

The Postsecular Traces of Transcendence
in Contemporary German Literature

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Abstract

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This dissertation focuses on texts written by four contemporary, German-speaking authors: W. G. Sebald's *Die Ringe des Saturn* and *Schwindel. Gefühle*, Daniel Kehlmann's *Die Vermessung der Welt*, Sybille Lewitscharoff's *Blumenberg*, and Peter Handke's *Der Große Fall*. The project explores how the texts represent forms of religion in an increasingly secular society. Religious themes, while never disappearing, have recently been reactivated in the context of the secular age. This current societal milieu of secularism, as delineated by Charles Taylor, provides the framework in which these fictional texts, when manifesting religious intuitions, offer a postsecular perspective that serves as an alternative mode of thought. The project asks how contemporary literature, as it participates in the construction of secular dialogue, generates moments of religiously

coded transcendence. What textual and narrative techniques serve to convey new ways of perceiving and experiencing transcendence within the immanence felt and emphasized in the modern moment? While observing what the textual strategies do to evoke religious presence, the dissertation also looks at the type of religious discourse produced within the texts. The project begins with the assertion that a historically antecedent model of religion – namely, Friedrich Schleiermacher’s – which is never mentioned explicitly but implicitly present throughout, informs the style of religious discourse. Formulating religion with an emphasis on the subjective appeal to “Anschauung” (Intuition) and “Gefühl” (Feeling), he provides a Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment, and his response shares structural and thematic similarities to what we find in the postsecular position towards secularism. The dissertation shows that certain contemporary German texts – as they enter into and inform dialogue in the public sphere (Jürgen Habermas) by attempting to find a publicly acceptable language to speak about and critique religious sensibilities – participate in a postsecular religious discourse with its own underlying response to the modern, secular age.

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DEDICATION

for my dad

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Introduction

The Postsecular Moment

Daniel Kehlmann's global bestseller *Die Vermessung der Welt* (2005) has as one of its themes the age-old contest between science and religion.¹ The narrator positions his protagonists as secular; they are scientists. Carl Friedrich Gauß (1777-1855) was a German mathematician, and Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) was a Prussian geographer, naturalist, and explorer. Throughout the text these protagonists endeavor to obtain and contain knowledge. Without reverting to supernatural explanations, they strictly employ the scientific method and scientific tools to acquire epistemological certainty. At the same time, the narrator fuses together the religious and the rational when presenting certain moments. This becomes particularly lucid at one key point in the novel. With his travelling companion Pilâtre, Gauß rides in a hot air balloon up into the atmosphere, arriving ultimately at a heightened position, which becomes religiously coded. Before their flight, Gauß is nervous. Pilâtre asks if he is praying. No, replies Gauß, "Er zähle Primzahlen" (65). Due to the looming uncertainty involved in traveling upwards to an unknown region, he is anxious and perhaps slightly fearful; nevertheless, he remains scientific. Numbers provide stability. As the journey commences, the two scientists ascend upwards. At their apex, Pilâtre says, "So sieht Gott die Welt" (66). Gauß is speechless: "er hatte keine Stimme mehr" (66). Space, "der Raum selbst" (66), absorbs his attention. He wants to remain in this elevated position with this voyeur-godlike perspective (De Certeau 92). The mathematician, a figure symbolic of the rational, enlightened thinker, experiences at this border location his scientific revelation of non-

¹ See Soboczynski.

Euclidean space: “Er...begriff zum erstmal, was Bewegung war, was ein Körper, was vor allem der Raum, den sie zwischen sich aufspannten und der sie alle, auch ihn, Pilâtre und diesen Korb, umfaßt hielt” (67). Positioned beyond, the protagonist occupies a transcendent location, from which he arrives at his scientific revelation that shapes the subsequent trajectory of the novel. In this scene, we vividly see how the narrator conflates religious imagery with scientific discovery. With this performance the narrator imbues his text with a transcendent moment that provides an alternative, “postsecular” perspective.

It is widely assumed, and rightly so, that the modern West is secular.² The same is true of its various cultural spheres, including literature. So, why should we now describe German-speaking literature as “postsecular?” Indeed, the very idea would appear to be contextually out of place, as a “post,” when positioned towards the secular, would seemingly herald the end of secularism and those generally accepted positive advancements accompanying it. Yet, the term does provide a timely conceptual framework for understanding how contemporary literature, while recognizing secularism and its insistence on scientific positivism, points to the limits of empirical reality and provides an alternative way of reading and perceiving the world. Of particular interest for this project is how German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas uses the term in his *Dankesrede* for the *Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels*.³ For him it describes a

² Philosopher Richard Rorty offers a forthright explanation for why the West’s secularization has been a necessary good to be embraced: “It was a good thing for both religion and science that science won the battle...science gives us the means to carry out better cooperative social projects than before” (*Future* 39).

³ Later in this introduction I provide a detailed assessment of the term “postsecular.” At this point it should be noted that the term is not unique to Habermas. Andrew Greely first

society involved in adapting itself to the “Fortbestehen religiöser Gemeinschaften in einer sich fortwährend säkularisierenden Umgebung” (*Glauben und Wissen* 10).⁴ Here, Habermas contends that religious communities have a continuing presence in secular society. In another one of his works, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, he conceives postsecular society as one embracing both religious and secular mentalities (116). He encourages secular citizens to recognize that they live in a postsecular – i.e. religiously inflected – society (139), and he calls upon religious individuals to realize their position in an increasingly secular environment. Consequently, he advocates for a complementary learning process (140). Within this contextual framework, as society secularizes, religious sentiments continue to play a vital role in the formation of public life (*Bewusstsein* 52). The secular and the postsecular are not opposing terms, but instead coterminous; the postsecular represents the “unfolding of the latest phase of secularization” (Beckford 8), as it acknowledges the persistence of religious modes of thinking within the various facets of secular society’s cultural spheres.

One of these facets, literature, plays a vital role in sustaining the religious imagination.⁵ While institutions of religion struggle to redefine themselves in

used it in his 1966 article “After Secularity.” Subsequently, Richard John Neuhaus used it in 1982 in his article “Educational Diversity in Post-Secular America” (Beckford 2).

⁴ In this short speech Habermas addresses religion’s place in society in the aftermath of 9/11. His primary contention is that secularization cannot be perceived as a “Nullsummenspiel” between the capitalistic, productive forces of science and technology and the powers of religion and the church. The persistence of this strict dichotomy – with the necessary outcome that one side wins at the expense of the other’s loss – would cause the dismissal of the civilizing role of a democratically enlightened common sense informed by both “science” and “religion.”

⁵ In the contemporary German literary scene authors whose works handle religious themes have been distinguished lately: “in den vergangenen zehn Jahren wurde der Büchnerpreis nicht weniger als viermal an Autor/innen verliehen, deren Schreiben massgeblich durch Religion bestimmt wird” (*Religion und Gegenwartsliteratur* 1).

contemporary society, literature and the arts more broadly come to represent those sentiments that had previously been restricted to religion. They have increasingly filled the void generated in the wake of religion's marginalization. According to philosopher Charles Taylor, "It is art which comes to fill this niche. In our civilization, moulded by expressivist conceptions, it has come to take a central place in our spiritual life, in some respects replacing religion" (*Sources* 376). Particularly since the Enlightenment, art has increasingly encroached on religion's terrain, coming, in many ways, to even supplant religion itself. Yet, religious representations themselves have never been absent in literature. German literature specifically, has, throughout the centuries, been replete with religious allusions. In the recent past however, such representations have, within an increasingly secularized realm, been experiencing a reemergence that includes an underlying response to secularism itself.⁶

Situated in secular contexts, numerous contemporary German novels exhibit religiously coded representations. For this particular project, I will analyze the works of W. G. Sebald, Daniel Kehlmann, Sibylle Lewitscharoff, and Peter Handke. Sebald's texts – *Schwindel. Gefühle* (1990) and *Die Ringe des Saturn* (1995) – present narrators who reflect back on their respective journeys through natural environments. What is material in nature becomes the catalyst behind their narrative descriptions, which are imbued with intimations of what is beyond the material. While Sebald's narrator in *Die Ringe* attempts to overcome melancholy, the narrator of *Schwindel* wants to gain access to past memories, connected as they are to certain locations. On their respective journeys to deal

⁶ Similar terms suggesting reemergence include the "religious turn," a concept proposed by Klaus Dermutz in "Der 'religious turn' im Theater" (*Gegenwartsliteratur* 2), and a "renaissance of religion," employed by Georg Langenhorst, in *Ich gönne mir das Wort Gott* (2009).

with melancholy and memory, the narrators encounter religious structures and religious individuals. The narrators then use these encounters to shape the way they interpret their natural surroundings. Delineating their experiences of these spaces, they infuse their descriptions with insinuations of transcendence. In *Die Vermessung der Welt* (2005), Kehlmann demonstrates how scientists, when investigating the natural world, become aware of the limitations of science. At such moments, they reveal the diffuse intuition of an order beyond the one circumscribed by scientific strategies. The mathematician Gauß develops a new model of understanding space, and Humboldt lives out his exploratory ambitions in South America's unexplored terrain. As the narration tracks their scientific endeavors it emphasizes their insistence on making sense of the empirical. Simultaneously, the text alludes to their predilections to explore their individual intuitions of what eludes the sensible. Lewitscharoff's text *Blumenberg* (2011) tells the story of how a ubiquitous lion appears to the prominent German philosopher and professor Hans Blumenberg. When confronting this image, he simultaneously comes into contact with his own anthropomorphic projection that is narratively formed and reflective of underlying religious premonitions. His students do not have access to this figure, and their fate is significantly different than that of Blumenberg's. As they die tragic deaths, Blumenberg lives with security and assurance in the presence of this figure he has confronted and constructed. In *Der Grosse Fall* (2011), Handke's narrator presents an actor, who, in performing his religiously perceived identity, attempts to save those ensconced in an unjust political regime. He wants to prevent citizens from participating in an unjust war that the president has theologically justified. While moving from the periphery to the interior, in order to save, he comes into contact with certain faces –

particularly a woman's – that challenge what he understand his identity to be. In these faces he identifies traces of transcendence, and these faces have a transformative effect on him, causing him to surrender his own transcendent identity, while remaining aware and cognizant of the persistence of an external instance. All of these texts thematize the religious and the secular, placing them in an intricate dialogue with each other.

The literature in this analysis approaches religion in an exploratory manner, endeavoring to arrive at representations appealing to a modern mindset distrustful of dogmatic assertions stemming from inflexible religious institutions. These texts do not present religion blatantly, nor necessarily in positive terms; they do not at all contend, or wish to be a religious voice. Rather, these contemporary German texts evoke the transcendent – that which is beyond the purview of the empirical domain –, by referring to it indirectly. The texts gesture towards transcendence by narratively giving it form. When this representation becomes present, it is, to a degree, immediately erased in that the representation does not permit resolution or comprehension about those underlying ideas and concepts that always only remain intuited. In this way, the texts provide a “trace” (in Jacques Derrida's use of the term) of transcendence, indicating both the impossibility and simultaneous necessity of speaking about that which one cannot know. Unambiguous statements regarding religion are studiously avoided. Instead, these texts avoiding closure and circumscription, offer an alternative intellectual perspective, one that acknowledges the possibility of the transcendent in the modern, secular age.

This project asks how these particular German texts represent religion within the context of secular culture. What do representations of transcendence look like in this milieu, and, are they necessarily coded as religious? How do the narrative techniques

employed introduce new forms of transcendence that take into account the diffuse religious sentiments pervasive in German society? My project looks at the textual strategies employed and the type of religious discourse present in the texts. What type of religion do the texts present? Does the form of religious discourse evident in these modern texts have a parallel? Does it evince comparisons with an historical predecessor that may not be manifestly mentioned but still latently present?

I argue that the chosen texts participate in a postsecular religious discourse with its own underlying response to the modern, secular age. This response, as we shall see, bears structural and thematic similarities to the one developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher. His definition of religion, influenced as it was by the qualities emphasized in Romanticism (such as a turn towards subjectivity), served as a reaction to the Enlightenment.⁷ Individuals, according to Schleiermacher, experience religion when their emotions are affected during moments of an intensified “Anschauung” – observation/intuition – of a vast universe unable to be contained, and this is accompanied with an elevated “Gefühl” – feeling – (Schleiermacher, *Über* 79). These are the bases of a religious experience and not a reasoned approach to the divine or the participation in certain moral acts. Because Schleiermacher’s definition of religion was, for its time, innovative and adaptive, Habermas believes that his ideas provide a suitable frame for viewing the postsecular moment; Habermas even goes so far as to suggest that he “ist ein Schrittmacher für das Bewusstsein einer postsäkularen Gesellschaft” (*Zwischen* 251). Schleiermacher’s model responded well to the Enlightenment values of “rationalism,

⁷ According to Taylor, the late eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of such reactionary movements, “which [also] define our contemporary situation” (*Sources* 314). At this moment there were a number of responses to “rationalist Deism and naturalism” (*Sources* 355), and Schleiermacher’s model would be an example of one such reply.

tradition, and formal harmony” (368), by adapting religion to the Romantic period’s intellectual mood, which stressed “the rights of the individual, of the imagination, and of feeling” (Taylor, *Sources* 368). With ‘staying’ power, Schleiermacher’s paradigm of religion can also be used as a reaction to modern secularization. The Enlightenment insisted on limiting knowledge claims to the empirical, and this altered religion, moving its anti-rational sentiments to society’s periphery.⁸ The current, secular age finds itself in a similar predicament, as it has participated in a process that has subtly relegated the religious voice to a marginalized status. Making this clear, Fredric Jameson suggests that secular culture has witnessed “the extinction of the sacred and the ‘spiritual,’” with the result that “the deep underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day” (*Postmodernism* 67). Nevertheless, within this secular, “material” context, individuals still experience religion, and, as I will suggest, this experience follows those contours of religion initially outlined by Schleiermacher. As the texts in this analysis demonstrate such experiences, giving them representation, they provide a response to secularism.

The texts themselves fit into a cultural and political context of secularization. In the example from Kehlmann’s novel mentioned at the outset, we have a protagonist acting according to secular strategies, interested as he is in the scientific approach to unveiling knowledge. This fictional character reflects the intellectual mindset evident in the broader contemporary secular context in which the text is written. Those qualities ascribed to Kehlmann’s protagonist parallel those characteristics attributed to modern

⁸ Identifying this historical shift away from religion’s normative function, Dannenberg writes: “um die Wende zum 19. Jh. [droht] der Heiligen Schrift die Marginalisierung in der Konkurrenz mit anderen Darlegungen von Orientierungswissen” (8).

individuals who have accommodated to the process of secularization. According to Charles Taylor, these secular individuals emphasize “modern science,” a “buffered identity,” and “modern individualism, with its reliance on instrumental reason and action in secular time” (*Secular* 566). Due to the transition from enchantment to disenchantment, the contemporary, secular subject approaches knowledge scientifically, remaining buffered – impermeable – to influences eluding the natural realm of cognitive comprehension. The texts I analyze present protagonists who both participate in and, as the scene at the outset suggests, react to this secular context. The texts prove to be secular in that they participate in the “wider political culture” interested in a “secular idiom and a ‘universally accessible language’” (Habermas, *Public Sphere* 5). At the same time, they reveal an alternative, postsecular perspective, as they, while probing the possibilities of language, attempt to generate innovative terms and forms for representing religion, providing a new lens through which individuals can view their multidimensional lives.⁹

This introductory chapter begins with a discussion of secularism. From there it moves to an assessment of how individuals can posture themselves within secularism’s “immanent frame” (Taylor’s term), namely, the contemporary context in which people can describe the world on its own terms, without having to resort to concepts beyond the empirical. Within immanence individuals may act “porously,” remaining open to what is unseen and unknown. After defining this term, I turn to an analysis of postsecularism, an alternative perspective within secularism that reflects this porous stance. Following this discussion, I provide a brief evaluation of the current climate towards religion in German

⁹ On this point, see Dietrich Gützen 282, where he discusses the role literature can play in reformulating and re-presenting religion within a contemporary social system in the process of reorganization and re-figuration.

society. After looking at Schleiermacher's definition of religion, centered as it is on materiality and subjectivity, I define the concept of transcendence to provide a framework for considering how religious experiences transpire in the texts. My final observations have to do with the concept of the trace delineated by Derrida. Establishing these terms and concepts will provide a helpful framework for assessing if and how the texts engage in postsecular gestures when they intimate the transcendent in a secular age.

I. What is Secularism?

To speak of these texts as postsecular when they broach the topic of religion, it is first necessary to understand the preceding concept of "secularism," the texts' wider context. This term carries with it an array of definitions, each with a different emphasis and based on different assumptions.¹⁰ According to Walter Jaeschke, specialist in classic German philosophy, secularism may represent society's general feeling of religion's irrelevance, "eine religiöse indifferente Weltlichkeit" (10). Or, it may indicate a society that has adopted pseudo-religious qualities, resulting from the dissolution of any opposition towards a religious sphere (10). With religious dimensions integrated into them, social and cultural institutions, including certain artistic forms and political ideologies, substitute the role religion traditionally played. According to Jaeschke then, secularism can either be the antithesis of religion or the neutral expression of originally religious strategies of thinking.

¹⁰ From a sociological perspective, Knoblauch identifies three aspects of secularization: "Die Abnahme und Schrumpfung der Religion, die Ausdifferenzierung der Religion und die Privatisierung der Religion" (16). Similarly, Wilson describes it as "The process whereby religious thinking, practices and institutions lose social significance" (14).

Historically, the term secularization was associated with the conveyance of religious property into worldly property.¹¹ This occurred when assets strictly belonging to the Catholic Church were abolished according to the “Reichsdeputationshauptschluss von 1803” (Knoblauch 16). This secularizing of society has continued unabated ever since the beginning of the 19th century, affecting literature (Detering 386-87) and philosophy as well.¹² Before this secularization process – those epochs including the Middle Ages and the Reformation – all literature, the natural sciences, and philosophy were based, to varying degrees, on the “Bibel, Christentum und Kirche” (Detering 386). In the “presecular” framework all realms of intellectual discovery and representation were overwhelmingly influenced by supernatural, non-empirical ideas stemming principally from the institution of the church.

With the onset of the secular age the foundations of thought have radically changed. To be convincing, to find resonance in the modern moment, literature, situated in the process of secularization and in the construction of public discourse, severs its ties from traditional theological discourse in order to reflect an environment that has experienced “the regression of belief in God” and “the decline in the practice of religion”

¹¹ Jaeschke questions the possibility of speaking of one particular historical instance in which secularization took place: “Dies gilt auch für den juristischen Begriff der Säkularisation, der sich in der französischen Verbform “*secularizer*” erstmals in den Vorverhandlungen zum Westfälischen Frieden belegen läßt, obgleich Säkularisationen seit dem 8. Jahrhundert erfolgen” (10). While Jaeschke speaks of numerous secularizations, this project will operate under the premise of a secularization initiated during the Enlightenment.

¹² Ingolf Dalferth – showing the development of the national states in the wake of the religious wars in Europe – points to three specific historical moments representative of distinct secularization motifs: “(a) die Veränderung vom konfessionellen Streit zum säkularen Frieden (politisches Motiv: 16.-17. Jahrhundert), (b) die Veränderung von einer monopolistischen Staatswirtschaft zu einer freien Marktwirtschaft (ökonomisches Motiv: 18.-19. Jahrhundert) und (c) die Veränderung von einer autoritären religiösen Vergangenheit zu einer liberalen Moderne (kulturelles Motiv: 19.-20. Jahrhundert)” (20).

(Taylor, *Sources* 309). The literature to be explored in this project positions itself as secular, as it distances itself from the constraints of institutionalized religion and offers fictional worlds whose irrational elements expose the possibilities of what is rational. In this vein, Langenhorst suggests: “Literatur lebt schließlich nicht nur von erfahrener und erschriebener Wirklichkeit, sondern vor allem vom Möglichkeitssinn, von einer Sehnsucht nach dem Anderen und Unendlichen, von der Vision dessen, was sein könnte” (“Literatur und Theologie”). In testing out what is possible, the texts explore patterns of thought reflective of an intellectual spirit interested in maintaining society’s current reality, namely, the “secular sphere,” one ever endeavoring to arrive at a common reason, democratic and universal forms of thinking, and the maintenance of scientific freedom.

a. A common reason

The secularization thesis relies on the preeminent place of reason, which, in the modern era, is the sole authority.¹³ According to Habermas, the “natürliche[n] Vernunft” consists of “die fehlbaren Ergebnisse der institutionalisierten Wissenschaften” (*Bewusstsein* 27). Science within the academy continuously carries out experiments, generating novel results, which, to the degree that they may be either preliminary or fallible, are still indicative of advancements in knowledge and more effective, efficient, or accurate ways of thinking. While our knowledge of what is rational will always remain incomplete, natural reason – reason that relies on public arguments to which all people have equal access (Habermas, *Religion* 5) – still directs our pursuit to arrive at accurate perceptions of reality and to depict it as it is. Reason, particularly since the Enlightenment, has played an ever-increasing role in determining the permissibility or

¹³ See Höhn 18.

impermissibility of certain ways of thinking. This natural reason stems from knowledge capable of being conveyed and justified in the bounds of discourse.

To participate in this discourse, modern individuals, finding themselves in a “‘disenchanted’ universe” (Taylor, *Secular* 28) – a world void of the mysterious and incalculable – cannot take recourse to the use of enigmatic terms unable to be reasonably understood or expressed. Hence, in Habermas’ terms, secular individuals endeavor to find common agreement, “Einigung,” through the use of “eines gemeinsamen Vernunft” (*Bewusstsein* 60). They restrict their assertions to material based in the empirical realm, to denotative statements consistent with logical positivism. To be ‘secular’ is to speak in a language that does not resort to the indemonstrable and mysterious. Communication ensues on the basis of language accessible “allen Bürgern gleichermaßen” and capable of “einer säkularen Rechtfertigung” (*Zwischen* 11). Discussion in a secular environment presupposes the use of terms upon which people could agree regardless of their specific religious, cultural, or ideological persuasions. As they narratively build their arguments, the literary texts in my project, participating in the secular endeavor to generate a universally acceptable language, attempt to discover appropriate terms that would offer nuanced figurations of what is presently considered rational.¹⁴ In doing so they come up with new forms of language and representation that would logically appeal to (and intellectually resonate with) the broad spectrum of an engaged readership interested in

¹⁴ In an interview, titled “A Conversation about God and the World,” Habermas mentions that “indispensable potentials for meaning are preserved in religious language, potentials that philosophy has not yet fully exhausted, has not yet translated into the language of public, that is, of presumptively generally convincing, reasons” (162). Philosophy, and I would include literature here as well, offers innovative, intellectual concepts descriptive of the human predicament that, at times, make sense. Hence, using a secular idiom, literature preserves religious language by translating it into what is publicly reasonable.

actualizing a common reason in public discourse. While being resolutely secular, interested in demonstrating the fictitious to ultimately elucidate the rational, they introduce incalculable elements, suggesting that what is reasonable in the postsecular moment is multifaceted, based, at times, upon what is also intangible and unverifiable.

b. Democratic, utilitarian thinking

For western society secularization has meant vital improvement for the vast spectrum of humanity, as reason has gradually replaced revelation.¹⁵ This idea is consistent with the “subtraction thesis” which runs as follows: “once we slough off our concern with serving God, or attending to any other transcendent reality, what we’re left with is human good” (Taylor, *Secular* 572).¹⁶ The standards for morality are situated in individuals rather than in an unseen, transcendent deity. People no longer act benevolently and perform good works in order to appease God, but rather because such behavior is rational and based on consensus. In this context, religious institutions – which, in the past, had been associated with a hierarchical, dogmatic, and even exclusive voice – do not solely decide and dictate what is rational. Instead, within a secular framework no one particular viewpoint dominates public discourse. No master narrative stemming from a specific religious persuasion pervades the public space. Consequently, democratic thinking – divorced from a framework “established in some action-transcendent dimension: either by an act of God, or in a Great Chain, or by a law” (Taylor, *Secular* 192) – involves reasonable discourse based on “mechanistic explanation” and “efficient causation” (Taylor, *Secular* 595). When this ensues

¹⁵ See Müller 230.

¹⁶ Taylor argues against the “subtraction thesis,” contending that the emphasis on “human good” evident in secular society does not necessarily preclude the ongoing belief in some sort of transcendence.

individuals are able to mutually decide on the most optimal course of action for securing a stable and coherent existence for the greatest number of people possible.¹⁷

For Habermas democratic thinking is necessary, because it allows people to arrive at a common sense that, in preventing exclusivity, secures a truly “secular” society. From his perspective, many voices must democratically participate in the evolution of this common sense that is advantageous because of its inclusiveness. Serving a “zivilisierende Rolle,” this “demokratisch aufgeklärte Commonsense” (*Glauben und Wissen* 10) paves a way between “Wissenschaft” and “Religion.” Continuing on and emphasizing how common sense is the product of a plurality of voices, Habermas writes, “Der demokratisch aufgeklärte Commonsense ist kein Singular, sondern beschreibt die mentale Verfassung einer *vielstimmigen* Öffentlichkeit” (13). A common sense capable of serving a civilizing function depends on language from both science and religion. Aware of their respective limitations, they both have valuable epistemological insights to offer a public consciousness in the process of being democratically formed. The texts in this analysis shape this democratically based common sense, as they position religious perspectives (or, representations) alongside scientific, secular ones, which are as equally evident in the novels. The religious representations that do become evident have a unique form, because the dominant, secular voice in the texts reveals an awareness of its inability to resort to the authority of a religious instance and to establish a definitive claim with regard to what the religious is. The novels, positioning the secular (scientific) and the postsecular (religious) side-by-side, endeavor to present both of the narratives that are at work in

¹⁷ Representative of this resolutely secular stance are, according to Taylor, “radical Aufklärer,” who “start from the fact that people desire happiness or pleasure and absence of pain. The only issue is how to maximize happiness” (*Sources* 321).

shaping the public's common sense, which is ultimately evolving in a climate of secularism interested in a scientific approach to improving human well being.

c. Exploratory freedom

Detached as it is from the religious sphere, the public sphere – where the exchange of ideas through literature transpires – offers a place of scientific freedom. Secular life is marked by the belief in limitless advance. A secular model of the world, increasingly disconnected from “the limitations ascribed to religion” (Fessenden 155) and antiquated religious paradigms, is informed instead through a belief in the “metanarrative of progress” (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 88). It presupposes the pursuit of a realm in which freedom is guaranteed and actualized for the greatest number of individuals.¹⁸ Regarding secularism's association with freedom, Taylor writes: “What is peculiar to the modern world is the rise of an outlook where the single reality giving meaning to the repeatable cycles is a narrative of human self-realization, variously understood as the story of Progress, or Reason and Freedom...” (*Secular* 716). Cognizant of society's emphasis on self development, people in the secular age carry out their lives according to their own determinations, and, in this sense, secular forms of thought are experimental, interested in moving beyond fixed patterns and modes of perception.¹⁹ Religion is, or has been, ironically, a relatively limiting, inflexible, non-mutable form, because it is attached to institutions devoted to preserving and disseminating traditional, pre-established forms of thought, the “ewige Wahrheiten” (Marx 229). Suggesting religion's aversion to

¹⁸ Watson identifies how the “The Voltaires, Spinozas and Rousseaus” were involved “in the delicate task of dismantling the Christian edifice for the sake of equality, freedom and elevation of the masses” (99).

¹⁹ Along these lines, Taylor suggests that modern outlooks are “tentative and exploratory” (*Sources* 318).

scientific freedom, Habermas writes: “Religion is in danger of blocking precisely this communicative action [achieved consensus] because it does not leave the religious participants in discourse free to enter the presuppositionless space of rational communication, but instead equips them with clear directives concerning the goal of the discourse” (*An Awareness* 5). Habermas goes on to argue that entrance into the secular realm requires religious individuals of all persuasions and ideologies to adopt secular strategies of thought, by setting aside their tendency to reduce their reasons for thinking in a specific manner to a final instance not circumscribed in the phenomenal realm.²⁰ Without adhering to specific, ‘religious’ creeds, the secular individual exists freely in a perpetual state of exploration, looking at both the natural world and the historical record for new discoveries that would shed light on the multifariousness of existence. The texts in this analysis, I will suggest, represent, in secular form, this exploratory approach to the discovery of human knowledge. While doing so, they present a religious discourse with its own exploratory modality, one that endeavors to disclose the forms of religion emerging in the secular age, one that emphasizes a framework of immanence, the topic to which I will now turn.

