who inhabit the Polish-German borderland. Here, too, different positions are in tension with one another because the subjectively experienced sense of (regional, local, or personal) belonging does not align with the political reality of the current national border. Both conceptualizations of defocalization—as identity (Chwin) and as perspective (Faris)—point to a disruption or at least a destabilization of belonging. In narratives of border poetics situated in the Polish-German borderland and written in the magical realist or fantastic mode, these two meanings of defocalization blend, support, and enhance one another.

In border poetics, belonging or identity are often complicated by multiple overlapping and intersecting determinants, such as language, ethnicity, class, sex, and gender. Border poetics broadens and integrates such differently defined border experiences because the border trope itself can connect different notions of defocalization. While conventional frameworks leave little room for conceptualizing such intersecting affiliations and contested belongings, the fantastic

provides possible ways of opening up rigid structures and destabilizing dominant discourses. By holding in balance the rationally conceivable and the supernatural, magical realism and the fantastic create narrative borderlands—indeterminate and fluctuating in-between spaces that are open to different interpretations and claims.

These in-between spaces are characterized by a simultaneous suspension and maintenance of difference, which correlates conceptually to the aforementioned notion of "transdifference."[8] Building on Breinig and Lösch, the effect of modes like the fantastic and magical realism can be described using the vocabulary of transdifference. Transdifference, like magical realism, "interrogates the validity of binary constructions of difference without completely deconstructing them," and it "runs 'through' the line of demarcation drawn by binary difference" (Breinig and Lösch 23). Traditional realist narratives operate along a binary understanding of reality: there exists only that which is "real" and can be rationally explained and that which does not conform to a rationally accepted reality. In the fantastic, this binary understanding is disturbed, and the reader, protagonist, and narrator are not always able to situate themselves with certainty in the storyworld, nor can they rationally explain all events. The resulting irritation is assuaged only when preconceived notions of reality are temporarily suspended and alternative spaces of contact and exchange become acceptable.

These alternative spaces offer the opportunity to imagine new connections with others and negotiate different kinds of attachments. The emphasis on connectivity and shared spaces makes border poetics a suitable idiom of the cosmopolitan imagination, and this aspect, too, is amplified within the non-realist framework. In her study *Magical Realism and Cosmopolitanism* (2014), Kim Anderson Sasser argues that magical realism fosters cosmopolitanism. Sasser points

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[8] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the concept of transdifference and its significance for border poetics.

out that belonging is a central question in cosmopolitanism, and because magical realism is a response to “challenges to belonging of any kind” (38–39), the two concepts are closely linked.

Magical realism or the fantastic also share with border poetics the desire to imagine alternative spaces as spaces in which hegemonic structures are questioned and resistance and solidarity can develop. Speaking of the meaning of opposition within the notion of transdifference, Lösch has argued that the temporary suspension of difference can generate resistance to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and trigger social movements (31). Applied to the practice of border poetics, disruption and defocalization provide an opportunity to discover and articulate new solidarities across and against the boundaries that regulate belonging.

There are several reasons why magical realism is a powerful means of expressing resistance and solidarity within border poetics. First, the mode has gained particular prominence within the larger history of Latin American postcolonialism as a challenge to Western cultural dominance and literary realism. This tradition remains an important reference point for theoretical reflections on magical realism, but the concept has also expanded beyond this context. Many scholars and writers today regard magical realism as a particular genre, style, or mode of writing that is “[…] concerned not specifically with postcolonialism, but with issues of subversion and oppression regardless of political circumstances” (Upstone 155).

Second, and in more general terms, magical realism has subversive potential as a counterpoint to realism. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris have ascribed this potential to the mode’s specific relationship with ideology and ideological commitments. They argue that although magical realism is not free from ideology, it has a less hegemonic stance than realism because

> […] its program is not centralizing but eccentric: it creates space for interactions of diversity. In magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is often given as a cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation. (3)

However, it is not magical realism alone that is deemed to have subversive potential. Two decades prior to Zamora and Faris's argument, Tzvetan Todorov had already asserted that resistance is an inherent feature of the fantastic—it resists censorship, social norms, and mores. He suggests that "the function of the supernatural is to exempt the text from the action of the law and thereby to transgress the law" (159). Such a transgression can be viewed positively as a challenge to the limitations of "reality" and established boundaries in the name of more cosmopolitan spaces.

As previously discussed, resistance and claim-making can go hand in hand. Fantastic elements and plots can simultaneously express resistance against established boundaries and make claims on changing these boundaries (often with the help of otherwordly creatures or powers). The double move of resistance and claim-making may lead to the creation of (imagined) communities that share similar desires and motivations to transgress boundaries—communities into which the reader may feel invited. The fantastic can be used to explore the attachment (wanted or unwanted) to a particular bounded space or concept but also the resistance against that boundary and the exclusions and inclusions it produces. I will now illustrate these points in three novels.

Günter Grass: *Die Blechtrommel* (1959)

Even though the novel was written three decades prior to the other works under consideration here, I begin the analysis with Günter Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*[9]). I consider the novel to be one of the earliest examples of border poetics in the German-Polish context, and it is especially pertinent within this chapter's context. And while much has already been said and written about this German classic, including its relevance within the German-Polish context,[10] a reading through the lens of border poetics promises new insights concerning its staging of real and figurative boundaries. The *Tin Drum* opens up interpretative venues for borderlands literature, especially when it comes to questions of defocalization and the transgression of boundaries.

As is well known, the *Tin Drum* tells the story of Oskar Matzerath, who was born in 1924 in what was then the Free City of Danzig. At the beginning of the novel, he is a patient in a mental care facility in 1950s West Germany, and he looks back on his life that has been shaped by the major historical events of the twentieth century, including the National Socialists' rise to power, the Second World War, and his family's postwar expulsion from Danzig. The novel is precise with regard to historical events, specific landmarks, and geographic location. However, the actual political and geographic borderland is a staging ground for various other borders and border crossings.

Oskar is a highly ambiguous individual—and this ambiguity is amplified by a number of fantastic characteristics. For example, he is born with the full mental capacity of an adult. He

[9] Cited page numbers for English passages refer to the English translation of the novel by Breon Mitchell. German quotations are provided with a reference to the original German text.

[10] For readings of Grass's works that focus on their German-Polish context, see for example the edited volume by Norbert Honsza and Jerzy Łukowicz as well as the scholarship by Maria Janion.

also makes the decision to stop growing physically on his third birthday and does not resume his growth until he is twenty-one, which coincides with the end of the war (*Tin Drum* 390). Oskar also possesses two narrative devices, or more precisely “instruments,” that can be regarded as narrators in their own right: He has a tin drum that he never puts down, and he discovers that he can make a high-pitched shriek that shatters glass across great distances.

Much of the novel’s border poetics can be traced to the plot and its historical context and setting in which figurative boundaries are negotiated. At the same time, the novel’s narrative structure and formal choices play a significant role in staging the multiple and variegated transgressions of actual and figurative boundaries. The variations in narrative perspective, voice, and focalization mediate and replicate the disruptions of the twentieth century and the resulting defocalized identities. Supernatural events and Oskar’s seemingly magical powers play a particular role in achieving this effect of ambiguity, and they destabilize the reader’s notion of what constitutes rationally conceivable reality. Since its publication in 1959, the novel has maintained its popularity and relevance, not least because it resists simple interpretations and questions one-dimensional understandings of belonging and affiliation.

Setting: Danzig/Gdańsk

Large parts of the *Tin Drum* are set in Günter Grass’s hometown Gdańsk, which was then the Free City of Danzig and had a majority German-speaking population. The author was born here in 1927, the year in which Oskar in the storyworld celebrates his fateful third birthday. Over the course of the centuries, this port-city on the Baltic Sea had been under Polish, Prussian, or German rule, but it had also been a free city at different moments in history. With the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Danzig’s Free City status was abolished, and the city was

incorporated into the German Reich. After the Second World War, it became part of Poland and was incorporated into the Polish national narrative.[11]

Danzig is also a borderland in another sense, i.e., as part of a region called Kashubia. As the OME-encyclopedia explains, Kashubia (Polish Kaszuby; German Kaschubei; Kashubian Kaszëbë) is a "cultural landscape" ("Kulturlandschaft") rather than a clearly demarcated territory. The Kashubians are a western Slavic people, who in the Middle Ages settled an area that reaches approximately from the Baltic Sea to Konitz/Chojnice in the south, Schöneck/Skarszewy and Danzig/Gdańsk in the east, and Stolp/Słupsk in the west. Throughout history, Kashubia was alternately under German or Polish influence or divided among Prussia, Germany, or Poland—and thus Kashubs were subject to either processes of Germanization or Polonization that lasted well into the twentieth century (Borchers).

Despite homogenization attempts during the communist period, Kashubians today have reemerged as a distinct community actively involved in shaping the politics of the Pomerania province and preserving Kashubian language and culture (Modrzejewski 2). The Kashubian language is not standardized and consists of different dialects. However, it is classified as an independent west Slavic language, and within Poland it is recognized as a regional language (Borchers). For Günter Grass's life and writing, the Kashubian language and culture were of great significance, and an obituary in *Gazeta Wyborcza* notes, he always referred to himself as Kashubian ("Günter"). Grass embodies the region's multiethnic and mixed character: his father was a Protestant of German origin and his mother a Roman Catholic of Kashubian-Polish origin (Garland 302). Oskar Matzerath in the *Tin Drum* has a similarly mixed heritage: His biological

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[11] Additional aspects of Gdańsk's history are also discussed in Chapter 3, in the context of Tanja Dückers's novel *Himmelskörper.*

father could be either his mother's current German husband or her Polish lover; Oskar's mother herself is half Kashubian and half Pole. Oskar's grandmother Anna is Kashubian, and, as the family gets ready to leave Danzig after the war, she gives a pithy summary of what it means to be Kashubian. Speaking in a kind of Kashubian-inflected German, Anna explains why she is staying behind:

> Denn mit de Kaschuben kann man nich kaine Umzüge machen, die missen immer dablaiben und Koppchen hinhalten, damit de anderen drauftäppern können, weil unserains nich richtich polnisch is und nich richtich deitsch jenug, und wenn man Kaschub is, das raicht weder de Deitschen noch de Pollacken. De wollen es immer genau haben! (*Blechtrommel* 547)
>
> [Because Kashubes don't move around a lot, they always stay put, and hold their heads still for others to whack, because we ain't really Polish and we ain't really German, and Kashubes ain't good enough for Germans or Pollacks. They want everything cut and dried. (*Tin Drum* 397)]

These details on the novel's setting and the regional composition seem to provide more information about the story of the *Tin Drum* rather than its narrative discourse. However, while location and time are important coordinates of the particular that is so central to border poetics, story and discourse cannot be easily separated. As is evident from my description, the region's geography and ethnic make-up have a major influence on the characters and therefore on the perspective from which the narrative is told. Thus, even though the setting is typically considered part of story rather than discourse, a place can also determine perspective or voice.

In fact, setting can take on such a strong and individual character that it emerges as a protagonist in its own right. This can happen when places are anthropomorphized, function as depositories of different voices, determine a character's point of view, or even provide their own narrative perspective. In such cases, setting can occupy a space between story and discourse. In the *Tin Drum*, too, location is more than a stage on which the action unfolds. It has an impact not only on the plot but also on *how* the story is told, i.e., from multiple perspectives and giving rise to different voices articulated in the narrative.

In an essay on Gdańsk, Peter Oliver Loew examines different narratives that have existed throughout the city's history. The myths of the Cold War years that portrayed the city either as distinctly German or Polish have today been replaced by the myth that Gdańsk has always been a multicultural city. And while Loew points out that "[i]n its history the city had a decidedly monocultural character" ("Trzy" 140), he shows that there exists the myth of a *genius loci* that supports this multicultural narrative. This myth ascribes a certain "spirit of place" to the city, which is said to derive from its contact with others and a long tradition of openness, independence, and prosperity. The *genuis loci* is an insistence on the city's special and distinct character—a unique quality of defiance and independence that is a source of pride and that can serve as a model for others ("Trzy" 138–141). According to this narrative, Loew explains, it was the particular *genius loci* that had inspired the resistance against numerous Polish kings as well as the communist regime. Why then, he asks provocatively in the essay as well as in his *Biography of a City*, was the very same city spirit unable to prevent Prussian annexation or the National Socialist take-over? ("Trzy" 139–40; *Danzig* 278).

The myth of *genius loci* can also be detected in the *Tin Drum*. Grass's Danzig is a mix of German, Polish, Kaschubian, and Jewish cultures represented in different protagonists but also in

the streets, buildings, and artifacts in the city. Yet Grass's variation of the *genius loci* is hardly that of a harmonious multiculturalism: Germans will succumb to Nazi ideology and murder their Polish and Jewish neighbors, streets and buildings will be destroyed. The city itself will survive it all—it is stubborn and obstinate, just like the novel's main protagonist and narrator, Oskar. Oskar presents his audience with a city that does not lend itself to appropriation by a German longing for the lost homeland in the East, nor does it easily fit into the official narrative of a mythologized Polish past. In fact, rather than embodying some kind of undying "Gdańsk-spirit," what emerges in the *Tin Drum* would be better described as an *anti-genius loci*.[12] This spirit absorbs the conflicted loyalties and bizarre attachments and entanglements of its inhabitants and keeps them present. It also resists absorption into any one narrative, and wherever Oskar goes, he is involved in disturbing any attempt at such co-optation: He drums and screams until the surfaces crack and crumble.

In the *Tin Drum*, Günter Grass builds a mosaic from the complex history of Germany and Poland as it is refracted in the city of Gdańsk. He succeeds not only in articulating a very particular border experience and historical situation but is also able to draw from material artifacts and ideas, from human life events, fears, and behaviors, to create a universal language that transcends particulars. In the introduction to the novel's newest translation, Grass himself hints at this confluence of the local and the universal, although it seems that he himself was unaware of it at the time. In 1959 he recounts a meeting with the publisher Kurt Wolff in Zürich:

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[12] As I will show later, Sabrina Janesch (*Ambra*) also treats the city's spirit as elusive and stubborn—it cannot be incorporated into a smooth narrative. Paweł Huelle's 1987 novel *Weiser Dawidek* (a response to Grass's novella *Katz und Maus* [engl. *Cat and Mouse*]), is set in the Danzig suburb of Langfuhr, which is similarly resistant to being co-opted for any simple narrative about the past. This anti-genius loci can also be applied to other places: my reading of Olga Tokarczuk's novel *House of Day, House of Night* shows that the *locus* (here the Silesian countryside) likewise resists its assigned "spirit."

Wolff tells Grass of his plans to publish the *Tin Drum* in America, to which Grass responds skeptically: "'The setting is so provincial, not even Danzig itself, but a suburb. The novel is filled with German dialect. And it concentrates solely on the provinces—'Say no more,' he [Wolff] broke in. 'All great literature is rooted in the provincial. I'll bring it out in America'" (*Tin Drum* vii).

Perhaps triggered by this conversation and inspired by the novel's international success, Grass later reflects on the local as the site of the universal, and he connects it to his own upbringing. Grass was born in Langfuhr, a suburb of Danzig today known as Wrzeszcz and an important setting in many of his works. In his 1963 novel *Hundejahre*, Grass notes that this place contained the whole world: "Langfuhr war so groß und so klein, dass alles, was sich auf dieser Welt ereignet oder ereignen könnte, sich auch in Langfuhr ereignete oder hätte ereignen können" (*Hundejahre* 374). ["Langfuhr was so big and so little that whatever happens or could happen in this world, also happened or could have happened in Langfuhr" (*Dog Years* 309).][13] This often cited passage conveys an understanding of locality as confluence of universal and particular experiences. This focus is indeed central to the *Tin Drum*, and I argue that it informs the novels border poetics. The construction of Danzig/Gdańsk as a repository and incubator of both particular and universal experiences depends to a great extent on the novel's narrator(s) and the different and contradicting perspectives that present the events to the reader.

Perspectives and voices: the world according to Oskar

Who is the narrator of the *Tin Drum*? Who is the protagonist? Whose story is being told and from which perspective? At first glance the answers to these questions appear straightforward:

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[13] For another exploration of this quote and Grass's "rewriting" of the city of Danzig, see Loew, *Danzig*, 253-256.

The first person narrator and main protagonist of the frame narrative are identical—voice and point of view are aligned in Oskar Matzerath. By contrast, the enframed narrative is told in the third person, and it is focalized through the protagonist. However, this is also the point of origin of the novel's defocalization: the narrator/protagonist of the frame narrative is the same person as the protagonist of the enframed narrative. Yet the first-person narrator, who is a patient in a "mental institution" (*Tin Drum* 3), speaks of himself and his previous life in the third person. He thereby creates a distance between his present and his past self. Throughout the novel, he again and again breaks down the very distance he has created, and he switches back and forth between first-person and third-person narrator. A closer look at the novel reveals that questions of perspective, focalization, and voice are more difficult to answer than it initially appeared. I must therefore begin again.

Oskar Matzerath is the *Tin Drum*'s main protagonist and narrator. The frame narrative is set in a mental care facility ("Heil- und Pflegeanstalt") in 1950s West Germany, where Oskar is a patient. Oskar is the first-person narrator and protagonist of this frame story that details his life in the institution and his writing process. As he looks back on the past and writes his life-story, the enframed narrative unfolds. This enframed narrative is told in the third person, but it is still focalized through Oskar. On many occasions, however, the I-narrator from the frame narrative intrudes into the enframed narrative, commenting on Oskar and giving the impression of a split personality. This intermingling of narrative perspectives, focalizations, and voices creates a strange dissonance and irritation—one that will prove to capture the novel's "tone" quite adequately.

The narrative moves between the knowledge and attitudes of two Oskars—the narrator and the protagonist. In both roles, Oskar knows more than a human in a rationally conceived

reality could feasibly know. For example, he describes minute details of the events preceding his life, and he also remembers the circumstances of his own birth. All in all, Oskar is a mysterious being. He is an omniscient I-narrator and thus knows more than he could as first-person narrator. He is thus in “violation of mimetic epistemology” (Heinze). Oskar appears to be able to focalize other perspectives and know the motivations and thoughts of others. He uses this knowledge to weave an intricate narrative web in which he holds all the strings. He also comments on himself and on the past, frequently transitioning between perspectives and constantly crossing the boundary between internal and external focalizations.

Oskar is defocalized in many different senses of the word, and as such he exposes the opacity of different political, moral, and epistemological boundaries. As one reviewer observed, he is an “incarcerated maniac, self-created dwarf, paranoiac, possessor of supernatural gifts, vindictive genius, fallen angel, miniature tyrant, obsessive beater of the titular drum. Oskar is all of these things and none of them; the ultimate unreliable narrator” (McManus). Oskar himself raises doubts about his trustworthiness as narrator when he begins his story with the word “zugegeben” (“granted”). “Zugegeben: ich bin Insasse einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt, mein Pfleger beobachtet mich, läßt mich kaum aus dem Auge; denn in der Tür ist ein Guckloch, und meines Pflegers Auge ist von jenem Braun, welches mich, den Blauäugigen, nicht durchschauen kann” (*Blechtrommel* 9). [“Granted: I’m an inmate in a mental institution; my keeper watches me, scarcely lets me out of sight, for there’s a peephole in the door, and my keeper’s eye is the shade of brown that can’t see through blue-eyed types like me” (*Tin Drum* 3).] With this concession the narrator implies that he cannot be trusted, and it sets the tone for the entire novel.