II. Life in the Immanent Frame

What does the immanent frame include? Taylor defines it as “the different structures we live in: scientific, social, technological, and so on, constitute such a frame in that they are part of a ‘natural,’ or ‘this-worldly’ order which can be understood in its

²⁰ For an extended discussion of how this “komplementäre Lernbereitschaft” ensues as religious and secular spheres translate “ihre Argumente in die jeweils andere Sprache,” see *Bewusstsein* 52.

own terms, without reference to the ‘supernatural’ or ‘transcendent’” (*Secular* 594).²¹

Being in immanence is to be restricted. An individual is restricted to only that which his or her senses can perceive. These perceptions are based upon empirical data. To be in the immanent frame is to be restricted to this data, to the phenomena. As individuals have accommodated themselves to the developments of an ongoing secularization – to a greater emphasis upon the material as opposed to the immaterial – they find themselves ensconced more resolutely in the sphere of immanence. Scientific advancements and new intellectual models for perceiving the world have rendered it impossible for people to avoid this immanent framework, which, according to Taylor, is “common to all of us in the modern West” (*Secular* 543). Both the religious and nonreligious cannot evade the historical developments that have led to the conclusion that one can epistemologically rely only on what can be evidently confirmed. Comprehension of the phenomenal world and the interpretation of experience therein do not require people to go beyond the tools and material at their disposal. In Kantian terms, they have the categories for generating knowledge regarding objects and experiences within themselves.²² All knowledge derives from the natural world, including the world both outside and inside the individual. A person’s survival and his or her sense of existential orientation in the bounds of time and

²¹ In a similar manner, Höhn speaks of the disappearance of an extra-empirical reference point: “Was zuvor außer oder jenseits der Welt vermutet wurde, fällt buchstäblich „aus“, d.h. findet nicht (mehr) statt, weil es keine „Stätte“ mehr für es gibt. Was *in* der Welt ist, muss auch *von* der Welt sein...Was früher einem Jenseits zugehörig schien, wird zum Bestand des Diesseits gezählt – oder bleibt ortlos, funktionslos, bedeutungslos” (19). Modernity has witnessed a radical turn to this-sidedness, as individuals have eliminated and excluded those moments of thinking which resort to instances beyond, those that cannot be localized in empirical space.

²² In his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant indicates these categories belonging to the subject and enabling the experience of an object when he writes, “Es sind drei subjektive Erkenntnisquellen, worauf die Möglichkeit einer Erfahrung überhaupt, und Erkenntnis der Gegenstände derselben beruht: *Sinn, Einbildungskraft, und Apperzeption*” (173).

space do not depend upon recourse to any object or idea not found in those spaces inaccessible to the senses. Instead, according to Taylor – who, in this manner, aligns himself with Kantian epistemology – being in the immanent frame “is the sense of an absence; it is the sense that all order, all meaning comes from us” (*Secular* 376). To access an actually existing, exterior world, modern individuals realize the importance of employing their own subjective capabilities of generating meaning. Becoming more localized in immanence has resulted in a more definitive turn towards subjectivity.

This subjectively positioned, modern figure possesses, in Taylor’s model, two ways of living in the immanent frame. Within it there are “porous” individuals who “want to live it as open to something beyond,” and “buffered” individuals who “live it as closed” (*Secular* 543). Regarding the later possibility, to maintain a closed stance is to adopt a “‘closed’ reading...see[ing] immanence as admitting of no beyond” (*Secular* 550); it is to remain constrained to a mind, which admits as “knowledge” only that which can be logically or rationally delineated. With regard to the former, an individual appropriates an open stance, becoming “porous,” by opening to those intuitions with seemingly no bearing in the empirical realm. It is to subjectively decide that one’s senses have both known sources (those stemming from the individual) and unknown sources (those stemming from beyond the individual’s cognitive faculties). Briefly, I want to outline the contours of these two possible selves.

Born out of science’s involvement in “disenchant[ing] the universe” (*Secular* 27), the “buffered” figure operates according to an “ethic of rational control” (*Secular* 134). It obtains epistemological orientation by relying solely on the mind and maintaining strict boundaries between what is known inside the mind and what is unknown outside the

mind: “To be a buffered subject, to have closed the porous boundary between inside (thought) and outside (nature, the physical) is partly a matter of living in a disenchanted world” (*Secular* 300). This figure limits its understanding of reality to those material phenomena which can be rationally – i.e., internally – processed and contained. Because this figure is incapable of rationally making sense of certain external stimuli – unable to draw them into internally established categories of comprehension – it is not quick to open itself up to exterior, foreign sources. Acting in an austere manner, this figure, with a “disengaged, disciplined stance to self and society” (*Secular* 136), remains “utterly unmoved by the aura of desire” (136) and seeks, consequently, to circumscribe what is known by establishing strict, impermeable boundaries; there is “a firm inner/outer boundary in a world which has been disenchanted” (*Secular* 142). Taylor further links this “buffered” figure to an “exclusive humanism” (*Secular* 27), which is accompanied by “an increased sense of human power, that of the disengaged, impartial ordering agent...this self-sufficient agent could face down and set aside age-old human fears, of malevolent spirits, of not being chosen by God, of the blind, overwhelming forces of nature” (*Secular* 261-262). Endowed with autonomy, the buffered person intellectually protects him- or herself from those indeterminable elements of existence – those entities which can only be inferred and not definitively known – by emphasizing that all knowledge derives from a mind, over which he or she maintains strict control. Because of the mind’s central importance “My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them” (*Secular* 38). The mind does not consider that which it cannot fathom or generate. For the buffered

individual everything revolves around limiting positive statements to that which the mind alone can fathom and conceive (*Secular* 539).

How do these reflections on the buffered self provide a helpful framework for analyzing the texts in this project? Important to keep in mind here is the notion that fiction in and of itself explores “non-buffered” realms, as it unfolds the feasibility of that which may be initially perceived as irrational. My suggestion will be that narrators, in certain instances, present their protagonists as buffered, interested in “instrumental rational control” (*Secular* 136), typifying a secular stance. However, the larger purpose of my investigation will be to show how the narrators present protagonists reacting to this buffered identity by countering it with a porous self that represents a postsecular turn. For example, Lewitscharoff’s protagonist, philosopher Hans Blumenberg, and Kehlmann’s protagonists, mathematician Carl Gauß and geographer Alexander von Humboldt, cast as resolutely rational and secular in their desire to control the empirical, nevertheless release themselves to investigations of and ruminations on possible forms eluding the empirical, performing thereby this postsecular porousness.

The alternative to living in a “buffered” manner in the immanent frame is to conduct one’s life in a “porous” fashion, to believe that “thoughts and meanings” are not “only in minds” but that there are instead “charged objects,” which “can impose meaning” (*Secular* 35). These include physical structures, entities in nature and nature itself, and other external stimuli that are ordinary but, within certain contexts or specific instances, become extraordinary. Such objects evoke meaning beyond their material form, and individuals, when experiencing these objects, sense this alternative, incomprehensible meaning, a meaning presupposed to stem from what is external.

Deliberately disconnected from meanings contained and obtained “exclusively in the mind,” the porous individual entertains a “zone” consisting of the “power of exogenous meaning” (35), meaning which does not derive from the individual, but instead penetrates the individual. Acting porously then involves the release of oneself to an exploration of intuitions externally stimulated, those not necessarily associated with, or derived from empirically accessible rational thinking. Discussing how this figure senses and experiences, Taylor writes: “The inside is no longer just inside; it is also outside. That is, emotions which are in the very depths of human life exist in a space which takes us beyond ourselves, which is porous to some outside power, a person-like power” (*Secular* 36). When coming into contact with any sort of external stimulus, an individual turns inward, examining his or her inner constitution, the emotions and perceptions. In this act he or she may become aware of a subtle intuition of exteriority, that which is unfounded and incalculable.²³ In this instance the emotions have been affected by an external cause. When an individual allows that which is external to affect an internal perception to such a degree that remnants of exteriority perpetually remain (what is exterior cannot be internalized and hence comprehended), it is then that he or she becomes porous and permeable to elements eluding the rigid standards of sensibility.²⁴ In another instance

²³ In another instance, Taylor draws the link between examining ‘inner’ depth while simultaneously intuiting what is ‘external,’ those sources defined as that which cannot be summarily contained: “The inescapable feeling of depth comes from the realization that whatever we bring up, there is always more down there. Depth lies in there being always, inescapably, something beyond our articulative power” (*Sources* 390).

²⁴ In Schleiermacher’s terms this would be a moment of “fehlende Einheit.” Manfred Frank describes this in the following way: “Immer durchquert das Selbstbewusstsein im Augenblick des ‘Übergangs’ vom Reflektierten zum Reflektierenden die Leerstelle einer ‘fehlenden Einheit.’ Da das Selbst sich diesen Mangel nicht als eigene Tat zuschreiben kann, muss es ihn als Effekt einer ihm ‘transzendente[n] [d.h. außer seiner Macht

Taylor suggests that “the turn inward may take us beyond the self as usually understood” (*Sources* 462). Moments of increased self-consciousness result in transformed perceptions of the self. The self understood as more than its materiality can be affected by the non-material elements that, at times, cloak the material. This understanding of what can occur in the self accords with what Taylor indicates when he writes that for “the porous self, the source of its most powerful and important emotions are outside the ‘mind’; or better put, the very notion that there is a clear boundary, allowing us to define an inner base area, grounded in which we can disengage from the rest, has no sense” (*Secular* 38). As the secular individual allows the boundary to break down between what is external and alien (beyond the mind) and what is comprehensible and rational (contained within the mind), he or she participates in an activity that can be viewed as porous. How this porousness is performed will be the focus of my investigation, and my contention will be that the emergence of this porousness is an indication of the postsecular strategies at work in these secular texts.

III. The Characteristics of Postsecularism

Throughout my analysis of the selected texts, I will view postsecularism as an intellectual movement within secularism, as a synonym, in Habermas’ model, “für die erneute Aufmerksamkeit gegenüber der Religion” (Reder, “Religion” 133). According to Dalferth, when the term secularism is employed, the existence of its negative, or opposite, “the religious,” is also simultaneously inferred. In an attempt to offer a way of overcoming this model premised on oppositions, he differentiates between a weak ‘postsecularism’ and a strong ‘postsecularism:’ “Man kann Post-Säkularität als

 liegenden] Bestimmtheit’ erkennen” (*Dialektik* 92). The transcendent here is that which cannot be unified in thought as one moves between reflecting and arriving at a reflection.

Wiedergewinnen des Religiösen verstehen (schwache Post-Säkularität) oder als Überwindung der Differenz zwischen Religiösem und Säkularem (starke Post-Säkularität)” (9). While weak ‘postsecularity’ refers to religion’s reemergence, with religious topics receiving renewed interest in public spaces, strong ‘postsecularity’ describes an overcoming of this dichotomy, to arrive at a term freed from the perpetuation of this juxtaposition. My project addresses both the weak and strong forms of postsecularism. Certain narrations do indeed evince renewed interest in religious topics. Other narrations dissolve the strict borders between the religious and the secular either by presenting their protagonists as experiencing the religious within the secular or by demonstrating the permeability of these spheres. This becomes especially apparent as certain figures, constructed along secular contours, experience moments inflected with transcendent premonitions, instances narratively created through recourse to religious language. The scene delineated at the outset demonstrates this. The occurrence of such instances is consistent with postsecular thought, which I now want to briefly define.

a. Critique of rationality

Living as open and porous in the immanent frame, the postsecular subject questions certain received concepts associated with secularism, including the concept of rationality. Secularization’s emphasis on the centrality of individual freedom has resulted in “a freedom from all authority” (Taylor, *Sources* 322). Encouraged by Kant in his influential essay, “Was ist Aufklärung,” the turn away from religious authorities, whether in the form of sacred texts or religious officials, opened the door for humanity to more thoroughly explore its own creative mental faculties. The Enlightenment, in a sense, freed people up to invent their own understanding of how they want to rationally exist. This

intellectual trend has never subsided. Secular individuals assume they can, when they want, think rationally, and when they speak of rational thought they frequently believe it to be a stable construction, perceived, in many ways, as an objectively existing, accessible entity, obvious and self-evident. However, as Habermas points out, “reason” and those concepts associated with it carry a unique history, stemming from a wide variety of sources, some being religious in nature:²⁵

So glaube ich nicht, daß wir als Europäer Begriffe wie Moralität und Sittlichkeit, Person und Individualität, Freiheit und Emanzipation – die uns vielleicht noch näher am Herzen liegen als der um die kathartische Anschauung von Ideen kreisende Begriffsschatz des platonischen Ordnungsdenkens – ernstlich verstehen können, ohne uns die Substanz des heilsgeschichtlichen Denkens jüdisch-christlicher Herkunft anzueignen (*Nachmetaphysisches* 23).

Those values and concepts considered rational in the secular age stem, according to Habermas, in many ways from those ideas initially espoused and developed in religious communities. Here, Habermas particularly appropriates the Judeo-Christian tradition, to speak of how it has been the source of that which is considered to “rational” within Western society.²⁶ In a later context, Habermas, expanding the scope of his reflections, contends that “postmetaphysical thinking” – that which is emblematic of the postsecular – “does not restrict itself to the heritage of Western metaphysics but also reconfirms its internal relationship to those *world religions* [my italics] whose origins...date back to the

²⁵ In a similar manner, Knoblauch suggests that the western, rational concept of human dignity cannot be imagined without the theological concept of dignity (21).

²⁶ Taylor makes the assertion as well that “secular humanism has its roots in Judaeo-Christian faith; it arises from a mutation out of a form of that faith” (*Sources* 319).

middle of the first millennium before Christ” (Habermas, *Between* 141). Those intellectual factors streaming into secular and postsecular thought do not stem from one specific religious tradition. Habermas’ basic argument can therefore be applied universally, so that what is considered rational in Western society includes ideas from a multitude of religious traditions; “die großen Religionen [gehören] zur Geschichte der Vernunft selbst” (Habermas, *Zwischen* 12).²⁷

Within these religious traditions lies a semantic potential that can continue to speak to and shape the concept of reason. Notions contained in religion can inform the language engendered when figurations of such ideas as morality and freedom are considered. Habermas suggests this in the continuation of the quote previously cited:

Aber ohne eine sozialisatorische Vermittlung und ohne eine philosophische Transformation *irgendeiner* der großen Weltreligionen könnte eines Tages dieses semantische Potential unzugänglich werden; dieses muß sich jede Generation von neuem erschließen, wenn nicht noch der Rest des intersubjektiv geteilten Selbstverständnisses, welches einen humanen Umgang miteinander ermöglicht, zerfallen soll (*Nachmetaphysisches* 23).

When individuals have a coherent identity, a solid sense of who they are, they are able to engage in respectable interactions. This identity must be perpetuated, and language accomplishes this. Terms stemming from religious traditions belong to the language guaranteeing what is reasonable. For religion to be able to inform this language that

²⁷ In *Glauben und Wissen*, Habermas contends: “Gewiss, auch das egalitäre Vernunftrecht hat religiöse Wurzeln – Wurzeln in jener Revolutionierung der Denkungsart, die mit dem Aufstieg der großen Weltreligionen zusammenfällt” (12).

preserves social identity, those terms associated with and espoused within religion must be translated into the public sphere. This function is ideally well suited for literature.²⁸ It can creatively employ religious notions, infusing them into figurations of rationality, in order to demonstrate the irrational elements of rationality. According to Habermas, this translation of religious sentiments into the secular idiom, which literature can accomplish, involves an ongoing critical reflection “auf den Vernunftbegriff, seine Entstehungsgeschichte und seine Grenzen,” because “in der Genealogie der Vernunft, wie wir sie heute kennen, philosophische und religiöse Inhalte miteinander verschmolzen sind und wechselseitig voneinander profitiert haben” (Graf 235). Reason has a genealogy; it has been developed historically. The factors that have influenced it, including modern science, have been “from the beginning bound up with a religious outlook” (Taylor, *Sources* 310), developed by individuals informed by and through religious worldviews, and such perspectives have seeped into figurations of rationality. Consequently, our concept of reason is historically formed through a network of ideas stemming as much from rational, progressive, propositions as they do from religious considerations.²⁹ To understand, to acknowledge, and to explore both the philosophical and religious factors at

²⁸ Speaking of the distinct similarities between religion and literature and their mutual dependence on symbols, Auerochs writes: “Mit der Religion teilt die Literatur die Eigenschaft, daß sie eine symbolische Form ist, die die Fähigkeit zur umfassenden Weltdeutung besitzt und sich in sprachlicher Gestalt artikuliert” (392). Both literature and religion, symbolic forms endowed with the ability to provide interpretations of the world, utilize linguistic signs to generate meaning. Nevertheless, literature itself has the unique capability of serving as the vocal piece for religious sentiments; recognizing this, Auerochs writes: “Zunächst, und von alters her, ist Literatur ein Artikulationsmedium von Religion” (392). Observing the signs and symbols comprising literary texts, readers come to perceive and understand the changing dynamics inherent in religious forms.

²⁹ Habermas, for example, contends that “Vernunft versteht sich als gesellschaftlicher Prozeß und, dies macht der Artikel deutlich, in geschichtlicher Dimensionen” (*Ein Bewusstsein* 42). Reason has always been an entity continually under construction, drawing its components from the historical moment in which it is (re)conceived.

work in the modern concept of reason is to call into question the “certainty” (*Sources* 312) perceived to innately inhere in the concept of rationality. I term the texts in this analysis postsecular, because they demonstrate society’s “present tentativeness” (*Sources* 312) towards the concept of reason. They also critically reflect on a construct that is unstable in that it is not as neutral or objective as it appears. As these texts critically explore various dimensions of the secularizing process – the advance towards greater degrees of rationality – they identify or indicate that within secularization itself there are remnants of religion, non-rational threads woven into the fabric of rationality.³⁰

b. An alternative narrative

While the story of secularization is the modern West’s present narration, an unquestioned stance towards it would allow this narrative to comfortably establish itself as the hegemonic intellectual framework. Secularism, existing as the master narrative with indisputable preeminence, would be the sole story of the modern age. Conceptually situated at the dissolution of boundaries, the postsecular moment reflects an intellectual stance that counters this prevailing ‘metanarrative;’ “Postsecular thought stems from a desire to resist any master narrative” (Kaufmann 68). As a narrative within the postmodern marketplace of competing narratives, the postsecular does not exist as a definitive marker;³¹ there has never been a “Bruch zwischen säkularen und postsäkularen

³⁰ According to Knoblauch, “Blumenberg sprach deswegen zu Recht von Säkularisation als den “Restbeständen” religiöser Legitimationen in der modernen Gesellschaft” (21).

³¹ According to Höhn, “Weder steht der Terminus “postsäkular” für eine Zeitangabe oder für eine Epochenschwelle, wonach das Zeitalter der Säkularisierung zu Ende sei und nach diesem Ende nun andere Kräfte...den Lauf der Zeit bestimmen. Noch ist er derart rekursiv zu verstehen, dass er “revisionary” etwa auf religiös aktivere Zeiten vor dem Einbruch modernisierungsinduzierter Säkularisierungen...zurückblickt” (24). Postsecularism does not avow secularism’s terminus, by suggesting the abrupt, unexpected emergence of new

Gesellschaften” (Graf 229). The postsecular does not demarcate the onset of a new, detached, and unprecedented form of thinking, which would suggest religion’s sudden return into public consciousness. Religion, within a postsecular framework, is not reappearing after its disappearance, because, as Höhn observes, “sie [Religion] war nie gänzlich verschwunden” (24).³² The postsecular does not represent an either/or, dichotomous thought structure. Instead, it affirms a secular ideology while expanding its parameters. It is, in Beckford’s words, “a progressive development that builds on the achievements of both religion and secularism” (3). In this sense, the “post” in “postsecularism” expresses the simultaneity of continuation and change; it expresses a displacing repetition of the concept of the secular (Mayer).

The postsecular, with its emphasis on a new mode of intellectual processing that does not attempt to chronologically segregate intellectual movements, attempts to tell a different story that remains unheard when the story of secularism, with its own inherent flaws, proceeds uncontested. According to Dunn, secularization carries two sources of instability: “(1.) the secularization process will threaten to destroy the kinds of human potential that it was intended to liberate, and (2.) under the guise of freeing us from superstition, enlightened skepticism is likely to merely substitute one set of questionable beliefs for another” (92). A secularism stemming from the Enlightenment wants to free individuals from the dictates of religious authorities, enabling them to experiment with new ideas, to test out a myriad of creative connections, in order to secure human

intellectual forces taking their cue from pre-secular models of comprehending reality. Instead, postsecularism presumes the continuation of secularization.

³² Graf affirms this sentiment: “In der Religionssoziologie ist man sich...einig, dass sich auch die europäischen Wohlstandsgesellschaften nie wirklich auf ein gänzlich Verschwinden von Religionen eingestellt hätten” (227).

intellectual advancements. As this process occurs, as secularism guarantees people's freedom to discover what is rational, new forms of rationality are instated, and then it is irrational to appropriate certain ways of thinking, as they are perceived as outdated and overcome. When secularism fixes and steadfastly determines what is rational, when rationality reigns, it may tend to limit people's imagination, preventing them from exploring what has been left unexpressed.

In order to continuously generate new modes of perception, individuals need to explore that which is both rational and irrational, in Freudian terms, the unconscious, wherein lies "the great power of the human symbolic capacity" (*Sources* 446). Habermas is, as well, of the opinion that reason in the modern moment may be founded on sources that are both rational and irrational, or unknown (See, for example, "Vorpolitische Grundlagen" 29). For Habermas, being under the authority of reason is essential, and yet this reason itself is constructed in a multivalent fashion, derived from numerous, at times even disparate, networks. As indicated by Dunn, placing too much emphasis on 'secular thinking' moves an individual from one authority to another, with the authority of religious texts being replaced by the authority of human reason, which has had its own historical flaws. When secularism becomes an unquestioned absolute, it jeopardizes the ongoing existence of certain perspectives, including the religious one. Chakrabarty, cautioning against dismissing alternative interpretations, contends, "Criticism in the historical mode, even when it does not institute a human subject at the center of history, seeks to dispel and demystify gods and spirits as so many ploys of secular relationships of power. The moment we think of the world as disenchanted, however, we set limits to the ways the past can be narrated" (88). To participate in social criticism, to question the

forms of knowledge that have been passed down, is to situate the individual at the center and to remove any external, non-empirical source, such as a god, which, previously, would have lent authority to a specific knowledge claim. While this type of criticism is necessary, a disenchanted view is as equally restrictive in that reason becomes the authority that the god once served. To maintain access to various interpretations and therefore to dynamic readings of people, cultures and societies, a multiplicity of narratives is necessary on the marketplace of ideas active in unveiling the modern world.

c. Critique of religion

When the religious sphere and the secular sphere are compartmentalized, they are established as juxtaposed opposites, unable to critically interact. They are segregated into their own specific spheres of influence. Secular society cannot endure religion's presence and vice versa. Yet, religion remains present in the public sphere; it is evident in various cultural manifestations, including literature. With secularism's presupposition of religion's absence, it cannot itself speak to religion; it cannot critically assess it.³³ A postsecular position, however, does provide a way for religious critique to transpire, in that it does not represent a continuation of the ongoing secular/religious dichotomy. Postsecularism, not presupposing religion's abandonment, offers a way to critique an institution that has had ongoing influence in Western society. In this light Habermas suggests: "Die postsäkulare Gesellschaft setzt die Arbeit, die die Religion am Mythos vollbracht hat, an der Religion selbst fort" (*Glauben und Wissen* 15). Instead of dismissing religion, postsecular society does the work of reforming religion's "irrational"

³³ As Marx suggests, the criticism indispensable for all elements of social life is dependent upon an initial criticism of religion: "die Kritik der Religion ist die Voraussetzung aller Kritik" (Müller 257).

flaws and altering its status so that it conforms to what is scientifically permissible in the modern world. Maintaining this ongoing critique of religion presupposes the dissolution of the two spheres – secular and religious – perceived to be mutually opposed; Dalferth suggests this when he states that the “Post-säkular” is the indicator “für eine Verabschiedung sowohl des Säkularen wie des damit mitgesetzten Religiösen. Erst damit lebt man nicht nur in einem säkularen Zeitalter, sondern in einer wirklich post-säkularen Welt” (25). Dissatisfied with a secular/religious dichotomy that has rendered religion’s antiquated forms as irrelevant within, and therefore excluded from (or distinctly separated from), public discourse, the postsecular perspective calls for a more differentiated approach to understanding how and in what form religion’s various facets can be understood and reinterpreted into the experience of modernity. I would not go as far as Dalferth in contending that both the secular and the religious are summarily dismissed with the onset of the postsecular. Instead, postsecularism is reflective of those efforts to bring religious thinking into check, to attune religious propositions, creeds, and teachings to the modern moment. Postsecularism acknowledges that the irrational concepts inherent in religion will never be entirely extricated, because they are necessary for coping with reality’s austere rationality. Yet, it simultaneously endeavors to point out that these concepts are nevertheless still irrational.

The postsecular stance admits that religion, like every cultural phenomenon, is in a state of constant flux. How religion is understood and represented continually alters and evolves. Adorno suggests this as well in his critique of religion: “Nichts an theologischem Gehalt wird unverwandelt fortbestehen; ein jeglicher wird der Probe sich stellen müssen, ins Säkulare, Profane einzuwandern” (14). In secular society religious

representations do not remain stagnant. Instead, individuals creating culture through various forms of art translate them in such a way that they are reproduced in profane – socially accessible – space. Consistent with Adorno’s sentiment, the modern sensibility points out how religious espousals lapse, at times, into the absurd and unbelievable, dependent as they are on traditional delineations, “überkommene[n] religiöse[n] Daseinsdeutungen” (Höhn 24). The modern mindset alters or dismisses outright those traditional forms inconsonant with contemporary interpretations of the human experience. However, this modern mentality cannot completely eliminate religion, in that individuals still possess the persistent demand to deal with the contingency enveloping them; according to Höhn there remains “die anhaltende Nachfrage nach solchen Deutungen z.B. angesichts von Kontingenzerfahrungen im Kontext ökologischer, politischer und gesellschaftlicher Risikoproduktionen” (24). Religious representations fluidly adjusting to societal developments continue to provide orientation for those who seek some sort of meaning in a human situation marked by contingency.

The modern search for meaning is intricately tied up with the pursuit of discovering what is possible. Here, religion and literature overlap; they both address the issue of contingency inherent in the human experience. They explore the unseen factors that may be at work in determining lived reality. They investigate possible worlds that have some sort of correspondence with the natural world. When the texts in this analysis conceive of new ways of representing religion, they simultaneously critique religion. This postsecular criticism has a deconstructive quality, as the critique is employed “zur Dekonstruktion, zum zerlegenden Zusammensetzen, zur Neukontextuierung religiöser Traditionen” (Höhn 24). The postsecular sentiment deconstructs elements of religion,

exposing them as either irrational or culturally irrelevant, and then takes the next step to re-conceptualize them, providing thereby novel religious representations. The literary texts I will analyze demonstrate a critical approach to religion, operating as they do with a dual trajectory, an understanding that those qualities sought in religion cannot be extinguished and an awareness that traditional notions of religion must be deconstructed in order to arrive at novel forms of transcendence, those that would resonate with a culture that finds itself in an ambivalent context.

IV. The Postsecular Climate

Currently, in the Western European context, religion stands somewhere between disappearance and pertinence. German-speaking culture finds itself straddling the hurdle between the postreligious and the postsecular.³⁴ Within this ambiguous milieu, the texts in this project broach topics related to religion and transcendence with their own predilection towards ambivalence. They do not project one specific mode for perceiving how religion is or is not present in modern culture. In this sense, they reflect a larger societal view, which is itself largely ambivalent towards religion. However, as these texts semantically shape public discourse, they do acknowledge the ongoing persistence of religious intuitions, without simultaneously suggesting a reversion to traditionally disseminated institutional forms. To clarify how the texts function and what they speak to, it is helpful to understand the cultural and social context in which they are written.

³⁴ Zabala equates a “postreligious culture” with “the deconstruction of western ontology” (*Future 2*).

From the sociological perspective, Germany's religious institutions experienced a continual downturn (Knoblauch 18) in the later half of the 20th century.³⁵ Consequently, on one hand, the texts find themselves in a milieu of religious disintegration, of religion's loss of relevance and the repression of religion (Höhn, "Reflexive" 15-16).³⁶ On the other hand, these literary productions exist in a present culture marked by a reactivation of religion (Höhn 16). In the German-speaking milieu "die neue Popularität der Religion [zusammenhängt] mit einer deutlichen Zunahme der öffentlichen Aufmerksamkeit" (Knoblauch 31). Religion has come to exist between these two poles largely because of the intellectual movement that occurred in the preceding 200 years – associated with such figures as Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud.³⁷ The result has been that religion has had to resolve itself to "einem Prozess der Enteignung von Zuständigkeiten und des Verlustes von Funktionen" (Höhn 17). Where religion once played a role, for example in providing explanations regarding the origin of the world (Höhn 17), now it no longer does. It has lost many of its competencies and functions, as they have been replaced with secular counterparts that have done a better job of meeting the needs of modern individuals.³⁸ In a Western Europe, where the

³⁵ In the introduction of her work on religion in contemporary German drama, Sinead Crowe cites the following statistic: "In 1949 over 90 percent of the population of Western and Eastern Germany were church members, but by 2000 this had decreased to approximately 80 percent in the West and 25 percent in the East" (5). She also points out that actual church attendance rates during this time period decreased as well, from 13 to 7 percent among Protestants and from 51 to 26 percent amongst Catholics.

³⁶ Graf connects this phenomenon to the end of the Second World War, a time when "typische religiöse Verhaltensweisen und Überzeugungen [abnahmen]" (225).

³⁷ See Newel's *The Secular Magi*.

³⁸ Knoblauch, for example, contends that "das Rechtssystem, die Wirtschaft, die Medien und das Bildungssystem" took influence away from the church. This caused "ein Prozess der institutionellen Spezialisierung" (19). Elaborating on this replacement process, Höhn suggests that for those competencies afforded to religion – including its ability to serve as

“Säkularisierungsthese” emphatically applies, religion, interestingly, still plays a role: “Religiöse Themen...[stehen] ständig auf der politischen und medialen Tagesordnung...: Kruzifix- und Beschneidungsstreit, Kopftuchverbot, Moscheebauten und Abtreibungsdebatte” (Graf 225). Religion and politics are as conflated as ever. Europeans continue to negotiate their political views with a religious perspective in mind, and, in this sense, religion’s persistence in the public sphere indicates the inadequacy of heralding a univocal, all-encompassing narrative of ‘secularism.’ While many in German society are increasingly “unchurched,” they are not necessarily void of religious dispositions (Davie 6-7).

Postsecularism represents the view that religion is not only surviving in secular society, but also actively shaping and orienting public discourse.³⁹ Habermas expresses this sentiment when he writes: “Der Begriff [postsäkular] bringt zum Ausdruck, daß moderne Gesellschaften sich nicht nur auf das Überleben der Religion einstellen müssen, sondern Religionen aktiv gesellschaftliches Leben auf unterschiedlichen Ebenen und in vielfältigen Formen prägen” (*Bewusstsein* 52). Religion’s widespread influence is a reality, to which, according to Habermas, society will have to adopt itself, as its affective capacity and sphere of influence remain pervasive. Embedded within a complicated relationship, “zwischen Bestreitung und Selbstbehauptung” (Höhn, “Reflexive,” 19), religion occupies an unusual role further demonstrating its ambiguous, destabilized, and

a “kollektives Depot für Lebenssinn und als Generator moralischer Normen” (17) – there are now alternatives, which are frequently linked to what is reasonable or rational (18). For further discussion on how secular counterparts have usurped roles originally carried out by religion, see Koch 47.

³⁹ For many people religion has existential relevance, functioning “als identitätsstiftendes Widerlager von Fremdheitserfahrungen in Migrationsgesellschaften, als politische Gegenkraft eines moralisch ausgezehrten Relativismus, als kultureller Gegenentwurf zu einer entfesselten ökonomischen Zweckrationalität” (Höhn, “Reflexive,” 19).

unclarified status. Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, identifying European society's fascination with non-Western, or alternative forms of spirituality, speak of the simultaneous process of secularization and sacralization in European society (3-5).⁴⁰ Religion, as a social and cultural institution, has lost its ability to further propagate its traditional, authority-wielding formulations.⁴¹ However, religion, as a source dependent on, and delineated through, sacred texts rich in linguistic symbols endowed with affective capabilities, finds representation through those traces of transcendence manifested in contemporary textual depictions involved in the generation of "neue Bilder und Mythen" (Allesch 139).⁴² The ensuing analysis will present just such new images. Examples would include those fleeting glimpses into a transcendent sphere emerging in the enveloping

⁴⁰ Regarding this interest in alternative forms of spirituality, Höhn writes, "Kein Arzt schickt heute noch seine Patienten auf eine Wallfahrt, damit diese am Grabe eines bedeutenden Heiligen durch Berührung seiner Reliquie an Leib und Seele gesunden. Und dennoch boomt die Nachfrage nach „ganzheitlichen“ Heilkuren, nach Heilkräutern aus Klostergärten, nach mystischen Heil(ungs)wissen" ("Reflexive" 32). In a similar vein, Taylor points out that "People still seek those moments of fusion, which wrench us out of the everyday, and put us in contact with something beyond ourselves...pilgrimages, mass assemblies like World Youth Days...rock concerts, raves, and the like" (*Secular*, 516).

⁴¹ A similar process is quite evident in the late 18th, early 19th century; Gützen writes, "Literatur hat die Religion nicht zerstört, sondern tritt an ihre Stelle, und zwar dort, wo Rezipienten sie in diese Funktion einsetzen...Kunst und Philosophie nehmen so schon in der Klassik und endgültig dann in der Romantik Raum und Funktion der Religion dort ein, wo die dogmatischen Lehren dem religiösen Bedürfnis nicht mehr genügen" (290).

⁴² Detering, for example, speaks of the Biblical references that ceaselessly manifest themselves in the works of great literature: "Als diskursive Dispositive, als narrative Schemata, als ikonografische Präfigurationen, als Reservoir für Themen und Motive, als kulturelles Archiv von Szenen, Bildern, Sprachformen und kultischen Ritualen bestimmen diese biblischen Texte nicht nur im engeren Sinne auf biblische Vorgaben bezogenen Dichtungen vom Mittelalter bis z. B. zu Tolstojs *Auferstehung*...sondern überhaupt die Selbst- und Weltmodellierungen der westlichen Kulturen bis weit in politische oder künstlerische Inszenierungen hinein" (390). In literature, culturally distinct spheres collide; cultural realms mix and interact. Hence, religion – along with its corresponding symbols – finds its renewed representation in the cultural space of literature, endowed as it is with the ability to reinterpret and reformulate what religion has been unable to express as its institutionalized status has diminished.

destruction pervasively present in Sebald's text, *Die Ringe des Saturn*. And, in Kehlmann's text, *Die Vermessung der Welt*, we have the picture of a disappointing world suggesting the possibility of a more complete one.

V. Religion

With the assumption that postsecular intellectual strategies latently inhere in the secular age, I contend that religion continues to have a presence in contemporary culture and particularly in literature. Before identifying how literature represents religion, it is first necessary to define religion. This will provide a framework for observing how contemporary German literary texts give religion some sort of form. Because definitions of religion abound, I do not have the space, nor is it necessary, to address all of them.⁴³ Instead, I will focus on explaining some dimensions of one important paradigm of religion: namely, Friedrich Schleiermacher's.⁴⁴ As a philosopher and liberal, Protestant theologian, he emphasized a subjective form of religion centered on the feelings emerging in an individual when he or she comes into contact with nature.

To account for modernity's turn towards the individual, I have specifically chosen to work with Schleiermacher's model, believing that it provides a helpful framework for

⁴³ Emile Durkheim's is one of the most popular ones; for him religion is a "solidarisches System von Überzeugungen und Praktiken, die sich auf heilige, d. h. abgesonderte und verbotene Dinge [...] beziehen, die in einer und derselben moralischen Gemeinschaft, die man Kirche nennt, alle vereinen, die ihr angehören" (Detering 382).

⁴⁴ With its inclusive overtones, his model as well reflects the religious representations surfacing in the secular age. Habermas recognizes this: his [Schleiermacher's] "transcendental philosophical introduction of religiosity has the advantage of being able to accommodate religious pluralism within society and the state without violating the claims of positive religious traditions or denying them altogether" (*Between* 233-234). He reveals this pluralistic tone in *Über die Religion*, when he writes "Nur in der Totalität aller nach dieser Construction möglichen Formen kann die ganze Religion wirklich gegeben werden, und sie wird also nur in einer unendlichen Succeßion kommender und wieder vergehender Gestalten dargestellt, und nur was in einer von diesen Formen liegt trägt zu ihrer vollendeten Darstellungen etwas bei" (171). See pages 138 and 140 as well.

identifying the subject dependent forms of religion evident in these contemporary texts.⁴⁵ Here I would be in agreement with Michael Reder, who contends that Schleiermacher's understanding of religion serves "als eine überzeugende Basis für den aktuellen Diskurs...insofern er eine Reduktion der Religion auf Moral umgeht und stattdessen die Bedeutung des Verhältnisses von Transzendenz und Immanenz in der allgemeinen Erfahrungswelt der Menschen herausarbeitet" ("Religion als kulturelle Praxis" 141). Schleiermacher does not reduce religion to a social practice enabling people to find moral orientation. With this move Schleiermacher reacts to Kant's 'reasonable, moral religion,' delineated in *die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1794). Kant's ideas on religion stem from the Enlightenment aim to obtain "Einsicht in die Rationalität der Schöpfung" and to test religious truths "vor der Instanz der Vernunft" (Gutten 286). A rational humanity must have a rational religion, and hence Kant's insistence on the "ethisches Gebiet" (Gutten 287). Schleiermacher does not emphasize this. Religion does not principally involve disseminating and proliferating rational foundations for morality.

For Schleiermacher, religion's source stems from experience. This perspective finds correspondence with a modern mood similarly insistent on the experiential as the basis for what is real. Religion captures the unfolding of that moment occurring when subjects fixed in immanence experientially intuit transcendence. Religion then becomes the language to express those intuitions arising as the intricate relationship between transcendence and immanence unfolds. These ideas on religion offer an appropriate

⁴⁵ Taylor states this concisely in the following: "So where the original Romantics turned to nature and unadorned feeling, we find many moderns turning to a retrieval of experience or interiority" (*Sources* 461).

historical precedent for considering the possibilities of postsecular forms of religion within the immanent realm of secularism. Postsecularism, as a reactionary strand within secularism, follows a similar pattern to the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment; it too reveals less interest in the ethical than in the experiential. Religion is not a rational construction. Instead, it consists of feelings, and, as Charles Taylor suggests, “Twentieth-century art has gone more inward, has tended to explore, even to celebrate subjectivity; it has explored new recesses of feeling, entered the stream of consciousness” (*Sources* 456). Literature, as one of the arts, finds itself in a unique place to explore how these experientially based feelings emerge.

Schleiermacher’s – subsequently quite popularized – definition of religion in *Über die Religion* (1799) will serve as the basis for my understanding of religion throughout this project. Schleiermacher writes:

Sie [Religion] begehrt nicht das Universum seiner Natur nach zu bestimmen und zu erklären wie die Metaphysik, sie begehrt nicht aus Kraft der Freiheit und der göttlichen Willkühr des Menschen es fortzubilden und fertig zu machen wie die Moral. Ihr Wesen ist weder Denken noch Handeln, sondern Anschauung und Gefühl. Anschauen will sie das Universum, in seinen eigenen Darstellungen und Handlungen will sie es andächtig belauschen, von seinen unmittelbaren Einflüssen will sie sich in kindlicher Paßivität ergreifen und erfüllen lassen...Jene sehen im ganzen Universum nur den Menschen als Mittelpunkt aller Beziehungen, als Bedingung alles Seins und Ursach alles Werdens; sie will im

Menschen nicht weniger als in allen andern Einzelnen und Endlichen das Unendliche sehen, deßen Abdruck, deßen Darstellung (79).⁴⁶

Numerous elements here require explanation. First, religion concedes any urge to control natural phenomena. It does not participate in the Enlightenment project of limiting knowledge to what is tangible or mentally sensible. Avoiding the tendency to epistemologically tame the natural order, religion instead wishes to allow nature to exhibit and render its own categories, those frequently exceeding humanity's categories of comprehension. Hence, religion does not endeavor to explain, to offer definitive interpretations and resolutely accurate explanations of natural occurrences. When the literary texts generate a religious atmosphere, they present protagonists who surrender their insistence on scientific certainty. In this act they reveal their intuition of a universe consistently unfolding what is beyond – what transcends – its presently existing forms.

Second, religion transpires when an individual, involved in an activity not necessarily perceived as pragmatic according to the strict standards of rational thinking and acting, does not perceive a finite object as a mere entity to be purposefully used. In this way, Ernst Müller suggests that Schleiermacher opens up “die Möglichkeit einer Erfahrung endlicher Dinge” that is “frei von praktischen oder rationalen Zwecken” (250). As an individual perceives a finite object as an end in and of itself, he or she can experience the noumena within the phenomena: “So ist die Religion bei Schleiermacher das Medium, um das bei Kant transzendent gesetzte “Ding an sich,” das “Unendliche”

⁴⁶ Schleiermacher's words, “Jene sehen” are a bit difficult to translate. The suggestion is that “Religion sieht” either “jene” “Darstellungen und Handlungen” performed by the universe or the “Wirkungen” caused by what the universe does. In either case, these (jene) activities (Handlungen) or effects (Wirkungen) are observed and identified within people, so the focus is on that which occurs to and within the individual.

(wie Schleiermacher synonym für “Universum” sagt) unmittelbar in den Erscheinungen bzw. im Endlichen zu erfassen” (Müller 250). Religion occurs when the universe’s finite objects are permitted to express their own eternity, that is, the limitless nature of how they can be interpreted or perceived. Any attempt to purposely contain an object would be viewed as a limitation on the object’s ability to unveil its own unending qualities. Religion is experienced when an individual allows him- or herself to be influenced by an ever-changing universe, one marked as fundamentally autonomous and in constant flux. Consequently, individuals fall into a religious posture when they surrender to their feelings and intuitions, as they allow the universe, with its own particular activities, to leave behind its impressions on them. With this in mind, I will specifically analyze the texts with a view towards how nature incites these feelings and intuitions, so that they become the source for the protagonists’ reflections on the transcendent.

Third, religion arises out of what the individual does to reveal the eternal. Because religion fundamentally consists of intuition and feeling, it is necessary to look at the human as the location from which depictions and interpretations of the universe stem: “Das größte Kunstwerk ist das, dessen Stoff die Menschheit ist welches das Universum unmittelbar bildet” (*Über* 132). Humanity is the source from which representations of the universe unfold and from where intuitions of the infinite become unveiled. Taking into account Schleiermacher’s definition of religion, with its focus on the natural sphere and the human subject, my analysis will emphasize identifying the role of materiality and subjectivity in the textual representations of transcendence.

Before elaborating on these two features, I want to briefly address a concept frequently associated with Schleiermacher, “Kunstreligion.”⁴⁷ His understanding of religion has historically been linked to artistic representations, and specifically literature: “Religion und Kunst stehen nebeneinander wie zwei befreundete Seelen” (*Über* 131).⁴⁸ Without preexisting scientific paradigms, they are both rooted in creativity. Exploratory in nature, they are endowed with the ambition to participate in an affective capacity. With this in mind, Detering writes “Kunstreligion kann schon bei Schleiermacher selbst so aufgefasst werden, als seien ‘große und erhabne Kunstwerke’ gleichberechtigte Medien religiöser Offenbarung neben der heiligen Schrift. So verstanden wäre die autonome Kunsterfahrung nicht mehr nur Analogie der religiösen, sondern würde selbst zur religiösen Erfahrung” (392). For Schleiermacher, significant works of art function in a manner similar to sacred texts, as they both provide the source through which an experience of revelation may transpire. When individuals observe such momentous pieces of art, the viewing itself, the experience of art, becomes a religious experience. While this possibility is important to keep in mind, the focus of my analysis will not be on the reader’s experience of the work of art.⁴⁹ Instead of investigating the effects certain texts may wield on readers, I will concentrate on how the texts, with postsecular

⁴⁷ Schleiermacher uses the term in the *Dritte Rede* (130) of *Über die Religion*, where he attributes to art the capability of awakening religious feelings (Groezinger 276).

⁴⁸ For Schleiermacher expressions of religion are entirely dependent on linguistic forms: “Darum ist es unmöglich Religion anders auszusprechen und mitzuteilen als rednerisch, in aller Anstrengung und Kunst der Sprache” (*Über* 137).

⁴⁹ And, indeed a few scholars have focused on this, as they have written specifically on how to perceive certain works of literature in the postsecular moment, situating literature as the place where religious experiences can occur: “The ‘cracks’ into which religious impulses flow in a world without religion are nothing other than the space of literature itself: literature is neither an alternative to, nor a substitute for religion, but a way in which religious experience can happen” (Bradley 5).

elements, possess the unique capability of rendering evocative, elevating forms – similar to those purveyed in religious institutions – in a universally accessible manner. Narrative features point to specific ways in which individual protagonists are transferred out of their quotidian lives. The protagonists demonstrate how they experience the transcendent, as they see beyond themselves, moving thereby into previously unoccupied spheres of cognition. Defining elements of “die romantische Kunstreligion,” associated with Schleiermacher, Auerochs contends that “das offenbarende Kunstwerk [gilt] als dogmenfrei, spontan, überwältigend und unmittelbar evident” (397).⁵⁰ Works of art are endowed with the capability of revealing, in that they can confront individuals with what is overwhelming. These revelatory qualities, associated with what religion offers, can be found in nature and in the space of literary and artistic productions.⁵¹ My analysis will focus on how the texts, at certain moments, offer the performance of religiously coded experiences, moments in which their protagonists subjectively reflect on their experiences with materiality and encounter those revelatory qualities typically associated with the functions inherent in religion.

⁵⁰ Identifying the link between Schleiermacher and “Kunstreligion,” Detering suggests that the concept that is “Teil von Schleiermachers Bemühen, gegenüber der Neigung zu einer Kunstidolatrie, die er bei Friedrich Schlegel und anderen frühromantischen Gefährten sorgenvoll beobachtet, Kunst und Kunsterleben als *Propädeutik* der Religion zur Geltung zu bringen, als Sensibilisierung für Religion” (392). He promotes a pedagogical model, in which art is perceived as an essential instrument used to prepare individuals for religion. In my project I will not be looking at the texts with this pedagogical perspective in mind. I am not under the assumption that these texts are in any way written with the intent on readying individuals for a religious experience.

⁵¹ When I speak of space here I have in mind an idea of space as delineated by Charles Taylor when he writes: “The work of art as vortex is a cluster; it is a constellation of words or images which sets up a space which draws energy into it...It [the epiphany] happens not so much in the work as in a space that the work sets up; not in the words or images or objects evoked, but between them” (*Sources* 476).

Religion, appearing to be without content because of its association with immaterial realms, ideas, and assertions, nevertheless has a definite source, which includes clearly defined objects. These “tangible” objects are, according to Schleiermacher, the universe and humanity’s interaction with it; he writes: “Stellet Euch auf den höchsten Standpunkt der Metaphysik und der Moral, so werdet Ihr finden, daß beide mit der Religion denselben Gegenstand haben, nemlich das Universum und das Verhältnis des Menschen zu ihm” (*Über* 75). Religion involves observing and interpreting the universe and identifying how individuals interact with it and are affected by it. Religion encompasses the study and reflection upon a human condition that is continually influenced by an ever-changing, dynamic universe, which discloses itself as it operates on individuals. While the natural sciences focus on interpreting the material, religion places its attention on subjects situated within, and affected by, the material. For this reason, materiality and subjectivity are the two categories specifically framing the analysis of the texts in this project.⁵²

Material, natural space, in Schleiermacher’s system, is an active agent. Endowed with capabilities of affectivity, it is the catalyst behind those religious feelings evoked in individuals. As individuals observe nature and become caught up in impressions exceeding their capacities to contain and compartmentalize, they experience sentiments that cannot be localized as they seemingly have an alternative origin. Pointing to the central role that observing the universe plays in the unfolding of a religious experience, Schleiermacher writes: “Anschauen des Universums...er [this concept of viewing the

⁵² According to Groezinger, religion, for Schleiermacher, is anchored in two ways, “im Gemüt des Menschen, d.h. einer inneren Provinz des Seelenlebens und im Universum, d.h. im Äußersten der vorstellbaren Welt” (277).

universe] ist der Angel meiner ganzen Rede, er ist die allgemeinste und höchste Formel der Religion" (*Über* 81). Religion requires and begins with the individual's observation – "Anschauen" – of space that acts, initiates, and catalyzes: "Alles Anschauen gehet aus von einem Einfluß des Angeschaueten auf den Anschauenden" (*Über* 81).⁵³ Nature serves as the stimulus; the seen influences the one seeing. In this sense, Schleiermacher offers a deeply material basis for the emergence of religious feelings, demonstrating that religion's content is as much dependent upon the tangible as it is upon the intangible. That is, tangible, empirical signs within the universe awaken intangible, non-phenomenal feelings and reflections within the individual, those that are definitively beyond the scope of empirical investigation. While the tangible serves as the trigger, it is always the sensing individual – equipped with the ability to perceive to an unbounded degree – that becomes the focalization point for religion's revelation. It is within this nexus that literature and religion converge, as the narrators present protagonists communicatively expressing the affectivity unfolding and unraveling within them, as they, in certain instances, fall under the grasp of material impulses with specifically charged forces. Regarding such impulses, Schleiermacher writes:

Wenn die Ausflüße des Lichtes nicht...Euer Organ berührten, wenn die kleinsten Theile der Körper die Spizen Eurer Finger nicht mechanisch oder chemisch affizierten...so würdet Ihr nicht anschauen und nichts wahrnehmen, und was Ihr also anschaut und wahrnehmt, ist nicht die Natur der Dinge, sondern ihr Handeln auf Euch....So die Religion; das Universum ist in einer ununterbrochenen Thätigkeit und offenbart sich uns

⁵³ For a more detailed discussion of "Anschauen" and its connection to religion, see Auerochs 397.

jeden Augenblick. Jede Form die es hervorbringt, jedes Wesen dem es nach der Fülle des Lebens ein abgesondertes Dasein giebt...ist ein Handeln deßelben auf Uns; und so alles Einzelne als einen Theil des Ganzen, alles Beschränkte als eine Darstellung des Unendlichen hinnehmen, das ist Religion (82).

Schleiermacher's suggestion here is that nature takes the initial move in evoking religion. There would be no human perception without the initiation of nature. In touching the senses, natural elements spur the activity of "Anschauen," and, as the universe exposes that which has not yet been perceived, it generates new forms. When these unique, individual forms are observed, they are then expressed, with the effect that the parts point to a larger whole that gestures towards the infinite. Hence, for any new religious form to appear on the public stage, the universe must be re-perceived and allowed to act – according to its own fashion and in its own manner – on modern subjects. For Schleiermacher, the material definitively serves as the catalyst behind those perceptions that are circumscribed as religious. Taking into account this emphasis on the material as the locus where religious intuitions are generated, I will devote two chapters in this project to authors (W. G. Sebald and Daniel Kehlmann) whose texts present a natural sphere with acting – "handelnde" – qualities. The authors present protagonists whose interactions with nature become the source behind the narrative work of integrating the transcendent into the immanent.

It is not only materiality that is at the foundation of every religious experience but also subjectivity. Individuals (subjects) reflectively process what the universe renders to the senses (the material), and they then mediate the phenomenal through their own

categories of perception. Religion cannot exist without the activity of what individuals perform when they interpret their interactions with an affecting universe. For a perception to be considered religious, or belonging to religion, it must take into account the subjective response to the material realm. According to Schleiermacher's quote mentioned earlier, it is people who serve as the "Mittelpunkt aller Beziehungen, als Bedingung alles Seins und Ursach alles Werdens; sie [Religion] will im Menschen nicht weniger als in allen andern Einzelnen und Endlichen das Unendliche sehen, deßen Abdruck, deßen Darstellung (79). Just as nature is the catalyst of the religious, so too are individuals. The eternal does not innately inhere in external, objective space. Instead, humans become the location where the infinite emerges. This is where religion becomes resolutely non-empirical and entirely subjective – "Die Offenbarung geschieht *im* Menschen" (Müller 247). Religion is dependent upon a subject's perceptive and then constructive categories; "Der Mensch wird mit der religiösen Anlage geboren wie mit jeder andern" (*Über* 120). With religious inclinations, autonomous subjects generate inflected, filtered perceptions of material space, which, in certain moments, become subjectively coded as religious, as the finite individual evinces those premonitions of eternity inhering within the subject. With this in mind, Schleiermacher's model, which emphasizes that which is unveiled within the subject, can be employed well in a modern, secular age that is resolutely individualistic.

In the current, secular milieu accentuation is placed on what the subject does. Underscoring the essential role the subject plays in creatively depicting the world, Taylor writes: "The creative imagination is the power which we have to attribute to ourselves, once we see art as expression and no longer simply as mimesis. Manifesting reality

involves the creation of new forms which give articulation to an inchoate vision, not simply the reproduction of forms already there” (*Sources* 379). The creative expression of these new forms is the direct result of the subject’s response to certain stimuli in the empirical, material realm. If and when religion is generated, it is done so in and through what the subject “artistically” performs. All feelings of the eternal stem ultimately from what transpires in the individual; Schleiermacher writes:

Schaut Euch selbst an mit unverwandter Anstrengung...und je mehr Ihr Euch selbst verschwindet, desto klarer wird das Universum vor Euch dastehn, desto herrlicher werdet Ihr belohnt werden für den Schrek der Selbstvernichtung durch das Gefühl des Unendlichen in Euch. Schaut außer Euch auf irgend einen Theil, auf irgend ein Element der Welt und faßt es auf in seinem ganzen Wesen, aber sucht auch alles zusammen was es ist, nicht nur in sich, sondern in Euch (129).

Turning inwards an individual finds representations of a universe that emanates a sense of an infinity belonging not to an externally existing world, but instead to an internally intuiting subject endowed with an inclination to see beyond its perceived restrictions and limitations. In this sense, the subject also becomes the principle and sole generator of those urges to move beyond the phenomenal realm. With this in mind, two chapters in this project will focus specifically on texts (those by Sybille Lewitscharoff and Peter Handke) demonstrating what the subject does to create a sense of the religious within immanent space. The subjects in these novels reveal a vivid awareness of a transcendent sphere, a realm that draws them beyond the immanent. According to Schleiermacher, “Das ist die erste Regung der Religion. Eine geheime unverstandene Ahndung treibt sie

über den Reichtum dieser Welt hinaus” (*Über* 120). Keenly aware of the finite and limited, these protagonists move towards reflections on the transcendent, in that they express the intuition of immaterial forms beyond the borders of their sensory perceptions.

VI. Transcendence

Taking into account Schleiermacher’s understanding of religion, with its emphasis on the material and subjective, this project will focus specifically on textual allusions to transcendence and how these become indicative of religion. For Schleiermacher the term “transzendent” is “etwas über das gewöhnliche Denken Hinausgehendes,” and examples include: “die Idee der Welt” and “die Idee der Gottheit” (*Dialektik* 2 304). Neither of these suggested entities stemming from imaginative intellects proceed from normal, ordinary thinking. They go beyond those ideas – generated in ordinary thought – that can be logically communicated or verified. Ordinary thinking is accessible, because that which is produced in it can be translated into sensible and logical language. Intuitions of transcendence include those premonitions in thinking that go beyond the thinking that generates empirical knowledge. Keeping in mind that transcendence always presumes what is “beyond” – beyond the rational and communicable –, I want to identify the qualities of transcendence framing this project: transcendence is a) situated in the subject and b) demonstrated as an activity in which perceived borders are crossed.

First, transcendence derives from a subject. When endeavoring to interpret a particular experience of the natural world, an individual elicits this notion when he or she reflects on what transpires within his or her self-consciousness at this moment. Any sense, or indication of the transcendent begins with the subject: “Wir müssen also von der Identität des Seins und Denkens *in uns* [my italics] ausgehen, um zu jenem

transzendenten Grunde alles Seins aufzusteigen” (Schleiermacher, *Dialektik 2* 270).

Being and thinking transpire in us; individuals create transcendence.⁵⁴ As being and thinking take place in the individual, they form an identity and subsequently generate self-consciousness – “das Selbstbewußtsein” – which, in Schleiermacher’s system, is the essential component behind the individual’s experience of religion. In the following extensive quote we can see the intricate relationship between the subject, his or her self-consciousness, and the transcendent (which is the product of subjective activity):

Wir finden die Resultate der Reflexion über das religiöse Selbstbewußtsein überall, wo die Religion zum Gegenstand der Kontemplation gemacht wird, d. h. in der Form der Glaubenslehre; und der transzendente Grund kann hier nicht anders betrachtet werden als in der Vermischung mit dem unmittelbaren Selbstbewußtsein. Daher herrscht in jeder Glaubenslehre eine durchgehende Vermenschlichung des transzendenten Grundes und eine Analogie mit dem menschlichen Bewußtsein vor, sie mag monotheistisch oder polytheistisch sein. Diese Anthropoisierung hat ihren Grund im Bewußtsein des Endlichen, womit immer das Selbstbewußtsein vermischt ist (*Dialektik 2* 297).

The transcendent, fused as it is with immediate self-consciousness – what the individual performs when thinking and being – becomes the product of a human consciousness rooted in the finite realm.⁵⁵ Consequently, any religious teaching – any notion or object

⁵⁴ In a similar manner, Schleiermacher, in an 1828 “Vorlesung,” writes: “alle Wahrheit des Denkens und alle Realität des Wollens [hängt] von dem Gesetzsein des transzendenten in uns [ab]” (*Dialektik 1* 284).

⁵⁵ In another instance, Schleiermacher contends: “Wir haben also jene transzendente Voraussetzung in uns als das treibende Prinzip unseres Bewußtseins, als das höchste

religiously marked – has an anthropomorphized transcendence. In another instance, Schleiermacher speaks of the innately subjective work of constructing an idea of the divine: “Wir wissen nur um das Sein Gottes *in uns* [my italics] und in den Dingen, gar nicht aber um ein Sein Gottes außer der Welt oder an sich” (*Dialektik I* 273). A neutral, objective transcendent entity outside of those forms in the individual does not exist. Starting with the idea of an anthropologically situated transcendence, I will employ the term transcendence as that which derives from what subjects produce and perform, when they express the desire to move beyond, to cross borders.

Second, the term transcendence is associated with the transgressing of borders. Providing a definition of transcendence and alluding to its emphasis on “crossing,” Knoblauch writes, “Im Sinne des lateinischen “transcendere” bedeutet sie zwar das Hinübersteigen oder Überschreiten” (55). To transcend literally means to “climb over” or “to cross,” “to transgress.” As a term it corresponds well to what is occurring in the modern moment, in which the “Grenzen zwischen Profanem und Sakralem” have become “flüssig oder...durchlässig” (Knoblauch 50). Objects symbolic of the religious literally transcend – or, cross over – into the profane. With the decline of institutionalized religion, the sacred has, in a sense, moved out beyond the constricting walls of mosques, cathedrals, churches, and synagogues. People experience the sacred within profane space, and the term transcendence reflects this porousness that dissolves difference.

Leben des Denkens, als Impuls dazu” (*Dialektik* 272). Transcendence is situated as a principle within human consciousness. This quality – this driving principle – is born out of the individual’s recognition that it is rooted in immanence. In this existential circumstance the individual desires to release itself from its temporal strictures. This desire to move beyond the world is located in the immanent frame of an individual’s immediate self-consciousness.

Transcendence thereby suggests the overcoming of “einer binären Unterscheidung” between “Sakralem” and “Profanem” (Knoblauch 55).