The narrator devotes the first chapters of his writing to telling the story of Oskar’s origin, but like Laurence Sterne’s *Tristam Shandy*, he diverts and begins some time before his own

birth. Oskar starts with his grandmother, and he thereby marks the centrality of women as another focal point of the story, in which men often appear merely as necessary accessories. Oskar begins with the first meeting of his Kashubian grandmother Anna Bronski and his grandfather Joseph Koljaiczek. He is very precise in mapping this event and thereby also provides the time and exact location where Oskar's mother is conceived: "Man schrieb das Jahr neunundneunzig, sie saß im Herzen der Kaschubei, nahe bei Bissau, noch näher der Ziegelei, vor Ramkau saß sie, hinter Viereck, in Richtung der Straße nach Brentau, zwischen Dirschau und Karthaus, den schwarzen Wald Goldkrug im Rücken saß sie […]" (*Blechtrommel* 13). ["The year was eighteen ninety-nine, she sat in the heart of Kashubia, near Bissau, nearer still to the brickworks, this side of Ramkau she sat, beyond Viereck, facing the road to Brentau, between Dirschau and Karthaus, with her back toward the black forest of Goldkrug she sat […]." (*Tin Drum* 6)]. Soon after, the two get married, and Anna Bronski becomes Anna Koljaiczek. They move from the countryside to Danzig, where Anna gives birth to Oskar's mother Agnes/Anna just at the beginning of the new century (*Tin Drum* 13).

This precision with regard to time and location continues throughout the novel. The narrative moves through a city of authentic landmarks, streets, and places. It is here, in Danzig, where Oskar is born in 1924, where he grows up, and from where he and the remainder of his family are expelled at the end of the Second World War (*Tin Drum* 401). And while these spatial and temporal coordinates anchor the novel in the real world, this realism is juxtaposed with a series of grotesque and fantastical events that throw everything out of focus and shatter what has been set up as the real world. These irritations appear both on the level of story and discourse.

Oskar as narrator plays a crucial role here—he is an unusual being, and he manipulates reality. The major historical events can be verified, but the storyworld also has its own

chronology and events, and Oskar spins them to irritate and undercut German collective memory. This is the case during a big Nazi rally, when Oskar hides underneath the grandstand and disturbs the carefully choreographed propaganda event. He begins playing his drum, at first causing the marching band to change its military tune into a waltz and later into a Charleston. Oskar's rhythms are pervasive, and in a carnivalesque scene, the attendees fall from one mass hysteria into another and begin dancing at the rally (*Tin Drum* 106–110). Oskar quite literally re-tells history from below: he may not be a player in the official orchestra, but from underneath the grandstand he can manipulate it as he pleases. In addition, here and in other instances, he is able to hide behind his physical appearance as a three-year-old child and is never suspected of anything.

The juxtaposition of Oskar's mental capacities and his deliberately chosen physical stature are particularly puzzling within a realist framework. He clearly exhibits an extraordinary amount of control over his mind and body. This unusual ability relates also to Oskar's own birth, which he recalls in detail, as well as a number of very conscious decisions he makes in the early days, months, and years of his life. He asserts "Ich gehörte zu den hellhörigen Säuglingen, deren geistige Entwicklung schon bei der Geburt abgeschlossen ist und sich fortan nur noch bestätigen muß" (*Blechtrommel* 52) ["I was one of those clairaudient infants whose mental development is complete at birth and thereafter simply confirmed" (*Tin Drum* 35)]. As Oskar listens to his mother Agnes and presumed father Alfred discuss his future, the newborn contemplates the options for his life. While Alfred envisions his son as the heir of his "grocery store" ("Kolonialwarenladen"), his mother promises Oskar a drum set for his third birthday. Uninterested in Alfred's middlebrow plans, Oskar impatiently awaits that fateful birthday, receives his present, and decides to stop growing at "ninety-four centimeters, or three foot one"

(*Tin Drum* 390).[14] In order to provide his family with a rational explanation of his arrested growth, he throws himself down the stairs of his home (51–52). This "accident" has the positive—but according to Oskar completely unintended—side effect of demoting Alfred's position in the family hierarchy, as he was presumably the one who had left the basement door open and must bear the blame for Oskar's impairment (52). Oskar maintains the stature of a 3-year old until he is 21 years old (390). He decides to resume growing during the family's expulsion from Danzig.

The world constructed in the *Tin Drum* is disrupted and defocalized on many different levels. Oskar himself is not only of a questionable state of mind, but his identity, as well as his motivations and attachments, are also unclear and take on a surreal air. First, it is known that his mother Agnes is half Kaschubian, but the identity of his biological father is not known with any certainty. Second, Oskar claims to be endowed with a number of remarkable talents, which further makes the reader wonder who he is and where these otherworldly abilities come from. Two unusual attributes are particularly relevant here, because they serve as narrative devices that supplement the narrative and provide alternate ways of telling the story. These voices or "instruments" underline the novel's unconventional narrative perspective: a tin drum that Oskar

[14] Tomasz Lewandowski has pointed out that throughout the novel, Oskar is permanently in hiding. He interprets the fact that Oskar intentionally stops growing as an act of hiding in the body of a three-year old (241).

received on his third birthday and that he plays incessantly; and a high-pitched shriek that can shatter glass across great distances.[15]

Both instruments are extensions of Oskar's self, and he uses them as voices that enhance the narrative. As he gets older, he uses these storytelling devices to make a living in a traveling variety theater. Oskar refers to his drumming as "work" and as part of the narrative process. When he beats the drum, he tells stories and remembers (*Tin Drum* 13, 180), searches and explores (62, 95), bears witness (241), and records history (485–486). He uses the drum to access information, as he explains very early on:

> Hätte ich nicht meine Trommel, der bei geschicktem und geduldigem Gebrauch alles einfällt, was an Nebensächlichkeiten nötig ist, um die Hauptsache aufs Papier bringen zu können, und hätte ich nicht die Erlaubnis der Anstalt, drei bis vier Stunden täglich mein Blech sprechen zu lassen, wäre ich ein armer Mensch ohne nachweisliche Großeltern. (*Blechtrommel* 23)
>
> [If I didn't have my drum, which, when handled properly and patiently, recalls all the little details I need to get the essentials down on paper, and if I didn't have the institute's permission to let my drum speak three or four hours each day, I would be a poor fellow with no known grandparents. (*Tin Drum* 13)].

Oskar's high-pitched shrieks are juxtaposed to his drumming. He uses this talent to defend his "work" of narrating against anyone who has either grown tired of his drumming or deems it

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[15] The drum and Oskar's high-pitched shrieks function as narrative voices. If the concept of narrative voice asks "who speaks" then both the drumming and his shrieks can be interpreted as extensions of Oskar's voice. At the same time, they also modify and enhance his voice. However, these narrative voices are accessible to the reader only as they are mediated, interpreted, and manipulated by the narrator who details both Oskar's intentions and people's reactions to his disruptions. The drumming and the shrieking are dissonant, loud, and provocative voices. Lewandowski has also argued that the drum provides an impersonal point of view (241).

inappropriate and attempts to take away his instrument: "Allein Sorge um den Fortbestand meiner Arbeit auf der Trommel hieß mich, meine Stimmbänder so zielstrebig zu gebrauchen" (*Blechtrommel* 77). ["It was solely my desire to keep working on my drum that led me to use my vocal cords so single-mindedly" (*Tin Drum* 53).] Later in the novel Oskar's screaming evolves from a defense mechanism into a narrative voice in its own right. While his drumming signifies the search for a uniform rhythm and the need to provide coherence and continuity to a narrative (albeit in a highly irritating way), his screams deconstruct narratives.

On the surface, Oskar's screams shatter material objects, but he also destroys the narratives these objects embody and the stories they tell. He views his presentations as historical performances, for example, when he travels with the theater company: "Ich zersang nicht mehr simple deutsch-ordinäre Bierflaschen, nein, ausgesuchteste, schöngeschwungene, hauchdünn geatmete Vasen und Fruchtschalen aus französischen Schlössern zersang und zerscherbte ich. Nach kulturhistorischen Gesichtspunkten baute sich mein Programm auf […]" (*Blechtrommel* 432). [I no longer sangshattered ordinary German beer bottles, no, I reduced to shards with my song the most exquisite, gracefully curved, paper-thin blown vases and fruit bowls from French castles. My act was structured on a cultural-historical point of view […]" (*Tin Drum* 311).]

In the process of destruction, however, Oskar also constructs new narratives and tells (anti)stories. He does not demolish random items in an unsystematic way. Rather, both the items and the sequence in which he destroys them are carefully selected to undo the meaning with which they have previously been endowed. Sadly for Oskar, only few in the audience are able to appreciate his narrative skills: "Wenn auch die feldgraue Masse im Parkett und auf den Rängen dem historischen Ablauf meiner Darbietungen nicht folgen konnte und die Scherben nur als gewöhnliche Scherben beklatschte, gab es dann und wann doch Stabsoffiziere und Journalisten

aus dem Reich, die außer den Scherben auch meinen Sinn fürs Historische bewunderten" (*Blechtrommel* 432). ["If the field-gray masses in the stalls and balconies could not follow my historical presentation and applauded the shards simply as ordinary shards, there were also occasional staff officers and journalists from the Reich who admired my historical sense as well as the shards" (*Tin Drum* 311).] Who exactly admires his skills does not matter much to Oskar, who generally displays neither moral qualms nor sympathies. Instead, the nonchalance of his observations (here and elsewhere in the novel) irritate the reader by exposing the destructiveness of Nazi ideology and warfare.

Oskar as narrator seems to operate very much like Grass himself, as Hans Magnus Enzensberger observed in a review upon the novel's first publication, and which is cited in the introduction to the translation:

> What differentiates Grass […] what legitimizes these blunt forays […] is the total objectivity with which he presents them. […] Grass does not seek out taboos; he simply doesn't notice them. It would be unfair to accuse him of deliberate provocation. He neither avoids scandal nor invites it; but that is precisely what will give rise to scandal: Grass doesn't have a guilty conscience, he takes what we find shocking for granted. (*Tin Drum* viii)

Oskar as narrator displays a similarly nonchalant attitude towards the storyworld. Perhaps this is the "total objectivity" to which Tomasz Lewandowski was referring when he said that through Oskar, Grass uncovered the "banality of evil" prior to Hannah Arendt (241).

The simultaneity of the processes of construction and destruction and the concomitant breakdown of any previously established boundaries extends to Oskar himself. As described above, he is at once a first-person narrator and the subject of his own narration told in the third

person. The I-narrator is omniscient, and he dictates the frame narrative, however, he also intrudes in the enframed narrative and thus continuously disrupts the boundary between extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrative. Moreover, this narrator pushes the limits of what the "I" can know through his supernatural ability to "read" other people. Oskar/I can recognize other people's intentions and motivations, and he can access their memories and fears. This special ability is another attribute that aids his narration. It is first made explicit in his encounter with a teacher, who is trying to take away his drum:

> Vorerst hielt ich [die Trommel] fest, schloß die Arme in Pulloverärmeln um das weißrotgeflammte Rund, blickte sie an, blickte dann, da sie unentwegt den uralten schablonenhaften Volksschullehrerinnenanblick gewährte, durch sie hindurch, fand im Innern des Fräulein Spollenhauer Erzählenswertes genug für drei unmoralische Kapitel, riß mich aber, da es um meine Trommel ging, von ihrem Innenleben los und registrierte, als mein Blick zwischen ihren Schulterblättern hindurchfand, auf guterhaltener Haut einen guldenstückgroßen, langbehaarten Leberfleck. (*Blechtrommel* 98)
> [At first I held on tight, wrapped the arms of my sweater around the red and white flames of the cylinder, and stared at her; then, since she maintained the ancient stereotypical schoolteacher's gaze without flinching, I looked right through her, finding sufficient narrative material inside Fräulein Spollenhauer for three chapters of depravity, then tore myself loose from her inner life, since my drum was at stake, and as my gaze passed through her shoulder blades, registered the presence on her well-preserved skin of a mole the size of a gulden piece with long hairs sprouting from it. (*Tin Drum* 68)]

It is evident in this passage that the narrator has access to everything, and he must make a decision as to which story he wants to tell. He sees enough material for a steamy romance, but in the face of her attempt to discipline him, he opts for an irritating and disruptive tale. Oskar's reaction to the teacher's violation of his narrative integrity is instantaneous, but at first the damage is only slight. He produces a warning scream that leaves a small scratch on Fräulein Spollenhauer's glasses. Upon the teacher's renewed attempt to take away the drum, however, Oskar unleashes the full force of his shriek, which leaves Fräulein Spollenhauer with bloody eyebrows and an empty spectacle frame (*Tin Drum* 70–71).

The ambiguous narrative perspective, the changing focalizations, and the indistinctness regarding voice as well as the narrator's and/or protagonist's manipulations and deceptions distort and even dismantle any realist framework. Even more, they expose realism's limitations and even inadequacy in providing orientation and continuity. Oskar is the wise fool, locked up in a mental institution. Told from the perspective of the 1950s, his story embodies and exposes Germany's highly ambiguous relationship to its Nazi past, its support of the National Socialist regime, the guilt and implications of individuals in the system, and the contingency of existence. Yet Oskar is anything but a moral compass—he himself is deeply flawed, manipulative, and mischievous. Nevertheless he passes through everything unscathed, disguised as a child, an innocent observer, when in reality he is the one who directs everything that happens around him. Thus, folded into the historical space and time are questions of epistemic, ontic, moral, and other transgressions that paint a dark and irritating picture of human nature and of Germany in the twentieth century.

Oskar's echoes and beyond

Oskar's shrieks and drumbeats have echoed far and wide in world literature, and they also reverberate in Grass's other works. *The Tin Drum* was followed by the novella *Cat and Mouse* (*Katz und Maus*, 1961) and the novel *Dog Years* (*Hundejahre*, 1963). Together, these three texts make up the so-called *Danzig Trilogy*. Although each text in the trilogy stands for itself, there are intertextual references throughout. These range from the recurring protagonists to cross-references to previous plots, as well as shared themes or motifs. With the *Danzig Trilogy*, Grass has created an open narrative web that lends itself to new connections from within Grass's oeuvre but also from the outside. Sabrina Janesch's novel *Ambra*, to which I turn next, is one expression of this intertextuality.[16]

When asked in an interview by Gunnar Cynybulk about the most important literary influences on her writing, Janesch mentions, among others, Günter Grass and Olga Tokarczuk ("Interview"). *Ambra* is in dialogue with Grass's work, but as I show, it also represents a unique engagement with the German-Polish theme and illuminates different aspects and strategies of border poetics. The same can be said for Olga Tokarczuk's novel *House of Day, House of Night*, with which I conclude this chapter. Tokarczuk's novel has no obvious connections with Grass or Janesch, but by placing all three novels alongside one another, I want to emphasize that these

[16] Another example of this intertextual engagement with Grass's work is Polish author Paweł Huelle's novel *Weiser Dawidek*, which I mentioned in an earlier footnote. I omitted a longer discussion of the work here because it connects more explicitly with Grass's novella *Cat and Mouse* than with the *Tin Drum*. *Weiser Dawidek* is set in and around Gdańsk in the 1950s and tells the story of the mysterious disappearance of a Jewish boy. Much of the story is told from the perspective of four friends who in the days immediately after Weiser's disappearance describe the events of the summer to the authorities. Another perspective is provided by one of the boys, who as an adult is still trying to find out what happened. Dawid Weiser's captivating personality and his unresolved disappearance have been compared to Joachim Mahlke in Grass's novella. There are also parallels in the narrative structure and setting. For a more detailed analysis, see Paweł C. Woźniak.

works tap into a broad transborder network of the literary imagination. This network has many threads and nodes—even if they do not always touch directly.

Sabrina Janesch: *Ambra* (2012)

Two years after her debut novel *Katzenberge*, Sabrina Janesch returned to the German-Polish theme in her second novel *Ambra*. There are several echoes of the *Tin Drum* in *Ambra*. First and foremost, the novel is set in Gdańsk, which has led one reviewer to describe it as the first literary exploration of the city by a German-language author since Grass (Platthaus). Furthermore, Janesch uses magic and fantasy, a multiplicity of narrative perspectives, and non-linear narration. There is also an instrument that supports the narration, to which I return below, as well as a not so subtle Grass-reference at the beginning of the novel: "Jeder Schlag auf jede Trommel und jeder Schrei, jedes zerbrochene Glas und jeder unlautere Gedanke findet Einlass ins Gedächtnis der Stadt […]" ["Each beat on every drum and each scream, each broken glass and each unsavory thought find their way into the memory of the city"] (*Ambra* 8).

Perhaps due to the iconic status of the *Tin Drum*, Oskar's ghost indeed appears to linger in the background when the main protagonist discovers her ability to read other people's minds and know the memories of all who have ever passed through the city. She does not beat a drum, nor does she scream and leave anyone with broken spectacles and bloody eyebrows, but she too has an intimate knowledge of others' thoughts and fears, and she manipulates them to her advantage. The *Tin Drum* and *Ambra* also share a magic trick of sorts. A narrative instrument—in the *Tin Drum* it is a drum and a glass-shattering shriek, in *Ambra* an amber pendant with a spider—turns the narrator into the rationally impossible omniscient I-narrator who displays a "preposterous knowledge" (Heinze 8).

The novel is set in the years 2009–2010, and it begins with its ending. The main protagonist Kinga Mischa is locked up in a room in her Polish relatives' apartment (a situation not unlike Oskar's, who is held in a locked room when he begins to write). Something happened to Kinga's cousin Bartosz Mysza (a traumatized soldier, who just returned from Iraq) and his girlfriend Renia Fiszer: "Renia und Bartosz waren verschwunden, einfach so, in die Stadt hinein, in ihre Gedärme waren sie gekrochen und nicht wieder aufgetaucht" ["Renia and Bartosz had simply vanished. They had gone into the city, had crawled into its entrails, and were not seen again"] (*Ambra* 371). Because Bartosz's mother Bronka suspects Kinga to be somehow responsible for the disappearance, she kidnaps Kinga. Strategically keeping her son's machine gun in Kinga's sight, she demands to be told everything.