The activity of transcendence includes the disintegration of oppositions. For Schleiermacher, this moment of fragmentation is when distinctly religious moments transpire: “In allen religiösen Momenten werden die sich widersprechenden Momente aufgehoben, und Wechsellosigkeit ist der eigentliche Ausdruck der zeitlosen Begleitung des transzendenten Grundes in unserem wirklichen Sein” (*Dialektik 2* 293). When the dissecting of borders renders contradictions (including the “sacred” and the “profane”) obsolete, changelessness is inferred. Transcendence marks this timeless moment, when identity is achieved through the erasure of a boundary space.⁵⁶ Unattached to a binary status, transcendence represents the overcoming of juxtapositions, with the result that the immanent frame becomes permeable, open to external forces. In this sense, figurations of transcendence become the catalyst behind the porousness evinced at various moments in the secular age, when the sacred permeates its way into the profane. Speaking of how transcendence infuses into the secular framework, Taylor writes: “It is not obvious a priori that the sense of something beyond...can be ultimately explained (away) in naturalistic categories. The festive remains a niche in our world, where the (putatively) transcendent can erupt into our lives” (518). Transcendence is this sense of something beyond, and, when differences are overcome, when borders are diffused and deconstructed, this concept connected to the sacred is experienced in profane space.

⁵⁶ In another instance Schleiermacher speaks of the consciousness of the transcendent as that place of pure identity: “indem wir wissen, wir haben das absolute immer nur an einem anderen, haben wir zugleich das gefunden, was in allem Denken dasselbe ist, das in allem Denken mitgesetzte Bewusstsein des transzendenten, die reine Identität des idealen und realen” (*Dialektik 1* 278).

Two distinct, mutually exclusive spheres do not persist, but instead realms fuse into each other through a transgressing activity. Intuitions of transcendence involve the sense that boundaries have been crossed, that the sacred, with an affective capability, has somehow transgressed into the profane, with the infinite porously making its way into the finite. Describing how the transgressing inherent in the transcendent reveals the religious, Schleiermacher writes: “Es giebt in dem Verhältnis des Menschen zu dieser Welt gewisse Übergänge ins Unendliche, durchgehauene Aussichten, vor denen jeder vorübergeführt wird, damit sein Sinn den Weg finde zum Universum, und bei deren Anblick Gefühle erregt werden, die zwar nicht unmittelbar Religion sind, aber doch, daß ich so sage, ein Schematismus derselben” (*Über* 124). Taking Schleiermacher at his word, I endeavor to analyze how the texts present these “Übergänge,” those traces of transcendence indicative of this intricate process of transferal between otherwise mutually exclusive spheres.

VII. The Trace

Lacking material substance, transcendence cannot receive representation. Consequently, disregarding it seems like a feasible option. Yet, within material culture intuitions of it persist, evidenced through the traces left behind. The trace is the material depiction of what is non-material, with the assumption that this materiality never presumes to manifest presence. The trace becomes the material fixture indicating an absent transcendence, and hence the link between the trace and transcendence is intricate and subtle. Schleiermacher, for example, suggests that individuals – ensconced in the immanent sphere and yet nevertheless driven by transcendent predilections – find traces of another, as they infer and sense the intangible in and through tangible, linguistic constructions: “Das ist die erste Regung der Religion. Eine geheime unverstandene

Ahndung treibt sie über den Reichtum dieser Welt hinaus; daher ist ihnen *jede Spur* [my italics] einer andern so willkommen; daher ergözen sie sich an Dichtungen von überirdischen Wesen" (*Über* 12). In a world without a materially accessible god, the trace is all there is. Employing the term "trace," I intend to use it in the way Derrida developed it. It evokes the unseen – the intangible – in such a way that the non-material receives form and takes on shape but then immediately slips out of comprehension so as to avoid being summarily grasped. Writing about an experience of transcendence involves, therefore, writing about its erasure, to make a mark and then to erase it only to leave a residue inferring and pointing to what was initially inscribed. Derrida writes:

What I call the erasure of concepts ought to mark the places of that future meditation. For example, the value of the transcendental arche [archie] must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased. [(Reveal and then conceal)] The concept of arche-trace must comply with both that necessity and that erasure. [(The original trace expresses out of necessity and then immediately retracts)] (*Grammatology* 60).

Mediated into language, the transcendent vaguely emerges within textual parameters. The text then immediately deconstructs the signs, so that the text leaves behind only the erased marks indicative of an ambiguous transcendence whose presence is only ever absent in the domain of immanence. Delineating a few contours of Derrida's 'trace' will provide a helpful framework for seeing how traces of transcendence appear in the texts.

First, the trace reflects the expression of a secret, the inference of a mystery unable to be positively unfolded. In this manner, it renders impossible absolute meaning and definitive signification due to "the polysemy of signification enacted in the *différance*

wrought by dissemination” (Wolfson 493). Because the trace derives from a network of differences, its meaning is always multifarious, as its construction is context dependent and incessantly fluctuating. Regarding this Derrida writes:

Why of the trace? ... If words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences, one can justify one’s language, and one’s choice of terms, only within a topic [an orientation in space] and an historical strategy. The justification can therefore never be absolute and definitive...The word trace must refer itself to a certain number of contemporary discourses (*Grammatology* 70).

A trace acknowledges the array of historically-situated, intertextually-constructed, competing – and, at times even contradictory – terms at play in any linguistic assertion. The trace depends then on terms forming and then deforming, positing and then retracting. Hence, “language is subject to undecidability [and] an inherent instability which [it] cannot escape” (Collins 71). In this manner, what language suggests perpetually remains a secret. According to Wolfson, “the secret, in his [Derrida’s] mind, relates to the fact that meaning can never be determined with absolute certainty...there is always a surplus of signification to be determined through a multivocality of voices” (493). When an idea (or intellectual paradigm) is propagated, when the presence of an object is indicated, it remains an enigma about which one cannot speak resolutely because of its foundation in a multitude of networks – a multiplicity of discourses and voices – that prevent the establishment of one specific interpretation. The texts I discuss use intertextual references – frequently religiously-coded – in order to materially present

the secretly enigmatic that cannot be materialized, resulting in representations marked with a perpetual deferral of signification and meaning.

Second, the trace reflects the total absence of an origin, a transcendent signified. All traces, constructed and perpetuated, point to an origin, which is also an original trace with its own inference of something inaccessible behind it. An originating point never exists. Delineating this idea, Derrida writes: “The trace is not only the disappearance of origin—within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin” (*Grammatology* 61). A beginning, originating instance manifests itself in so far as it immediately erases itself. Revelation transpires as an erasure. By linking traces back to an originary trace, Derrida deconstructs origin, a transcendent signified capable of giving all other traces some sense of meaning. Without meaning, these traces become reflections on an absent origin, which was indeed never present or accessible. If traces point to absence, then the traces of transcendence provide the marker of a missing, non-existent transcendent entity. And, this is the precise why I want to use the term trace, believing that the trace indicates a transcendence that does not exist as an objective origin, but instead as a subjective construction that comes into formation linguistically through the subject’s interaction with his or her environment. The trace, reflecting a voided absence, becomes a subject’s indication that evocations of the transcendent are always literary constructs of a voided absence that can only be filled with ruminations stemming from subjects who are informed by a multitude of networks marked by discongruity.

Chapter One

Nature and Materiality as Sources of Religious Reflection

As indicated in the introduction, a “buffered” individual – prototypical, according to Taylor, of the modern self – is disengaged “from everything outside the mind” (*Secular* 38), closed off to what is incomprehensible, to those unexplainable premonitions

evoked in nature beyond the scope of rational containment. Taylor juxtaposes the “buffered” self with a “porous” self, which is open to some “outside power” (*Secular* 36). Porous individuals, in their interactions with nature, passively surrender to what nature does and how it acts. In this activity they reflect a willingness to allow what is beyond their rational control to affect them; nature becomes the catalyst for considering the unseen forces operating behind it. This chapter analyzes how Sebald’s narrators in *Die Ringe des Saturn* (1995) and *Schwindel. Gefühle* (1990) perform this, how they reproduce porousness in their narrations. Inscribing porousness into their accounts, they indicate how nature had acted upon them, as it left behind the persistent intuition of an unknown constant lying “outside” of nature, beyond cognition and perception.

The texts stem from the narrators’ desire to reflect on the emotions that had surfaced on their respective journeys, including those that contained a premonition of an external presence within the internal, perceived domain. In certain instances, the narrators interpret the spaces they experienced as transitional, marked by inferences to what exceeds immanence. Such transitional spaces have, according to Schleiermacher, religious dimensions: “Es giebt in dem Verhältnis des Menschen zu dieser Welt gewisse *Übergänge* [my italics] ins Unendliche” (124). Individuals point to these “Übergänge,” when they interpret their intuitions in religious terms, like the eternal or infinite. When intimating at these “Übergänge” – when narratively recording them – the narrators point to sentiments surfacing in physical space while simultaneously eluding ordinary explanation. They portray themselves as porous by delineating a posture of passivity in a natural realm they had initially perceived as having its own permeating, external forces.

Literature can textually create these transitions by representing porous selves positioned in boundary spaces. Sebald frequently does this by placing his narrators at border locations. Here is one example from *Die Ringe des Saturn*: “Eine Zeitlang saß ich dann noch auf dem Grasplatz zwischen dem elektrischen Zaun und dem Rand der Klippe” (85). Here, the narrator points to the significance of the middle sphere he inhabits, one from which his particular vantage point stems when he generates language about his experiences. When the semiotician Yuri Lotman introduced the concept of the semiosphere, he contended that without it language does not exist. The concept of the semiosphere is based on a division between the core and the periphery. A semiosphere’s core is comprised of meaning producing signs. Beyond the semiosphere is the extra-semiotic, that which is present externally but has not yet been internally incorporated and attributed a sign. Discussing the significance of boundary locations for literary productions, Lotman writes: “The boundary is a mechanism for translating texts of an alien semiotics into ‘our’ language, it is the place where what is ‘external’ is transformed into what is ‘internal,’ it is a filtering membrane which so transforms foreign texts that they become part of the semiosphere’s internal semiotics while still retaining their own characteristics” (136-37). In Lotman’s paradigm semiospheres are distinct, isolated realms possessing their own cultural codes.⁵⁷ Between these semiospheres exists a liminal spot where the transfer and translation of these codes transpire; an intuited impression receives form in the signs an individual employs. In this process a mediator (narrator) internalizes a culturally external text into his or her specific culture without losing the traits of the “other” text’s exteriority. Figures at boundary locations perform the function

⁵⁷ According to Hallet, Lotman defines “die Semiosphäre als die Gesamtheit aller Zeichenbenutzer, Texte und Kodes einer Kultur” (69).

of a translator: “An der Peripherie beheimatet, übertragen sie [Lotmans Grenzgänger] die von außen hereinströmenden Texte in die Sprache der Semiosphäre. Dabei entstehen Mischformen, die mit den Normen des Kerns in Konflikt geraten” (Hallet 69). Employing Lotman’s model, I contend that Sebald’s narrators introduce figures acting “porously.” They internalize an external culture, as they explore how to give linguistic representation to that which remains foreign and “alien.” Performing this, they reproduce the transcendent, the unknown, in their own cultural and linguistic semiospheres. Because the transcendent remains indefinite and unfamiliar the narrators’ representations of it always surface with allusions to what is unknown. While maintaining resolutely rational, secular postures, the narrators simultaneously demonstrate permeability through their interest in disclosing those transitional spaces imbued with reflections on what cannot be delineated definitively within the immanent sphere.⁵⁸ With this chapter I intend to investigate if and how the narrators serve as “Grenzgänger,” receiving impressions from material spaces and narratively communicating them, alluding, in the process, to a transcendence that – eluding definitive representation – can only be traced through suggestion and inference.

Die Ringe des Saturn

Recounting his approximately 30-mile journey through the English region of Suffolk, taken a year earlier, the narrator of *Die Ringe des Saturn* details historical and

⁵⁸ The narrator in *Die Ringe*, for example, commences with a discussion of René Descartes, who taught that “man absehen muß von dem unbegreiflichen Fleisch und hin auf die in uns bereits angelegte Maschine, auf das, was man vollkommen verstehen...kann” (26). Consistent with what was outlined in the introduction this would be a definitively secular, immanent perspective. Throughout the novel, the narrator juxtaposes the buffered with the porous.

contemporary encounters evincing ubiquitous destruction.⁵⁹ As he relates his experiences, he offers momentary glimpses, instances of complete clarity and harmony, into realms presenting the prospect of being untarnished by the strict confines of immanence.⁶⁰ He allows his encounters to lead him to profound reflection on his gripping, crippling melancholy, “das lähmende Grauen” (11), from which he wishes to free himself. On his journey he meets significant, frequently melancholic people from the past (244). Additionally, he encounters places marred by history’s inequities (181) and locations (191) rendered powerless by the “Übermacht” (70) of nature. To obtain freedom, he looks for the possibility of some sort of continuation within this milieu of desolation, for an escape out of the unending cycle of catastrophe – “Der reale Verlauf der Geschichte ist dann natürlich ein ganz anderer gewesen, weil es ja immer, wenn man gerade die schönste Zukunft ausmalt, bereits auf die nächste Katastrophe zugeht” (270). The narrator reads history as moving in a cyclical trajectory from one catastrophe to the next.

⁵⁹ Examples of destruction abound in the text, including towns with “den Spuren eines schleichenden Marasmus” (61); individuals, such as Kaiser Hsien-feng, who had come to the “Ende seines kurzen, von Ausschweifungen zerstörten Lebens” (176); the destroyed city of Dunwich, which is now only “der letzte Überrest” (187) of a meaningful city in the Middle Ages; the decay of religious structures, such as the Eccles Tower, which “war eingefallen” (189); “fortschreitenden Zurückdrängung und Zerstörung der dichten Wälder” (201); a decaying house (262); and mass destruction (275).

⁶⁰ An example of one of these momentary glimpses is when the narrator writes: “Aber doch konnte man an dem Tag, an dem ich dort an dem stillen Ufer saß, glauben, man schaue hinein in die Ewigkeit. Die Dunstschleier...hatten sich aufgelöst” (77). For examples of the clarity, see pages 285-286. The narrator indicates harmony when he writes, “All das changierte in einer Weise, daß die Illusion einer vollkommenen Harmonie hervorgerufen wurde zwischen natürlichem Wachstum und Fabrikation” (46).

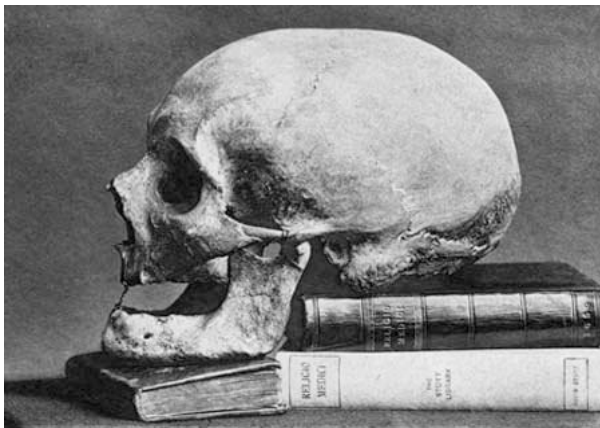
Ensnared in this terrain of calamity, he finds the prospects of perpetuity in the silk motif threading together the various elements of the text.⁶¹ Silk, connected to the transmigratory capabilities of caterpillars and moths (26), is symbolic of the transcendent, the crossing of borders in the Latin sense of the term *transcendere*. As such, this thread, alluding to the transcendent, frames the text. It provides the context through which the narrator interprets and delineates his experiences in nature and with the material therein. By shrouding the text in a porous cloak, the narrator adds a religious dimension to explain his intuitions in certain tangible spaces.⁶² In this sense, while writing, weaving his text together, he demonstrates porousness, as he elicits the sense of transitional spaces, “Übergänge,” a term that appears in the text when the narrator relates his impressions of Somerleyton Hall, “dessen besonderer Ruhm anscheinend darin bestand, daß sich die Übergänge zwischen Interieur und Außenwelt so gut wie unmerklich vollzogen” (46). Usurping the role of “Grenzgänger,” the narrator linguistically mediates between the perceived, natural world and the unperceived, intuited world, creating, in the process, “Übergänge,” which allow the transcendent to be intuited within the immanent.

I. The Written Thread of Silk

⁶¹ This motif is conspicuously prevalent from beginning to end; for examples, see 32, 35, 39, 131, 182, 312, and 332.

⁶² One of Sebald’s earlier works – a very short, ten page text, which some scholars have considered to be an unofficial outline for what would eventually become *Die Ringe des Saturn* – provides *Die Ringe* with a distinctly religious framework. Mentioning churches, or cathedrals more than ten times, the author provides specific advice to those considering a visit to southern England; it “depends on how often you want to lose yourself in contemplating the many wooden angels who, with seeming ease, carry on their backs the hammer-beam roofs of many of the region’s countless churches” (“The Carved Wooden Angels,” 246). Here, the contemplative stance is linked to distinctly religious objects.

The silk thread Sebald's narrator weaves indicates transcendence in as much as he contextualizes the text through the writings of Thomas Browne, who, according to Hutchinson, has a "Sonderstatus" in the text, functioning "als eine Art Schutzheiliger" (*dialektische* 126). As the "Sohn eines Seidenhändlers" (21) who became a well-educated doctor, he wrote and thought voraciously about the natural world, which he considered to be "Das Schattenbild einer anderen" (29). For him there was always something beyond the world, a transcendent space housing the pure, Platonic forms, and hence the natural realm would always only render an "Abglanz der Ewigkeit" (30). In a manner similar to Schleiermacher, he saw the eternal within the material. This intellectual framework shapes the movement of the text, as the narrator consistently refers back to Brown and incorporates Brown's style into his own work. We as readers see a picture of his 1643 text, *Religio Medici*, early in Sebald's narration (21), with two copies of it stacked on top of each other underneath a skull – and, as Blackler notes "death draws people into sacred spaces" (42). Indeed, when Browne, in his own work, "contemplate[s] a skull," he



realizes he doesn't have "the true theory of death" (*Religio* 82).⁶³ He considers new ways of conceiving death, and his writings reflect his desire to arrive at alternative perceptions on this topic: "I believe

the world grows near its end, yet is neither old nor decayed, nor shall ever perish upon

⁶³ Sebald's narrator documents Browne's meditations on death when he writes: "Der Arzt, der die Krankheiten in den Körpern wachsen und wüten sieht, begreift die Sterblichkeit besser als die Blüte des Lebens. Ihn dünkt es ein Wunder, daß wir uns halten auch bloß einen einzigen Tag" (36).

the ruins of its own principles” (82). While the world’s appearance seemingly indicates its eventual demise, there may be alternative interpretations; destruction may have its limitations. The narrator employs Browne’s philosophy to suggest that the destruction ubiquitous in his own text may have its limitations. In *Religio Medici*, a text evidently significant for Sebald’s narration, Browne explores the relationship between silkworm and the intuitive sense of some sort of transcendent continuation within a milieu of annihilation. He asserts, “those strange and mystical transmigrations that I have observed in silk-worms turned my philosophy into divinity” (74). Reflecting on the lifecycle of silkworm (from egg, caterpillar, cocoon, to moth), Browne notices how they transform into visibly different entities, while maintaining their original substance. He associates this with what he believes to be true about the human experience. A central core, a soul perhaps, remains in the midst of an individual’s various permutations. On the topic of metempsychosis – transmigration of the soul – Browne writes, “[the] soul of one man passed into another...men are lived over again...there was none then, but there hath been some one since that parallels him, and as it were his revived self” (*Religio* 20). Browne, in his 17th century text filled with religious ruminations, contemplates the idea of an individual self reemerging and preserving itself in the life of another individual.

Sebald’s text, demonstrating Browne’s influence on his work, explores as well the possibility of transmuted forms. The narration commences with a reference to Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung*, and this intertext, according to Theisen, “informs Sebald’s interest in mutable identities and metamorphic identifications” (573). The narrator probes the question of human transformation and to what degree this can, or does, occur, by comparing his situation in the hospital to Gregor Samsa’s, who similarly crawled across

the floor to look “in undeutlicher Erinnerung...an das Befreiende” (13). The narrator integrates Gregor into his story to express his current, “paralyzed” condition and his ardent desire for freedom, which would be obtained through the ability to comprehend and make sense of his past.⁶⁴ Reflecting back upon his journey experienced one year earlier, the narrator frames his quest for comprehension as a search to be free, to find those moments of clarity within historical processes that are overwhelmingly shrouded in epistemological uncertainty – “Wer weiß, wie es vor Zeiten wirklich gewesen ist?” (104).⁶⁵ Unable to accurately reconstruct reality, to clearly remember events, the narrator finds himself paralyzed. He is in a predicament in which he can only hope to realize a mutated identity, one that is shaped and informed by literary predecessors, who, reliving themselves in him, enable him to clarify his clouded present.

As he delineates his journey in an attempt to preserve personal memories, he simultaneously resurrects literary and cultural figures that have permeated into his thinking. Without ultimately making sense of the past – either his personal past or history’s general past – he does endeavor to preserve it by resurrecting significant historical personalities and inscribing their intellectual considerations into his narration as he reflects on his own experiences of particular historical and natural places. The following comparison provides a good example of how Sebald’s narrator weaves Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* into his text. Commenting on Joseph Conrad’s (Konrad Korzeniowski) earliest interests, Sebald writes: “Damals war der Kongo nur ein weißer Fleck auf der Afrikakarte gewesen, über die er [Korzeniowski], die farbigen Namen leise

⁶⁴ This endeavor, the narrator realizes, will remain forever unfulfilled: “...dann glaubt man, man könne sich erinnern. Aber in Wirklichkeit erinnert man sich natürlich nicht. Zu viele Bauwerke sind eingestürzt, zuviel Schutt ist aufgehäuft” (211).

⁶⁵ See 89.

vor sich hin murmelnd, gebeugt saß oft stundenlang. Fast nichts war im Inneren dieses Weltteils eingezeichnet, keine Bahnlinie, keine Straße...Inzwischen freilich war die Karte ausgefüllt worden. *The white patch had become a place of darkness*” (143). Here, Sebald’s narrator, focusing on Conrad’s exploratory urge to enter into uncharted terrain, seemingly directly integrates one of Conrad’s ideas expressed in *Heart of Darkness*: “Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth” (21). Incorporating Conrad’s ideas into his text, Sebald’s narrator demonstrates how he keeps alive a cultural figure by carving out space for his ideas within the parameters of his own text.

By resurfacing and embodying artifacts from the cultural and literary archive exposed to destruction, the narrator calls into question the limits of annihilation, wondering whether life, in its various manifestations, can maintain itself through transformations ultimately immune to entropy. To do this, Sebald’s narrator particularly utilizes Browne and his wrestling with the issue of transmigration to guide the trajectory of his text, as he poses a question that the narration seemingly sets out to answer. At the end of the first chapter, he states:

Dergleichen von der Strömung der Zeit verschonte Dinge werden in der Anschauung Brownes zu Sinnbildern der in der Schrift verheißenen Unzerstörbarkeit der menschlichen Seele, an der der Leibarzt, so befestigt er sich weiß in seinem christlichen Glauben, insgeheim vielleicht zweifelt. Und weil der schwerste Stein der Melancholie die Angst ist vor dem aussichtslosen Ende unserer Natur, sucht Browne unter dem, was der

Vernichtung entging, nach den Spuren der geheimnisvollen Fähigkeit zur Transmigration, die er an den Raupen und Faltern so oft studiert hat. Das purpurfarbene Fetzen Seide aus der Urne des Patroklos, von dem er berichtet, was also bedeutet es wohl? (38-39).

Two themes this quote addresses require further elaboration, “Transmigration” and “der Urne des Patroklos.” First, Browne explored the issue of transmigration from a multitude of perspectives, not only seeing it in the natural world – with silkworm as the example – but also viewing the topic within an historical framework. An example of the later is evident in the following quote: “A great part of Antiquity contented their hopes of subsistency with a transmigration of their souls: a good way to continue their memories, while having the advantage of plural successions, they could not but act something remarkable in such variety of beings, and enjoying the fame of their passed selves, make accumulation of glory unto their last durations” (*Urne-Buriall* 47). Just as Browne assessed the various dimensions of how to perceive transmigration, so too does Sebald’s narrator. The texts, for example, in which he shows interest, are concerned with various elements of transmigration. In Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, we find the following reference to a type of pseudo-transmigration, in which the memory of one man is perpetuated in the life of another man: “All that had been Kurtz’s had passed out of my hands: his soul, his body, his station, his plans, his ivory, his career. There remained only his memory and his Intended...I thought his memory was like the other memories of the dead that accumulate in every man’s life” (117). Integrating Conrad’s work into his own, the narrator performs this theme of transmigration explored by Browne and given representation by Conrad. Second, Sebald’s narrator inserts Browne’s ideas deriving from

the *Urne-Buriall*, where Browne writes: “But in the Homerial Urne of Patroclus, whatever was the solid Tegument, we finde the immediate covering to be a purple peece of silk” (*Works* 24). The silk’s permeability is juxtaposed with the solid Tegument. Silk is presented as a material suggestive of porousness. Indicating the significance of Browne’s ideas for his work, Sebald’s narrator mentions this urn at other points in his text (91, 97). Referring back to Sebald’s extended quote previously cited and taking into account the preceding observations, we can begin to make sense of what Sebald’s narrator, with Browne’s assistance, sets out to investigate with his text. If the immortality of the soul is even a feasible consideration, it is, according to Browne, historically preserved entities, protected from time’s annihilating activity, that provide the evidence of such a possibility. Indeed, if melancholy, caused by meditations on a hopeless end to human existence, has a cure, one must find it in the hope of transmigration, that intricate process associated with silkworm.

Browne’s texts entertain questions of continuation and the overcoming of melancholy. In his work, *Hydriotaphia, Urne-Buriall*, we encounter these reflections. Preceding Sebald’s narrator by nearly four centuries, Browne writes, “It is the heaviest stone that melancholy can throw at a man, to tell him he is at the end of his nature; or that there is no further state to come” (*Works* 42). An individual’s awareness of his or her eventual demise is the cause of melancholy. Sebald’s narrator directly translates Browne’s language into his text when he writes of “der schwerste Stein der Melancholie,” a phrase stemming from the quote cited in the previous paragraph. Continuing on with his consideration of melancholy, Browne suggests the possibility of a remedy, “But the superior ingredient and obscured part of our selves...will be able at last

to tell us we are more than our present selves” (*Works* 42). The reflecting self possesses hope of some sort of prolongation. Incorporating Browne’s ideas into his text, the narrator, in a porous gesture, demonstrates how he and his ideas consist of more than his own, isolated semiosphere. Remaining porous to external sources, he resists identification as a merely modern, buffered subject. He possesses a mutated identity, as he has incorporated the ideas of a religiously minded thinker into his own thought structures. Within himself he finds the intricately woven threads of literary continuation, the hope of finding a panacea for his persistent melancholy.

As to whether Sebald’s narrator employs Browne’s reflections and worldview to suggest a religious, transcendent perspective is debated in the scholarship. For example, Theisen suggests that “Sebald strips away Browne’s religious elements of metempsychosis – Sebald infuses the recurrence of the similar with the assumption that the writer’s “I” is a tissue of citations from other texts” (570). While this is a possible interpretation, I am not at all convinced that Sebald’s writer’s “I” does not carefully take into account the ideas infused into its construction. The narrator picks particular concepts from certain texts that advance his own ideas, and transmigration evidently interests Sebald’s narrator to the same degree it did Browne. While Sebald’s narrator may question Browne’s belief in the immortality of the soul, he nevertheless frames his text with beginning and ending chapters both focusing on Browne and the topic of silk. He suggests that the “Unzerstörbarkeit der menschlichen Seele” (38), which Browne may have doubted, is a feasible possibility, as “den Körper verlassende Seele” (349) is symbolically preserved through hanging the “seidendem Trauerflor” (349).

Throughout the text the narrator emphasizes the relationship between weaving and writing, demonstrating the intricate interconnectedness between creation and preservation. After discussing the Huegenot weavers in Norwich, for example, the narrator connects the act of weaving to the act of writing, employing a popular cliché. Weavers and “die mit ihnen in manchem vergleichbaren Gelehrten und sonstigen Schreiber” (334) have a tendency towards melancholy, which is easy to understand in the context of their “beständigem krummen Sitzen” and their “andauernd scharfem Nachdenken und zu endlosem Überrechnen weitläufiger künstlicher Muster” (335). Those who write are like those who weave. Writers take ideas and, in many cases, people, and, after identifying patterns and how they can be stylistically appropriated, keep them alive, by giving them new forms, transforming their shape, without fundamentally altering their substance. Indeed, that is exactly what Sebald does. This takes place as the narrator, proceeding on his pilgrimage to the hallowed realm of literary worlds on the verge of slipping out of memory – Blackler speaks of “Sebald’s archival redemption of the literary archive” (170) – presents authors and other figures, both real and imaginary, whom Sebald’s narrator writes into the literary archive, to memorialize and preserve them. As he recreates his experiences, he participates in the ongoing attempt to immortalize. Writing their stories into his story, he identifies how aspects of their works have ended up inside of his work, insinuating a transmigration of sorts.