Just like Scheherazade, who tells stories to save her own life, Kinga proceeds to put her own 1001 stories to paper. The longer she draws out the process, the more time she wins for herself and the more she can hope that Renia and Bartosz will return, or that someone will begin searching for her. She thus claims that the events that have led to Bartosz and Renia's disappearance originate several generations ago. In a series of enframed stories, the narrative then weaves back and forth seamlessly between different times and places as well as between different narrative perspectives and voices. At the end of the novel, the narrative frame closes and Kinga is still in the room in which she first began telling the story.

The enframed story begins in the recent past. The reader learns that Kinga Mischa is a university graduate who lives with her elderly father in a small German town in Lower Saxony. When her father passes away in 2009, she unexpectedly inherits an apartment in Gdańsk. She travels to the city hoping that the property might solve her financial problems and to find out more about the Polish side of her family. In the city she not only discovers why the family had

been estranged but she is also overwhelmed with the multitude of voices and stories that force themselves upon her. She becomes aware of her increasing power of clairvoyance and soon figures out that she has access to the city's memory through an amber pendant she inherited from her father. This pendant contains a fossilized spider, and it had been a matter of contention in her family for many generations. Through this pendant, Kinga becomes the voice and the repository of all haunted souls, and she channels not only her own family's history but also that of the entire city.

While the fantastic was already an important element in Janesch's first novel (in particular through the figure of the beast), the magical realist or fantastic mode—in the sense outlined above—is even more pervasive in *Ambra.* Magic and fantastic elements drive the plot forward, they facilitate different points of view, and they create an alternative explanatory framework. This framework is necessary to grasp past and present events as well as understand their inherent contingency and interconnectedness. The fantastic is especially significant when it comes to bridging the gap between the past and the present and for accessing and understanding events that did not become part of recorded history. These events have since been forgotten because they took place among friends and family, in people's homes and communities, or because people have died before they were able to pass on their memories—including Kinga's mother, who passed away when Kinga was still young. In this way, the novel rewrites history from an individualized and previously marginalized perspective.

Because Kinga has access to other worlds that also transgress temporal limitations, she is able to recover voices that were lost to the "real world." She uses her special "talent" by joining "so eine Art Varietétheater. Aber nur für Mitglieder" ["a kind of variety theater. But for members only"] (87). This theater also features a "Kleinwüchsiger im Frack" ("a small person in

a tailcoat") (132) and is in many ways reminiscent of "Bebra's Theater on the Front" in which Oskar Matzerath showcases his glass-shattering gift.[17] Kinga's performance consists in reading other people's minds and revealing their thoughts to the audience. Through these performances and in her daily life in the city, she collects others' memories and includes them in her 1001 stories. The recouped stories highlight the many ways in which the personal is enmeshed with the political by way of intersecting and competing affiliations, such as national belonging, ethnicity, and gender. At the same time, they propose alternative kinds of knowledge and perception that destabilize conventional realist frameworks. The stories reveal a more comprehensive way of knowing—an omniscient perspective that goes beyond human capacity—which is made possible by the pendant.

The novel's title *Ambra* already hints at the magical item, and it opens up other connotations as well.[18] The amber pendant is of singular importance to the plot. It has been passed down through several generations, although Kinga is the first female to ever own the heirloom. Over the course of the novel, this pendant reveals itself as a narrative instrument that lends its owner a radically expanded perception. The magical pendant, or rather the fossilized spider inside, not only brings multiple voices into the narrative but it is also a protagonist and narrator with its own perspective and voice. More generally, amber refers to a gemstone made of fossilized tree resin, and it provides the reader at once with a very broad temporal and a specific

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[17] The scenes in the theater are also reminiscent of the "magic theater" in Hermann Hesse's novel *Steppenwolf* (1927) as well as in Thomas Mann's short story *Mario and the Magician* (1929).

[18] "Ambra," as Platthaus explains in his review of the novel, is an old word for amber. It stems from the time when people believed that it was produced by fish rather than by tree resin. Interestingly, the German word for amber is *Bernstein*, and in Polish it is called *bursztyn*. I therefore suspect that the novel's title may initially be rather mysterious for readers who are not familiar with the word in other Latin languages in which it is closer to the English "amber."

spatial orientation. In terms of space, amber will make most German and Polish readers think of the Baltic Sea region, which is particularly famous for this gemstone. The time frame, on the other hand, is far beyond an individual's experience. The reader learns that millions of years ago the spider was trapped by a drop of tree resin (*Ambra* 53) and has witnessed and recorded everything that has happened since.

The pendant is a key instrument for collecting and bringing out different perspectives and voices to create a polyvocal narrative. The magic item is central to the novel's border poetics as it permits the transgression of time and space and the boundaries between individuals. There are four main perspectives or voices in the novel: the setting itself, the narrator and main protagonist Kinga Mischa, the spider in the amber pendant, and a city scribe. There is also a hybrid voice that appears frequently throughout the novel and which represents a radical blending of two different perspectives and times: Kinga channels the memories of her cousin Bartosz that force themselves upon her.

Setting: The city by the sea

Ambra takes place mainly in Gdańsk, although the city remains unnamed and is referred to only as "die Stadt am Meer" ("the city by the sea").[19] Danzig/Gdańsk is the setting but it can also be regarded as a narrator, one who spills out the stories collected over the centuries. The "city by the sea" has collected everything that has ever happened—including the previously mentioned exploits and stories of Oskar Matzerath: the drumbeats, the screams, the broken glass, and any "impure thought" (*Ambra* 8). The fact that the city has the ability to remember ("Gedächtnis")

[19] The novel does not try to hide the identity of the city, but the name is never mentioned in the text. The only mention is in the hardcover edition of the novel, which offers an illustration on the inside cover in which one can detect scribblings of the name Danzig.

underlines its organic nature and makes the past a permanent presence. There are frequent descriptions of the city as a living being with memory; it breathes, has a heart and intestines, and it swallows and digests people and their memories. It is determined by everything that has ever happened, and it is shaped by all peoples, times, and places that have ever passed through. In *Ambra* it releases those stories back into the storyworld via the spider in the amber pendant and Kinga Mischa.

The anthropomorphization of the city does not necessarily make it a human protagonist or narrator, but rather a supernatural being with human attributes. The city is thus endowed with the *genius loci* I referred to earlier—a spirit that transmits a distinct atmosphere, a specific voice. While this specific "spirit" of a place is often evoked and constructed to lend a place narrative cohesion and emphasize its unique and special, mostly positive, character (Loew, "Trzy" 138-141), in *Ambra* the *genius loci* resembles the anti-spirit I observed in the *Tin Drum*. It is stubborn and resists an oversimplification of the past, preventing the city from being easily appropriated for any particular narrative. Instead, this city "eats" its people and their memories (*Ambra* 89, 371); it digests them, and it throws them back at the protagonists and a narrator who has do deal with an unfiltered collection of thoughts, memories, and dreams. Through the amber pendant the city speaks with the narrator, and Kinga Mischa, who cannot escape or control these voices, channels them. She tells them to the reader, she writes them down for Bronka, and she discloses them to the audience in her variety show.

Perspectives and voices

Ambra is composed of a series of intertwined narratives that offer different perspectives on the narrated events as well as a frame narrative that also provides the motivation for the narration. Kinga Mischa, main protagonist and first-person narrator of the frame narrative, is of mixed

German-Polish heritage. Due to conflicting loyalties during the Second World War, the family was torn apart and some fled to Germany while others remained in Poland after the war. Kinga was born and raised in West Germany with little awareness of her Polish roots or her family history. Her mother died shortly after Kinga was born, which also means that the female perspective on her family history was lost for her. She is able to recover this history only when she enters the "city by the sea" with the magic family heirloom.

Growing up, Kinga is only presented with a vague and often mythologized version of her Polish heritage. She is told that she is named after the Polish Saint Kunigunde, a princess who had to leave her homeland and live in a foreign land (just like Kinga's parents had to when their families were expelled from Gdańsk after the war) (19–20). Kinga's last name Mischa is the Germanized form of the Polish name Mysza, which translates to English "mouse." Actual mice are present throughout the novel, and the juxtaposition of "Kinga" and "Mysza" also draws attention to Kinga's double narrative perspective: On the one hand, she tells a story from below, from the perspective of a mouse, focusing on small details and family events. On the other hand, these stories are placed within the larger context of German-Polish history since the nineteenth century.[20]

Kinga is also true to her name because she rules over her narrative and directs it in her interests. The reader and the other protagonists in the story are manipulated to believe Kinga's version of events, as she presents herself as a reliable narrator with the best of intentions. Yet, her version becomes increasingly untenable as other narrators speak up, and Kinga gradually

[20] Animals and plants as well as the relationship between nature and culture play an important role in the novel and would lend themselves to an ecocritical analysis or a discussion of the novel through the lens of animal studies. This crossing of boundaries between nature and culture and between species can also be read as an expression of border poetics on the level of story.

appears to be motivated by jealousy and guided by self-interest. She grows more unreliable and mysterious, and by the end of the novel, the reader wonders whether Kinga might be involved in her cousin's disappearance after all. The narrators who contribute to destabilizing Kinga's reign over the narrative are the omniscient spider-narrator, whose voice often merges with that of Kinga, and a German city scribe with the name Tilman Kröger.

The fossilized spider in Kinga's necklace can be seen as the main narrator in *Ambra*. It embodies a state of spatial and temporal in-betweenness: An animal caught within an inanimate object, it is frozen in time and space, but the pendant's magical qualities grant its wearer simultaneous access to multiple times and places. Passed down from father to son for several generations and imbued with the magical power to record history and reveal it to its bearer, the pendant helps Kinga recover the past, and it filters her experiences in the city. Similar to Oskar's tin drum, the amber pendant serves as an instrument of narration that allows Kinga to articulate what would normally be inaccessible to her. At other times, however, the spider appears to narrate the events without intervention (and thus manipulation) from Kinga.

Kinga recalls the moment in her childhood, when her father explains the amber pendant to her:

> Siehst du die Spinne? Sie hat sich alles gemerkt, alles was jemals um sie herum geschehen ist. An dieser Stelle widersprach Kinga, denn wie konnte man sich denn alles merken, was um einen herum geschah. Der alte Mischa lenkte ein und sagte, dass sie sich nur die speziellen Dinge merkte, und eines Tages würde sie, Kinga, schon dahinterkommen, was das sei: die speziellen Dinge. (*Ambra* 22)
> [Do you see the spider? It remembers everything that has ever happened in its vicinity. Here Kinga objected. How could one possibly remember everything. Old Mischa relented

> and said that it only remembered particular things, and one day she, Kinga, would find out what those were: the particular things.]

It turns out that the special things are the personal family history and the movements and shifting loyalties within one family. They include the experiences of war and dislocation, of great historical events refracted through the everyday lives of individuals. These forgotten and untold stories come to haunt Kinga from the moment she enters the city, and they increasingly bother her. Stories about her own family's past also mix with other peoples' pasts and memories. Kinga can indeed see and hear all the special things around her. And in a city like Gdańsk, the multitude of "special things" turns out to be quite overwhelming.

According to Kinga, the spider enables her to channel the different voices. While the spider is the actual omniscient narrator, Kinga is frequently the voice that articulates this narrative. On other occasions the spider also seems to speak by itself and reveal things about Kinga that undercut her account. All voices and memories are simultaneously present; every voice and memory is accessible to Kinga simultaneously, regardless of origin. This ability is most notable with regard to her cousin's experiences during his tour of duty in Iraq. Bartosz is plagued by his memories, and those in turn take possession of Kinga. She channels Bartosz's perspective and then confronts him with things she could not possibly know. She does so in order to prove her mind-reading skills (and also, the reader might suspect, to manipulate her cousin because it appears that Kinga is also in love with his girlfriend Renia).

The transitions from one perspective to another are not always clearly marked, which adds to the web-like structure of the novel and its polyvocality. This fluidity is expressed on the formal level, for example, when the perspective switches seamlessly from a first-person narrator to a third-person narrator, as was also the case in the *Tin Drum*, or when the change from

Kinga's to Bartosz's narrative voice occurs mid-sentence. Some transitions are also expressed visually on the page. Italics are used throughout the novel in episodes involving Bartosz's stationing in Iraq, which are always told from his intimate first-person perspective but channeled through Kinga. In the following scene, Kinga meets Bartosz for the first time when he picks her up from the train station. She does not yet understand the origin of the different voices and images in her head, which include Bartosz's memories of his fallen comrade Jarzębinski. The passage below reflects how this transition is represented visually on the page, with the second part set off from the first and printed in italics:

> Ich nickte, als ob ich verstehen würde, aber natürlich verstand ich überhaupt nichts. Bartosz rief etwas vom Vorplatz des Bahnhofs herüber. Wir schlossen zu ihm auf und ich
>
> *sah hoch am Himmel einen Geier kreisen, daran erinnere ich mich, und hätte der Beschuss nicht angedauert, ich schwöre, ich hätte das Vieh abgeknallt, weil es mich wahnsinnig machte, wie es da oben schwebte und geduldig kreiste, als würde es tatsächlich davon ausgehen, dass wenn alles vorbei war, man Jarzębinski einfach im Wüstensand liegen lassen würde.* (*Ambra* 41)
>
> [I nodded as though I understood, but of course I didn't understand anything. Bartosz yelled something over from the train station. We caught up to him and I
>
> *saw a vulture circle high above me, that's what I remember. Had the shelling not continued, I swear, I would have gunned that beast down, because it drove me crazy how*

it was hovering up there, circling patiently, as if it assumed that when all of this was over, we would simply leave Jarzębinski behind in the dessert.]

As the reader soon learns, this seeming change in perspective is in fact not so much a transition but a radical expansion of the main protagonist's perspective and its merging with Bartosz's point of view. Kinga instantly identifies as a disturbance this breaking down of the boundary between herself and others, and she refers to it as her "little problem" ("mein kleines Problem"). Initially she is not sure where to place this experience that occurs immediately after her arrival but which becomes more pronounced the longer Kinga lives in the city. More and more, she reenvisions distant times and places in the present, but she can only re-present old animosities and conflicts, not solve them. However, the radical multiperspectivity brings multiple and conflicting viewpoints into conversation, and makes apparent the events of the past and people's different feelings and motivations.

Thus, Kinga's retelling of Bartosz's story or even her own family history does more than chronicle the events or ensure that Bronka does not kill the narrator. Rather, Kinga also narrates those back to life who have been marginalized or ignored in the grand historical narratives—most notably the women in her family. This process of world-(re)making also affects Kinga: by illuminating female strength and agency in her own family "his-story" and by connecting herself to them, Kinga also narrates herself into existence. These women's reconciliatory powers were able to persevere and keep the family together through war, hunger, expulsion, and strife. While the men were fighting on opposite sides in the Second World War—one brother felt loyal to the Polish state while the other (Kinga's grandfather) saw himself as German—their wives, German and Polish, respectively, were at home, reuniting a house that had been divided by these

competing national loyalties. Joined in female solidarity, and in the absence of their men, they raise a child together and survive the war. While this story could be read as a romanticization of the role of women in war, it also signifies a lost part of the family history. In fact, it was buried so deep, due to her mother's early death, that Kinga needed a magical item to recover it. It is the spider that makes the story present—it holds all the narrative strings, and it weaves together different perspectives.

There is a counter narrative to Kinga's story, which adds to the reader's mounting doubt regarding the veracity of the narrator's claims. Kinga's antagonist is the city scribe Tilman Kröger, a German who has been invited by city officials to write a book about the city and who therefore chronicles all events.[21] Kröger is frequently in the same places as Kinga, a fact that irritates Kinga and makes her resentful towards the writer. Kröger counters Kinga's narrative with his own interpretation of Kinga's life in Gdańsk and her relationship to Bartosz and Renia. However, the seeming juxtaposition of Kinga's unreliable, personal, and female narrative "from below" with that of an official male narrative is itself ironized: the city scribe suffers from writer's block, and in all actuality has never put any words of the contracted official narrative on the page. Instead, Kröger becomes part of the tale spun by Kinga.

Kinga—locked up in Bronka's apartment—is like the spider trapped in amber. She is seemingly in control of all the narrative strings, but this control is increasingly questionable. In

[21] Kröger can also be read as a self-ironic figure because Janesch herself was the official city scribe of Gdańsk in 2009. The city scribe scholarship is provided by the "Deutsches Kulturforum östliches Europa," and it fosters intercultural dialogue and understanding. Its goal is to make known to a broad public the "shared cultural heritage of Germans and their neighbors in those regions of central and eastern Europe where Germans once lived or are still living today" ("Stadtschreiber Danzig").

the end, perhaps in an act to reassert control, she burns the amber pendant and ends the story.[22] Through these multiple perspectives and voices, *Ambra* weaves a narrative that resembles that of a spider web, or the knots that Iwasiów describes. The novel is at once situated in a very specific context but at the same time creates connections between these contexts. It raises questions of what we can know and how knowledge can be accessed. This is a question that is also important for Tokarczuk's novel that I will discuss next. Both novels, as well as the *Tin Drum*, require supernatural, magic, or mythic elements or abilities to access this kind of hidden knowledge.

Olga Tokarczuk: *House of Day, House of Night* (1998)

Of the literary works in this study, Olga Tokarczuk's 1998 novel *Dom dzienny, dom nocny*, (*House of Day, House of Night*, henceforth referred to as *House*) perhaps comes closest to representing the most salient example of the practice I describe as border poetics. This is due to the complexity of transgressions and border crossings addressed in the novel, which include the play with narrative perspective and focalization, the transgression of gender boundaries, an exploration of the unstable border between nature and culture, as well as the life of artifacts and otherwise silent objects. In postmodern fashion, *House* also breaks with genre conventions and thus underpins the significance of the interplay of form and content in the practice of border poetics.

The text is labeled a novel, but like Anzaldúa's *La Frontera*, it pushes genre boundaries and would be more adequately described as a collage of loosely connected stories and sketches,

[22] Amber burns easily, and is therefore also called Brennstein (burn stone) in German. *Ambra* references the ritual burning of amber by shamans (61) and an old children's rhyme said at a game of hide-and-seek: "Bernstein, Brennstein, alles muss versteckt sein!" ["Amber, burnstone, everyone must hide!"] (372). The burning of the pendant at the novel's end can also be interpreted as Kinga's response to her loss of narrative control. In order to end the story and not reveal the truth about Renia and Bartosz, she has to reassert her control and destroy the pendant with the all-knowing narrator inside.

historical documents, a dream diary, and other texts, such as recipes. As the two previously discussed novels, *House* is structured by complex and shifting constellations of various border spaces on the story plane and on the discursive level. The setting, however, entails a shift away from the northern Danzig/Gdańsk area to the southwestern region of Silesia. In addition, one would be hard-pressed to find "echoes of Grass" in *House*. Even though this work stands apart from the previously discussed novels, its use of magical and mythological elements and how these permeate the narrative perspective are exemplary of border poetics.

Setting: the Silesian countryside

Silesia is a borderland in many senses of the word. Political borders—past and present—and their remnants that render the borderland also a symbolic one, provide the topography for Tokarczuk's intellectual activities and literary oeuvre. This is in part grounded in her personal experience with and in these border spaces. Tokarczuk was born in 1962 in Sulechów, Poland, less than 60 miles from the German-Polish border, in a region that since the fifteenth century had been part of the Margraviate of Brandenburg and later the Prussian province of Brandenburg until it became part of Poland after the Second World War. In the late 1990s, the author moved to a small village outside Nowa Ruda, about 120 miles south of her birthplace. It is here, near the current Czech border, that *House* is set.

In the frame narrative, the unnamed first-person narrator and her partner have just moved into a house in the Polish countryside. From here she ventures out on trips to the region, visits with neighbors, enters the virtual reality of the Internet, and occasionally abandons any kind of corporality and visits other times and places in her dreams. The narrator adopts various perspectives to tell a series of individual stories. Some of them are connected by recurring characters, but most share themes and motifs or are tied together through their connection to the

region. Here, Silesia's unsettling and unsettled history is central and Tokarczuk shows how traumatic experiences and a sense of strangeness and alienation determine the lives of its inhabitants. As elsewhere, many postwar inhabitants were new to the region, including expellees from the eastern territories (as Janesch illustrates in *Katzenberge*). In addition, the novel is also set near the current Polish-Czech border, which means that besides the now symbolic German-Polish borderland, there is an actual geopolitical border that is significant for some episodes.

Tokarczuk uses the region's complex history and the multiple forces impacting an individual's identity to create a complex literary landscape in which all borders are porous. This landscape is teeming with ghosts that cannot be expelled, uncontrollable animal spirits, everyday objects that have become part of the living world, and signs that are not easily deciphered. This fluidity of boundaries is further underscored by a sense of simultaneity of time: Stories from the early Middle Ages reverberate in contemporary questions of gender identity, a car left behind by a German during the expulsions is now an organic part of the landscape, a werewolf seen in drug-induced hallucinations is a reminder of horrific war experiences. The interconnected stories illustrate that no event, place, or person is isolated and that everything can be summarized as a series of recurring, universally human experiences, needs, and desires. This long view of history stresses that changing affiliations inform the identity of places and peoples and that these are inscribed into the landscape in various ways. Thus, the novel's relatively restricted geographical space is a site for exploring universally conceived figurative boundaries, including those between nature and civilization, man and woman, human and animal, dream and reality, life and death, and between Self and Other.

In her article on the representations of German-Polish borderlands in Polish literature, Irene Sywenky has described Nowa Ruda in the novel as "a deeply mythological space that is

both historical and timeless, connected to the real world and isolated from it" (74). As Sywenky notes further, Nowa Ruda "has an uncanny resemblance to the apocryphal topographies of William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County and Gabriel García Márquez's town of Macondo" (74). Sywenky's observation explicitly connects the text to other works of world literature and appears to support Stelmaszyk's notion that Polish literature has become more "worlded" since the end of the Cold War.[23] I therefore argue, as other scholars have done, that the creation of the mythological space supports the re-orientation of the local towards a larger framework or context, which I would describe as universal.[24] Like Janesch's *Ambra*, Tokarczuk's *House* presents a variety of intersecting borders and border experiences that foster a cosmopolitan imagination and that inscribe the text into a shared world literary space.

Perspective: the non-I

When asked in an interview about the focus of her writing, Tokarczuk responded: "I tell the whole story as if I was looking at a map that is, speaking from a point of view above it all, only I tell the story from the kitchen, from home. How it was to have two families in one kitchen, two women cooking and unable to understand one another. How it looked from that side, from the

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[23] For more on the idea of the "worlding" of Polish literature after 1989 and its alleged re-orientation away from Polish themes and the dominant Romantic literary tradition, see Chapter 1.

[24] Eigler analyzes *House* together with Janesch's *Katzenberge* within the larger context of a transnationalization of German-Polish memory (*Heimat* 151-176). Kołodziejczyk looks at the role of magical realism to recover and re-narrate history (Kołodziejczyk, "Uncanny"). In her comparative analysis of two novels by Tokarczuk, Ewa Wampuszyc shows that the use of magical realism in *House* disrupts dominant narratives "unmasking their instability, rather than simply idealizing a place or past" (368) She argues against reading the novel in the context of the literature of small fatherlands or homelands, which according to her "promotes a poetics of nostalgia and return" (Wampuszyc 368). However, as discussed in Chapter 2, literature of the small homelands has changed significantly after 1989 and is marked precisely by a critical engagement and distancing from a mythologized past (Czapliński). Wienroeder-Skinner also places the novel in the context of literature of the small homelands and highlights its conciliatory and non-ideological tone, which facilitates German-Polish reconciliation needed in a unified Europe (278).

inside. An intimate view" (Tokarczuk in Wiącek 141). To tell a story adequately, Tokarczuk suspends the dualism between inside and outside. She wants to simultaneously capture the birds-eye view and an intimate perspective. The private sphere can be the small space of a house, but it can also extend to locality or region.

This expansion of the intimate realm is evident in *House*, a polyvocal novel in which many voices speak without any one being privileged over the other. The novel also represents an intervention in standardized and hegemonic narratives—in the writing of history with a capital H. This other history, as it is presented in the novel, is made in the private sphere—between two strangers, who are forced to share a space and transform it into something new. A multiplicity of perspectives relates the different stories that make up the novel, and they articulate world as a complex network of spatial and temporal connections. The transitions between narrative perspectives are fluid, and so the first-person narrator reveals not only her thoughts and dreams but, as in Janesch's *Ambra*, she also transfers into an omniscient perspective from which she can channel the intimate perspectives of others. The novel's polyvocality stems from these constant changes between first-person narration and third-person narration with a focalization through different protagonists. These different narrators often circumvent what Rüdiger Heinze called "mimetic epistemology" and display a "preposterous knowledge" (8) that is expressed in dreams, mythology, and magical elements. The multiplicity of perspectives also frees the narrator from constraints of time and place and fosters an exploration of intersecting border experiences throughout several centuries.

By looking closely at these experiences of borders and border crossings and by going beyond the language of realism to do so, Tokarczuk uncovers what lies beneath the veneer of perceptible reality. She uncovers a mythological landscape that brings previously marginalized

narratives into the center. Many of these “outsiders” are those who do not conform to the norms of gender and sexuality. In *House*, these protagonists are given a voice to tell their own stories, and they have agency over their narratives. The frequent shifts in perspective can therefore also be seen as an ethical stance against the marginalization of certain narratives.

These intimate focalizations (told in the third person) are made possible by the self-positioning of the I-narrator at the novel’s outset. While the narrator describes a dream here, the multiple and changing points of view that follow suggest that the narrator is a subject-less, body-less, name-less being that hovers high above the valley in which Nowa Ruda is located and that can observe, and therefore also embody and narrate, everything:

> Pierwszej nocy miałam nieruchomy sen. Śniło mi się, że jestem czystym patrzeniem, czystym wzrokiem i nie mam ciała ani imienia. Tkwię wysoko nad doliną w jakimś nieokreślonym punkcie, z którego widzę wszystko lub prawie wszystko. Poruszam się w tym patrzeniu, ale pozostaję w miejscu. To raczej widziany świat poddaje mi się, kiedy na niego patrzę, przysuwa się i odsuwa tak, że mogę zobaczyć wszystko naraz albo tylko najdrobniejsze szczegóły. (*Dom* 7)
>
> [The first night I had a dream. I dreamed I was pure sight, without a body or a name. I was suspended high above a valley at some undefined point from which I could see everything. I could move around my field of vision, yet remain in the same place. It seemed as if the world below was yielding to me as I looked at it, constantly moving towards me, and then away, so first I could see everything, then only tiny details. (*House* 1)]

This narrative perspective is highly flexible, and it allows for the constant shifting between different protagonists: at one time zooming in to perceive every little detail and at other times zooming out to survey everything from a great distance. The distances covered refer also to temporal distances. And just like the main protagonist in *Ambra*, the narrator is able to bring seemingly disparate times to life in the present: "I zaraz odkrywam inną rzecz—że potrafię patrzeć także poprzez czas, że tak samo jak zmieniam punkt widzenia w przestrzeni, mogę go zmieniać także w czasie, jakbym było strzałką na ekranie komputera, która jednak porusza się sama z siebie albo po prostu nie wie nic o istnieniu poruszającej nią dłoni" (*Dom* 8). ["Then I discovered that I could see through time as well, and that just as I could change my point of view in space, so I could change it in time too. I was like the cursor on a computer screen navigating of its own accord, or at least oblivious of the hand that is moving it" (*House* 1–2).]

As pure sight, the I-narrator is unbounded by space and time—free to inhabit multiple identities.

The radically defocalized perspective applies also to the category of gender, and it expresses a thorough critique of heteronormativity throughout the ages. The language itself as well as narrative perspective and plot implement this gender critique. Using the grammatical properties of Polish as well as stereotyping that is embedded in the lexicon, Tokarczuk conveys how deeply gendered language is. As some scholars have noted, the English translation insufficiently conveys this critique (Kołodziejczyk, "Uncanny"; Paleczek).[25] Comparing the

[25] Feminist aspects of the novel are for example highlighted in the articles by Paulina Gąsior and Urszula Paleczek. Focusing on feminist translation, Gąsior argues that the English translation omits the novel's feminist message, most importantly by the omission of an entire chapter that focuses on gendered language (152–53). According to Gąsior, foregrounding the novel's focus on history in the paratexts further downplays the importance of gender (157). Paleczek analyzes the novel's gendered language and draws attention to difficulties in the English translation, which "omits most of Tokarczuk's challenges to the patriarchal structures of the Polish language" (48). Paleczek's article shows that entire passages are missing from the English translation, which is also true of the German translation.

original text of the above cited sections reveals, for example, that in Polish, the subject-less narrator uses the gender-neutral "it" in the formulation "I *was* like the cursor"—"jakbym *było* strzałką." Here, "było" is the first-person singular subjunctive of the verb to be and the *o* ending marks the gender of the speaking I as neutral. A masculine narrator would say "jakbym *był* strzałką" without an ending, while a female narrator would say jakbym *była* strzałką, with the feminine *a* ending. Assuming the non-identity of a subject-less being, the narrator also rejects being gendered in any way. At least within the dream described above, the narrator claims a pure, universal being unbounded in every sense of the word and open to perceive and contain every particular detail without preconceived notions.

The "pure sight, without a body" wanders from one marginalized, Other, or queer perspective to the next—giving it a voice and narrating it into existence.[26] In the next section, I analyze a particular story line from the novel and show how three different perspectives are interconnected and intertwined. The focus is on the narrator's discovery of a book and the intertwined stories of a monk from the sixteenth century and a saint from the thirteenth century.

Perspective: alternative forms of knowing

The story begins in the narrative present and the narrator's visit to the basilica in Wambierzyce (formerly Albendorf). At this famous pilgrimage site, she encounters a striking crucifix of Saint Wilgefortis (*Dom* 71-72). In the tourist shop by the church she discovers among the tourist brochures an old book, the anonymous and unpaginated biography of Kummernis of Schonau

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[26] Anzaldúa describes the borderland as a "constant state of transition." It is inhabited by the Other and by those who are always in transit: "The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los atravesados live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the normal" (Anzaldúa 25). Similar Others inhabit the world Tokarczuk creates in *House*, and mythology and fantastic elements often emphasize their otherness.

("Kümmernis von Schonau" in the German translation), known also as St. Wilgefortis. As a book within a book, this biography is presented to the reader in its entirety.

Together with the narrator, the reader learns of the unusual woman's life and suffering: After her mother dies, Kümmernis grows up in a convent while her father, Baron Schonau, is crusading through Europe. Kümmernis finds fulfillment in devoting her life to God and is prepared to take her vows. However, her father returns and, seeing that his daughter has turned into a beautiful young woman, arranges her marriage to a fellow knight. Kümmernis refuses, and her enraged father locks her in a cell. She does not relent and desperately prays to God to save her. Her prayers are answered when Kümmernis grows a beard that makes her unattractive as a wife. Baron Schonau tries to punish his daughter further, but seeing that it has no effect on her, he kills her. To her father's dismay, many Christians see her as a martyr and revere her. While Kümmernis's story is focalized through her, additional information and commentary seems to have been added to the biography.

This biography poses a problem for the narrator of *House*: who was the author of this hagiography and how could they have known so much about her? To answer this question, the narrative perspective changes, and several episodes that are dispersed throughout the novel, tell the story of Paschalis. Paschalis is a young monk, who lived several centuries after Kümmernis, presumably in the early to mid-sixteenth century. He falls very ill after delivering some goods to a convent, and he ends up staying with the nuns. He feels deeply connected to the women and, even though men are strictly forbidden from living there, manages to come to an agreement with the Reverend Mother: he can stay if he agrees to write down the story of Kümmernis. He painstakingly reconstructs Kümmernis's life and thereby also his own. He realizes that he feels tormented and trapped inside his male body and desires nothing more than to be a woman.

From an embodied transgender perspective, Paschalis tells the story of a woman who has crossed the boundaries of gender to escape her socially prescribed role. He explores his own pain to find the right narrative, and he gradually blends his own increasingly felt female identity with that of the saint. Upon reading his account, the Reverend Mother admiringly asks how Paschalis knew all those things, and he thinks:

> Skąd wiedział? Nie wiedział skąd wie. Taka wiedza bierze się spod zamkniętych powiek, z modlitwy, ze snu, z patrzenia wokół, zewsząd. Może w ten sposób przemawiała do niego sama święta, może obrazy z jej życia rodziły się gdzieś między wierszami jej pism. Wydawało mu się, że nie tylko będzie ważne, gdy napisze, jak było, nazwie tę całą konfigurację zdarzeń i czynów. Że równie ważne, a może nawet ważniejsze będzie pozostawienie miejsca i przestrzeni na to, czego nie było, co nigdy się nie zdarzyło, a co się tylko mogło zdarzyć—wystarczy, że zostało wyobrażone. (*Dom* 157–158)
>
> [How did he know it? He did not know how. Such knowledge comes from under closed eyelids, from prayers, from dreams, from looking at the world around you, from everywhere. Maybe the saint herself was speaking to him, maybe the scenes from her life originated among the verses of her writings. (*House* 116) (N.b. the remainder of the paragraph is omitted in the official translation)]
>
> [He had the feeling that it will not only be of importance to write down, how it really was and to name this whole configuration of events and deeds. It will be just as important, or perhaps even more important, to leave room for that which wasn't, for that which had not happened or only might have happened—it was enough that it had been imagined. (my trans.)]

In the story of Paschalis and Kümmernis, imagination is needed to access and recover a different version of history. Paschalis must use his imagination in order to tell Kümmernis's true story, but the narrator herself must also use her imagination to understand how Paschalis knew what he knew. To do so, she assumes her subject-less position and recreates history. This history is told simultaneously from above and below, alternative forms of knowing are acknowledged, and gaps and breaks remain open for alternative and flexible interpretations. As Elżbieta Wiącek has shown, with this strategy the novel reflects the postmodern condition and makes clear that there is no form of privileged knowledge (143).

Through this and other plot lines, *House* creates a space in which a specific place and particular moment become an opportunity to explore other times and places that require multiple border crossings and imaginative transgressions. Thus, universally relatable questions (e.g., gender identity) are made visible through their connection to the particular. Boundaries are transformed into zones of contact across different time periods, and they are exemplified by the narrator's dissolution into a boundless being—albeit only in her dreams. The narrator's defocalized being puts her into temporary and flexible affiliations, thereby fostering a cosmopolitan imagination. The novel's title itself also provides an important point of orientation for this interpretation: the house of day is the space of the particular, the visible and tangible home that corresponds to lived reality. The house of night, by contrast, is the space of dreams and visions, and these are universally relatable and similar in people throughout the world, as the narrator learns by sharing her own dreams on the Internet. *House of Day, House of Night* thus combines the particular with the universal and creates a third home that can house the cosmopolitan imagination.

Discourses of Border Poetics

This discussion has shown that *The Tin Drum*, *Ambra*, and *House of Day, House of Night* use supernatural elements to express the mobility and ambiguity of a broad range of border experiences. The fantastic and its related modes of expression produce points of view and voices that bring locally lived border experiences into a framework of universally conceived human border experiences. Magical elements both serve to highlight and help transgress the specificity of experience. Such narratives describe the movement across the boundaries between dream and reality, life and death, or social and natural worlds. This mobility does not dislocate the subject but rather relocates it in a newly created space formed by the cosmopolitan imagination.

The magical realist mode, as Zamora and Faris have argued, effectuates "the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction." They continue that the "plurality of worlds" that is made possible by fantastic elements often places the texts themselves "on liminal territory between or among those worlds—in phenomenal and spiritual regions where transformation, metamorphosis, dissolution are common, where magic is a branch of naturalism, or pragmatism" (6). These texts are not detached from reality but rather help imagine alternative versions in which existing boundaries and spaces are transformed into sites of interaction and exchange. In this understanding, magical realism can be understood to negotiate "[…] between these normative oppositions and alternative structures with which they propose to destabilize and/or displace them" (Zamora and Faris 6).

While they rattle the very foundations of what Seyhan terms "officially sanctioned" (31) discourses, the texts discussed here also generate universally relevant cosmopolitan spaces out of the historical and the present conditions of the German-Polish borderland. Binaries such as dream and reality, life and death, and social and natural world are creatively negotiated and

temporarily suspended. It is a testing ground, a space of transdifference, in which to train the cosmopolitan imagination. This new space remains flexible and fluid (just like the subjects that inhabit it) and it does not insist on its own completeness. As Gloria Anzaldúa has expressed in her concept of the “third country,” “[a] borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa, 25). Its transitory nature is also always a question of perspective—a perspective that can be claimed.

Chapter 5

Performance: Remapping the German-Polish Borderland

That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are the traits of the frontier.

(Frederick Jackson Turner,
"The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1893, 226-227.)

Prussia of the mid-eighteenth century exuded a frontier spirit that was not unlike that of the American West, as historian Frederick Jackson Turner described it in the early twentieth century. In his book *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, historian David Blackbourn provides insights into the history that in the late 1740s gave rise to the Prussian variant of this frontier spirit. According to Blackbourn's study, "agricultural improvement and internal colonisation" (33) under King Frederick II (Frederick the Great) made new lands habitable, and a "[narrative] of endurance" (67) was to draw settlers to these lands.

Blackbourn demonstrates that the emergence of the Prussian frontier came about in part due to Frederick the Great's efforts to modernize his state. One of the measures taken to achieve this goal was to significantly expand on previous attempts to cultivate marshlands, including those around the Oder, Neisse, Netze, and Warthe Rivers. Advances in map-making, mechanics, land surveying, and agriculture aided in the endeavor. After the so-called Oderbruch (the marshes around the Oder River) had been made arable by the mid 1750s, the Warthebruch between Landsberg (today Gorzów Wielkopolski) and Küstrin (Kostrzyn) was reclaimed by the early 1780s. Ditches, dams, and dykes were built, rivers regulated, and swamps dried to make

these marshlands suitable for farming. In order to attract new settlers to these and other areas, recruitment and promotion focused on “advertising Prussia as a promised land for hardworking immigrants” (51). Descriptions of previously scarcely populated Prussian lands drew on images of conquest and exotic wilderness, and this aided in the creation of a kind of Prussian frontier narrative that featured “hardships and pioneer myths” (50). The colonists who settled in the Warthebruch came from many different areas of Germany and beyond (51). They built homes, made the land productive, planted crops, and set up an infrastructure (66).