This narrative activity becomes lucid as he reminisces on his meanderings through Michael Hamburger’s house, where he poses the question, “Wie kommt es, dass man in einem anderen Menschen sich selber und wenn nicht sich selber, so doch seinen Vorgänger sieht?” (217-218) Both the narrator and Michael torture themselves with

writing, doubt the meaning of their work, and suffer from an alcohol allergy. While sharing these autobiographical similarities, the connection goes deeper. The narrator conveys the sense that he had actually lived in this house, and that it was he who had left the house and not Michael, thus fusing their two existences together. Reflecting on the items in the house, the narrator claims “dass ich von Michael geführt wurde durch ein Haus, in dem ich vor langer Zeit einmal logiert haben musste” (220). Merging himself with another writer, the narrator demonstrates how their unique, individual, temporal manifestations are merely two permutations of a central substance based on ideas. For Schleiermacher such an activity would be an indication of religion; he writes: “Von diesen Wanderungen durch das Gebiet der Menschheit kehrt dann die Religion mit geschärftem Sinn und gebildeterem Urtheil in das eigne Ich zurück...Ihr selbst seid ein Compendium der Menschheit, Eure Persönlichkeit umfasst in einem gewissen Sinn die ganze menschliche Natur und diese ist in allen ihren Darstellungen nichts als Euer eigenes...verewigtes Ich” (*Über* 100). An individual’s realization of its universal content – of how he or she consists of ideas stemming from an endless number of human personalities – is a religious awareness. Traveling back through literary history, the narrator elevates obscure, and not so obscure, figures, which, by participating in the narrator’s “verewigtes Ich,” become eternal as they are written into the eternal world of ideas. In this vein Corless suggests that just as the “purple piece of silk might evidence transmigration of the silkworm into silk, so these books might evidence the authors’ souls transmigrating from living body to the immortal body of the book” (35). One author Sebald’s narrator textually immortalizes is indeed Browne, whose writing style and worldview provide the narration with its decisively religious tone.

II. Thomas Browne's Metaphysical Influence

“I was born in the planetary hour of Saturn, and I think I have a piece of the leaden planet in me” (131) writes Browne in *Religio Medici*. Invoking this saturnine individual – “typically melancholic, peripatetic, thoughtful, hesitant, slow” (Blumenthal 537) – Sebald’s narrator presents a figure reflective of his own identity. He thereby employs an author whose “cosmological” worldview and writing style play a prominent role in guiding, informing, and shaping the text’s form. Describing the Brownian worldview, Zisselsberger writes, “For a deeper explanation of what drives history, Browne looks upward into the cosmos rather than outward to the rest of the globe” (289). Not within the empirical framework of immanence Browne identifies the source moving humanity but rather beyond the level of the visible: “Die Unsichtbarkeit und Unfassbarkeit dessen, was uns bewegt, das ist...ein letzten Endes unauslotbares Rätsel gewesen” (29). Invisible and incomprehensible factors beyond the phenomenal realm influence human activity transpiring at the tangible level. Browne identifies, for example, the “Abglanz der Ewigkeit” on the “Kürzeln und Stenogrammen der vergänglichen Natur” (30). He sees the eternal and invisible stamped upon the temporal and fleeting. While the narrator may not agree with all of Browne’s assertions and presuppositions – seeming to even challenge, at times, Browne’s overly theologized reading of the world – he does find a common spirit with this “Erzmelancholiker des 17. Jahrhunderts,” (Hutchinson, “Leichtigkeit,” 458).

Both of them, as slower, reflective individuals, see language as a means of elevating themselves and others out of the stifling, immanent realm, and so they write in an effort to create porous, open, transcendent spaces within buffered, rational thinking.

Building “labyrinthische ... Satzgebilde, die Prozessionen oder Trauerzügen gleichen in ihrer schieren Aufwendigkeit” (30), Browne, according to the narrator, carries readers “auf den Kreisen seiner Prosa höher und höher,” leading them to a “Gefühl der Levitation,” with the result, “Je mehr die Entfernung wächst, desto klarer wird die Sicht” (30). Browne’s writing style elevates readers out of their quotidian existence. The levitated subject experiences a “boundless,” “weightless” feeling, which enables a heightened sense of perception and clarity; knowledge is obtained.⁶⁶ Freed from the strictures of oppressive confusion, reality is more lucid. However, in as much as comprehension comes into grasp, it – in Derridian fashion – remains perpetually elusive, through sentences that, in their timeless maneuvering, point to an eternal reality, which can never be contained.⁶⁷ This juxtaposition reveals itself throughout Sebald’s text; with greater height from an object or greater distance from an historical event, there is the sense of greater clarity or increased knowledge. However, in as much as one can see reality (both natural and historical) more clearly, one cannot obtain an unobstructed perspective. The narrator indicates this when he writes, “und doch, sagte Browne, ist jede

⁶⁶ In his article on the role of levitation in Sebald’s writing style, Hutchinson cites a 1996 interview with him; Sebald claims: “Das ist mein schriftstellerischer Ehrgeiz: die schweren Dinge so zu schreiben, dass sie ihr Gewicht verlieren“ (“Leichtigkeit,” 462). What Sebald’s narrator, at particular moments, performs – when, for example, “die geringste Erhöhung...verhelfe einem in diesem wunderbaren Land zum größten Gefühl der Erhabenheit” (104) – he finds in the works of Thomas Browne.

⁶⁷ Elaborating on how Browne’s sentences function, Hutchinson writes: “Jedoch sind es gerade diese Sätze, die ‘Kreise seiner Prosa,’ die seiner Sprache die Levitation ermöglichen, indem sie vermögen, durch ihre im Bild des ‘Kreises’ ausgedrückte Endlosigkeit ein Gefühl der Zeitlosigkeit hervorzurufen” (“Dialektische,” 154). The endlessness indicated by the sentences produces the feeling of timelessness. This semantic circularity generates the sense of levitation; a reader structurally revolves around a described entity and is led thereby to perpetual deferment (Derrida), caught in that which does not end, instead of in that which would isolate, define, and evoke the sense of finiteness.

Erkenntnis umgeben von einem undurchdringlichen Dunkel” (30). Browne counterposes the elevation allowing for clarity with the obstruction linked to blurred vision.

The narrator, as both wanderer and writer, performs this Brownian dichotomy, as he oscillates between existing in the darkened labyrinths of incomprehension and seeing the “Muster,” those patterns that allow for momentary comprehension. As a wanderer on his pilgrimage through geographic space, the narrator writes: “Todmüde und schon bereit, mich irgendwo niederzulegen, gelangte ich bei Einbruch...an einen etwas erhöhten Platz...Und als ich von diesem Aussichtsposten hinabblickte, sah ich auch das Labyrinth selber, den hellen Sandboden...ein im Vergleich mit dem Irrwegen...einfaches Muster” (206). Temporarily escaping chaotic space, the narrator has identified an orienting pattern. As a writer, attempting to contribute to the cultural archive, he writes: “Wir, die Überlebenden, sehen alles von oben herunter, sehen alles zugleich und wissen dennoch nicht, wie es war” (152). Even from his privileged historical position, the narrator finds it difficult to separate himself from the historical processes, to gain a privileged perspective, in order to identify some sort of ordering, sense-building principle. He demonstrates, in a Derridian sense, how the past cannot be summarily contained within present description; meaning is constantly deferred, as one fluctuates incessantly between clarity and obfuscation.⁶⁸ The text’s circularity, evident in its repetitive nature of continually producing and then destroying, further affirms this sense of deferral. The text,

⁶⁸ Derrida, commenting on the incapability of reconstructing the past, writes: “This passivity is also the relationship to a past, to an always-already-there that no reactivation of the origin could fully master and awaken to presence. This impossibility of reanimating absolutely the manifest evidence of an originary presence refers us therefore to an absolute past. That is what authorized us to call *trace* that which does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present” (*Grammatology* 66).

in various scenes, alludes to its own incomplete nature. The Ashbury sisters, for example, engage in weaving endeavors that never arrive at a finished product: “daß ihnen in ihrer Phantasie etwas von solch außergewöhnlicher Schönheit vorschwebte, daß die fertigen Arbeiten sie unfehlbar enttäuschten” (252). Perpetually dissatisfied, the sisters participate in labors that “resemble a constant process of construction, deconstruction, and renewed construction, ad infinitum,” because they are always “invariably disappointed” (Gray, “Sebald’s Segues,” 43) with what they had originally imagined.⁶⁹ Emphasizing deferral and its own inability to arrive at precise articulations of reality, the text creates spaces of vagueness and uncertainty, as it gets close to knowledge and then draws back.⁷⁰ Within this darkened sphere of ambiguity, this “heart of darkness,” the narrator inserts religiously coded spaces and extraordinary times that serve as “Übergänge,” positioning himself as a mediator in a liminal space between competing impressions, those stemming from both immanent and transcendent terrain.

III. Religiously coded Spaces

Subtitled his work “Eine englische Wallfahrt,” Sebald places his narrator’s reflections in a specific context, comparing his traverse of geographical spaces to a type of religious journey. Indeed, when he walks to Dunwich, he marks it as a stage on his pilgrimage, describing the place as “eine Art Wallfahrtsort für schwermütige Schriftsteller” (192). Here, the narrator reminds his reader that certain physical locations had historically served pseudo-spiritual functions, as they had become destination points

⁶⁹ Alec Garrard’s construction of his model of the temple in Jerusalem occurs in the same manner. New ideas on how it could have been in actuality cause him to continually commence with a new design; he is never satisfied with the model’s appearance. Sebald’s narrator creates a text that performs in the same manner, destroying as it constructs.

⁷⁰ For an example, see page 75.

for the melancholic. While the majority of the sites to which the narrator journeys are distinctly secular, other locations, transformed from the profane into the sacred through the narrator's poetic descriptions, remind the reader that the narrator is engaged in a religiously marked event. For example, at one point the narrator writes: "Der Eindruck, daß ich mich auf einem Areal befand, dessen Zweck über das *Profane* [my italics] hinausging, wurde verstärkt durch mehrere tempel- oder pagodenartige Bauten, die ich auf keine Weise in Verbindung bringen konnte mit militärischen Einrichtungen" (281-282). Discussing his position within these religious structures subtly indicates his involvement in the methodic experience of a pilgrimage, which is fundamentally an "enchanted" activity, a hearkening back to a distinctly pre-secular way of acting. When Taylor describes the persistence of enchantment in the secular age, he writes: "the 'festive' [which] includes feasts and pilgrimages...outside of quotidian routine...[during which the practitioners are] put in touch with the sacred. ...The festive...is an important continuing form of religious and quasi-religious life in our own day" (469). At another point, Taylor writes, "The festive remains a niche in our world, where the (putatively) transcendent can erupt into our lives" (518). Situated, to some degree, as a pilgrim involved in the festive, the narrator localizes himself in a place of vulnerability to unexpected, external forces.

With a passive posture the narrator explores the feelings and perceptions evoked in the physical spaces he encounters. These spaces become then the catalyst behind what we observe as readers, namely narrated spaces, which, according to Hallet, possess the following dimensions: "Darüber hinaus sind erzählte Räume Teil eines subjektiven Semantisierungsprozesses, bei dem die Wahrnehmungsspezifität der individuellen

Sinne, kulturelle Wissensordnungen und die Materialität des Raums ineinander greifen” (25). Linguistically generated narrated spaces necessarily derive from a subject’s experience within a specific spatial coordinate. While linked to physical locations, they are not direct, pure reproductions of them. Hence, in order to assess textually constructed spaces, a reader has to take into account the narrating subject’s sense perceptions, the cultural codes employed to generate knowledge, and the material elements of a specific location. When Sebald’s narrator inflects textually generated spaces with transcendent references, he reconstructs physical locations with attributes of porousness, open as they are to elements beyond the scope of materiality. For this analysis I will categorize these spaces as elevated, ambiguous, and labyrinthine.

a. Elevated Spaces

When describing certain natural spaces and physical structures, the narrator creates a sense of elevation through terms suggestive of upward movement, generating the perception of distance from the terrestrial realm. As he delineates his intuitions in locations cast with an upward trajectory, he indicates the sense of something eluding the immediately empirical, and this becomes the basis of his own metaphysical reflection. According to Hutchinson, “die physischen Schilderungen solcher Gebäude gleiten dann häufig ins Metaphysische hinüber” (*dialektisch* 88). One building that performs this function is Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands. Here, he generates an “Übergang,” as he infuses the transcendent into the immanent, merging what is above with what is below. In his reflection on his experience of Schiphol, the narrator mentions how one could have had the sense of being outside of life: “Das Flughafengebäude...war erfüllt von einer so wunderbar gedämpften Stimmung, dass man glauben konnte, man befinde sich schon ein

Stück *jenseits* [my italics] der irdischen Welt” (110).⁷¹ Within this structure, the narrator senses a pervasive silence, a “gedämpft” mood, a moment of austerity not frequently confronted in the terrestrial sphere. This narrative move shifts thinking beyond the material world. In a building typically symbolic of fast-paced globalized interconnectedness, passengers find themselves “still auf den Rolltreppen stehend,” as if they are in some sort of hallowed sanctuary.

Within this stillness the narrator generates an extraordinary type of time; he writes: “Langsam, als stünden sie unter dem Einfluß von Beruhigungsmitteln oder als bewegten sie sich in einer zerdehnten Zeit” (110). Here, the narrator produces the feeling of a slowed, extended time. In the process he creates a unique space within secular immanence, one in which he senses an alternative form of temporality. Assessing the religious dimensions of altered time, Charles Taylor writes: “People who are in the saeculum, are embedded in ordinary time...Now higher times gather and re-order secular time. They introduce ‘warps’ and seeming inconsistencies in profane time-ordering” (55). This is what Sebald’s narrator seems to be doing. He introduces a “warp,” an inconsistency, “zerdehnte Zeit,” into the ordinary experience of time, and this has an immediate effect on the spatial aura. Time effects space and vice versa: “Die Zeit, die an sich abstrakt und nicht sinnlich erfahrbar ist, gewinnt erst durch ihre räumliche Konkretisierung und Manifestation im Chronotopos Gestalt” (Hallet 73). While time itself is difficult to materialize, an idea like “zerdehnte Zeit,” stretched-out time, is even more difficult to concretize. Yet, Sebald’s narrator endeavors to manifest this concept in

⁷¹ At another point in the text, “Jenseits” is employed to indicate a life that exists after the point of death; discussing the premature death of T’ung-chi, the narrator writes: “Man kehrte sein Gesicht nach Süden und kleidete ihn für die Reise ins *Jenseits* [my italics] in die Roben des immerwährenden Lebens” (179).

his narrated space by using elements of the material world – passengers who have slowed down – to depict this abstract reality. Considering elements of Bakhtin’s chronotope – how space and time are linguistically configured – Hallet writes, “Durch diese Materialisierung der Zeit im Raum schafft der Chronotopos die Voraussetzung für die szenische Entfaltung der Ereignisse. Umgekehrt wird der an sich leere und formlose Raum von der Zeit, wie eben dargelegt mit Sinn erfüllt und dimensioniert” (73). Materialized time gives space a structure that determines how a specific scene will unfold and the types of feelings that will be evoked in the scene. The way in which Sebald’s narrator uniquely introduces time creates a distinct framework for perceiving the airport’s empty, secular space. A unique type of time has filled the space with meaning. The narrator has transformed uninterpreted physical space, by inscribing his interpretation of the space into the narrated space of his text. Engaged in this activity, the narrator evokes transcendent overtones that provide the indications of how his subjective perceptions are as much shaped by the material as they are by the immaterial.

Further elaborating on his experience, the narrator inflects his recollections with allusions to what lies beyond the tangible. The transcendent dimensions that become evident can be linked back to the initial context the narrator uses to frame his text, namely Thomas Browne’s meditations on death and the religious elements of it. The narrator describes how the airport appeared to him “wie der Vorhof des unbekanntes Landes, von dem kein Reisender mehr wiederkehrt” (111). As a place where planes continually ascend and descend, an airport is endowed with an inherent verticality. Symbolically, it points beyond localized knowledge. Hence, this profane space becomes the mediating point between the known and the unknown, a place where one is prompted

to intuit a transcendent sphere beyond life. This secular space, involved in transferring individuals into the unknown, becomes even more porous – and even sacralized – when the narrator suggests angelic presence: “Ab und zu wurde von den offenbar körperlosen, engelsgleich ihre Botschaft intonierenden Stimmen der Ansagerinnen jemand aufgerufen” (111). An angelic voice occasionally calls out in a mystical manner to passengers silently making their way through the terminal. In this manner, endowing his experience of the airport with otherworldly references, the narrator transforms this frequently visited location into an “Übergang.” It exists as a space, in which the external, transcendent has collapsed onto the buffered, secular subject, and this exposure has an immediate effect upon the subject.

After discussing those feelings and intuitions that had accrued in the airport’s space, the narrator moves to describe where he finds himself, positioned as he is in a “Propellerflugzeug” (112) far removed from the tangible realm. Here, the link between levitation and religious, existential reflection becomes especially poignant. While flying from Amsterdam to Norwich, he looks down upon a “gesamte Fläche” that had transformed into “ein geometrisches Muster” (112). Following the “logic” of the text, he is symbolically elevated out of the labyrinth of terrestrial chaos. The significance of this geometric order can be traced back to an earlier use of geometry in the text, when the narrator describes Browne’s perspective: “endlos ließe sich zeigen, mit welcher eleganter Hand die Natur geometrisiert” (32). Browne understands nature to be an active agent, which purposefully constructs, arranges, and enables him to see a “Muster,” the “sogennanten Quincunx” (31) everywhere “an der lebendigen und toten Materie” (31). Nature itself, in a Brownian worldview, takes on attributes traditionally ascribed to the

divine; nature generates and constructs patterns. To observe and experience nature as an entity that has its own organizing principle is, according to Schleiermacher, a resolutely religious undertaking, “Religion haben, heißt das Universum anschauen, und auf der Art, wie Ihr es anschauet, auf dem Prinzip, welches Ihr in *seinen Handlungen* [my italics] findet, beruht der Werth Eurer Religion” (112). Viewing the universe with its own “Handlungen” is to acknowledge that it has its own processes and purposes. When one adopts this contemplative, passive stance, one adopts a religious approach to observing and understanding the world. Looking down upon the geometrically ordered space below him, the narrator points to nature’s unique ability to order itself. Cars glide along narrow lanes, and they are contrasted with ships moving up a river, giving the impression as if “sie stünden für immer still” (112). Again, we have space depicted in a distinct way through the manipulation of time. This arrested movement is compared to an abacus, which had been invented “zur Berechnung der Unendlichkeit” (112). Merging movement with eternity, the narrator seemingly stops time, carving out a contemplative space, a meditative moment open to the eternal. That’s exactly what the narrator is led to do; he begins to pose existential, ontological questions.

His raised perspective, the corresponding order beneath him, the momentary removal from chaos lead him to religious, existential inquiries, which frequently remain unfronted in the realm of destruction. The narrator writes, “Wenn wir uns aus solcher Höhe betrachten, ist es entsetzlich, wie wenig wir wissen über uns selbst, über unseren Zweck und unser Ende” (114). At the moment of levitation, weightlessness, the narrator has a clear view and begins to ask questions relating to “being,” those that are neglected at the plain of everyday existence, as the devastating realities and perplexing anomalies

of life all too often obfuscate and muddle vision, preventing a subject from seeing beyond the burdens of historically situated atrocity. The description of the airport, as a religiously coded entity, becomes the narrator's tool, in Brownian fashion, to integrate an elevated space into this text, and this space becomes the catalyst for metaphysical contemplation.

Another example of how the narrator communicates a premonition of transcendence by creating an elevated space is evident in his discussion of Denis Diderot, the French philosopher known for his materialistic worldview. Here, the narrator indicates how an elevated position affected this well-known thinker who had become an atheist. We see how Diderot's levitated status led him to a distinctly religious reflection. He had the subtle intuition that a specific physical phenomenon had come into existence by means of an artistic, determining hand. Before commencing his discussion of Diderot, the narrator comments on Jacob van Ruisdael's painting, *Ansicht von Haarlem mit Bleichfeldern*. The image reveals how the depicted flatland is observed from a heightened position. People had traditionally interpreted the painting with the assumption that the painter had been standing on the nearby sand dunes. However, according to Sebald's narrator, the painting was actually produced from a higher perspective: "In Wahrheit ist van Ruisdael beim Malen natürlich nicht auf den Dünen gestanden, sondern auf einem künstlichen, ein Stück über der Welt imaginierten Punkt. Nur so konnte er alles zugleich sehen" (103). Employing this transcendent perspective – like "a solar Eye, looking down like a god" (de Certeau 92) – the narrator positions the painter above the world, giving him increased visual range and presenting him as an individual not ensconced within immanence. With this technique the narrator seemingly recalls the creation of a position

he had earlier attributed to Thomas Browne, who had “denkend und schreibend versucht, das irdische Dasein, die ihm nächsten Dinge ebenso wie die Sphären des Universums vom Standpunkt eines Außenseiters, ja man könnte sagen, mit dem Auge des Schöpfers zu betrachten” (29). According to the narrator, Browne had attempted to view earthly existence through the eyes of an external creator. With his assumption of an “other” realm, he wanted to obtain access to it and therefore endeavored to acquire a transcendent perspective. Emphasizing van Ruisdael’s artificial position, in which he is able to see everything, the narrator draws similarities to Thomas Browne’s previously cited perspective. As he points particularly to the painter’s location of removal, he infers the painter’s arrival at the transcendent perspective sought after by Brown. The narrator uses this distinct constellation as the context to frame his commentary on Diderot.

After leaving the art gallery, the narrator continues his journey and reflects on the relatively flat landscape of Holland, which Diderot regarded as the Egypt of Europe. Assessing Diderot’s perceptions of this space, the narrator writes, “Die geringste Erhöhung, schreibt er [Diderot], ver helfe einem in diesem wunderbaren Land zum größten Gefühl der Erhabenheit” (104). According to Diderot, when elevated, he obtains an extended perspective; in Kant’s language, he senses an “Unbegrenztheit” associated with the “formlosen Gegenstand” (*Urteilkraft* 329) before him. Consequently, the feeling of the sublime emerges. Taking into account the preceding frame, we can see how individuals are symbolically positioned like van Ruisdael, able to see everything. In this moment a metaphysical, transcendent perspective emerges. Indeed, “die erweiterten Perspektiven der Levitation [bilden] eine der Hauptmöglichkeiten von Transzendenz“ (“Leichtigkeit,” 467). According to Kant, a sublime feeling emerges when an individual,

at a stable, secure position, is mystified and overcome by the internally generated perception of that in nature which is superior – “überlegen” (*Urteilstkraft* 353) – to the individual, as it exists outside of his or her control; the perception is sublime in that it cannot be brought into a sensible representation: “Erhaben ist, was auch nur denken zu können ein Vermögen des Gemüts beweiset, das jeden Maßstab der Sinne übertrifft” (*Urteilstkraft* 336). A perception is considered sublime when it goes beyond the senses. Hence, to delineate this sentiment, one cannot resort to common, rational language. With this in mind, it is interesting to note the next step the narrator takes. He explains how Diderot, when situated within his levitated, “safe” location and perceptive of a distance that exceeded his level of comprehension, had to resort to terms inflected with transcendence, i.e. those beyond “der Sinne.” He described the Dutch cityscapes, “ganz als seien sie von einer Künstlerhand über Nacht nach einem bis ins letzte durchdachten Plan hervorgezaubert worden” (104). Diderot stood elevated before an urban environment – a physical space comparable to the one depicted in Ruisdael’s painting – that could only be conceptualized as that which was derived from the magical powers of an artist with a distinct plan. Combining levitation, the sublime, and an artistic plan, the narrator, employing the reflections of a resolute materialist, Diderot, creates a porous narrated space, which reveals how slight traces of transcendence seemingly inform and illuminate the narrator’s textual meditations on destruction.

b. Ambiguous Spaces

Performed ambiguity, confusion, and disorientation mark many aspects of the narrator’s wanderings. He presents himself, at times, as utterly lost. He cannot obtain either external or internal orientation. At the internal level, he finds himself “in die

unablässig in meinem Kopf sich drehenden Gedanken verloren” (204), as he stands in front of the same forest grove, out of which he had exited one hour earlier. At the external level, he is unable to distinguish what really exists in nature from what is only imaginary; the narrator writes: “Ich wandte mich um, schaute zurück auf die leere Bahn, über die ich gekommen war, und wusste nicht mehr, ob ich das blasse Seeungeheuer am Fuß der Klippe von Covehithe nun in Wirklichkeit oder bloß in meiner Einbildung gesehen hatte” (89). Disintegrating perceptive boundaries, the narrator generates ambivalent spaces existing at the border between reality and created fiction. These oscillating thoughts and intuitions, which the narrator, writing a year after his experience, consciously produces and reproduces, exhibit radical fluctuation, and this ambivalence and uncertainty become spatially projected. He allows himself to be drawn into topographical confusion, wandering “with no ostensible purpose” (Long 136). In a highly technological, grid and map-oriented age, he, in all likelihood, could rationally prevent himself from getting lost. Instead, he opts to embody a postsecular persona, which, according to McClure, is more interested in “seeking” than “dwelling,” wishing to obtain “partial knowledge,” which is “fragmentary, plural, and only partially illuminating” (8). He is on “a quest for some kind of signification beyond common perception” (Wolff 26). The confused, non-definitive spaces he linguistically creates reflect the disoriented nature of his journey. Enveloped in a veil of confusion, these spaces, lying somewhere between the real and the imaginary, consistently evoke a fragmentary sense of comprehension. Discussing how descriptions of geographical space reflect what occurs inside an individual subject, Lehnert writes, “Die reale/physische Geographie wird über den poetischen Diskurs wieder angeeignet – der innere und der äußere Raum, das Reale und

Imaginäre fallen zusammen” (223). Through poetic strategy internal spaces can be projected externally. Sebald’s narration spatially manifests inner ambiguity, and, as Zylko suggests “a rise in ambivalence indicates the imminent dynamic breakthrough” (402). In numerous instances the narrator infuses his descriptions of real spaces with signs of uncertainty, projecting his internal ambivalence into narrated space. Thus, he enables moments of indeterminacy to serve as breakthroughs, moments when the real merges with the imaginary, causing the external to be present alongside the internal, such that a premonition of the transcendent surfaces.

These narratively delineated ambiguous spaces prevail throughout the text. On one of his many side excursions the narrator finds himself in Somerleyton Hall, where he writes, “Die Besucher vermochten kaum zu sagen, wo das Naturgegebene aufhörte und das Kunsthandwerk anfing” (46).⁷² The narrator juxtaposes what is naturally given with what is artificially, or artistically produced. Here, physical space fuses with created space – “die Übergänge zwischen Interieur und Außenwelt” transpire “unmerklich” (46) – with the result that he cannot definitively ascertain how to differentiate between what is inside and what is outside. The porousness evident here is inconspicuous. Furthermore, the narrator incorporates a religious element, by setting this scene within the bounds of a significant religious symbol, “unter der Kuppel einer phantastischen Moschee” (46). Continuing to delineate the setting, the narrator mentions how visitors, when meandering through Somerleyton, may not know where they are: “Tatsächlich weiß man...nicht so recht, ob man sich auf einem Landsitz in Suffolk befindet oder an einem sehr weit

⁷² In another instance, with similar grammatical structure, the narrator writes: “eine Sturmflut verwüstete die untere Stadt und die Hafengegend so grauenhaft, dass monatelang kein Mensch mehr wusste, wo die Grenze war zwischen dem Meer und dem Land” (190). Here, the border dissolves as stability merges into fluidity.

abgelegenen, quasi extraterritorialen Ort” (49). This space disorients those who experience it to such an extent that the space itself becomes dislocated, existing either as a known location, the “Landsitz in Suffolk,” or as an unknown place, an “extraterritorial Ort,” a term that later in the text has religious connotations, as it is linked to a mosque the narrator enters (100). While writing from a reflective distance, the narrator nevertheless consistently introduces spatial ambiguity, creating the conditions for “transitional moments,” in which the external, or unfamiliar can break through into the internal, the familiar. What is unique in this particular scene is how the narrator uses ambiguity to explore the possibility of meta-empirical spaces that can be creatively communicated in his text, existing alongside what is real, while remaining beyond the scope of cognition.

c. Labyrinthine Spaces

At the outset of his work, the narrator mentions Thomas Browne’s “labyrinthische...Satzgebilde” (30), and with this reference he provides a self-reflexive commentary on how his own text will function. It too possesses tricky, labyrinthine sentences, through which both the narrator and the reader must slowly maneuver, occasionally arriving at moments of clarity. With this style the narrator creates moments of porousness, instances allowing for reflection and contemplation. Describing labyrinthine texts from an historical perspective, Schmitz-Emans states, “In späteren Zeiten, vor allem im Barock, übernehmen labyrinthische und permutative Texte in verschiedenen Spielformen allerlei Funktionen. Insbesondere laden sie auch weiterhin zu Kontemplation und Meditation ein” (278). Using Browne (1605-1682) to frame his text, the narrator presents a doctor and poet from the Baroque era (roughly 1600 to 1752), giving his work a distinctly Baroque flavor. The narrator’s labyrinthine sentences do

indeed create meditative moments, which frequently occur within the obscured, “aussichtslos” (50) spaces ensconced in ubiquitous destruction. Reproducing various types of labyrinths, the narrator suggests the presence of otherworldliness within the confused regions of immanent space. These labyrinths exist both externally, outside the narrating subject – i.e. in the physical, natural spaces he confronts – and internally, within the narrating subject’s mind.