Within the newly cultivated marshlands around the Oder and Warthe Rivers, an area of settlements with a peculiar name was established. According to Andrea Böhm in the German weekly *Die Zeit*, this area, which was no larger than a few square miles and settled by about 15,000 people, was named “Neu-Amerika” (New America) by Frederick the Great (Böhm). For many colonists in the eighteenth century, North America embodied the hope for a new beginning, and the settlements were to express this hopefulness both in spirit and in name. While the colonies no longer exist today, a historic Prussian map from 1921 still displays place names such as Louisenwille, Florida, Hampshire, Pennsylvanien, Maryland, and Philadelphia in the area around the Warthebruch east of Küstrin (“Kreis Landsberg a. d. W.”). This little-known history of exploration and land reclamation served as an inspiration for a series of projects more than two hundred years later.

In 2010, a group of German and Polish artist-activists initiated a project called *Nowa Amerika*. Its goal is to reconceptualize the German-Polish border region and to create a new and, in my interpretation, more cosmopolitan landscape. *Nowa Amerika* is a fictional and utopian place, but it is anchored in the real world of the German-Polish borderland through its historical referent, as well as through specific activities that include a series of community-centered events,

artist initiatives, and institutions concerned with creating a space of interaction. *Nowa Amerika* is preceded by the smaller project *Słubfurt*—an imagined city on the Oder River that was later declared the capital of *Nowa Amerika*. These two projects are the main focus of this chapter that explores the performative aspects of border poetics.

Performing (in) the borderland

Nowa Amerika and *Słubfurt* can perhaps be best described as activist art: they are a series of participatory projects that encompass various socio-cultural activities and opportunities for civic engagement. They are occasions for transborder interaction that bring people together in different initiatives, subprojects, and events. The projects intervene in the borderland reality in ways designed to make people stumble over the everyday, alienate and provoke them, and thus force them to become aware of the space around them. The projects often establish a prominent presence in the public sphere and prod even those who are not involved or interested in their surroundings to reconsider these spaces and their history.

Nowa Amerika and *Słubfurt* aim to transform spaces of conflict and violence into inclusive spaces of cosmopolitan exchange. How these goals are articulated and the promotion and publicity that is needed to legitimize and operate these projects (both in a financial sense and in an effort to maximize community engagement), may at times appear too idealistic, didactic, and even moralizing. It is therefore also legitimate to ask whether these performances of border poetics are self-serving and whether they might even generate new kinds of exclusions. Despite such pointed critiques, the projects deserve critical attention for their creative energy, offering alternative imaginations, and for contributing to—and often initiating—important discussions about the future of Polish-German relations and borderlands more generally.

While the imaginary country *Nowa Amerika* and its capital *Słubfurt* are artistic and activist projects, I argue that they can also be regarded as performances. They are performances *in* a borderland—they stage their particular environments and make explicit the connections to the lived social, cultural, linguistic, and political realities within them. At the same time, they are also performances *of* the borderland because they find innovative ways of staging the borderland as a complex set of local and global constellations. While specific to the German-Polish context, this borderland is treated as a fluid concept: a palimpsest of different histories, cultures, and languages that also has universal resonance. The projects thus exemplify the type of "rooted cosmopolitanism" discussed earlier, and as such they not only practice a local critique of established borders, but they also strive to go beyond the context within which they are situated.

This aspiration to have a broader appeal and to integrate the particular with the universal applies to a number of other projects as well. Some examples are considered briefly at the end of this chapter, and they include the Berlin-based "Zentrum für politische Schönheit," which connects the particular history of divided Germany with the global refugee crisis, as well as the "Borderlands Foundation" in the Polish countryside in Sejny, which is invested in a Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian-Jewish dialogue but which also applies its reconciliatory work well beyond this regional context. These projects make clear that while the performance of border poetics is always related to a specific border experience, it is also a practice of world-making and worlding that goes beyond these particulars. Because these performances emerge from an

engagement with the borderland as a multivalent space, they produce a semantic openness and flexibility that also allows them to be translated into other contexts and "borderscapes."[1]

It is helpful here to recall Arjun Appadurai's notion of the imagination as social practice because the performances of border poetics seek to effectuate social change by engaging imaginatively with the actual border landscape. As in the previous instances of border poetics, the territorial border is transformed into a staging ground for more figurative border crossings. Similar to literary border narratives, the focus is on *practice* and the processual nature of borders, but unlike literary texts, performances produce a materiality that is much harder to ignore due to its prominence in the public sphere. Performances of border poetics implant signposts of the cosmopolitan imagination into the reality of the borderland, and this modified reality can be physically experienced. While these performances assume different forms with varying political agendas, they are decidedly political, and their goal is to reimagine and reshape borderlands into pluralist communal spaces. To create such spaces, they must also break down the boundary between "performer" and "spectator," much like in a Brechtian Lehrstück. The goal is to produce engaged networks of people that will implement and sustain the cosmopolitan vision of these projects locally as well as transfer it into other contexts.

A discussion of *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* in the context of performance, and especially the performative aspects of border poetics, is productive not only because these projects

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[1] Chiara Brambilla has pointed out the problematic notion of landscape in this context. However, I mean it here as shorthand and not necessarily in a territorial way. Brambilla uses the term "borderscapes" to avoid the ambiguous and territorial connotations that "landscape" invokes. She refers to Appadurai's notion of scapes, and her focus is on shaping the landscape to reconstitute it as something new. Due to the immediate impact on the material and symbolic composition of the borderland, performances of border poetics can also be viewed within the context of "borderscaping." The term suggests a process that is analogous to landscaping, i.e., the physical modification of a particular space, but it draws attention to the special condition of the borderland.

instantaneously address the particular and the universal, but also because they integrate the figurative and the real by approaching the world simultaneously from a constructivist and a realist perspective: On the one hand, the creators of these projects argue in *Nowa Amerika: Ein Land dazwischen* that reality is always constructed and that *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* function as alternative constructions of reality ("Wirklichkeitskonstruktion") (Kurzwelly et al. 15). In this re-imagined reality, borders do not exist. However, these cosmopolitan constructions are also based in and determined by the borderland's real conditions. Even though they are fictions, the projects are action-focused and process-oriented and rely on real places and locations as well as on the participation of people who actually inhabit the borderland space. These alternative versions of world are "staged" in different public arenas (albeit not typically in a traditional theater setting). They can therefore also be described as reality *performances*.

My analysis of *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* focuses on how their performances of border poetics destabilize the notion of "German" and "Polish" and merge the concepts into a new space that aspires to go beyond national categories. Performance has been widely discussed, and in the context of border poetics, I will focus on three aspects in particular: First, performance is understood in the sense of a theater performance and the staging of a fictional world. Second, the concept helps illuminate the specific relationship between reality and fiction, which includes the relationship between performer and audience and the porous boundary between them. Third, with regard to the world-making capacity of border poetics, performance is also considered in relation to linguistic utterances that can shape reality in concrete ways.

Słubfurt and *Nowa Amerika*

Nowa Amerika and *Słubfurt* are fictions anchored in a particular reality. But what is this reality within which to understand these two imaginary places? *Słubfurt* combines the names of Słubice

and Frankfurt (Oder), two towns located across from one another on the Oder River, about 60 miles east of Berlin. Shaped by the complicated and painful German-Polish history, they were therefore long separated politically and mentally. Until the end of the Second World War, the two towns were one in the city of Frankfurt (Oder). In 1945, when the Oder and Neisse Rivers became the new German-Polish border, Frankfurt was divided, and the part on the right riverbank was integrated into the Polish state and renamed Słubice. Even after East Germany recognized the German-Polish border in 1950, and despite the rhetoric of brotherhood that presumably united the Eastern Bloc, the cities remained divided, and there was little contact between their inhabitants. After the end of communism, this difficult legacy was not easy to overcome.[2]

Today Słubice has about 18,000 inhabitants, while Frankfurt (Oder) is considerably larger with a population of about 58,000. A bridge that spans some 820 feet connects the two towns. For six decades, i.e., throughout the communist period and before Poland joined the European Union, the bridge served as an important border crossing point, with the national border running through the middle of the Oder River below. After Poland's accession to the Schengen zone in 2007, the border checkpoints were removed, and today pedestrians and motorists cross freely between the German and Polish sides. Recent years have seen various

[2] Several scholars have examined the history of these two towns and this particular border region. For more on the immediate postwar history of the city, see Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast and Katarzyna Stokłosa's study *Geteilte Städte an Oder und Neiße.* For a historical view of cross-border cooperation, and a closer examination of the changes in the relationship after 1972, when the border between the GDR and Poland was opened, see Elżbieta Opiłowska's article "'The Miracle on the Oder'."

attempts of collaboration on the municipal and administrative levels.[3] However, with the exception of some "regional enthusiasts" (Kinder and Roos)[4] or university students who live and study comfortably in what they perceive as one urban space, the cities are still separate entities, not only politically and administratively, but also culturally and socially.[5]

In light of this history of division, the *Słubfurt* project was designed to bring the cities and their inhabitants closer together and create new and shared spaces. *Słubfurt* (the first of the two projects) was initially conceived by artist-activist ("Aktionskünstler") Michael Kurzwelly, and *Nowa Amerika* was initiated by Kurzwelly and Szczecin artist Andrzej Lazowski.

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[3] For further information, see the website of the Frankfurt-Słubicer Kooperationszentum. While many attempts to connect the cities have failed, there have been some successes. These include a cross-border bus connection that started in 2012 and the joining of the district heating networks in 2014 (Nowak). An article in the publication of the Berlin rider's association (Fahrgastverband IGEB) provides more details ("Endlich"). Another article in the same publication describes the resistance to connecting the cities by public transport (Höfer). Such examples illustrate the deep divisions that have long separated the border cities and the long time it has taken to cooperate even in an area that is as basic as public transportation.

[4] Sebastian Kinder and Nikolaus Roos highlight the importance of so-called "regional enthusiasts" for the development of a regional identity and the positive reimagination of the borderlands. They define regional enthusiasts as people who transgress borders mentally and physically and aim to decrease their significance. They engage ambivalences critically, shape reality, and animate others to rethink their relationship to the region.The authors apply this category also to Kurzwelly and those involved in *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt*.

[5] The academic communities in Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice are major forces in fostering a closer German-Polish cooperation by centering their scholarly activities on borders and borderlands as socially, economically, and politically inflected spaces. Frankfurt-Oder's European University Viadrina itself embodies a history of multiple border-crossings, as its website explains. It was established in 1506 as Universitas Francofurtensis but had to close in 1811 due to competition from Berlin. The university's entire inventory and some of its scholars moved to the Leopoldina University in Breslau (today Wrocław). In 1991, the university in Frankfurt (Oder) reopened ("Universitas"). Yet, as ethnologist Ulf Matthiesen describes in a 2002 interview with Uwe Rada, the Viadrina had reappeared in the city "like a UFO" and has had a hard time finding its place in the city. The Collegium Polonicum, a cross-border academic and cultural institution, found itself in a similar situation (Matthiesen). Inaugurated in 1998, it is the joint effort of the Viadrina University and the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. It is located in Słubice, in a newly built structure that sits right on the Oder River. The University as well as the Collegium have in recent years established many centers, research areas, and course offerings that deal with various borders and border crossings, for example, the Center for Interdisciplinary Polish Studies (ZIP), the research focus on "B|Orders in Motion," or "trialog," a German-Polish-Russian project. For more on the "strangeness" of the university, see also a report broadcast on *Deutschlandradio* (van Laak).

Kurzwelly, whose vita on his homepage (http://arttrans.de) reads like that of a border-crosser, is still a key figure in the projects and fundamentally shapes many of their activities. He was born in West Germany in 1963. In an interview he explains that his desire to transcend boundaries stemmed from his time as a student in France. Here he felt embarrassment and guilt about Germany's historical legacy and developed a sense of ethical responsibility to make a positive contribution to the world. After spending several years in France, he reluctantly returned to Germany and studied painting. In 1990, he moved to Poznań, Poland, where he founded the "Międzynarodowe Centrum Sztuki" (International Arts Center). In 1998, the art association "Frankfurter Kunstverein" invited Kurzwelly to do a larger project in Frankfurt (Oder), and he relocated to the city (Kurzwelly "Słubfurt e.V.").

Living in Frankfurt (Oder) inspired Kurzwelly to develop the idea of "Słubfurt," which became the registered society ("eingetragener Verein") Słubfurt e.V. in 2000. Through this work, Kurzwelly became invested in the community, and in 2004 he also assumed a position as lecturer at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). Ten years after the official founding of *Słubfurt*, the project had expanded significantly, and, as Andrea Böhm writes, in 2010 a related project with the name *Nowa Amerika* was initiated at the suggestion of Kurzwelly's friends from Szczecin. The maps and guidebooks published by Słubfurt e.V. show that the imagined country stretches along the entire length of the German-Polish border and includes an unspecified and fluid space east and west of the border. *Słubfurt* was declared the capital of *Nowa Amerika*.

Kurzwelly explains that the goal of these two projects was not to build a bridge between Germany and Poland but rather to overcome this binary and merge two seemingly distinct spaces

into a new and shared "post-German" and "post-Polish" space.[6] As a hybridization of two place names, the name *Słubfurt* itself exemplifies this underlying philosophy. Similarly, the name *Nowa Amerika* combines the Polish word "nowa" (*new*) with the German spelling of America. In both cases, the combination of two names represents the merging of German and Polish spaces into new and postnational social spaces and contact zones. The subtitle of the official *Nowa Amerika* guidebook—*Land dazwischen/kraj pomiędzy*—highlights this point by defining the new country as a contact zone—a "country in-between" (Fig. 1).

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[6] Kurzwelly refers to the notion of "post-German" and "post-Polish" in the *Nowa Amerika* guidebook (Kurzwelly et al. 5) and in a 2012 interview with the radio station "Deutschlandfunk" (Kurzwelly, "Die Realität"). Elsewhere Kurzwelly has noted that "*Słubfurt* is a city at a border between two countries that no longer exist" ("Słubfurt ist eine Stadt an der Grenze zweier Länder, die es nicht mehr gibt."). Here he renders the region along the "former" German-Polish border a permanent borderland, but he also redefines this borderland as a fluid and non-binary space ("Słubfurt e.V.").

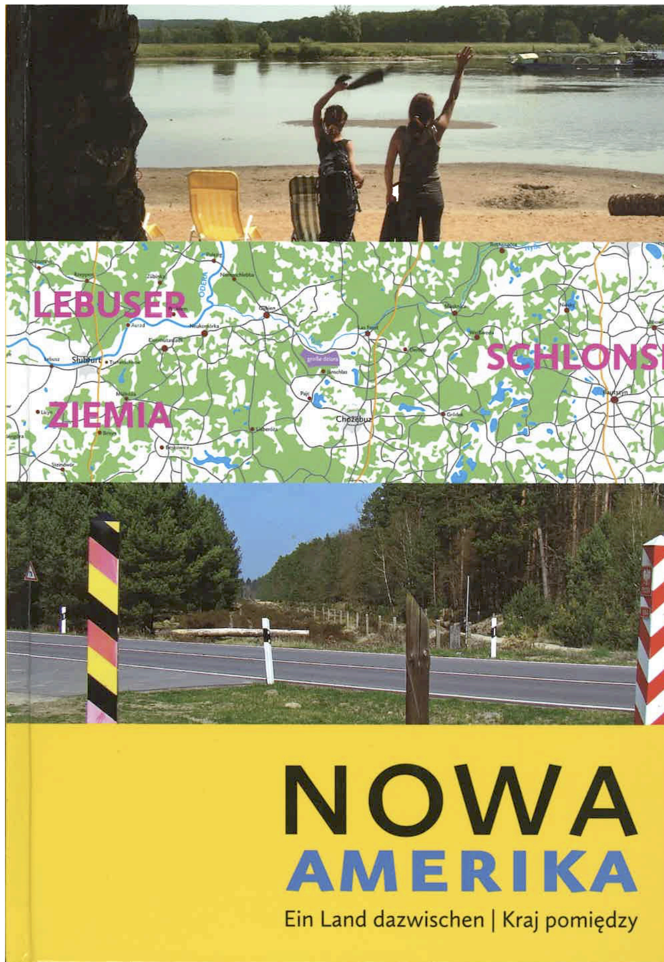

Figure 1. Cover of the Nowa Amerika guide book, printed edition and pdf file. *Nowa Amerika: Ein Land dazwischen/Kraj pomiędzy*, Słubfurt e.V., 2014. www.nowa-amerika.eu/serwice/przewodniki-guides.

As in-between spaces, *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* aim to provide various new and expanded options for identification, affiliation, and participation.[7] This goal has resulted in some creative collaborative projects, which have also earned the region wider media attention on both sides of the Oder River (Adrian; Böhm; Galka; Tomala). Thus, since its founding, *Słubfurt* has evolved into an elaborate performance of an alternate reality. Furthermore, and as the guidebook

[7] See my discussion in Chapter 2 of in-betweenness as a positive notion that can hold an excess of meaning and flexible identification options.

explains, *Słubfurt* is closely connected not only to *Nowa Amerika* but is also the equivalent of the "real" American capital, Washington, D.C. (Kurzwelly et al. 59). In many ways, *Nowa Amerika* is an expansion of *Słubfurt*, and many of the initiatives one can now find throughout the "country" had their beginnings in *Słubfurt*.

When *Nowa Amerika* was founded, the group explicitly referred to the eighteenth-century idea of "Neu-Amerika" as a source of inspiration to create a postnational borderland. Yet the projects tend to display a rather selective relationship to this history—a point I return to in the conclusion of this analysis. The following sections demonstrate how the projects stage their interventions in the borderland reality through the imagination and how they translate this imagination into real, material forms. These translations or transfers occur in three main ways: first, through different forms of mapping and remapping; second, through experimentation with language; and third, through the establishment of new institutions and structures modeled on those found in the "real" world. *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* may be imagined places, but they are anchored in the reality of the borderland, and they produce imagined worlds that spill back over into this reality and expose its citizens to the world at large in various ways.

Maps, walls, and borders

All towns and places in *Nowa Amerika* have a very specific location that can be found on a series of specially created maps and pamphlets as well as in the *Słubfurt: city guide/przewodnik miejski/stadtführer* (2010) and the guidebook *Nowa Amerika: Ein Land dazwischen/Kraj*

pomiędzy (2016).[8] To get a sense of the country's geography, one needs to begin by imagining a conventional map of Germany and Poland. *Nowa Amerika* stretches along the entire length of the Oder and Neisse Rivers. These rivers are "the former German-Polish border," and they are the country's "backbone" ("Rückgrat") (Kurzwelly et al. 17). This backbone is the only non-negotiable (albeit fluid) part of the country's geography; all other boundaries are flexible, and, according to the guide book, the country extends like an "amoeba" (sometimes even including the "provinces" Berlin and Poznań) (16).

However, *Nowa Amerika* is not only fluid and flexible in its expanse, its creators have also given up on the south-north orientation of the Oder and Neisse Rivers: the conventional map has been turned by 45 degrees until the Baltic Sea is alternately located in the western or the eastern part of the country and the normally southern-most tip where Poland, the Czech Republic, and Germany meet, can instead be found in the country's eastern- or western-most corner. In *Nowa Amerika*, Oder and Neisse thus flow from east to west (or from west to east, depending on which map one consults) (Fig. 2). Yet, this disturbance of the conventional order of things does not mean that borders have been dissolved in *Nowa Amerika*.

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[8] The *Nowa Amerika* guidebook comprises over 400 pages and is heavily illustrated with detailed maps and color photos. It provides information about many different smaller and larger towns and villages in *Nowa Amerika* and introduces the reader to the region's shared German and Polish history, albeit largely omitting difficult aspects of this past. The guidebook is available for free from the association (a donation is requested) or it can be downloaded as a pdf file directly from the association's website: www.nowa-amerika.eu.

Figure 2. A map of "Szczettinstan," one of the regions of Nowa Amerika. *Nowa Amerika: Ein Land dazwischen/Kraj pomiędzy*, Słubfurt e.V., 2014, pp. 56-57. www.nowa-amerika.eu/serwice/przewodniki-guides.

In one *Słubfurt* publication, Kurzwelly explains that the city was mapped following set theory: looking at a map of Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice, two equally sized circles were drawn around each city, which represented Germany and Poland, respectively. Where the two circles met, a compass was placed and a third circle was drawn that contained equal parts of the previously delineated spaces (Fig. 3). This transborder space of the third circle is the city of Słubfurt (Kurzwelly, "smacznego" 26). The description poignantly illustrates that borders are not in fact dissolved. Rather, new borders are drawn, and new contact zones are created in the process. A map of *Słubfurt* (10–11) shows that even the space conceptualized as a transborder

space is enclosed in a circle and hence defined by a new border. Kurzwelly is well aware of the double-nature of borders as spaces of inclusion and exclusion. He regards it as an intrinsic law of space ("immanentes Raumgesetz") that any space, in order to be perceived as such, requires an inside and an outside (Kurzwelly, "Słubfurt e.V.").The key for these projects, however, is that the border is permeable and conducive to active exchange and permanent reevaluation.

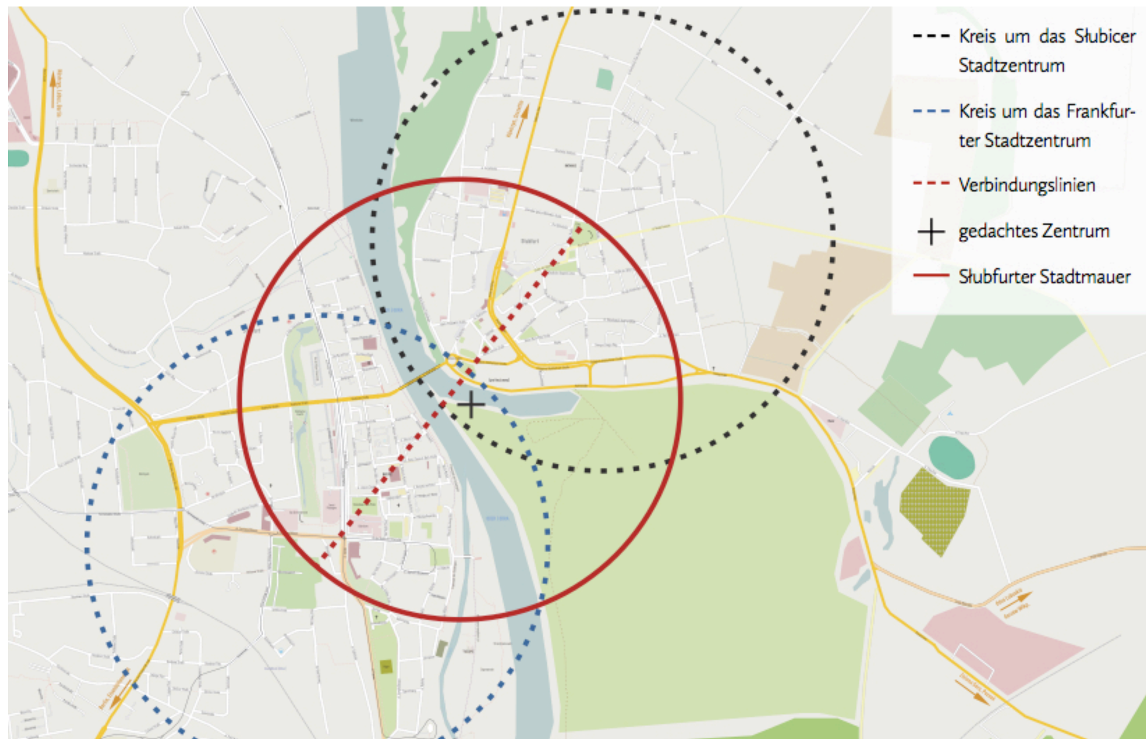

Figure 3. Map of the transborder city *Słubfurt*. *Nowa Amerika: Ein Land dazwischen/Kraj pomiędzy*, Słubfurt e.V., 2014, p. 319. www.nowa-amerika.eu/serwice/przewodniki-guides.

Słubfurt's symbolic city wall underscores this principle of openness (Fig. 4). The *Słubfurt* website explains the wall's history: A first part was constructed in *Słub* in 2004 and a second one in *Furt* in 2007. Both parts form a kind of parenthesis ("Klammer") around the city (Słubfurt e.V.). The wall can be regarded as an ironic comment on fortifications, and its function is the opposite of what is typically expected of a wall. Instead of protection against outsiders, the

Słubfurt city wall is intended to communicate the openness of the imagined city. The wall thus represents *Słubfurt's* welcoming spirit, while at the same time making it visible as a distinct space so that those interested can, at least in theory, claim participation in it.

Figure 4. Children playing at the Słubfurt city wall. *Nowa Amerika: Ein Land dazwischen/Kraj pomiędzy*, Słubfurt e.V., 2014, p. 325. www.nowa-amerika.eu/serwice/przewodniki-guides.

The city wall plays with the idea of permeability/non-permeability in concrete ways. On the one hand, it is made of brick and is thus solid and impermeable. On the other hand, it is a low structure only a few meters long, and thus a visitor can easily jump over it, go around it, or use it as a bench on a walk through town. Most importantly, the wall is clearly visible. Because its purpose is not immediately evident, it may irritate a viewer into asking questions and trying to find out more. Getting additional information requires effort: the unsuspecting visitor must find and read a plaque in order to learn that the structure is the "Słubfurt City Wall/Mur Miejski

Słubfurtu/Słubfurter Stadtmauer," and that it was created by Michael Kurzwelly.[9] However, the plaque reveals nothing about the structure's meaning and intentions, what *Słubfurt* or who Kurzwelly is, and further investigation is needed.

In another playful twist, visitors who do invest the time to learn more and who find the information provided online will see that Słubfurters are encouraged to purchase their own piece of the wall for placement in their living room or garden (Kurzwelly, "Słubfurt City Wall II"). And, as the website assures, since the very notion of the Słubfurter is an inclusive and cosmopolitan one, anyone, anywhere in the world, can become a Słubfurter and purchase a piece of the wall. However, here the illusion remains an illusion, and the website provides no actual purchasing option for the product.[10]

Institutions, structures, symbols

As these examples show, *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* are elaborate reality constructions. They are accompanied by a system of material objects (such as the city wall, guidebooks, and maps) but also by institutions and their symbols. Such institutions include a tourism office that provides Słubfurt walking tours, a radio station, and a "daily newspaper" ("Tageszeitung"), which is not, in fact, published daily. There is also a "Nowa Amerika Uniwersytät" (located in the Collegium Polonicum in Słubice), which holds classes devoted to developing new projects. The *Słubfurt*

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[9] Additional photos of the city wall and further details on the project can be found in various sources, e.g., an article by Andreas Clasen, as well as the "Słubfurt: city guide" and "smacznego," both edited by Kurzwelly.

[10] Another website explains: "Słubfurter ist jeder, der sich als Słubfurter fühlt, egal wo er oder sie auf dieser Welt wohnen. Deshalb sind Sie auf jeden Fall mauerberechtigt. Rufen Sie uns an!" ["Everyone who feels like a Słubfurter is a Słubfurter, no matter where he or she resides in this world. You are therefore most certainly entitled to a piece of the wall. Call us!"] ("Historiea").

city guide informs that a "degree in Słubfurtology from the Department of Social Manipulation is especially in vogue" (Kurzwelly, *Słubfurt: city guide* 29).

There are also institutions and symbols that normally operate on a nation-state level. One example is *Nowa Amerika's* flag (Fig. 5), which combines the black, red, and gold colors of the German national flag with the white and red colors of the Polish national flag. The blue triangle symbolizes the Baltic Sea. There is a wavy blue line that emerges from the triangle and divides the flag in two. This line represents the country's backbone—the border rivers Oder and Neisse. The four golden stars that are distributed on either side along the blue line symbolize *Nowa Amerika*'s four regions: Szczettinstan, Terra Incognita, Lebuser Ziemia, and Schlonsk.

Figure 5. Two Nowa Amerikans hold up the Nowa Amerika flag. The image is added as postcard to the printed Nowa Amerika guide and included as unpaginated image in the online pdf-version. *Nowa Amerika: Ein Land dazwischen/Kraj pomiędzy*, Słubfurt e.V., 2014. www.nowa-amerika.eu/serwice/przewodniki-guides.

Słubfurt also has its own set of symbols and institutions. The city's coat of arms contains a rooster, which is both the symbol of Słubice and Frankfurt (Oder). Belonging to the city can be claimed easily by obtaining a *Słubfurt* ID card in a local copy shop or by simply printing it out at home. One can also become a community member in practice, by participating in *Słubfurt*'s community-oriented events. This focus on community is reflected in *Słubfurt*'s "banking system." The currency at the "ZeitBankCzasu" (literally a "time-bank of time") is hours ("Studzina"—a combination of German "Stunde" and Polish "godzina") and minutes ("Minutyn"). The bank gives volunteers the opportunity to exchange a variety of services, such as cleaning, shopping for the elderly, construction, or gardening. In early 2015 the project's cosmopolitan principle was made clear when the "ZeitBankCzasu" reached out to asylum seekers in an effort to make them feel included in German society. Students from Viadrina University approached a restaurant owner from Damascus, who had been waiting for the approval of his asylum request and who was not allowed to work until then. By cooking for a *Słubfurt* event he earned the gratitude of the guests, and in exchange for his time he received German language lessons (Weiß).

Already prior to the establishment of the ZeitBankCzasu, Słubfurters played with the idea of developing a currency and were asking themselves what the purpose and value of such a currency would be. As detailed in an interview with Ludewig, artist Roland Schefferski designed the "1 Słubfurter" coin in 2005. He minted and distributed 2000 pieces, each marked with the inscription "to dotyczy ciebie—das betrifft dich" ("this concerns you"). Rather than having a monetary exchange value, this coin was to make people think about their responsibility towards the world around them, what Schefferski called an "intervention" (Schefferski). Currently, several types of coins are in circulation in the *Słubfurt*/*Nowa Amerika* space. Starting around

2011, one frequently finds reference to a currency called “Leubuzzi,” named after a West Slavic tribe that originally settled this area. This coin also bears the “to dotyczy ciebie—das betrifft dich” slogan on one side, and either the word *Słubfurt* or *Nowa Amerika* and the year imprinted on the back. People have also been asked to help develop the currency’s paper bills (“Kulturstadt”). Clearly, *Słubfurt*’s main currency is participation and social engagement in the community. This community is created through highly symbolic structures and institutions that provide a fictional institutional framework for the many events, festivals, and initiatives.

Language and communication

Language provides a similar structure and symbolic system to the *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* projects. Language is used to create new realities, and it is a field of experimentation and play. According to J. L. Austen’s speech act theory, language can create new realities when persons with authority pronounce something to be true (e.g., a civil servant proclaiming two people married creates a new reality in which the two people have been married). Similar processes also work in the fictional realm of *Nowa Amerika*. They contribute to world-making, and the fiction that is established in and through language also seeps into the real world.

An example for this seepage is in the city’s own creation myth: In the various accounts of *Słubfurt*’s history, one can almost inevitably find the information that *Słubfurt* was not only founded in 1999, but that it was also entered into the registry of European City Names (“Register der Europäischen Städtenamen [RES]”) in 2000. Yet my research was unable to confirm the existence of such a registry beyond the boundaries of the *Słubfurt* project. Searches for the term in library catalogues and online yield only results that lead back to the project itself. It seems that here, too, the project has gone beyond itself and created the fiction of an external institution for

legitimization and credibility. While most of these references are within the project's own publications, there has been some transfer of this fictional information into the real world.[11]

Language also plays an important role in other respects. As these projects aim to build bridges and create new transborder spaces and communities, language is both a means of communication and a system of symbols that transports a political message. To facilitate communication and transmit information, the projects use languages in their standard, unmodified forms. This means that all published materials are at least bilingual in Polish and in German, and increasingly English is added as a third language. The addition of English may reflect the desire to be more inclusive (for example, to newly arrived migrants) and it also accounts for the status of English as *lingua franca* that can often ease communication between Germans and Poles and compensate for the lack in mutual language proficiency.

In addition to using multiple languages for communication, language is also modified: hybridized words are created and new words are invented. Beyond the geographical names already mentioned, the official *Nowa Amerika* guide, the different maps and brochures, as well as the website, feature many hybridized place names. These names are created using two strategies: combination and/or translation. In the first instance, German and Polish place names are morphed into new words. In the second instance, translation and combination are used at the same time: a word or word fragment of a German place name for which no Polish equivalent exists is removed and reinserted back into the place name as a literal translation.

The first category (German-Polish merged place names) includes names such as "Ostbałtyk" (the new name for the Baltic Sea that is a combination of German *Ostsee* and Polish

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[11] Virtually all *Słubfurt* publications mention this "fact," but one can also find it repeated in other sources ("1. Preis"; Rundschau).

Bałtyk) or the city names "New Szczettin" (German *Stettin* and Polish *Szczecin*) and "Küstrzyn" (*Küstrin* and *Kostrzyn*), or the border rivers Oder/Odra and Neisse/Nysa, which become the "Odera" and the "Nyßa." The second category produces slightly different hybrid designations that consist of the literal translation of a German word contained in a place name, and it produces results that are often humorous, as these examples show: In the case of the German town Eisenhüttenstadt, the word *Hütte* is isolated and translated into Polish *huta* (both meaning *foundry* in English) to form the new name "Eisenhutastadt." Following this logic, more humorous creations also emerge when the name of Oderwitz is subjected to a partial literal translation of the suffix *–witz*. This suffix is the Germanized form of a Slavic suffix (Polish *-owice*) common in place names and similar to the suffix –town in English. However, when it appears as a noun, German "Witz" also means *joke*. When the suffix "witz" in Oderwitz is taken literally and translated into Polish *żart* (engl. *joke*), it creates the new name of "Oderażart," which would translate to *Oderjoke* in English.

In addition to the merged place names and the literal translations, there are also hybrids to which additional referents have been added. "New Szczettin," for example, is a merger of the German name Stettin and Polish Szczecin. The adjective "new" is added to express its similarity to the port city New York in the "old America" (Kurzwelly et al. 59). In *Nowa Amerika* some place names that had existed under Frederick II's reign, and which then disappeared after 1945, were also revived. Thus, the map of *Nowa Amerika* shows towns like "Hampshire," "Sumatra," and "New Yorck" (Kurzwelly et al. 10–11).

The strategy of hybridizing German and Polish words is also applied to non-geographical names, for example, on the *Słubfurt* and *Nowa Amerika* websites. The *Słubfurt* website has information categories such as "Newsy" (with the Polish plural –y ending added to English

news), "Informacjonen" (a merger of German *Informationen* and Polish *informacje*) and "Partner MiastaStädte," that leads the visitor to more information about *Słubfurt's* partner cities (Słubfurt). The projects' related websites use these and similar hybrid names, and those who are not versed in either German or Polish can easily guess the names' meaning. By contrast, to be in on the "joke" of a place name such as "Oderżart," requires knowledge of both German and Polish.

The examples discussed here show that the use of language has different and, at times, contradictory functions in the project. On the one hand, it is a project-specific language that builds a community and draws attention to difference (and at times it creates new distinctions). It also uses language to overcome difference through the invention of new words. On the other hand, the language can also alienate audiences in positive as well as in negative ways. People might either be turned away from the project or feel motivated to become involved and learn the "other" language, or at least to pay more attention to it. Although not everyone might find this playful use of the language appealing or feel included, in general the examples above do not produce an incomprehensible new idiom. This use of the language therefore stands in contrast to the entirely new language that the project creators also invented: Słubfurtisch.

Słubfurtisch grew out of the experiments described above. In my view, this new language runs the danger of creating more exclusions. In a videoblog published on *tagesschau.de*, Kurzwelly explains this new language in Słubfurtisch to journalist Ulrich Adrian: "Der echte Słubfurtczyk mówi in beiden języków gleichzeitig und skaka von der einen Sprache in die drugie język. Już nie wie w którym Sprache eigentlich sprecha" [The Polish-German mix translates to "The real Słubfurter speaks in both languages at the same time and jumps from one language into the other language. He doesn't know which language he is speaking in"] (Adrian). Rather than

merging German and Polish lexemes into new words, Słubfurtisch, as observed by a member of the *Nowa America* listserv, appears to be somewhere between a pidgin language and code switching (Herder). In the videoblog, Kurzwelly represents the new language as oscillation between German and Polish and as a natural and involuntary expression of identity.

However, the artificial nature of this language stands in contrast to the natural form of expression it is meant to convey. Code switching, or any other form of language mixing as shown above, would occur naturally in speakers who are fluent in two or more languages, and it would happen in very particular situations and among speakers who are familiar with one another. It is not a new language per se but a way in which language is used. Słubfurtisch corresponds to the desire to create a new transborder and post-national space defined by hybridity and mixing; it is an expression of transdifference in which linguistic difference is both maintained and suspended. Yet, while this practice of mixing different languages and being familiar with one another would be the ultimate goal of the community that *Nowa Amerika* seeks to create, I find this particular effort unconvincing.