The narrator uses external, textually reconstructed labyrinths, which were ostensibly experienced in physical space, to evoke considerations of transcendence. The most religiously coded labyrinth is “The Saints,” a group of villages “bennant nach dem Namenspatron der jeweiligen Pfarrkirche” (296). Wandering through this region, the narrator has the sense, “*I might well get lost in The Saints*” (296). But, before getting completely lost, he is saved by an orienting source, a church tower: “Ein paarmal glaubte ich mich schon verlaufen zu haben, als gegen Mittag mein Ziel, der runde Turm der Kirche von Ilketshall St. Margaret in der Ferne auftauchte” (296). Within a labyrinth of religious symbols, which allow for the meditations of which Schmitz-Emans writes, his disorientation finds orientation through a vertically projected tower that provides an ultimate source of stability. Regarding the emergence of orienting instances within the text’s labyrinthine spaces of chaos, Gray suggests that “Sebald’s narrator, like his reader, is constantly on the verge of getting lost in textual, epistemological, and geographical labyrinths, and yet he is repeatedly rescued by a countervailing view that affords a perspective permitting reorientation” (“Vanishing,” 522). Employing the church as a reorienting point, the narrator indicates the significant role a physical, cultural symbol of transcendence plays in offering momentary stability within an immanent space marked

by uncertainty. With this textual performance the narrator explores the importance of taking into consideration the alternative symbols persistently present in the secular age.

To frame his interior labyrinths, the narrator performs a movement in which he proceeds from external, physical labyrinths, “von den Irrgängen auf der Heide” (216), to the internal labyrinth of his mind, where he contemplates the motivations for writing. These, he suspects, could be based upon custom, amazement about life, the love of truth, confusion, etc. Then, he posits that the activity of writing parallels that of entering a labyrinth; the writer begins to lose the overview as he or she proceeds into the maze of his or her imagination. The author loses the privileged position, the “einfaches Muster” (206), which the narrator had just experienced when finding his way out of a physical labyrinth. The narrator writes:

Vielleicht verliert ein jeder von uns den Überblick genau in dem Maß, in dem er fortbaut am eigenen Werk, und vielleicht neigen wir aus diesem Grund dazu, die zunehmende Komplexität unserer Geisteskonstruktionen zu verwechseln mit einem Fortschritt an Erkenntnis, während wir zugleich schon ahnen, dass wir die Unwägbarkeiten, die in Wahrheit unsere Laufbahn bestimmen, nie werden begreifen können (217).

Here, the narrator juxtaposes epistemological progress with spiritual development. When a writer presumes that he or she has advanced in knowledge by generating new ideas through writing, he or she may be under a false pretense. In actuality it may have been growth in spiritual complexity that the writer experienced. In this constant state of misinterpretation, when it is assumed that rational explanations prevail over metaphysical ones, there is nevertheless the subtle intuition that unaccounted for “imponderabilities”

are actually responsible for directing people's lives. However rational an individual becomes, he or she still possesses an underlying awareness that "unseen," "unexplainable" forces are responsible for determining the course of events.

This view regarding the formative influence of intangibles is suggested as well in Sebald's earlier work, *Schwindel. Gefühle*, where the narrator writes: "So sagt er einmal...dass sich, wenn er es recht überlege, zwischen der Logik des Sandkastens und der Logik des Heeresberichts, die ihm beide vertraut seien wie kaum sonst, ein weites Feld der undurchsichtigsten Gegebenheiten erstrecke. Kleinigkeiten, die sich unserer Wahrnehmung entziehen, entscheiden alles! Bei den größten Schlachten der Weltgeschichte sei das genauso gewesen" (171). The "Kleinigkeiten" in *Schwindel* parallel the "Unwägbarkeiten" in *Die Ringe*. Both are just assumed to be determining, external forces beyond perception. This duplication of sentiments reveals a consistency in Sebald's thinking. His narrators do not shy away from textually alluding to supposedly controlling factors outside the empirical framework. Further unpacking the quote cited in the previous paragraph, we can see how the narrator provides additional religious coding by mentioning the writer's "Geisteskonstruktion," indicating his interpretation of humanity as more than merely scientific or mechanistic.

With his use of the terms "spiritual construction" and "imponderabilities" in the formerly cited passage, the narrator situates his own ideas in an earlier framework established in his discussion of Thomas Browne's writings. Read in a Brownian context, these determining "imponderabilities" have a distinctly religious quality: "Die Unsichtbarkeit und Unfaßbarkeit dessen, was uns bewegt, das ist auch für Thomas Browne, der unsere Welt nur als das Schattenbild einer anderen ansah, ein letzten Endes

unauslösbare Rätsel gewesen” (29). In Browne’s system, an invisible, incomprehensible force moves humanity. This is not a scientific, materialistic worldview. Just as Browne believes invisible forces to be operative in a directing capacity, so too does the narrator entertain the intuition that imponderabilities determine the course of one’s life. In this sense, the narrator shatters the idea of a completely buffered, rational self that “find[s] the idea of spirits, moral forces, causal powers with a purposive bent, close to incomprehensible” (Taylor, *Secular* 539). Sebald’s porous narrator, on the other hand, evinces openness to considering purposive powers beyond the immediate, natural frame of reference. When this writing subject loses the overview, the trajectory of his own text, he becomes aware of his limitations, of the incapability of his own mental faculties to unfold the mysteries of the world, and, within this labyrinth of muddled ideas, he is reminded of an exterior force that somehow directs and guides his reflections. Correctly, Gray asserts the following: “this theme of inscrutable motives, imperceptible underlying causes, or hidden, unfathomable designs forms a prominent leitmotif that runs throughout this text” (Gray 507). The text’s labyrinths – based on those existing externally in nature and those existing internally within the narrator – generate instances of dizzying incomprehension, and, as the narrative draws traces of transcendence into these particular spaces, it remains open to the religious in an immanently secular age.

IV. Transcendent Time

When the narrator describes how he experienced natural landscapes and the material elements he confronted therein, he, in various instances, infuses into his narration dynamic uses of time. At the formal level, the text itself follows a temporal trajectory unlike many novels in which time markers signify plot development. With

linear structures stories typically move in a direction arriving at a definitive end. This is not the case with Sebald's text. Interpreted in accord with Lotman's classifications, its form manifests greater similarities to a world of enchantment than to one of disenchantment. Lotman writes: "In archaic cultures cyclical time predominates. Texts created according to the laws of cyclical time are not in our sense plot-texts and generally speaking they are hard to describe in our normal categories...the absence of the categories of beginning and end: the text is thought of as a constantly repeated system synchronized with the cyclical processes of nature" (151). Indeed, the cyclical time evident in *Die Ringe*, without a clearly demarcated beginning or end, follows the perpetually occurring natural processes of destruction encountered by the narrator. The narrative episodes evolve organically from the nature confronted within the English landscape of desolation. Absent of linear structure, the text, with its isolated episodes, hearkens back to a pre-secularized world in which non-teleological plots do not allow for closure. Describing such texts further, Lotman adds, "They tell not of one-off exceptional events, but of events which are out of time, endlessly repeated, and in this sense, unchangeable" (152). Sebald's narrator describes events seemingly capable of occurring in any time, because, without a specific, identifiable narrative logic, one particular story does not necessarily build upon a prior one. The disjointed stories provide evidence of an archaic, pre-secular narrative approach as opposed to a secular one, as the stories themselves resist temporal linearity. In this way the narrator's pre-secular strategy is simultaneously a suggestion of the text's postsecular quality with its underlying resistance to a secular, rational approach to narration. The narrator seemingly provides a self-reflexive commentary on how his own narration functions, when he writes about

how he sensed time when he found himself within the walls of Sommerleyton Hall; he writes, “Auch in welchem Jahrzehnt oder Jahrhundert man ist, lässt sich nicht ohne weiteres sagen, denn viele Zeiten haben sich hier überlagert und bestehen nebeneinander fort” (49). The narrator’s reference to time’s cyclical and indeterminable nature point to the significance of time itself for the text. Within a framework of unspecified time the narrator nevertheless focalizes certain experiences and marks them off as significant by endowing them with a unique type of time.

As the narrator recalls an episode in Holland, when he came across a religious structure, he frames this original perception by evoking the sense of an abnormal, extraordinary type of time. After looking at a building facade, he peers through a gate that had been slightly opened by a man linguistically coded as Muslim, “dunkelbärtiger” with a “langem Kleid.”⁷³ Through the “spaltbreite Öffnung” the narrator’s gaze centers for “einen mir unvergesslichen, ganz *aus der Zeit gelösten Moment lang* [my italics] auf eine hölzerne Stellage” (100). In this sudden “warped” moment, removed from ordinary time, he identifies a rack of degraded street shoes that had been taken off by the devout who had entered the mosque in order to perform one of their five daily prayers. This observation becomes extraordinary as the narrator expresses his perception of a type of time that draws him away from his ordinary semiosphere. In this unique time dimension his observation becomes decisively religious, as he switches his focus to a structure linked to the sacred: “Erst später habe ich aus dem Hinterhof des Hauses das Minarett hinaufsehen in den azurfarbenen holländischen Abendhimmel. *Eine Stunde und*

⁷³ References to the “islamitischen Metzgerei” (100) just previously mentioned and the “morgenländischer Männer“ (101) discussed directly afterwards infer that this Muslim individual opens the narrator up to an unplanned, spontaneous, religious experience.

mehr bin ich in dieser gewissermaßen *extraterritorialen* Gegend herumgegangen [my italics]” (100-101). Spatially situated in a courtyard, the narrator identifies a vertically projected Minarett. Gazing at this religious symbol, the narrator uses a specific period of time to frame and delimit the localized space in which he finds himself. For the duration of more than an hour the narrator believes to be in a space disconnected from his normal spatial coordinates.

Space has become significant, marked off as it is by distinct temporal parameters. Describing the inseparable relationship between space and time and their mutual effect on each other, Hallet writes: “Die Zeit verdichtet sich hierbei, sie zieht sich zusammen und wird auf künstlerische Weise sichtbar; der Raum gewinnt Intensität, er wird in die Bewegung der Zeit, des Sujets, der Geschichte hineingezogen. Die Merkmale der Zeit offenbaren sich im Raum, und der Raum wird von der Zeit mit Sinn erfüllt und dimensioniert” (73). During this moment, demarcated from normal time, the narrator exists in a place seemingly detached from an immanent, familiar terrain. This coincides with Taylor’s discussion of how “modern” individuals narratively delineate their experience of the transcendent outside the ordinary flow of time, when they describe themselves as rising above all their “coordinates of...momentary existence in the world into a kind of state outside time,” when everything “seen and experienced exist[s] in a total ‘co-present’” (*Secular* 728). Sebald’s narrator connects his experience of this ‘state outside time’ with a religious emblem, by reflecting on a Minaret that evokes his sense of another type of time. Transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary by distinguishing between certain times, the profane and the sacred, the narrator performs – in Taylor’s terms – a momentary movement away from a “disenchanted” realm and into an

“enchanted” one, demonstrating how alternative temporal perception within immanence has the effect of elevating an individual out of his or her ordinary coordinates.⁷⁴

Another instance when time, marked as extraordinary by the narrator, facilitates with the creation of an “Übergang” is when the narrator visits Alec Garrard, a Methodist lay minister who had committed the previous two decades of his life to working on a model of the Jerusalem temple. He wanted it to look “wie er gewesen war am Anfang unserer *Zeitrechnung* [my italics]” (286). The text distinctly thematizes time in this scene, and this is evident in numerous ways. The narrator, before meeting up with Garrard, journeys on a path appearing to be an “endlose[n] Gerade[n]” (285). Similarly, Garrard spends two decades of his life on this project. And, the project itself is supposed to be a replication of an original one that was temporally located at the beginning of the calendar. Within this context emphasizing time, Garrard explains the nature of his work. Ideas direct his project, and because ideas “sich im Verlauf der *Zeit* [my italics] andauernd verändern” (291), he senses the project will never come to completion. He must repeatedly tear down “Was man für bereits vollendet gehalten hat” (291) and

⁷⁴ The disenchanted, according to Taylor, is “a cosmos conceived in conformity with post-Newtonian science, in which there is absolutely no question of higher meanings being expressed in the universe around us” (446). Elaborating on this, Taylor states that “in this disenchanted Protestant setting, there is no more sacred in the earlier sense, in which certain places, times, people, acts are distinguished as such from the profane” (454). Emphasizing his experience of a different time, distinguishing a sacred moment (marked off through the word “extraterritorial”) from a profane one, Sebald’s narrator creates a spatially enchanted context in which higher meanings (re)emerge. Regarding the enchanted realm, Taylor writes, “In an enchanted world there is a strong contrast between sacred and profane. By the sacred, I mean certain places: like churches, certain agents...certain times...certain actions” (446). Sebald’s narrator textually marks this contrast. In this instance, it is both the place and the time that point to a realm of enchantment.

promptly begin the process anew. The 20 years spent on the project is a snippet of an eternal activity. Incessantly changing time prevents him from arriving at a masterpiece.

Like Garrard, the narrator is keenly aware that the ideas contained in his literary works will also never arrive at permanency. He infers this when referring to a “Musterkataloge, deren Seiten mir immer als Blätter aus dem einzig wahren, von keinem unserer Text- und Bildwerke auch nur annähernd erreichten Buch erschienen sind” (338). With the intuition of a single, “true” book, writers are involved in textual productions, which will always only be attempts to arrive at a narration with permanency, and this can never be obtained. With this suggestion the narrator infers that a constant missing is experienced in all textual productions. This thinking moves in a distinctly Derridean direction. Writing is participation in an activity of constant deferral. Because of time’s annihilating quality, ideas slip into oblivion; the one, true book remains elusive. Consequently, Sebald’s narrator can only reproduce “peripheral texts,” in which, according to Lotman, “chance and disorder predominate. This group of texts also shows itself to be capable of shifting on to the metalevel, but it cannot be reduced to any one single and organized text” (162). The narrator performs what he experienced on his journey. He travelled on the periphery, and he writes on the periphery. A final text, a “Musterkatloge” is therefore impossible. All of his linguistic attempts are approximates, which must be continually restructured and reworked. Ensnared in this state of constant flux, in which chance and disorder predominate, the narrator and Garrard must resign themselves to those fleeting, porous moments temporarily opening to permanency.

This permeability, with a distinct suggestion of transcendence, is evident when the narrator commences with the description of his encounter with Garrard. The narrator

writes about how he experienced nature as he was approaching Garrard's house:

“Bisweilen an diesem in meiner Erinnerung manchmal bleischweren, manchmal ganz gewichtlosen Tag riß die Wolkendecke ein wenig auf. Dann kamen die gefächerten Strahlen der Sonne auf die Erde hernieder und erleuchteten den ein oder anderen Flecken, gerade so wie es dereinst üblich war in religiösen Darstellungen, die das Walten einer uns übergeordneten Instanz symbolisieren” (285-286). Vacillating between feeling what is leaden and what is weightless, the narrator, in Brownian fashion, writes with an upward trajectory, opening up the clouds and allowing the sunrays to provide epiphanic illumination.⁷⁵ What had been obfuscated on the path now becomes readily visible, as an external source transformed the tertiary sphere. Infusing this scene with an allusion to religious representation, the narrator demonstrates his intuition of transcendence within secular, ordinary space. This imagery frames his encounter with Garrard, whose temple, at various moments, reflects what the narrator had just done with his description of the landscape, as it too becomes an immanent space open to the transcendent.⁷⁶

The narrator uses Garrard's model to make transcendence present without providing it with a clear form of representation. His model of the Jerusalem temple – an object rooted in immanence – is capable of opening up to an external realm of

⁷⁵ When discussing the nature of his project, Garrard strictly avoids referring to it as a product stemming from divine revelation. In this sense he also provides a subtle critique of the religious idea of divine inspiration. Garrard state: “*And when I said to him [Einer dieser amerikanischen Evangelisten] it's nothing to do with divine revelation, he was very disappointed. If it had been divine revelation, I said to him, why would I have had to make alterations as I went along? No, it's just research really and work, endless hours of work, sagte Garrard*” (291).

⁷⁶ The tabernacle, according to Wolfson – in his discussion of Derridean thought –, symbolizes “the necessarily impermanent place wherein the divine glory is disclosed as the presence that cannot be iconically represented” (492). Garrard's model temple represents a transitory entity that unveils a transcendent presence never capable of receiving representation.

completion. To depict how this opening occurs, the narrator mixes temporal markers with religious concepts. There are moments, for example, when Garrard, working meticulously on his model and spending “*endless hours of work*” (291), experiences how “Das Abendlicht [dringt] seitwärts hier durch das Fenster” (294), and he sees, a “Gesamtansicht,” the temple with all of its elements in seemingly perfect harmony, “als sei alles bereits vollendet und als schaute ich hinein in die Gefilde der *Ewigkeit* [my italics]” (294). Glimpsing this relative perfection, Garrard experiences an eternal time – juxtaposed as it is with the sphere of passing time – in which the continual process of tearing down and building up occurs. As an idea becomes perfect, so too does time; instead of perpetually changing, it becomes stable in its permanency.

This perspective on time, represented by Garrard, resonates with the narrator. When the two of them ride together to Harleston, they sit “stillschweigend” next to each other, and the narrator internally expresses the following sentiment: “ich wünschte mir, die kurze Fahrt übers Land möge niemals ein Ende nehmen, *that we could go on and on, all the way to Jerusalem*” (295). As the narrator considers this moment of seeming fullness – an utter stillness in the presence of this quasi sacred, ascetic figure – he wishes, within the confines of transience, for eternity, for the city Jerusalem, which was earlier described in the book as “die sehnliche erwartete Braut, die Hütte Gottes unter den Menschen, das Bild eines anderen, neu gewordenen Lebens” (109).⁷⁷ Symbolically,

⁷⁷ At another point the narrator uses “eternity” to juxtapose it with time’s unstoppable trajectory that participates in the “fortschreitende Erosion der Küste” (77). Locked in a time that disintegrates matter, the narrator gestures towards an absolute time (one that would perhaps leave nature immune to its destructive forces); “Aber doch konnte man an dem Tag, an dem ich dort an dem stillen Ufer saß, glauben, man schaue hinein in die Ewigkeit“ (77). The immanent time that incessantly destroys is counterposed with a transcendent time, which, while eternal and therefore also unceasing, provides a fixed

Jerusalem serves as the image of another life, a linguistic marker of the eternal within the finite. This “eternal” city is arrived at only through an eternal pursuit. Wolfson suggests this idea when he speaks of Derrida’s ideas on Jerusalem. According to Derrida, there is a certain impossibility of being in this place. The phrase expressed during the Passover Seder “Next Year in Jerusalem” symbolizes that Jerusalem “is the place to which one must always be going, deferring of the pledge and postponing of the promise” (Wolfson 487). When the narrator speaks of his inner desire to go all the way to Jerusalem, he simultaneously expresses his inclination to participate in an eternal activity.⁷⁸

Showing interest in the eternal, ensconced as he is within the finite, the narrator generates an “Übergang,” suggesting an alternative, more permanent form of time. In this way, he offers a remedy to himself and others who have been struck with a debilitating melancholy; “Der Melancholie der vergehenden Zeit setzt Sebald den ‘Übergang in den Bereich des Transzendenten’ entgegen, ‘den die großen Augenblicke der Literatur – und vielleicht auch des Lebens – ins Werk setzen” (Hutchinson, “Leichtigkeit,” 477). Melancholy emerges when an individual perceives that he or she, fixed only within the limits of a fleeting time, has no hope of accessing a place of temporal permanency. Aware of this, the narrator provides a panacea as he constructs certain transitions into a realm of transcendence. He does this by textually exploring, weaving, at times, elements

moment of clarity. Glimpsing the eternal can be viewed as a religious activity; according to Schleiermacher, “[Religion] ist unendlich, nach allen Seiten, ein Unendliches des Stofs und der Form, des Seins, des Sehens und des Wissens darum. Dieses Gefühl muss Jeden begleiten der wirklich Religion hat” (84). References to eternity frequently carry with them a religious quality.

⁷⁸ When such correlations transpire, according to Schleiermacher, when “das Unendliche” is present within the “Endlichem” (*Über* 79), religion exists.

of the literary and cultural archive into his narrative, providing suggestions of alternative forms of space and time within the immanent space of his written text.

V. Conclusion

In its final sentence, the narration ties Browne and silk together, indicating how both have been present throughout the narrator's meditative excursions into the natural spaces of the English countryside on the verge of destruction. Both Browne and silk are associated with the idea that this natural destruction may not have the final word, because the soul, after it leaves the body, may participate in another journey. Therefore, silk, black ribbon should be hung on mirrors and pictures, so as not to hinder the soul on its final journey; the narrator writes: "Und Thomas Browne...vermerkt an irgendeiner...Stelle...in Holland sei es zu seiner Zeit Sitte gewesen, im Haus eines Verstorbenen alle Spiegel und alle Bilder...mit seidenem Trauerflor zu verhängen, damit nicht die den Körper verlassene Seele auf ihrer letzten Reise abgelenkt würde" (349). While Brown may doubt the immortality of the soul and the narrator may continue to question whether he can truly be released from his debilitating melancholy, both express interest in the continuing exploration of the silk thread that remains immune to annihilation and may serve as the ideal "Übergang," weaving together entities fixed within immanence to a transcendent, eternal realm. By threading Browne's religious musings and poetic style into his narration, Sebald's narrator, in the resuscitative act of writing, offers the possibility of preservation in the midst of a "beinahe nur aus Kalamitäten bestehende Geschichte" (349), as he introduces a porous subject that remains permeable to external forces, to both his literary predecessors and to those spatial-temporal experiences within nature that evoke intuitions of the transcendent.

Schwindel. Gefühle

While Sebald's narrator, in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, textually inscribes the intuitions of transcendence he felt as he explored the prospects of perpetuity in a natural environment caught in the throes of destruction, the narrator of *Schwindel. Gefühle* evokes transcendence when writing about the spaces and places in the natural world he encountered on his journey to remember and record past memories. The process of recollecting, linked as it is with the narrator's movement into diverse material settings, serves as the express intent of his narration: "Im Sommer 1987...habe ich...die Reise von Wien über Venedig nach Verona noch einmal gemacht, um meine schemenhaften Erinnerungen an die damalige gefährvolle Zeit genauer überprüfen und vielleicht einiges davon aufschreiben zu können" (93). He travels to cities and into various environments, in order to, through the act of writing, access memories deeply embedded in his consciousness. As he executes this task, he remains porous to what is external – what is beyond his rational grasp – to those transcendent elements that formatively moulded his perceptions during specific events in the past. To interpret these bygone experiences, the narrator employs textual marks imbued with religious coding. For example, the narrator demarcates the progression of his recovery from a sickness using "religious" markers: "Weihnachten," "Dreikönigstag," and "Fastenzeit" (274-275). With its prolific number of religious allusions, the text can be read as a postsecular work, with a "secular-minded character," who turns "back toward the religious," (McClure, 3), as he explores the still vital role religion plays in secular space.⁷⁹ In postsecular form, the text similarly resists

⁷⁹ The narrator's interest in evidence demonstrates this secular mindset. Regarding Dr. K., the narrator writes, "Wir wissen also, wie gesagt, nicht, was er in Wirklichkeit alles gesehen hat. Es gibt nicht einmal einen Hinweis darauf, dass er den Dogenpalast besucht

definitive assessments of religion, a “monolithic truth” (McClure 3), and the tendency to use religion to arrive at meaning. In this sense Sebald would agree with the text’s approach to religion, as he himself does not believe religion provides meaning; in an interview, he claimed: “all our systems of creed, all our constructions...are built in that way, in order to make some sort of sense, which there isn’t, as we all know” (*Emergence* 97). The text seemingly reflects Sebald’s sentiment, by manifesting a mixed, or layered understanding of religion’s significance.

At times, the text depicts objects associated with religion in a negative light.⁸⁰ At other moments, the narration connects religion to a sense of beauty or the narrator’s most vivid memories.⁸¹ Endeavoring to access past images, whether positive or negative – “Die Konturen von Bildern, die ich festzuhalten suchte, lösten sich auf, und die Gedanken zerfielen mir, noch ehe ich sie richtig gefaßt hatte” (42) – the narrator reflects on both his memories and his failed attempts to remember and, while performing this, employs religious symbols that frame the entire movement of the text. Consequently, as the narrator textually reproduces various experiences on his journey, intuitions of

hätte” (164); further on, “Belegt werden könnte jedoch...” (165). Similarly, in a secular, scientific fashion he records his encounter with the “astrophysicist” Malachio. And, he incessantly studies the newspaper (62).

⁸⁰ For example, when Madame Gherardi begins to speak “von einem göttlichen Glück...dem nichts im Leben zu vergleichen sei” (33), Marie-Henri Beyle [Stendhal] is overcome with “einem furchtbaren Schrecken” and immediately distances himself from her, apparently unable to cope with her strange religious language.

⁸¹ Comparing the landscape to a miracle, the narrator employs religiously-coded terms to mark the aesthetically pleasing: “Die Sonne trat hervor, die ganze Landschaft erglänzte, die Tirolerinnen...schauten bloß noch hinaus auf das, was da draußen vorbeizog wie ein *Wunder* [my italics]” (191). Furthermore, those senses that emerged when he experienced the effects of distinctly religious spaces remain in his memory; he writes: “Vieles von dem, was ich damals in ihnen [the chapels] gesehen oder gespürt habe, wird in mir geblieben sein...der Wunsch nach einer Wiederholung der in ihrem Inneren herrschenden vollkommenen Stille” (196).

transcendence surface, at either the moment of initial encounter, or through the narrator's subsequent mediation. To uncover how this transpires, how the narrator's natural surroundings stimulate inscriptions of transcendence, I will focus on two elements: narrative intervention and narrative reflection. We see narrative intervention when the narrator strategically infuses "Übergänge" into his text, by going beyond secular, neutral descriptions to depict what is materially present before him. With regard to narrative reflection, the narrator uses his text to meditate on the religious dimensions of his experiences with the people and sacred spaces he confronts on his journey. The transcendent becomes manifest at both levels. My analysis is particularly interested in exploring how the narrator performs permeability in these two particular activities, becoming "porous," "vulnerable to cosmic forces (Taylor, *Secular* 38)," as he opens his reflections to what is transcendent and broadens his interpretation of reality beyond the strictly immanent.⁸²

I. Narrative Intervention, a Postsecular Hermeneutic

Into his text the narrator introduces a "porous," postsecular hermeneutic. Principles or entities outside of the natural, immanent frame can inform interpretations of various physical phenomena. This meta-empirical way of reading becomes evident as the narrator records his journey from Vienna to Venice. While on the train he observes the

⁸² Without linking the narrator too closely to the author, it is interesting to note what Sebald says in a particular interview, when asked the question, "[do] you feel sometimes that coincidence or duplication is a way in which nature is breaking through the surface of our civilized lives [?]. We may not know what it means, but we have a sense that something beyond us is taking place." Sebald responds, "...one sometimes does have a sense that there is a double floor someplace, or that events are outside your control. This notion of the autonomous individual who is in charge of his or her fate is one that I couldn't really subscribe to" (*Emergence*, 117). While steering very clear of religious language, Sebald indicates that forces and circumstances beyond the phenomenal frame of reference may influence humanity.

landscape and notices: “die aus den Alpentälern herauskommenden niedrigen Wolken“ (59). This naturally occurring phenomenon reminds him of a painting by Tiepolo, “das [er] oft lange betrachtet [hat].”⁸³ Though not visually represented in Sebald’s text, the painting shows the city of Este in the background, Saint Thekla in the foreground, a host of angels above her in the right hand corner, and other citizens, with

pain written into their expressions, extended over the surface of the ground.

After describing important elements of the painting, the light for example, and establishing the dire context, in which the figures find themselves, the narrator proceeds to talk about what is emphasized, namely Thekla; he writes:

Zur Linken, knieend, die heilige Thekla, in ihrer Fürbitte für die Bewohner der Stadt, das Gesicht aufwärts gekehrt, wo die himmlischen Heerscharen durch die Luft fahren und uns, wenn wir hinsehen wollen, einen Begriff



geben von dem, was sich über unseren Köpfen vollzieht. Heilige Thekla,

⁸³ By including this statement the narrator suggests (1) he has had an ongoing fascination with this decisively religious painting, and (2) that physical depictions infused with religious imagery and symbolism inform his observations and interpretations of nature, particularly the landscape through which he is presently travelling.

bitt für uns, auf daß wir von aller ansteckenden Sucht und unversehenem Tod
sicher erlediget und von allem Anlauf des Verderbens barmherzig erlöset
werden. Amen. (59)

As he transitions from describing the painting to discussing Thekla's intercession, the narrator makes interpretive moves indicative of how he more actively incorporates his own intuition of transcendence into his text. Doing so, he participates in a postsecular discourse, in which there "is a religiously inflected disruption of secular constructions of the real" (McClure 3). With his interpretative interference, the narrator disrupts the neutral, secular description of the real painting, fusing the transcendent into the empirical. How does he do this? First, the narrator embraces the prayer for himself and his readers. He shifts from a neutral analysis of the painting in which he uses the "sie" – "wo sie [the figures in the painting]...von der aus ihrem Inwendigen hervordrängenden Seuche vollends niedergestreckt wurden" (59) – to an interpretation of what "die Bewohner der Stadt" would be saying if they could speak. This becomes the narrator's inclusionary gesture as he employs the "wir" – "bitt für uns." He projects his ideas onto those surrounding Thekla, and, in doing so, replaces them with himself and his readers. This freely taken interpretive maneuver is no longer analytical; i.e. he is not simply describing. Instead, he introduces into his text a dynamic hermeneutic strategy that allows one to add what is not seen (his modern day prayer) to what is evident, or, in this case, not evident in the physical realm (i.e. Thekla is not praying for us).

Second, the narrator's prayer reflects not only the historic situation, offered by the painting's context, but also modern sentiments. The narrator's request for intercession stems partly from what is depicted in the painting, "Anlauf des Verderbens," and partially

from what is beyond the painting, when he, for example, asks to be freed from “ansteckende Sucht.” This “Sucht” is not evident in the painting; these people are dying from pestilence not struggling with addiction. This gesture reflects the narrator’s modern situation, as he suggests that we, in the secular age, are caught in some sort of addictive vices. This indicates the narrator’s understanding of how the painting can be interpreted in a “porous” manner by infusing it with what is beyond its immediate context.

Third, according to the narrator, interpreting the painting does not require the viewer to remain in the immanent. He or she may incorporate a predilection for the unseen into the analysis. One can observe solely what is depicted, or, one can see what is inferred, the “point not visible.” Writing in another context, Taylor defines this “point not visible” as “the point outside the self-contained system of everyday explanation, the one in relation to which all our ordinary meanings change, the hinge of the paradigm shift. The artist takes us ‘past psychology and sociology towards the limits of mystery’” (*Secular* 732). The narrator’s interpretive work around this painting allows the viewer to seriously consider both what is exterior to, and interior within the painting. Including what is beyond the self-contained system interjects the ordinary with mystery. The viewing agent can choose to take into account activity not strictly depicted at the material level. This statement, “wenn wir hinsehen wollen” indicates that we as viewers have a choice as to whether we want to allow the heavenly host to provide us with a concept of what is taking place “über unseren Köpfen.”⁸⁴ The narrator gives complete freedom,

⁸⁴ Commenting on the wider role of visual art in Sebald’s works, Anne Fuchs writes: “His deliberations on fine art develop a model of what one might call ‘knowing contemplativeness’, a form of seeing that attempts to leave the framework of the present behind” (176). The act of contemplation moves the experiencing subject from the material to the immaterial. When the narrator speaks of how the “heavenly host” could

allowing the reader to perceive the heavenly host simply as it is in its mere materiality, a “closed reading,” which sees “immanence as admitting of no beyond” (Taylor, *Secular* 550), or to see this host as an entity, which points to a transcendent realm, to what is beyond, where some activity may be occurring beyond the narrator or the reader’s recognition.⁸⁵ According to Taylor, there are, and this being one of them, “modes of aesthetic experience, whose power seems inseparable from their epiphanic nature, that is their revealing something beyond themselves, even beyond nature as we ordinarily know it” (*Secular* 607). Sebald’s text, in its analysis of the Tiepolo painting, reflects upon just such an aesthetic experience, during which the viewer has the opportunity to see something beyond the immanent frame, to obtain a “porous” perspective, one remaining open to unseen, transcendent elements.

II. Narrative Reflection: Experiencing the Other

During the narrator’s coincidental encounter with the Venetian named Malachio – a name stemming from the Hebrew (Mal'akhiy) “my messenger” – the dual components of religion according to Schleiermacher, “intuition” and “feeling,” become particularly

give a viewer a concept of some sort of activity that takes place outside of the immediate framework, he does indeed seem to invoke this possibility of a “knowing contemplativeness,” which would draw the viewer beyond the immanent present, if he or she were to accept the concept offered by the heavenly host.

⁸⁵ Discussing another fresco, the narrator differentiates between objects pointing beyond the immediately visual and those representations constrained to immanence; he writes: “Eine eher nördlich anmutend Gegend erhebt sich...in den blauen Himmel. Auf einem Meeresarm weist ein Schiff mit geschwellten Segeln...in die Ferne. Sonst ist alles Gegenwart und *diesseitig* [my italics], das wellige Land, die gepflügten Felder...” (86). The ship, with its billowed out sail, points into the distance, to the “jenseits,” in keeping with the analogy drawn by the narrator. Entities within immanent space may serve as signposts to a meta-phenomenal sphere.

manifest.⁸⁶ The narrator frames their meeting as a chance encounter, because, while traveling to Venice, he just happens to be reading Grillparzer's "*Tagebuch*" (62). This Grillparzer, "der Rechtskundige" (63), when he was in Venice, thought about "den Palast, in dem die Gerichtsbehörden ihren Wohnsitz aufgeschlagen haben und in dessen innerster Höhle...das unsichtbare Prinzip brütet" (63). One of the "Verfolgten" that arrived before this invisible principle, who came "mit der venezianischen Gerichtsbarkeit übers Kreuz" (63), was Casanova. He ended up deciding to escape from prison on the same day the narrator arrived in Venice, October 31st (though removed from each other by two centuries). As an individual who thought deeply about "die Grenzen der menschlichen Vernunft" (65), Casanova desired to determine when he would attempt his escape from prison on the basis of factors beyond reason. Aware that "das Unbekannte" (68) is always at work, he wanted to base his decision on a "willkürlichen Wort- und Zahlenspiel" (68), believing that within significant coincidences there existed "ein Gesetz...das auch dem klarsten Denken nicht zugänglich ist und dem er sich deshalb unterordnet" (68). Cassanova determined the date of his attempted escape through a carefully established system, mixed with numbers and letters, which became ultimately dependent on "die auf den Stundenschlag akkurate Angabe" (68). Behind this happenstance occurrence Cassanova believed a higher law to be at work, a law

⁸⁶ Commenting on the notion of chance in an interview, Sebald states: "It is this whole business of coincidence, which is very prominent in my writing...it certainly comes up in the first book, in *Vertigo*, a good deal. I don't particularly hold with parapsychological explanations of one kind or another, or with Jungian theories about the subject. I find it all rather tedious. But it seems to me simply an instance that illustrates that we somehow need to make sense of our nonsensical existence" (*Emergence* 96). Sebald draws the connection between coincidence and the nonsensical, indicating that the unexplainable elements of chance are worthy of investigation; unseen, unreasonable realms have, from Sebald's perspective, a certain 'real' possibility.

inaccessible to the most resolute strategies of reason.⁸⁷ Invisible principles beyond perception determine the outcome of events, and this imperceptible law is an indication of what is immediately beyond the immanent. Submitting to this law as if it were a divine entity, Cassanova surrendered himself to what he believed to be a powerfully active agent, and he ended up deciding to escape from prison on the 31st of October, the same day the narrator meets Malachio.

Within this context of invisible principles eluding human reason, the narrator frames his encounter with Malachio, an individual who embodies juxtaposing perspectives, the scientific (human reason) and the supernatural (invisible principles). As his name suggests, he becomes a “messenger” who brings the sacred to the narrator, serving as a mediator between the transcendent and the immanent. In a secular sphere void of God, Malachio’s presence stimulates the creation of a sacred space. Describing the sacred, Derrida writes, “‘The sacred, it is true, appears. But the god remains distant.’... [T]his anticipation as a thought of Being always sees God coming, opens the possibility of an encounter with God and of a dialogue with God” (*Writing* 146). To integrate this idea into an analysis of Sebald’s text, I would contend that the sacred begins to appear – God is indicated while remaining distant and absent – as this classic representative of the secular mind, a natural scientist, opens himself and the narrator up to religious contemplation in secular space.⁸⁸ At a bar on the Riva, the narrator enters into conversation with Malachio, “der in Cambridge Astrophysik studiert hatte und der *alles*

⁸⁷ A similar law is suggested later in the text by an old General sitting next to Dr. K. (Kafka); “wenn er [the General] es recht überlege...Kleinigkeiten, die sich unserer Wahrnehmung entziehen, entscheiden alles!” (171).

⁸⁸ Similar to how the narrator of Sebald’s *Die Ringe des Saturn* uses the doctor, Thomas Browne, to incorporate a religious framework into the narration, the narrator here uses an astrophysicist to give this account a religious tone.

[my italics], wie sich bald herausstellte, aus der größten Entfernung sah, nicht nur die Sterne” (70). This scientist sees not only the material – the most distant stars – but also apparently “everything,” an abstract, undefined term encompassing the most distant, non-phenomenal reaches. What exactly this “everything” could include becomes more evident as the two of them make their way through the Venetian canals out onto “das offene Wasser” (70). As Malachio turns off the motor, a pervasive silence emerges. The narrator recalls; “Das Boot hob und senkte sich mit den Wellen, und es verging, wie mir schien, *eine lange Zeit* [my italics]. Vor uns lag der verglimmende Glanz unserer Welt, *an dem* [my italics] wir, wie *an einer* [my italics] Himmelsstadt, uns nicht sattsehen können. Das Wunder des aus dem Kohlenstoff entstandenen Lebens, hörte ich Malachio sagen, geht in Flammen auf” (70). This time indicator, “eine lange Zeit,” is reminiscent of the “zerdehnte Zeit” in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. Regarding the significant role time plays in manufacturing specific spaces, Hallet writes, “der an sich leere und formlose Raum [wird] von der Zeit, wie eben dargelegt mit Sinn erfüllt und dimensioniert” (73). The narrator generates an extraordinary space by filling it with lengthened time. At this moment in nature’s sanctuary, time slows down, allowing for an extended period of contemplation, in which they begin to focus on their intuitions of a decaying world. Similar to the worldview represented in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, the world progresses towards destruction; Malachio recognizes this entropic principle. In this sense, he represents the secular, scientific viewpoint, explicated by Taylor, when he writes, “science seemed to show that we are nothing but a fleeting life-form on a dying star; or that the universe is nothing but decaying matter, under ever increasing entropy” (569). Accepting the findings of science, Malachio indeed believes that the world will be

reduced to flames, and this seems to be the view the narrator adopts, as he concludes his text with his dream of an entire city going up in flames. Representations of fire are ubiquitous on the final page of the novel: “das grosse Feuer von London;” “es war ein grausig blutig böses Lohen;” “Die Kirchen, Häuser, Holz und Mauersteine, alles brennt zugleich;” “Am Gottesacker die immergrünen Bäume fangen Feuer;” “Ein rasend kurzer Fackelbrand;” “die ausgezackte Feuerwand” (287). Yet, the dying radiance, “der verglimmende Glanz,” the world generates offers an inexhaustible beauty, one that can be repeatedly experienced without ever being summarily enjoyed; the viewing subject will never arrive at complete satisfaction.

That which is forever desired (and never completely grasped, following the trajectory of a Derridean principle of deferral) is the radiance of the world, and, to note, not the world itself. The “radiance” that remains perpetually alluring is indicated by the “an dem,” and this is likened to a “heavenly city,” connected as it is through the “an einer.” By distinguishing the world from its radiance, the narrator separates the real from an appearance. He further disconnects this appearance from the real, by comparing the appearance – “der Glanz” – with an unknown realm, a heavenly city. Expressing the desire for a radiance disconnected from physical reality, the narrator points to his intuitive understanding of the transcendent, as he indicates the desire for an entity unable to be grasped. This radiance is much like the eternally deferred to which Derrida refers. Writing about desire, Derrida contends; “[desire] permits itself to be appealed to by the absolutely irreducible exteriority of the other to which it must remain infinitely inadequate. Desire is equal only to excess. No totality will ever encompass it. Thus, the metaphysics of desire is a metaphysics of infinite separation” (*Writing* 93). Malachio and

the narrator desire that from which they are separated. Ensnared in a perpetual state of desire, they experience a natural realm pointing beyond itself in its radical exteriority. Indeed, the narrator must linguistically resort to what is beyond the immanent frame – to a “Himmelstadt” – to discuss his intuition of the inexhaustible he senses in nature.

Similarly, by including Malachio’s commentary on their experience – “hörte ich Malachio sagen” – the narrator provides more precise insight into that “alles” which Malachio allegedly sees. The astrophysicist describes the world – one destined to be consumed by flames – as a “Wunder,” a “miracle.” For this scientist it is “miraculous” that living matter derives from carbon. The narrator uses this to demonstrate how Malachio steps into a language exceeding the scientific in order to explain the occurrence of scientific facts readily visible within immanence. Malachio does indeed recognize “everything,” both the mechanical operations of nature, as well as the transcendent processes behind these operations, those that are intuited but never blatantly evident.

After establishing Malachio’s understanding of matter’s “miraculous” origin, the narrator emphasizes the silence enveloping this space. He demonstrates how the sense of stillness catalyzes religious reflections that in turn form the basis of an extraordinary moment. The narrator describes the scene accordingly, “*Wortlos* [my italics] deutete mein Führer hinüber zu dem Inceneritore Comunale auf der der Giudecca westwärts vorgelagerten namenlosen Insel” (70). The narrator elaborates on the “Comunale,” representing it as “ein *totenstilles* [my italics] Betongehäuse unter einer weißen Rauchfahne” (70). Here, gestures replace words. An austere, hallowed atmosphere forms on this boat trip when the two of them experience a radiance prompting the intuition of a heavenly, unexperienced city. Reflecting on the relationship between science and the

spiritual, Martinson states that “God does not reveal himself” in this world. Hence, “Silence embraces and permeates everything meaningful” (72). Empty of God, infused only with vague intuitions of the transcendent, this space does indeed become meaningful, as the clutter of noise clears and the subjects are able to focus intently on their perceptions. Within this ambience of silence, the narrator mentions the thoughts Malachio had recently been entertaining: “Malachio sagte, er habe in letzter Zeit viel nachgedacht über die Auferstehung und er frage sich nach der Bedeutung des Satzes, demzufolge unsere Gebeine und Leiber von den Engeln dereinst übertragen werden in das Gesichtsfeld Ezechiels. Antworten habe er keine gefunden, aber es genügten ihm eigentlich auch schon die Fragen” (71). The narrator’s inclusion of Malachio’s reflection on the Gospel account of the resurrection, a “miraculous” event, which many find difficult to rationally comprehend, indicates textual interest in irrational beliefs, those ideas incapable of being accessed by the clearest thinking. Additionally, Malachio is intrigued by an Old Testament passage in the book of Ezeziel, in which an allusion to another resurrection surfaces; the Lord, with Ezeziel’s assistance, brings the dry bones of the deceased back to life.⁸⁹ Pointing out Malachio’s curiosity about these possibilities of resurrection, the narrator presents an individual who, while remaining open to nonverifiable, religious intuitions, does not require resolution; speech and verbal answers are unnecessary. The silence represented in the narrated space reflects the silence exercised by Malachio when he considers communicating about matters of which no

⁸⁹ The narrator’s brief mention of “Ezechiel” is an allusion to Ezeziel 37. The Lord leads Ezeziel into a valley full of dry bones. God asks him the question: can these bones live? The Lord then instructs Ezeziel to prophecy to the bones. As he executes these orders, the bones come to life, representing the resurrection of the house of Israel. The Lord then says that he will bring people up from their graves and into the land of Israel, granting them a resurrection experience.

definitive answers can be formed. In a sense, taking a cue from Wittgenstein, both Malachio and the narrator remain silent on topics related to the transcendent; “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen” (*Tractatus* 85).

Traditional religious institutions frequently endeavor to espouse definitive answers to fundamental questions in order to establish the transcendent within categories, arriving at strict doctrinal statements, turning the resurrection, for example, into an absolute fact. Malachio, on the other hand, demonstrates unconcern as to whether his religious musings result in a steadfast conviction on a particular issue. In this regard, Malachio’s thinking would coincide with Derrida’s: “The infinitely-other cannot be bound by a concept, cannot be thought on the basis of a horizon; for a horizon is always a horizon of the same” (*Writing* 95). Answers, resulting in anthropological categories and concepts, would pose restrictions and would not coincide with Malachio’s suggested interest in vast distances and borderless realms. However, by simply posing such existential, religious questions, he, in the modern, secular-scientific west, performs, according to Taylor’s model, a porous act, opening himself to the transcendent, evoking his intuition of the transcendent without limiting it, thereby allowing the infinitely other to remain the other in its perpetual absence. Again, this seems to follow a Derridean framework: “Only the other, the totally other, can be manifested as what it is before the shared truth, within a certain nonmanifestation and a certain absence. It can be said only of the other that its phenomenon is a certain nonphenomenon, its presence (is) a certain absence” (*Writing* 91). Malachio’s reflections unveil a transcendent other that remains absent in so far as his thinking persists in a state of irresolution. This unconcern for

answers, in which meaning is perpetually deferred, in which presence is never obtained, becomes a hallmark of postsecular religious experiences.

The religiously coded deferral becomes further evident as the scene comes to a close. When the narrator and Malachio departed from one another, Malachio “rief: *Ci vediamo a Gerusalemme*. Und aus größerer Entfernung bereits wiederholte er lauter noch einmal: Nächstes Jahr in Jerusalem!” (72). As indicated in the first part of this chapter, the Jerusalem theme – apparent as well in *Die Ringe des Saturn* – is significant in unveiling the religious dimensions of Sebald’s thinking. Jerusalem symbolizes the perpetuation of longing. Hence, this final gesture indicates a lack of closure (Derridean deferral) to their time together. This moment of silence, experienced under the vast skies on the open water, must be repeated. Throughout the text the narrator shows genuine interest in the repetition of such religiously coded events. When speaking of his lasting impressions within a chapel’s sacred space as a youth, he expresses that his “Wunsch nach einer *Wiederholung* [my italics] der in ihrem Inneren herrschenden vollkommenen *Stille* [my italics]” (196) was one of the foremost sentiments the chapel had left ensconced in his memory. Both Malachio and the narrator are drawn to the repetition of those experiences enveloped in silence and capable of being perpetually reproduced. Taking into account Malachio’s interest in traveling to Jerusalem and revealing how this pseudo-religious sage has influenced him, the narrator descends into his own realm of silence and begins to recall specifically vivid events from his past.

Describing his stint in Venice and endeavoring to process the sentiments that arose there, the narrator ascribes to the city an all-pervasive silence. From dawn to dusk it is cloaked in serenity: “*Still* [my italics] bricht nämlich der Tag an, durchdrungen nur von

einzelnen Rufen” (72). Further describing Venice’s distinct aura, distinguishing it from other cities, the narrator explains: “Wie oft, dachte ich mir, bin ich nicht schon so in einem Hotelzimmer gelegen, in Wien, in Frankfurt oder in Brüssel, und habe, die Hände unterm Kopft verschränkt, nicht wie hier auf die *Stille* [my italics], sondern mit wachem Entsetzen auf die Brandung des Verkehrs gehorcht” (72). The narrator juxtaposes Venice’s stillness with the ubiquitous “Ozean” (72) of noise in other cities that had prevented him from adopting a reflective posture. Drawing a sharp distinction between noise’s destructive character and silence’s liberating quality, the narrator contends:

Ich bin im Verlauf der Jahre zu dem Schluß gelangt, dass aus diesem *Getöse* [my italics] jetzt das Leben entsteht, das nach uns kommt und das uns langsam zugrunde richten wird, so wie wir das langsam zugrunde richten, was da war lange vor uns. Ganz und gar unwirklich, als müsste sie gleich zerrissen werden, dünkte mich darum die *Stille* [my italics] über der Stadt Venedig an diesem frühen Morgen des Allerheiligentags (73).

Here, the narrator contrasts the noise, “aus diesem Getöse,” which he had just previously mentioned – “[die Wellen] werden lauter und lauter” and “[die Wellen] überschlagen sich...auf der Höhe des Lärmpegels” (73) – with the “unreal,” “unwirklich” silence he experiences in this city on a day coded in religious language, “Allerheiligentag.” The silence present in a city, whose radiance compares with that of a “Himmelstadt,” enables the narrator to temporarily leave the perpetual, noisy cycle of destruction. This city serves as a respite in the midst of a world generated through turmoil and destined to end in mayhem. A contemplative spirit emerges; the narrator comes to the realization “als könne man sich tatsächlich ohne weiteres durch Nachdenken und Sinnieren allein ums Leben

bringen” (74-75). This city therefore represents a retreat into the mind, as its stillness enables the disclosure of significant moments encountered earlier in life. During his youth in the town of W. the experience of “Allerheiligentag” had a great deal of importance for him – “Nichts ist mir in der Kindheit sinnvoller erschienen als diese beiden Tage [Allerheiligen und Allerseeleentag] der Erinnerung an die Leiden der heiligen Märtyrer und der armen Seelen, an denen die dunklen Gestalten der Dorfbewohner seltsam gebeugt im Nebel herumgingen, als seien ihnen ihre Wohnungen aufgekündigt worden” (73). What remains fixed in his memory are those moments laden with deeper meaning, those sacred days, on which he, as a child, had the opportunity to remember the sufferings of the martyrs. Exactly why, as a child, these sufferings were significant for the narrator is left unanswered. Perhaps he was indeed genuinely moved by the suffering saints of ages past; maybe religion’s serious dimensions truly captivated him.⁹⁰

Indeed, the suffering associated with religion is a topic the narrator addresses. At a later point in the text, the narrator not only mentions suffering but also depicts it, as he describes his findings in Mathild’s library. He happens upon numerous types of books, “Lehrbüchern der Geometrie und Baustatik und einem türkischen Lexikon...zahlreiche religiöse Werke spekulativen Charakters, Gebetbücher aus dem 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhundert mit zum Teil drastischen Abschilderungen der uns alle erwartenden Pein” (244). Directly following these words comes an image bearing the title, “Für die

⁹⁰ Saints, at other points in the text, do occupy an important place in the narrator’s mind. In as much as he expresses respect toward these influential figures within the Christian tradition, he also reveals an element of either cynicism or irony. For example, directly after mentioning the holy martyrs and their lasting influence in his mind, he proceeds to disclose his dream, in which Franz von Assisi is depicted in a seemingly humorous, humiliated way: “Der heilige Franz lag in einem schwankenden Schilfbeet mit dem Gesicht nach unten im Wasser, und über die Sümpfe schritt die heilige Katharina” (75).

abgestorbenen Seelen in dem Fegfeuer" (245); it depicts a calamitous scene, with fire burning in the building, individuals falling from one floor to the other, interactions between devils, angels, and humans sentenced to purgatory, and expressions of utter dismay, fear, and anguish. The narrator's use of the "uns" demonstrates how he includes himself and his readers once again in this reflection: This time in purgatory could be our fate. However, he does seemingly approach this aspect of traditional church doctrine with a critical eye. To contextualize the scene, the narrator surrounds these prayer books – which provide visual displays of immanent, unavoidable agony – with speculative religious works (mentioned directly before) and a discussion of Mathild (directly after the image), who "sei unmittelbar vor dem ersten Krieg in das Regensburger Kloster der Englischen Fräulein eingetreten, habe aber das Kloster noch vor Kriegsende unter eigenartigen, ihm, Lukas, nicht näher bekannten Umständen wieder verlassen" (246). The narrator seemingly calls religion's rigidity, high expectations, and lofty claims into question, by presenting this woman, who entered a monastery only to realize that she could not handle its restrictive quality. She quickly fled the austerity of the sacred to pursue "real" world matters. With this scene the narrator provides a speculative look at religion, pointing out how religion's emphasis on forms of martyrdom and self-renunciation frequently fails to speak to the human condition situated in everyday reality.

Taking into account the narrator's speculative stance towards religion's presentation of suffering, one can gain a better understanding of why the narrator proceeds to talk about his "Erinnerung an die Leiden der heiligen Märtyrer und der armen Seelen" with a comical, ironic undertone. The narrator's subtle sarcasm becomes manifest, as he "comically" presents "die dunklen Gestalten," who, when participating in

the activity of honoring the martyred saints, expressed a type of humiliation suggestive of the fact that they had just foreclosed on their apartments. Reflective of the postmodern, postsecular moment, the narrator speaks not only of religion's sacred facets, its incitement to silence and reflection, but also of its ludicrous, anti-rational dimensions. Continuing on with these humorous (to a degree, mocking) sentiments, he explains why these "holy" days were most special for him, namely, because of the "Verspeisen der Seelenwecken" (74). Detailing this special dish and how it was prepared, the narrator discloses a memory that was much more humorous than serious. To construct and describe this trivial, ironically amusing event, the narrator reverts to the use of religious terminology; "der Mehlstaub, der an meinen Fingern zurückgeblieben war,....[ist] vorgekommen wie eine Offenbarung" (74). The reader cannot help but identify the author's skepticism towards religion, as he reduces revelation to the flour dust left behind on his fingers. While elements of comedy indicate the narrator's nuanced understanding of religion, the narrator also uses the silent city of Venice to reflect back on his personal experiences with religion, which, to the degree that they were irrational and ludicrous, were also substantive and meaningful.

In a more serious tone, Venice's silence similarly leads the narrator to reflect back upon Malachio's final words. When Malachio suggests that Jerusalem could be the destination of their next trip, he points to a place rich in religious meaning, requiring a sort of pilgrimage, a decidedly religious act. This possibility of visiting Jerusalem remains fixed in the narrator's mind; he reflects deeply on Malachio's statement: "Ich fragte mich, was Malachio mit den Worten *Ci vediamo a Gerusalemme* gemeint hatte, versuchte, vergebens, mich an sein Gesicht oder an seine Augen zu erinnern" (76).

Evidently, Malachio's words – alluding as they do to the possibility of continued religious contemplation and the repetition of silence – impact the narrator. After seriously considering their significance, he begins to enact his own type of resurrection, a topic that, according to the narrator, had thoroughly engaged Malachio. Assessing the entirety of his experience afforded by Venice's silence space, the narrator indicates that he, to a degree, performs that religious concept upon which Malachio had contemplated, "Die Auferstehung" (71). The narrator's pseudo-resurrection is recorded in the following manner: "Die zweite Nacht in Venedig verging, und es vergingen der Allerseelentag und eine dritte Nacht, aus der ich am Montagmorgen erst in einem eigenartigen Zustand der Gewichtslosigkeit wieder zu mir kam" (76). Closely paralleling Christ's time in the tomb (three days: Friday to Sunday), the narrator spends three nights before experiencing a condition of weightlessness, a feeling of being levitated out of some sort of non-coherence. The resurrection the narrator evidently experienced was a release from the strictures of memory, which he had confronted during his silent days in Venice. After moments of meditation about a life that had died away in the past, he comes back to life in the present, to a re-recognition of his self that enables him to continue on with his journey. His encounter with Malachio becomes the catalyst behind his pseudo-resurrection experience and his awakening into a sense of self-identity formatively shaped in and through the spaces he had earlier experienced.⁹¹

⁹¹ Later in his journey the narrator meets another individual similar to Malachio, Salvatore, a name that in Italian means "savior." Like Malachio, he leaves the narrator to reflect on those religious images generated during their encounter. Salvatore talks with the narrator about a few current, political happenings that had to do primarily with terrorist acts perpetrated by "Gruppe Ludwig." After Salvatore's departure, the narrator reflects, "Ich aber bin lang noch sitzen geblieben auf der Piazza mit dem Bild des

III. *The Sacred Spaces of Silence*

Just as the narrator depicts Venice as a city cloaked in stillness, he does the same with certain locations traditionally marked off as sacred, i.e. religious institutions. Through the silence in distinctly sacred places – or those that narratively become so – the narrator arrives at religious, existential meditations, demonstrating how openness towards the transcendent has immediate effects on his consciousness. The religiously coded, spatially experienced silence accompanies a sense of both orientation and disorientation. On the connection between silence and religion, Sara Maitland writes “And so the Romantics sought out solitude and silence in order to ‘find themselves’ just as the desert hermits sought out silence to ‘lose themselves’” (19).⁹² Considering the type of silence thematized in *Schwindel. Gefühle*, I would contend that the narrator fluctuates between these two categories. On one hand, he, like the desert hermits, experiences a type of silence accompanied with disorientation, as he empties himself of specific desires or a definite agenda and becomes open to chance occurrences directed by a transcendent instance beyond himself. On the other hand, through “Romantic” silence, the narrator stabilizes his self, becoming less influenced by external forces and more aware of his position within his own past and present. Incorporating silence into his narration, Sebald’s narrator demonstrates how there is not one distinct reaction. He “finds” himself, by retreating into a deeper understanding of his past experiences, becoming more confident on his textual journey into his past; and, he “loses” himself within those religious spaces that end up reorienting him.

hereinbrechenden Engels, das Salvatore mir hinterlassen hatte, und beschäftigt mit dem Aufzeichnen seiner Erzählung“ (151).

⁹² For further elaboration on “religious” silence and “Romantic” silence, see Maitland 21.

By infusing certain spaces with silence, the narrator follows a pattern of theological thinking that has traditionally acknowledged the intimate relationship between silence and religion. Schleiermacher, for example, makes this connection when he writes the following: “die Religion lebt ihr ganzes Leben auch in der Natur, aber in der unendlichen Natur des Ganzen, des Einen und Allen; was in dieser alles Einzelne und so auch der Mensch gilt...das will sie in *stiller* [my italics] Ergebenheit im Einzelnen anschauen und ahnden” (80). Religion occurs when there is silent observation in front of nature’s individual, isolated segments indicative of an eternal whole. In silence an individual removes him- or herself from the “secular” age, from the ordinary processes of time, in order to be able to devote full attention to the eternal elements of nature. In another instance, Schleiermacher writes, “die wahren Beschauer des Ewigen waren immer *ruhige* [my italics] Seelen” (85). A quieted soul is required for contemplating the eternal within the temporal. Again he writes, “die religiösen Gefühle lähmen ihrer Natur nach die Thatkraft des Menschen, und laden ihn ein zum *stillen* [my italics] hingeebenen Genuß” (87). When religious feelings paralyze an individual, rendering him powerless, he or she can begin to enjoy silent contemplation.⁹³ Endowing his “erzählte Räume” (Hallet 25) with silence, Sebald’s narrator generates unique spaces infused with religious inferences, and, within these spatial contours, he senses both increased existential awareness and heightened enjoyment of nature. The following section examines how the subject experiences silence both within, and outside spaces – primarily chapels – traditionally marked as sacred.