I acknowledge that Słubfurtisch is intended as an "exercise" for the imagination and a model of cosmopolitan space. It should therefore not be measured against what is practical and achievable. However, there are problems with the way Słubfurtisch is presented and used. Most importantly, there are relatively few speakers who are proficient in German and Polish to a degree that would make Słubfurtisch a communicative language. Słubfurtisch might therefore be perceived as elitist and condescending, and this may actually inhibit the creation of a community

of speakers. The continued use of bilingual or multilingual materials is significantly more inclusive and conducive to building the community of *Nowa Amerika*.[12]

The language is a theatrical performance, used to demonstrate the vision of a hybrid cultural situation. It is an artificial construct that makes its artificiality known and thereby runs the risk of excluding those people it aims to include, i.e., those who are unfamiliar with the other's language and culture. In so doing, it also keeps the "incompetent" audience at a distance—it stages a vision of inclusiveness that leaves most of the audience behind. It is more reminiscent of a secret code used by the project participants as an internal community building strategy, reinforcing a vision for those who are already "inside."[13] While it is intended as a symbol of inclusion, in effect it may inadvertently communicate to those on the outside that they are not competent and qualified to participate. Indeed, the construction of Słubfurtisch may have taken the language game too far and become a bordering strategy that creates new exclusions.

The Słubfurtisch language and the hybrid word-creations on the website and maps differ from one another in their underlying strategies, but they all play with language and its functions and try to radically unsettle it. And while the newly invented "Słubfurtisch" language has no communicative value, and in practice may create distance rather than proximity, it does illustrate

[12] Another more inclusive approach to language may also be the one found in the pedestrian zone "Große Scharrnstraße" on the "Furt" side of town. Here, reminders of the linguistic border between Germany and Poland are painted in white on the pavement. German-Polish word pairs provide a very basic vocabulary lesson and the passer-by can learn words such as "Lippen – usta" (lips), "Orgasmus – orgazm" (orgasm), "Gänseblümchen – stokrotka" (daisy), "Bärchen – misiaczek" (little bear), or "Nebel – mgła" (fog). I experienced this street personally during a visit, and it is also featured in Ulrich Adrian's videoblog.

[13] The *Słubfurt* city guide even refers to *Słubfurt* as a religion: "Grundsätzlich sind in Słubfurt alle Religionen vertreten. Soll doch jeder glauben, was er will. Słubfurt ist auf dem Prinzip der Wirklichkeitskonstruktion entstanden. Erst der Glaube an die Existenz unserer Stadt ließ Słubfurt Realität werden. Daher kommt unsere Stadt einer Religion gleich" ["In principle, all religions are represented in Słubfurt. Everyone should believe whatever he wants. Słubfurt has been built on the principle of reality construction. Only the belief in the existence of our city allowed Słubfurt to become a reality. Thus our city is like a religion."] ("Słubfurt: city guide" 32).

the need for a common language in which both partners are equal. It may therefore be more appropriate to think of these experiments as intentional provocations rather than practical ideas for the future. Kurzwelly, after all, admitted that having the "ł" in Słubfurt was meant to provoke German speakers who recognized the letter as foreign and intrusive and often seem unable to pronounce it correctly ("Słubfurt e.V."). By contrast, practical considerations guide the bilingual (and sometimes tri-lingual) design of the publications. They do not modify the existing languages, and yet the reader's encounter with them may alter how these languages are perceived.

In concluding the section on the use of language in these projects, I want to point out that the difficulties and shortcomings in communication between Germans and Poles are rarely a question of language skills alone and are more frequently a question of attitudes and of disagreements or misunderstandings that have an ideological, cultural, social, or historical basis. A more serious engagement with these differences, rather than the fetishization of an entirely new language, may prove more productive. It would require the dialing up of the critical element in the critical cosmopolitanism, especially with regard to the historical context of these projects.

The borderland as tabula rasa

From their very conception, *Słubfurt* and *Nowa Amerika* have been deeply anchored in a particular context. However, in many respects they are also curiously detached from any such specificity and particularity. The projects take considerable liberty with historical facts and marginalize the problematic aspects of the past in order to maintain a positive vision. This detachment renders the borderland a blank slate for which a better version of the past can be assumed that better fits the imagined present and future. The disconnect produces a cosmopolitan

vision of sorts, but it places serious limitations on the projects' border poetics because it has a limited (self-)critical approach.

In the case of *Nowa Amerika*, the selective use of the past begins with the name itself. In the guidebook and in other publications, the authors explain that in choosing *Nowa Amerika* as the name of the project, they have been inspired by Frederick the Great's "Neu-Amerika." This reference may be surprising, given that Prussian power politics under Frederick the Great and the close ties with the Russian Empire also led to the first partition of Poland in 1772. The authors are well aware of the contradiction, and while they acknowledge this fact, they elide any closer examination of the history. Instead, they insist that their reference to the Nowa Amerika guide that Prussian history is based purely on its peaceful aspects:

> Friedrich der Große hat dazu beigetragen, dass Polen in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts von der Landkarte verschwand, was klar zu verurteilen ist. Aber er hat auch neue Landstriche ohne kriegerische Handlungen gewonnen […]. Diese ungewöhnliche Geschichte hat uns dazu inspiriert, unseren neuen Raum, der den durch die ehemalige deutsch-polnische Staatsgrenze getrennten Grenzraum verbindet, Nowa Amerika zu nennen, das Land der Pioniere und Freiheitshungrigen, die einen neuen Raum bürgergesellschaftlich gemeinsam gestalten wollen und erkannt haben, dass dies unser Gelobtes Land ist. (Kurzwelly et al. 15–16)[14]

[14] Articles written about *Nowa Amerika* perpetuate the myth of a peaceful conquest of land: "Ausgerechnet der Mann, der seinem Reich einst mit Gewalt Schlesien einverleibte, erschloss in den sechziger Jahren des 18. Jahrhunderts *auf friedliche Weise* Neuland, indem er das Warthebruch trockenlegen ließ" ["Of all people, it was the same man who once violently took Silesia for his empire who in the 1860s developed new lands *peacefully* by reclaiming the Warthebruch"] (Böhm , emphasis mine).

> [Frederick the Great has contributed to Poland's disappearance from the map in the second half of the eighteenth century, and this is clearly something to be condemned. However, he also gained new lands without warfare […]. This unusual history has inspired us to name our new space, a space that connects the borderland, and which was previously divided by the German-Polish state border, Nowa Amerika. It is the land of pioneers and those who hunger for freedom; of those who want to create a new social and civil space and who have recognized that this is our Promised Land.]

The purposeful omission of certain historical details makes it not only possible to produce a thoroughly positive image of the borderland, it also elevates the project to a quasi-religious one in which *Nowa Amerika* is hailed as "Promised Land."

The idealization of the borderland is based not only on disregarding Prussia's foreign relations and expansionism alone, it also depends on romanticizing the reclamation project and disregarding any implications of settling supposedly "empty" land. Blackbourn's study shows that land claimed for "Neu-Amerika" and other regions had been far from empty, and thus the project relied on military force and considerable violence against the local population. Internal colonization was anything but a peaceful operation, and it came at a cost to humans and the environment. In fact, the project destroyed wetlands and fishing villages, displaced hundreds of families and animals, and often produced war-like situations (63–66). Citing German realist writer Theodor Fontane's travelogue *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg*, Blackbourn notes that "[c]ontemporaries who referred to a 'silently conducted Seven Years' War' were nearer the mark" than those who praised it as a peaceful operation (40). The *Nowa Amerika* guidebook makes no mention of these problematic aspects and creates a new frontier myth that

fits its purpose of giving the borderland a "fresh start" and that resembles the frontier myth of the American West.

The *Nowa Amerika* guidebook also provides ample evidence for omissions of more recent historical events. While the volume speaks to some extent of Germany's attack on Poland, the effects of National Socialism as well as the Second World War, this appears to be done only to assure the reader that German crimes against the Poles are not being questioned or evaded. However, the publication contains hardly any reference to Jews or a past or present Jewish life, which would have disturbed the positive narrative and raised some uncomfortable questions about antisemitism in Polish society. A search in the electronic version of the over 400-page guide book for the German and Polish words for "Jew" or "Jewish" returns only seven results, all very brief references, and three of them referring merely to the remnants of Jewish cemeteries. Even more, the reader will search in vain for words such as pogrom, antisemitism, or antisemitic—all words that would require a discussion of German crimes and the Holocaust but that would also necessitate some mention of Polish-Jewish relations. For example, the entry on "New Szczettin" casually states that after 1968 no Jews remained in the city, but it does not even give as much as a hint of the antisemitic campaigns that forced many Jews who had initially returned to Poland after the Second World War to leave the country for good.[15] This guidebook seems to echo the desire expressed by Karl Dedecius in his essay on German-Polish literature.

[15] The guidebook simply says: "Bis heute noch kann man dort den Schatten der chassidischen Hüte entdecken. Aber nach 1968 gab es keine Juden mehr" ["Until this day, one can discover there the shadows of the Hasidic hats. But after 1968, there were no more Jews"] (Kurzwelly et al. 150). The remark about the Hasidic hats is similarly obscure. If it is intended as metaphor, it is unclear for what, i.e., where these visible "shadows" still exist. The guidebook at least provides no evidence of any traces of Jewish life.

As previously mentioned, Dedecius wanted to chronicle only positive events, and not the cemeteries ("nicht die Friedhöfe, sondern die Sternstunden der Menschheit") (*Deutsche* 3).

In the twenty-first century version of "Neu-Amerika" there is no room for a critical engagement with any problematic aspects of the past. Kurzwelly leaves historical complexities aside and explains that *Nowa Amerika* reconceptualizes the German-Polish borderlands and reinvents them as postnational transborder regions ("Słubfurt e.V."). This utopian vision is decidedly presentist and future-oriented, and the past must be adapted to fit this idea. This approach is a consequence of the project's overall philosophical framework, which defines both reality and time. First, at the basis is the belief that any reality is constructed, and therefore it can also be modified or replaced by the construction of a new one (Kurzwelly, "Słubfurt e.V."). Second, this flexibility of reality is coupled with a fluid understanding of time. The project website explains that *Słubfurt* was conceived from the perspective of the future, it "grows" back into the present, and in so doing it also changes how the past is understood ("Historiea"). The application of this temporality and the constructivist understanding of reality have the effect that the newly created spaces of *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* are largely emptied of their difficult and conflicted pasts, and history becomes even less than a backdrop for a performance of an alternate reality.

Regardless of these aspects that, in my view, limit the projects' border poetics as a critical practice, do these initiatives nevertheless have an effect on the region and its inhabitants? What are these practical effects? And who actually lays claim to *Słubfurt* and *Nowa Amerika* and feels invested in the project? There are at least two answers to these questions: On the one hand, the dedication, creativity, and humor embodied in these projects have made them quite popular.

At the same time, one can observe instances of disinterest, critique, and rejection of this transborder approach (Böhm).

The favorable reception is grounded in the positive publicity for the projects and their socio-cultural effects as they have created very involved communities throughout the region. The projects have received numerous awards and various types of EU, federal, state, and individual funding to support their border-crossing initiatives, making it what Seyhan has called an "officially sanctioned" narrative.[16] In short, *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* have become part of the region's identity, and they serve as important marketing tools for city boosters. Although until a few years ago it seemed that the German side was more eager (or able) to tap into this resource, Słubice is beginning to draw attention to these projects as well. However, the project is still much more prominent on the official website of Frankfurt (Oder).

The city's homepage shows a logo on the top left corner that features a blue and a green square inscribed with the city names "Frankfurt" (added above in smaller font is the word "Oder") and "Słubice." The names are connected (or separated, for that matter) with a stylized bridge. The subtitle reads "Ohne Grenzen. Bez granic" (without borders) ("Frankfurt-Oder.de"). This logo repeats on all pages throughout the site, thus always foregrounding the city's identity as a border town. Similarly, the official pages of the tourism association "Tourismusverein Frankfurt Oder e.V." focus on marketing the European twin cities as: "Europäische Doppelstadt Frankfurt (Oder) und Slubice [sic]" ("Start")—however, not without consistently misspelling Słubice by leaving out the diacritical. In 2015, one could find here, in addition to the more

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[16] For example, Słubfurt e.V. received the first prize for political education, awarded by the Bundesausschuss politische Bildung for the project "Parlament – Kommunalwahlen in Slubfurt" in 2011 and an award by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes for its "cross-border engagement" ("für sein grenzüberschreitendes Engagement") in 2012 ("Zentrale").

conventional excursions and tours that are offered in the city, a *Słubfurt* walking tour ("Thematische Führung"). A 6-day bus tour of *Nowa Amerika* that was led by Kurzwelly himself was also offered ("Package-Angebote"). In addition, several of the sub-projects are advertised throughout the site.

In sum, one may question whether *Słubfurt* and *Nowa Amerika* are indeed still the statements against a commercialized festival culture they were designed to be, and some residents who have become chance participants in the reality construction may have felt irritated by the projects' at times overly didactic stance. Yet I believe that the projects are evidence of a very creative intervention in the space we live in, which is determined by existing frameworks such as nation state and language. *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* are most successful where they push against these frameworks and ask their "citizens" to stretch their imagination. They are effective when they provoke people to reconsider the space they live in and offer opportunities to become actively involved in shaping the borderland and creating transborder communities. The projects are problematic where they insufficiently reflect historically informed particulars, such as the region's Jewish history or the costs of land reclamation. This reduction renders a decontextualized and therefore often uncritical variant of cosmopolitanism that runs the risk of being another form of the "kitsch" previously discussed: "reconciliation kitsch" (Bachmann) or "cosmo-kitsch" (Schoene). With their overtly positive stance, the project can be contrasted with other initiatives that critically analyze negative and painful aspects of history and that make coming to terms with the past a crucial part of their mission. I now want to briefly discuss two examples that approach this task in differently, albeit not necessarily uncontroversial or less didactic ways.

Beyond the German-Polish Borderland

As projects with a cosmopolitan orientation, *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* are not only about the German-Polish borderland. Kurzwelly himself stresses the importance of borders to foster exchange by virtue of their permeable nature, and he criticizes how Europe's internal borders have become more permeable while its exterior borders are hardening ("Słubfurt e.V."). One may describe such a locally bound but globally situated project as an example of what César Domínguez has termed an "actually existing cosmo-practice." This term may be clarified by going back one more time to Ludewig's interview with Kurzwelly in which she asks him about the project's utopian potential with regards to Europe. He responds that while *Słubfurt* and *Nowa Amerika* happen to be situated in Europe and may be able to contribute to discussions about Europe, he favors a broader view. *Słubfurt*, Kurzwelly suggests, could just as well be located in the US-Mexican borderland, and he has been approached about doing this project at the border between Rwanda and the Congo ("Słubfurt e.V."). Thus, at least in aspiration, there are many productive intersections that can result from unsettling the borders in one's own locality. Doing so is both a political and an ethical project.

Fundacja Pogranicze – The Borderlands Foundation Sejny

The Borderlands Foundation (Fundacja Pogranicze) was founded in 1990 as a non-governmental and not-for-profit organization. It was initiated by a number of "culture animators" who were theater practitioners or involved with cultural centers, among them Krzystof Czyżewski.[17] The Foundation's headquarters was established in Sejny, a town of about 5,600 inhabitants near

[17] The founding members of *Pogranicze* included people involved with theater in the towns Gardzienice and Słupsk, as well as Krzysztof Czyżewski and Małgorzata Sporek-Czyżewska from the Dąbrówka Cultural Centre in Poznań and Wojciech and Bożena Szroeder from the Culture Center in Czarna Dąbrówka in Kaschubia (Watson 232).

Poland's border with Lithuania and Belarus. Its goal, as stated on the website, is to "propagat[e] the borderland ethos and bridge-building between the people of various religions, ethnicities and cultures." The Foundation works in close cooperation with the Center "Borderland of Arts, Cultures and Nations" (Ośrodek "Pogranicze—sztuk, kultur, narodów"), which was founded in 1991 and also has its seat in Sejny. The institutions share similar goals and are connected by a cooperation agreement ("Foundation").

Theater scholar Ian Watson has analyzed Czyżewski's and *Pogranicze*'s work and described it as "rooted in a performance-based social engagement philosophy and practice influenced by Poland's postwar intellectual history, as well as the work of the Polish theatre troupe Gardzienice and aspects of Jerzy Grotowski's Active Culture research" (232). Their aim is to address difference as it is encoded in national, ethnic, and cultural identities and to promote understanding and cooperation among people. Besides cultural activities, performances, and festivals, one of the Foundation's main pillars is education. Here, it engages in a wide range of activities, including publishing,[18] organizing lectures, workshops, and seminars, oral history projects, and conflict resolution workshops (232). Emphasizing the hybridity and fluidity of the borderland is of central importance in pursuing the goal to remember and memorialize, to build new connections and rebuild the region's rich cultural heritage destroyed by wars and border

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[18] As Watson points out, one of the Borderland Publishing House's most impactful publications was Princeton University professor Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (2000), published in English in 2001 under the title *Neighbors*. The book about the massacre of 1,600 Jews in the town of Jedwabne in 1941 stirred considerable controversy in Poland because Gross showed that Jedwabne's Jews had been murdered by their Polish neighbors, and not German occupiers. This initiated painful and controversial debates in Poland about Polish antisemitism and culpability in crimes against Jews—debates that continue until the present day. Watson's article provides detailed insights into this publication history, and he points out that while Gross took considerable risks in researching and writing the book, publishing it was also an enormous risk for the small, local foundation that depends on government subsidies and private donations (231–232).

revisions. Difference is not washed out but maintained and made productive. This resonates with Gloria Anzaldúa's definition of the borderland, a connection that American Studies scholar Magdalena J. Zaborowska points out in her article about the work of the Borderlands Foundation (14).

As can be gathered from this brief description, the Foundation's goals are diverse, and one could study the individual projects or overall philosophy from many different perspectives. With regard to border poetics, I am most interested in the connection between the local context within which the Foundation operates and the global and transnational context into which it also inscribes itself. This is evident in the international attention and recognition of the regional and global outreach practiced in the Foundation's many activities, as Watson explains. Among others, the Ford Foundation has recognized this work and asked the Borderlands Foundation "to employ the techniques in international conflict zones, including the Aceh province of Indonesia, the Caucasus, and Bosnia. Czyżewski, as President of the foundation, was invited to become a member of the European Cultural Parliament and an adviser to the European Cultural Foundation" (Watson 232).

Czyżewski's work on borders is transferrable, and he was at one point also involved with the German-Polish border. When the German and Polish governments declared 2005/2006 a German-Polish year and initiated many events and activities, Czyżewski served as an advisor in conceptualizing a series of projects by the Büro Kopernikus. As the website for the German-Polish year states, the goal was to celebrate the "Bogen vom 60. Jahrestag des Kriegsendes bis zum 15. Jahrestag des deutsch-polnischen Nachbarschaftsvertrages" ["arch from the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war to the fifteenth anniversary of the German-Polish Treaty on Good Neighborly Relations"] ("Deutsch-Polnisches Jahr"). The Berlin-based Kopernikus office

implemented several joint cultural and art projects with the goal of establishing a strong German-Polish collaborative network.

Das Zentrum für politische Schönheit (The Center for Political Beauty)

A performance of border poetics also took place on the occasion of Germany's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 2014. The official event consisted of a light installation of eight thousand illuminated balloons that stretched for fifteen kilometers and marked the former course of the Wall through the city center. After being exhibited in the city for two days, this "Lichtgrenze" ("light border") was then transformed into a chain of people as groups and individuals who served as balloon patrons gathered next to their balloons on the evening of November 9, 2014. On the stage next to the Brandenburg Gate, the Staatskapelle Berlin, under the direction of Daniel Barenboim, played the European anthem, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" from the *Ninth Symphony*, which accompanied the balloons' release into the night sky over the course of the twenty-five minutes ("Ballonaktion").

While the event was generally received positively, some remarked that it was kitschy and an overall disappointment (Lehming). The anniversary celebrations also brought out many critical voices within and outside Germany. Besides the continuous erasure of traces of the actual Wall or any remnants of an East German past not linked to oppression and dictatorship, attention was drawn to the new walls being erected around "fortress Europe" that put in question the overly positive rhetoric of a peaceful European Union. In this context the "Zentrum für politische Schönheit" ("Center for Political Beauty") launched its own series of events called "Europäischer Mauerfall" ("European Fall of the Wall").

On the Center's Indiegogo crowdfunding website, artistic director Philip Ruch made a clear call for action that is focused on the present: "Gedenken wir nicht der Vergangenheit,

gedenken wir der Gegenwart – und reißen die EU-Außenmauern ein. Nicht mit warmen Worten, sondern mit Bolzenschneidern!" ("Let us commemorate not the past but the present—and tear down the exterior walls of the EU. Not with warm words but with bolt cutters.") At the same time the organizers insisted in a disclaimer that this event was "a peaceful and legal open air performance along the longest stage of the world." Far exceeding the goal of raising €5,900, the campaign raised a total of nearly €40,000 between November 2–11, 2014 ("Erster" *Indigogo*).

On November 7, and after a thorough search by around one hundred police of the German state security, federal police, and the federal border police, two buses with about one hundred persons departed for Bulgaria to dismantle the EU border fence. Each step of the journey, especially the encounters with police and local officials, was meticulously documented on various media. While this "zweite friedliche Revolution" ("second peaceful revolution") did not succeed in taking down the EU borders, the group certainly achieved its goal of raising significant (positive and negative) attention in the media as well as among German politicians and the "Verfassungsschutz," Germany's domestic intelligence service.

In an event related to the "Europäischer Mauerfall," which was perhaps even more controversially discussed, the self-proclaimed "aggressive humanists" removed fourteen white crosses from their location near the German Parliament building in Berlin (Fig. 6). Dedicated to those killed along the inner-German border during the Cold War, the crosses were then purportedly brought to the EU's outer borders in Bulgaria, Spain, and Greece (Fig. 7). The "Center's" website shows photographs of African refugees holding these crosses (Fig. 8) and, on the group's Facebook page, an interview with an African refugee was posted. It was later revealed that the crosses in the photos and in the video were replicas, but the national and international attention for this performance was considerable (Noack; Oltermann). Many people,

including several former East German civil rights activists and politicians were outraged at the desecration of the memorial; they deemed it disrespectful and an instrumentalization of their memory (Kaul).

Figure 6. The crosses that commemorate those who died at German-German border during the Cold War have been removed from their location at the Bundeskanzleramt in Berlin. Foto © Ruben Neugebauer, 2014. Published online at "Erster Europäischer Mauerfall." *Zentrum für Politische Schönheit,* www.politicalbeauty.de/mauerfall.html.

Figure 7. The crosses have been relocated to the EU’s external borders. Foto © Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, 2014. Published online at “Erster Europäischer Mauerfall.” *Zentrum für Politische Schönheit,* www.politicalbeauty.de/mauerfall.html.

Figure 8. Refugees in Melilla holding one of the missing crosses. Photo © Patryk Witt, 2014. Published online at “Erster Europäischer Mauerfall.” *Zentrum für Politische Schönheit,* www.politicalbeauty.de/mauerfall.html.

While it seemed unclear at first if and when the crosses would be returned to their location, this was indeed done immediately after the end of the official festivities on the evening of November 9. As the events unfolded, newspapers also began to report that the entire event was related to the upcoming theater festival "Voicing Resistance" organized by the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin. While the theater provided financial assistance (a portion of a larger fund they had received from the state to organize the festival) and some logistical support to the Center within the larger framework of the festival, theater director Shermin Langhoff insisted on having had no prior knowledge of any details of the group's performance (Collet and von Törne). Police and intelligence services began investigating the Center as well as the Gorki Theater immediately after the removal of the crosses was noticed, which, according to the newspaper *taz*, did not happen until the next day (Kappert).

While the group members have been referred to as activists, the head of the Center's planning unit, Cesy Leonard, insists that they are not campaigning but rather creating a poetic work (Wildermann). Indeed, one can easily read the Center's work as a particularly striking example of border poetics as a cultural practice. Using creativity and artistic imagination, the group added another layer to the meaning of the white crosses and disturbed the official commemoration that sought to celebrate November 9 as a day of freedom in a borderless Europe while ignoring Europe's new border regimes and keeping the humanitarian crises hidden from view. The symbolism of these crosses has expanded, regardless of whether they were indeed ever held by refugees in Melilla or not. It is worth noting that the symbols of oppression themselves had agency, as Ruch claims on the Center's website as well as in many interviews and reports.

He insists that the crosses had *chosen* to flee the scene in order to show solidarity with those who will die in the future.[19]

The white crosses' "travel adventures," as well as the other above-mentioned performances, take the event and the symbolic meaning of the fall of the Berlin Wall and insist on its continued importance not only at geographically different locations but also across time. At the core of this performance is the provocative question: what kind of Europe do we want to live in? The Center's answer, it seems, is clearly oriented towards a critical cosmopolitanism, towards transborder thinking and towards reimagining Europe without deadly borders (as their other performances and events also illustrate). The Center is credited for filling the gap that was left by director and artist Christoph Schlingensief, who passed away in 2010, and for invigorating the German art and theater scene through provocation and creative resistance (Wildermann; Kaul). The Center's political activism is also evident on their website, which provides detailed information on all their projects. Most of the current projects address the ongoing refugee crisis and comment critically on Europe and Germany's exclusionary practices.

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[19] On the Center's website, for example, the following statement was published: "Die Installation "Weiße Kreuze" hat kollektiv die Flucht aus dem Regierungsviertel in Berlin vor den Gedenkfeierlichkeiten zu "25 Jahren Mauerfall" ergriffen. Die Mauertoten sind in einem Akt der Solidarität zu ihren Brüdern und Schwestern über die Außengrenzen der Europäischen Union geflüchtet. Genauer: zu den zukünftigen Mauertoten. 30.000 Tote an den EU-Außengrenzen in den vergangenen 25 Jahren und die laufende militärische Abriegelung des Kontinents waren zuviel für ihre Totenruhe. Sie sind jetzt bei den Menschen, die als nächstes durch die EU-Außenmauern sterben werden" ["The installation "White Crosses" has collectively fled the government district in Berlin to escape the "25 Years of the Fall of the Wall" celebrations. In an act of solidarity, those who have died at the Wall fled to their brothers and sisters at the outer borders of the European Union. More precisely: to those who will die at the wall in the future. 30,000 dead at the EU's outer borders in the past 25 years and the continuing military fortification of the continent were too much for the peace of the dead. They are now with the people who will die next due to the EU's outer borders"] ("Erster Europäischer Mauerfall").

Performances of Border Poetics

Shifting the focus from texts to actions and processes, this chapter asked how border poetics is enacted not in written texts but in the public sphere. The projects I have discussed under the heading of "performances of border poetics" are evidence of very different kinds of performances, but they all enact the connection between the local and the global in order to create new communities as well as new and more open border landscapes. Each in their own way, they can be described as border-transgressing fictions implemented in reality.

The main focus here was on *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* because they have created the most comprehensive alternative—the most elaborate fictional world in the Polish-German borderland. This world includes its own government, flags, money, language, etc. In many ways, *Nowa Amerika* and *Słubfurt* are not so different from the nation state. Much like a nation state they depend on the creation of an "imagined community" (Anderson) and are accompanied by various symbols, institutions, and tangible markers that actualize the fiction in a given space. On the surface, it may appear that the goal of *Nowa Amerika* and similar initiatives would be to dissolve borders and to promote the universalizing kind of cosmopolitanism that has been widely criticized. However, I argue that just as the literary texts in this study, these projects contribute to a proliferation of various types of borders throughout society (Balibar). As previously shown, this proliferation of borders advances a cosmopolitan imaginary because it multiplies the possible contact zones between people and places based on their varying and ever-changing affiliations and belongings. The cosmopolitan constellations that emerge at the border are locally bound and derive their "worldedness" from the multiplication of perspectives and exchanges of people tied to different local contexts and the networks that emerge when these people come together. Differences are thematized within these projects, and there is often an attempt to make

the conflicts and tensions resurface and to turn them into interactions that can be made productive for a positive reimagination of the borderland.

The shift away from narrative texts also draws attention to the actors of border poetics and the physical and material products and outcomes of the symbolic border-crossing acts. As in the previous chapters, the imagination expressed through performance is understood as a social practice. However, in contrast to narrative texts in which ideas circulate in transnational and transcultural flows and reshape reality in more subtle ways, the performances discussed here actually reshape reality and leave physical markers in the border landscape.

Performances of border poetics have a direct and perceptible impact on the borderland's material reality, and they can bring about social and political change by drawing attention to issues of inequality and injustice. Because they have an immediate effect on the material and symbolic composition of the borderland, performances of border poetics can also be viewed within the context of Brambilla's notion of "borderscaping" (see footnote 1 in this chapter). It is a term that suggests a process analogous to landscaping, i.e., the physical modification of a particular space, but it draws attention to the borderland's special condition. Going beyond the material, landscape is also a symbolic realm, and landscaping the deterritorialized labor/work of the cosmopolitan imagination. Border poetics is an expression of optimism that rigid structures and asymmetrical power relations can be resisted. As a literary and cultural practice, it seeks to undermine and resist the creation and implementation of exclusionary border regimes.

Conclusion

On April 19, 2015, an overcrowded boat with almost 800 migrants on their way to Europe capsized 70 miles north of the Libyan coast. Only 28 survived. It was the largest refugee catastrophe in the Mediterranean Sea until that day, but it was hardly the last. For the Mediterranean alone, the death toll reported that year by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was 3771 ("IOM"). The same UN agency reported for the following year that 5,079 people had drowned ("Mediterranean"). Add to these numbers those who died elsewhere on their journeys or those who perished before they were even able to leave. Moreover, there are also the millions of displaced persons who are homeless, trying to survive in overcrowded refugee camps, hoping for asylum, traumatized by war and flight. In 2015, "65.3 million people, or one person in 113, were displaced from their homes by conflict and persecution" (Edwards). These numbers have likely only risen since.

In light of this ongoing human catastrophe, "border poetics" may seem like a futile concept. In this study, I have examined borders as spaces of a cosmopolitan imagination, and I have found this imagination expressed in different kinds of texts. From this, I have proposed that there exists a narrative and cultural practice that rethinks and reimagines world from the perspective of multiply overlapping and entangled borders. I have called this practice border poetics. Yet, for most people in the world today, borders are neither poetic nor a matter of the imagination—they are very real, often insurmountable, and frequently a matter of life and death.

What can it mean in such a context to write about border poetics and to claim that literary and cultural expression can advance a cosmopolitan imagination; that it can create new worlds in which difference is temporarily suspended? Is it possible to provide a serious critique of borders from the safe distance of a text? And what is the meaning of this critique for those who are

currently on the move? I have no satisfying answers to these questions. But I propose that it is precisely the persistence of these questions and the lack of answers that is the motor for border poetics.

There is a tension between the reality of the borders that I described above, and the desire for borders to be less precarious and deadly—both in their literal and in their figurative iterations. Thinking through borders, critiquing them, and ultimately imagining them as sites of contact and exchange are acts of the social imagination and, so I believe, fuel for social change. These narratives deserve our attention, not only because they can tell us something about our shared border experiences but also because they make visible our shared responsibility for the border experiences of others. Border narratives may be about local or individual issues, but border poetics makes these particulars comprehensible in other contexts. In the process of translating particulars into other contexts, narratives of border poetics participate in a cosmopolitan world-making.

Such an affirmative belief in narratives, and literary narratives in particular, resonates with the argument that Romance scholar Ottmar Ette makes about literature. He names among the most critical issues of our time the question of "how radically different cultures might live together with mutual respect for each other's differences." He emphasizes the crucial role played by the humanities, particularly literary studies, in answering to this challenge ("Literature" 983). Elsewhere Ette has argued that the knowledge about life transmitted through literature ("Lebenswissen der Literatur") equals a knowledge required for the survival of humanity ("ÜberLebenswissen der Menschheit") (*ÜberLebenswissen*). Ette's play with the verbs "leben" and "überleben" (living and surviving) shows that he ascribes to literature both a practical and an ethical role: through the literary imagination we can shape the world we live in—and this we

must do to ensure humanity's survival. This view resonates with Wisława Szymborska's imperative, expressed in the poem "The Beginning and the End," with which I also began my study: "Someone must lie there, / in the grass that has grown over / the causes and the effects, / blade of grass in their mouth, / and stare at the clouds."

Germany and Poland may not be the "radically different cultures" that Ette had in mind. Yet, difference does not run neatly along "cultural" or "national" lines. Rather, it runs through "cultures," groups, and individuals as much as between them. These differences create the kinds of complex but unremarkable entanglements that Inga Iwaśiów has described, and we could see again and again in the texts I examined here: "People are like knots: nobody knows what gets caught up inside and whether they can be untangled. Whoever thinks that this is material for myths or sagas is mistaken. Knots are knots. Nothing less, nothing more. Knots" (*Bambino* 66).

In this dissertation I have examined the role of borders and borderlands in contemporary German and Polish language narratives. The German-Polish example served as case study to describe how these different narratives use territorial borders and borderlands as staging grounds for figurative border crossings. In order to better analyze these aesthetic expressions of border experiences, I developed a theoretical framework that allowed me to examine these narratives as articulations of a critical cosmopolitanism. In defining and examining border poetics, I explored how actual, physical spaces and the borderlands of the imagination relate to one another in multiply overlapping border experiences. In other words, my concern was with the interplay of the historical and political borderlands that regulate human movement on the one hand, and the figurative (social, cultural, individual) boundaries that structure human experience, on the other hand. This integrated perspective draws attention to the human dimension of borders: the lived experience of various borders and their similarities across different times and places.

Building on scholarship in the fields of cosmopolitanism, border studies, and world literary studies, I have argued for viewing border poetics as a narrative and cultural practice that places historically and geopolitically specific boundaries in relation with universal and figurative border experiences (e.g., gender, ethnicity, or class, alongside epistemic and ontic boundaries). Border poetics derives from a critical stance towards borders as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. I argue that the practice unsettles established narratives and proposes alternative models for a locally anchored yet globally oriented citizenship. Border poetics can thus be viewed as an idiom of the cosmopolitan imagination.

Because border poetics entails a kind of world-making that is grounded in the particular, I began with an overview of the German-Polish context. I showed that the narrative construction of the border has undergone a transformation, and that especially the end of the Cold War has led to a greater openness and porousness of the territorial and the ideological borders between Germany and Poland. As this study was primarily concerned with literary and cultural narratives, this overview likewise focused on literary and cultural relations between Germany and Poland. Then, in thinking through a theoretical framing of border poetics, I returned to concepts from this particular German-Polish context, such as my analysis of the different histories and meanings that the concept of "borderlands literature" entails in Germany and in Poland.

The goal of the next three analytical chapters was to interrogate and expand this framework by using case studies to discern whether there are specific narrative strategies that produce border poetics. Chapter 3 assessed how certain thematic orientations lend themselves well to border poetics, and here I examined fictions of memory. Chapter 4 was concerned not with *what* was being told but with *how* it was told. The chapter was devoted to magical realism and the fantastic as particularly suitable modes for border poetics. Lastly, in Chapter 5, I

analyzed performances of border poetics, in particular, how border poetics is enacted in the public sphere through engaged art projects and community-centered activities. In the three analytical chapters, I examined the interplay of real and figurative boundaries through the lens of my proposed theoretical framing of border poetics. Focusing on story, discourse, and performance has allowed me to explore and demonstrate three different strategies that can be read as expressions of border poetics. Specifically, the focus on story, discourse, and performance reveals border poetics in three iterations: content, form, and action.

In order to show that not every engagement with territorial ("real") and figurative boundaries automatically constitutes border poetics, I have also included texts that ostensibly practice a critical engagement with borders but ultimately fall short in providing a fully engaged critique of borders. Typically these texts apply a one-sided and romanticized perspective, or they are unconvincing in their staging of the particular. I have shown how some narratives gloss over important aspects of the past or lack the self-critical awareness of their own bordering practices. Thus, border poetics can also be seen as an at times unvoiced or subconscious aspiration, a vision that is continuously expanded and reexamined as more and more narratives critically address borders and bordering practices.

All borderlands share in one way or another stories of disruption and discontinuity; when borders are created, fortified, or moved, there is always some way in which the order of things, the connection between peoples, places, and ideas is unsettled and put into flux. In the present time—in our century of mass migrations—the encounter with severely disrupted narratives is not only a German-Polish experience, but also one that is shared and can be understood universally. For example, many have drawn parallels between the current refugee crisis and German expellees after the Second World War (Kossert "Flüchtlinge"; Bernhard), the wave of refugees

from the Eastern Bloc after the Hungarian Uprising in 1956, or the migration movements after the fall of the Iron Curtain (Thorpe; Lister). Such parallels suggest that narratives of disruption are recurring and share certain universal elements, no matter their particular context. However, the parallels only work because the language of the universal acquires meaning through particular and diverse experiences.

Border poetics is therefore neither restricted to the German-Polish context nor is it a new phenomenon. Within the framework of world literature, we can appreciate the particularities of a text and how it relates to that specific context, but we can also connect it to other texts produced in other times and places. Therefore, we can see the connections between Olga Tokarczuk's figure of Peter Dieter, whom I mention in the introduction, and who dies right on the Polish-Czech border, and Saadat Hasan Manto's short story "Toba Tek Singh" (1955), which uses a similarly absurd border situation to reflect on the 1947 Partition of India. We can articulate correspondences between Gloria Anzaldúa's border poetics in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and that of German and Polish authors and artists. In this sense of reading the local through the lens of global networks, I hope to contribute to the discovery of new connections between various literatures and the ongoing transnational reorientation of German Studies and the continuous worlding of world literature.

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