⁹³ The theme of paralyzing, “die Lähmung,” appears throughout the text (83, 126, 130, 171, 273, 276, 277), though not necessarily linked to religion. However, at one point there is an overt connection drawn between paralysis and a religious space: “Im Inneren des Doms” the narrator experiences a “Lähmung meines Erinnerungsvermögens” (130).

Excavating past memories, the narrator writes about how his intuitions in the religious structures – chapels, cathedrals, and churches – he encounters. Within these settings, silence has a particularly forceful effect on him. On one occasion, the narrator makes his way from Venice to Padua in order to visit the “Kapelle des Enrico Scrovegni” (95). Up until this point he had known about it only through a very vivid description, “in der die Rede ist von der unverminderten Kraft der Farben der Fresken des Malers Giotto und von der immer noch neuartigen Bestimmtheit, die über jedem Schritt, jedem Gesichtszug der in ihnen gebannten Figuren waltet” (95). The fresco’s two unique features are its strong colors and its inclusion of a novel artistic method. It incorporates a determining principle that prevails over – or, is active within – the meticulously constructed, spellbound figures. This description expresses distinct orchestration. The painter created these angels with intention, determining them to have a certain effect. With this description in his mind, the narrator enters the chapel and explains his sentiments in the following manner:

Wie ich dann...tatsächlich im Inneren der Kapelle vor den vom Gesims bis zum Bodensaum in vier Reihen sich hinziehenden Wandbildern stand, erstaunte mich am meisten die *lautlose* [my italics] Klage, die seit nahezu siebenhundert Jahren von den über dem unendlichen Unglück schwebenden Engeln erhoben wird. Wie ein *Dröhnen* [my italics] war diese Klage zu hören in der *Stille* [my italics] des Raums (96).⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Providing commentary on this scene, Anne Fuchs writes, “Once the narrator crosses the threshold and enters the chapel, he leaves his own subjectivity behind and focuses his attention on the details of the fresco. Moved by the expressiveness of the angels’ ‘silent lament’, he discovers an endless calamity which is the metaphysical lining of our reality. The oxymoron of a ‘silent lament’ is further underlined by the insertion of the three

The following images reveal what is depicted in Sebald's text:



The narrator employs a stark juxtaposition between sound, “diese Dröhnen” (textually inserted through the use of simile) – stemming from “diese Klage” (visually experienced and accessible to both narrator and reader) – and silence (physically and spatially experienced – accessible only to the narrator). The soundless lament, visually depicted, receives a voice through the narrator’s textual interference, as he ascribes a noise, “ein Dröhnen,” to the event. With this interpretive approach to this fresco he intimates at what he is doing with his entire narrative, giving a voice to his personal memories, which, if

black-and-white reproductions of some of the angels that surround Christ’s body” (178). Fuchs provides a helpful elucidation of this passage. First, when entering the chapel, the narrator does set aside his subjectivity, or, in the framework established by Taylor, his “buffered, rational” (38) self, and becomes “porous,” open to whatever type of effect the angelic spirits may cause. Then, through his religious experience, he regains himself, his subjectivity, his buffered, secular perspective. It’s as if his subjectivity (his commitment to self-comprehension) is strengthened through his moment of being lost in religious meditation. Second, Sebald does indeed move the calamity into a greater degree of physicality/materiality, by including pictures (a narrative act that is not always performed) of these angels beset with anxiety. Fuchs continues to describe these images in the following manner: “With its skilful choreography from left to right his description moves from the concrete to the allegorical, from an anchorage in the phenomenological world to a metaphysical perspective” (179). While I’m not sure if one can read all of this into the depictions, there is the sense that a movement from downwards to upwards does occur. In the first image, the angel folds its hands, expressing a moment of prayer. Second, the angel looks upward with outstretched, supplicating hands. Third, and finally, the angel, with its ears covered, evinces the notion that its attempts had been in vain. However, the wings (which, in the text, are mentioned as “das weitaus Wunderbarste von allem, was wir uns jemals haben ausdenken können” (96)) are still pointed upwards, offering the hope that calamity may not be the final word.

they were not remembered (throughout the text the narrator indicates this as the biggest obstacle he attempts to overcome), would be in jeopardy of no longer being heard. In the all-pervasive silence he allows the angels to speak. In this meditative act, they do indeed, through the text's intimation, speak to him, so that he ends up walking out of this silent space (one, in which words were not physically generated) "mit diesen Worten (*Gli angeli visitano la scena della disgrazia*) auf der Zunge" (96).⁹⁵ The narrator suggests that, in the midst of the silence, he is spoken to; the sounds he generates bring about the words he possesses upon his exit. These words serve as the impetus for the narrator to go immediately back out into the world, "durch den tosenden Verkehr" (96), in order to obtain additional information about past experiences and to allow his past to speak into the present. The narrator ends up leaving as quick as possible, heading back to Verona, in order to find out exactly why he had so abruptly ended his stay in this city seven years earlier, and why Kafka, as well, spent an unconsoling afternoon in this city on his way from Venice to the Garder See. In this particular instance, the narrator symbolically fills the silence in this sacred space with sounds having a catalytic, revelatory function, inciting the narrator – encouraged by the words that angels are present in a calamitous world – to continue his efforts to put together and remember his past.

At another point in the text, a sacred space functions to disorient the narrator, causing him to lose himself, rendering him unable to remember. The narrator's

⁹⁵ My translation: "The angels visit the scene of calamity." And, indeed, after hearing, or creating these words, he enters back out into the realm of calamity. Demarcating the sacred space as a place marked off from the calamity of the world, the narrator draws careful distinctions between the secular realm of noise, "der tosende Verkehr," and the sacred realm of "Stille."

experience inside a cathedral becomes debilitating; he cannot sort out his present location or his precise identity. The religious structure serves to convey the idea that one is always caught between disconnected, incongruous identities. It spatially symbolizes that one is fixed between “der Landschaft der Lebendigen” and “einem anderen Ort” (130). Immediately before going into the cathedral, the narrator had been working with the Italian authorities to regain his identity, which he had lost when two men stole his passport; “ich könne mich nicht ausweisen, weil ich meinen Paß eingebüßt habe” (124). After receiving a new passport, he leaves the consulate office and decides to walk the streets of Mailand, although he knows that his aimless walking will lead to nothing but anguish. During these directionless meanderings he enters a cathedral and makes the following observation: “Im Inneren des Doms setzte ich mich eine Zeit nieder...und wußte, wie ich mich mit unverminderter Deutlichkeit erinnere, mit einem Schlag nicht mehr, wo ich mich befand...wußte ich nicht einmal zu sagen, ob ich noch in der Landschaft der Lebendigen oder bereits an einem anderen Ort weilte” (130).⁹⁶ He is utterly disoriented. Having just nearly lost his physical, national identity, now he is confused about his existential identity, as to whether he, in the midst of this sacred location, is in an immanent order, among the living, or whether he has transgressed into a transcendent realm.

⁹⁶ This idea of bewilderment and how it is linguistically expressed find resonance in previously cited quotes from *Die Ringe des Saturn*: “Tatsächlich weiß man...nicht so recht, ob man sich auf einem Landsitz in Suffolk befindet oder an einem sehr weit abgelegenen, quasi extraterritorialen Ort” (49). And, in another place, the narrator writes: “Derart leer und verlassen ist diese Gegend, dass einer, der ausgesetzt würde in ihr, kaum zu sagen vermöchte, ob er an der Küste der Nordsee sich befindet oder nicht vielleicht am Ufer des Kaspischen Meers oder am Golf von Lian-tung” (186-87).

Due to this existential identity crisis he is beset with a “Lähmung [s]eines Erinnerungsvermögens” (130). This mental circumstance derives from the space in which he finds himself; his immediate spiritual state is spatially linked to a religious location. Concerning the effects of space on literary subjects, Hallet indicates, “Orientierung und Positionierung im Raum haben ebenso reale wie symbolische Bedeutung für die fiktionale Subjektkonstitution: Figuren werden durch die Räume identifiziert,” becoming either “mobil” or “immobil” (25). Sebald’s narrator, positioned within the cathedral, is identified through, i.e. constructed by, his current space, which causes a symbolic paralysis of his inner constitution. This paralysis of thought is symbolic and not real, as he is able to quickly bring himself into movement; his immobility turns into mobility.

In an attempt to remember how he had arrived at this unrecognizable place, he proceeds up into the gallery of the dome. From here he looks out over the city of Mailand and experiences vertigo, “immer wiederkehrenden Schwindelgefühlen” (130). According to Brunner, vertigo “ist jener Zustand, bei dem sich die Wahrheit der Beobachtung und die gleichzeitige Trübung der Wahrnehmungsschärfe zu einem permanent unentschiedenen Konjunktiv vereinen, der jede Position sowohl formuliert, als auch im Akt der Formulierung sofort wieder in Frage stellt” (481). Vertigo reflects the narrator’s position of indecision, “unentschieden,” caught between absolute perception and utter deception of the senses, or between two divergent identities. When the narrator’s view ought to be most clear, elevated as he is in the upper echelon of a dome, there is a “Dunst” over the city; the panorama is “verdüstert.” This causes a “Reflex des Unvermögens” (131). Again, he finds himself paralyzed, unable to arrive at clarification. By ascending to the top of this religious structure, which was the initial impetus for the

feelings of confusion and disorientation, he seeks clarification. Instead, he spatially disconnects himself more from the realm of the living, “die Landschaft der Lebendigen”; reality becomes increasingly foreign. “Schwindelgefühlen” accompany this displacement, this removal to “einem anderen Ort,” as he looks out “über der [ihm] nun vollends fremd gewordenen Stadt” (131). At this elevated, performatively transcendent position, the narrator visually displays his inability to arrive at distinct resolution with regard to not only his national identity, but also his existential identity.⁹⁷

“An der Peripherie beheimatet” (Hallet 69), established on top of a religious structure, disconnected from the secular space beneath him, the narrator occupies a boundary location filled with significance. Elaborating on Lotman’s paradigm of the semiosphere, Zylko contends, “The role of boundary primarily consists in the fact that it acts as a special filter, a device selectively letting in texts from other culture-domains, as well as nontexts...The alien may become familiar. What is external becomes internal; what is nontext becomes text” (398). Existing as this filter, the narrator presents himself as one who is attempting to bridge two discordant cultures, whether those are divergent national cultures, or the abstract cultures of transcendence and immanence. Consequently, he remains incapacitated, unable to arrive at internal cohesion due to the

⁹⁷ The narrator refers, at other points in the text, to the inability to feel entirely comfortable with his national identity. When he tries to fall asleep in a hotel room, he hears fellow Germans speaking loudly and obnoxiously beneath him and remarks: “Tatsächlich wünschte ich mir in diesen schlaflosen Stunden nichts sehnlicher, als einer anderen oder, besser noch, gar keiner Nation anzugehören” (107). His existential uncertainty is further highlighted by the occupational confusion he expresses; observing the narrator writing, a woman asks him “ob [er] ein Journalist sei oder ein Schriftsteller.” His response is “dass weder das eine noch das andere ganz zutrefte” (108). With these comments, the narrator creates his identity as difficult to pinpoint. He possesses an indeterminate understanding of himself, one not carefully and precisely delimited, but instead one open and permeable to external sources and circumstances.

influx of external, incongruous sentiments. In this sense, the narrator here performs and mimics what I believe to be one of the strategies of the text, a Derridian “coming forth and holding back, enlightenment and obscurity” (*Writing* 149). Presenting his “Being” as one “necessarily produced in difference” (*Writing* 150), between utter perception and lack of clarity where there is no resolution, the narrator establishes an undetermined, non-essential identity, performing an opening gesture, allowing his being to be constructed by forces external to him. In a postsecular framework he performs an “ontological opening” (McClure 3). Withdrawn from the noise of the city, the “*lauter* [my italics] Mailänder und Mailänderinnen” (131) beneath him, the narrator experiences an unsettling silence that allows him to reflect on the various networks at work in the multi-faceted construction of his identity. Ultimately, there is a degree of resolution. Directly after leaving Mailand, the narrator arrives in Verona where he encounters a silence verging upon the religious: “Die *Nachtruhe* [my italics], die ich genoß unter dem Dach der Goldenen Taube, das ich mir gefiedert...vorstellte, grenzte...ans *Wunderbare* [my italics]” (132). Confidently – “Zuversichtlich” (132) – he can begin to write once again. In a sense, the narrator’s initial experience of silence in the cathedral causes him to lose himself in an identity that opens outward, towards the unknown and ambivalent, resulting in identity disorientation. This state finds some sort of resolution, as he is able to find himself once again in a space of silence giving him the ability to continue along on his journey of unfolding and divulging past memories.

This final example demonstrates how the narrator, skillfully using silence, transfers the sacred out of a traditional religious institution and repositions it in nature. Reflecting on his experience in Tyrol, the narrator produces a telling convergence

between nature, silence, and the religious. Before describing his stint in one of the chapels around his hometown, he frames this religious structure with a poignant consideration of nature's beauty, creating it with the help of religious terminology. Evident in his description is the connection between what is physically captivating and silence; the narrator writes:

Die Sonne trat hervor, die ganze Landschaft erglänzte, die Tirolerinnen *verstummten* [my italics]...und schauten bloß noch hinaus auf das, was da draußen vorbeizog wie ein *Wunder* [my italics]. Mir selber erging es ganz ähnlich. Die frisch gefirnisste Gegend...die dampfenden Wälder, das blaue Himmelsgewölbe, es war selbst für mich...wie eine *Offenbarung* [my italics] (192).

Using simile, the narrator ascribes as miraculous the glistening landscape, whose shimmering sight silences the Tyroleans. Words cannot capture the moment. The narrator takes recourse to a supernatural term, a concept stemming from theological discourse. This concept of a "Wunder" is, according to Schleiermacher, "nur der religiöse Name für Begebenheit, jede, auch die allernatürlichste und gewöhnlichste, sobald sie sich dazu eignet, daß die religiöse Ansicht von ihr die herrschende sein kann, ist ein Wunder" (108). Any sort of ordinary occurrence may become a "miracle" when a transcendent/religious perspective prevails over any type of secular interpretation. With the comparison he draws, Sebald's narrator indicates the miraculous by transforming a common occurrence into an extraordinary one, infusing it with just such a religious framework. A natural entity becomes indicative of the transcendent and leaves an impression upon those fixed in immanence. In an effort to find the appropriate language

to categorize his experience, the narrator describes his observation of this scenery as an “Offenbarung,” employing terminology reflective of an intuition that something has broken through from the outside. Moving beyond secular vernacular, he sacralizes nature, and, to the degree that he resists scientific, neutral explanations, he demonstrates his predilection for interpreting the material through a transcendent framework.

As the narrator continues to meditate on the phenomenal realm and the pervasiveness of the silence therein, he further imbues it with allusions to cultural symbols indicative of the religious. Standing under a grouping of trees, he explains:

[ich] schaute mir, aus dem Dunkel heraus, das wunderbare weißgraue Schneien an, von dessen *Lautlosigkeit* [my italics] die wenige fahle Farbe in den nassen, verlassenen Feldern vollends ausgelöscht wurde. Unweit des Waldrands steht die Krummenbacher Kapelle, die so klein ist, dass mehr als ein Dutzend auf einmal darin gewiß nicht ihren Gottesdienst verrichten oder ihre Andacht üben konnten (195).

He experiences this snowfall as an event without sound; the pale colored flakes noiselessly disappear into the fields. Presenting it in its quietude, the narrator, to a degree, sacralizes nature. Within this context, in which nature’s silence has been textually emphasized, the narrator shifts his attention from the natural sphere to a religious symbol, the chapel.

The silence suggestive in nature evidently turns the subject’s attention to religion, as if the solemnity within the natural world had prepared him for the austerity of the chapel. This silent, religious space enables him to retreat once again into his imagination,

where he turns the chapel into an object with structural similarities to the Biblical arc.⁹⁸ He finds a place of refuge within the confines of this religious structure: “Ich setzte mich eine Zeitlang hinein in dieses gemauerte Gehäuse” (195). Securely situated in this sacred abode, with the snow falling outside, he begins to imagine himself in a scenario reminiscent of the Biblical account of the flood; “bald kam es mir vor, als befände ich mich in einem Kahn auf der Fahrt und überquerte ein großes Wasser...(Ich) überließ mich der Vorstellung einer Schiffsreise aus dem überschwemmten Gebirge hinaus...abgesehen von der Verwandlung des Gemäuers in ein hölzernes Schiffchen” (195). In his dream he has transformed the chapel into a wooden ship, using it to sail across the open seas. The freedom he experiences on the water finds many parallels in the text. For example, there is the earlier mentioned meeting with Malachio in Venice. Additionally, Salvatore contends that the act of reading is like traveling freely out onto open waters.⁹⁹ The chapel, carrying the narrator in a state of liberation from the world’s grief and calamity, symbolically represents permanency within the entropic, passing ‘secular’ age. Commenting on this moment in the text, Oliver Sill writes,

Das Ich sucht in einer Kapelle Schutz vor dem heftigen Regen....die
 “ungeheure Wolkenwand” und das “große Wasser” [versinnbildlichen]
 den Zustand einer Welt fortwährender Zerstörung und Vernichtung, so

⁹⁸ The text suggests that this connection can be drawn as it later speaks directly about the arc: “Die Romana war die ältere von zwei Töchtern einer Häuslerfamilie, die im Bärenwinkel ein...spielzeuggroßes Anwesen hatte, das auf einem niedrigen Hügel lag und mich immer an die biblische Arche erinnerte“ (256). And, on the next page, the narrator explains that, whenever he passed by their house, Romana’s father, “schaute...wie der Noah aus der Arche zu einem der winzigen Fenster heraus” (257).

⁹⁹ “Den ganzen Tag über sitze ich inmitten der Lärmflut der Redaktion, am Abend aber setze ich über auf eine Insel, und wenn ich die ersten Sätze anfangen zu lesen, so kommt es mir jedesmal vor, als rudere ich weit auf das Wasser hinaus” (144).

erfährt das Boot in den Träumen und Visionen des Ichs eine entschieden positive Sinndimension. Es erscheint als “rettende Arche” (609).

The narrator’s understanding, however, of this ‘saving’ arc is complicated and multi-dimensional. On one hand, he appreciates the safety it offers, and, on the other hand, he has negative impressions of its symbols of cruelty.

The arc’s binary symbolic quality becomes apparent when the narrator describes the memories that have remained ensconced in his mind throughout the years. He writes: “Am meisten aber sind mir aus der Krummenbacher Kapelle, abgesehen von der Verwandlung des Gemäuers in ein hölzernes Schiffchen, die Kreuzwegstationen in Erinnerung geblieben” (195). Images associated with the “Kreuzwegstationen” are the “schmerz-und wutverzerrte Gesichter, verrenkte Körperteile, ein zum Schlag ausholender Arm” (196).¹⁰⁰ Consistent with Pierre Nora’s understanding that “memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects” (Hallet 185), the narrator employs the chapel, a spatial entity, to function as a physical repository for those memories embedded in his consciousness, memories connoted as both positive and negative. On one hand, the chapel offered refuge and triggered the narrator’s imagination; he was able to leave the world of reality and enter into a seemingly secure space, preserving himself through participation in the fictional stories he created. On the other hand, the chapel was associated with horrifying religious symbols, suggestive of pain, hardship and suffering.

¹⁰⁰ Providing further explanation for the narrator’s possible revulsion towards the images depicted in the Krummenbach chapel, Davies writes, “These images [‘faces distorted in pain and anger, dislocated limbs, an arm raised to strike’] come from the Stations of the Cross, a narrative which could be read as depicting a protagonist (Christ) who is subjected to violent, excruciating punishment by a cruel Father-God as an act of atonement for the flaws in Creation for which he, as an all-powerful and all-knowing Being, must ultimately be held responsible” (294).

The chapel thus becomes permanently marked as the place where fictitious possibility is linked with the cruelty of reality, where transcendence and immanence are muddled together, leaving the subject with radically juxtaposed impressions.¹⁰¹ His mixed reactions to these chapels scattered around his hometown become very clear when he writes the following:

Aber Kapellen wie die von Krummenbach gab es zahlreiche um W. herum, und vieles von dem, was ich damals in ihnen gesehen oder gespürt habe, wird in mir geblieben sein, die Angst vor den dort abgebildeten Grausamkeiten nicht weniger als in seiner Unerfüllbarkeit der Wunsch nach einer Wiederholung der in ihrem Inneren herrschenden vollkommenen *Stille* [my italics] (196).

While unable to suppress the images of cruelty associated with the chapel, he nevertheless cannot extricate from his mind the insatiable desire to perpetually repeat the complete stillness found in the chapel. As a youth he enjoyed the solemnity in the chapel's inner space; he wished to continually re-experience a stillness that could never be completely grasped, to arrive at stillness' totality. Fulfilling, arriving at, the transcendent moment remained always just beyond him. And yet, this memory of incompleteness remains with him. He remembers that which was indefinitely deferred, the infinitely transcendent that could not be grasped. In Derrida's words, "The alterity of the

¹⁰¹ Similar to the narrator, Kafka also had dichotomous impressions of religion. When Dr. K in Verona became tired he went "in die Kirche zur heiligen Anastassia...Nachdem er sich eine Zeitlang mit aus Dankbarkeit und Widerwillen gemischten Gefühlen in dem kühlen, halbdunklen Raum ausgerastet hatte, machte er sich wieder auf..." (164). Due to these conflicting impressions, Kafka did not reside very long in this religious edifice as his emotions of thankfulness and repugnance could not be brought into cohesion.

transcendent thing, although already irreducible, is such only by means of the indefinite incompleteness of my original perceptions” (*Writing* 124). Hence, desire remains, permitting itself “to be appealed to by the absolutely irreducible exteriority of the other to which it must remain infinitely inadequate” (*Writing* 93). The stillness, constructed in the text’s narrated spaces, symbolizes the transcendent in as much as it remains religiously coded and out of reach. This particular scene’s sense of deferment is further reflected through the circularity that exists in this narrative sequence. The silence perceived in nature leads the narrator to the chapel, where he reflects on how he, as a youth, experienced religion. What he enjoyed about religion was the complete silence, which, in a sense, he now finds in nature. He is able to transfer the experience of the sacred in a religious institution into the natural world, circling from nature back to nature through the chapel, which transforms the narrator’s interpretation of nature, coded as it now is within a distinctly religious, sacred framework. Hence, nature has indeed been sacralized, and the infinite dimension of this natural order is a further indication of how this desire for the transcendent will remain perpetually deferred.

IV. Conclusion

Describing facets of postsecular texts, John McClure contends that they “affirm the urgent need for turn toward the religious even as they reject (in most instances) the familiar dream of full return to an authoritative faith” (6). With its numerous and distinct representations of religion, *Schwindel. Gefühle* does indeed reject any possibility of reverting back to traditional forms of religion, those harsh images associated with absolute doctrinal statements and out of touch with modern humanity’s present need in the secular age – the age of disenchantment – to move beyond the superstitious. Speaking

of how humanity wants to step away from the illusory, Derrida writes: “‘We must get rid of our superstitious valuation of texts and written poetry.’ Superstition is thus the essence of our relation to God, of our persecution by the great furtive one. The death of God will ensure our salvation because the death of God alone can reawaken the Divine” (184). Critiquing religion – and its association with severity – Sebald’s narrator does not necessarily bring about God’s demise, but he does press for a reimagination of how to perceive the divine within a radically immanent framework. The narrator “reawakens” and refigures the transcendent, by repositioning it in those natural locations shrouded in silence. To a degree, the narrator attempts to materialize the transcendent – to make it felt – so that the basis of one’s interaction with the divine is not merely a matter of superstition. The stillness inherent in nature and nature’s material forms enables the narrator to come into contact with those transcendent intuitions that were at work in constructing the identity which became his and which he, with his narration, attempts to unveil. To disclose this identity – moulded and shaped as it was through his former experiences in religious spaces – he performs a porousness, allowing the infiltration of what is beyond the scope of reason, and he performs this by opening himself to the traces of transcendence inhering in the people and spaces he encounters on his journey.

Chapter Two

Inscribing Transcendence at the Limits of Science

This chapter explores Daniel Kehlmann's novel, *Die Vermessung der Welt* (2005), identifying how his various writing strategies generate spaces in which the protagonists experience moments of transcendence, instances marked with religiously coded intuitions. The author Kehlmann himself shows interest in the ongoing dialogue between religion and science. He provides, for example, significant critiques of both in a 2005 *Spiegel* interview: "ich sehe das Problem auf beiden Seiten: wenn die Religion den Naturwissenschaften Vorschriften macht, wenn etwa die US-Regierung aus religiösen Gründen die Stammzellenforschung stark einschränkt; oder wenn, auf der anderen Seite, Naturwissenschaftler helfen, schreckliche Waffen zu entwickeln oder mit Menschen zu experimentieren, und das ganz moralfrei betrachten" (176). With a keen understanding of the negative dimensions of both religion and science, he demonstrates a desire to understand the relationship between two social spheres typically perceived as opposed to one another, and this interest manifests itself in his texts as well. They remain open to the insights into the human condition both practices have to offer. The natural world, with its geometric forms and intricately connected numeric formulas, and the spiritual world, with its intuited, unseen forms, both play a role in the construction of his figures. Commenting on Kehlmann's linguistic attempts to explore both immanent and transcendent spaces – the secular and the religious – Anderson suggests that Kehlmann's novels possess a "'wissenschaftlichen' Ton" with a "Sprache, die eine klare Ausdrucksform und präzise Gedanken aufweist," while they simultaneously present "Geistesmenschen als Hauptfiguren, die die Realität als einen nicht abgeschlossenen

Bereich von Möglichkeiten sehen und ständig versuchen, ihre Wahrnehmungs- und Ausdrucksgrenzen zu erweitern” (65). Religiously inclined protagonists desiring to scientifically increase and expand their borders of perception fill the pages of Kehlmann’s novels. Construing reality through the lens of various scientific models, his figures explore the natural world, investigating phenomenal spheres capable of rendering new forms of knowledge, which, frequently, can be precisely rendered and delineated in empirical terms, and, at other times, can only be suggested through the expression of intuitions that slip away from tangibility. The text I analyze here, *Die Vermessung* – a quite successful work with 6 million copies of it in circulation does not instantaneously appear to address ‘religious,’ transcendent questions.¹⁰² Nevertheless, I will argue that the narrator imbues certain scenes with intimations of transcendence. He carves out spaces in which feelings of transcendence emerge, moments in which borders are crossed between spheres assumed to exist, and it is these spaces that I will seek to analyze.

Particularly, I examine how the narration uses intertextual religious references to present the contours of specific scenes.¹⁰³ By assessing how the narrator deploys certain terms to evoke a religious tone, I position my analysis within reception that has, up until this point, identified the text’s postmodern, historical spaces (Costagli 2012; Gerstenberger 2010), its channels of transcendence (Ruf 2013), its interest in exploring

¹⁰² “Der Roman stand 37 Wochen auf Platz 1 der Spiegel-Bestsellerliste...Allein in deutscher Sprache hatte es sich bereits zwei Jahre nach Erscheinen etwa 1,5 Millionen Mal verkauft” (Soboczynski).

¹⁰³ As one example, the narrator uses well-known religious symbols when discussing Humboldt’s initial encounter with South America. Arriving in the unexplored land is similar to a resurrection experience: “Am frühen Morgen des dritten Tages bildeten sich langsam die Umrisse einer Küste im Dunst. / Trinidad, sagte Humboldt ruhig” (50-51). He confronts “Trinity” on the third day, and this frames the manner in which he approaches this “new” life.

the inadequacies of an entirely scientific, mechanical explanation of the world (Gasser 2008; Anderson 2008), and its connections to the tradition of Magical Realism (Rickes 2012). Taking these prior studies into consideration and what they have accomplished, I specifically investigate how certain scenes, with their distinct references to prior texts, are semantically coded with a religious trajectory. My discussion of *Die Vermessung* extends to other texts by Kehlmann – namely, *Beerholms Vorstellung* (1997), *Unter der Sonne* (1998), *Mahlers Zeit* (1999), *der fernste Ort* (2001), and *Ruhm* (2009) – in order to show that many works in his oeuvre thematize transcendence and to use the ideas regarding transcendence contained in these other texts to elucidate certain sections of *Die Vermessung*. Linking the ‘postsecular’ forms of transcendence evident in *Die Vermessung* to his prior works enables us to identify the evolution in Kehlmann’s thinking on the relationship between religion and science. We can see how the voice projected in his writing shapes – and is shaped by – a public discourse perpetually seeking to arrive at a more accurate, “rational” model of how two seemingly mutually exclusive social spheres can express their content in an environment that, while stressing the empirical, remains curious about possible realities beyond the physical.

The novel does indeed present the ‘extra-physical,’ the ‘metaphysical,’ as it develops characters reflecting, at times, on the intangible. They explore the subconscious realm of their mental faculties, when they seek to express their response to certain natural stimuli. Acknowledging metaphysical presence in his text, Kehlmann contends: “Man hat ja ein paarmal gesagt, daß es in *der Vermessung der Welt* zuwenig Metaphysik gebe. Ich fürchte eher, es gibt zuviel davon” (“Diese sehr ernsten Scherze,” 161). Metaphysics is ubiquitous throughout the text. To determine how the text broaches “metaphysics” and

what its relationship to religion/transcendence is, a brief elucidation of the term is necessary, and for this I will look at the text and a definition Habermas provides. Metaphysics appears in the text when the narrator speaks of Humboldt's childhood experiences with a realm beyond the living:

Kunth gab den beiden Jungen Bücher zu lesen, in denen es um Mönche ging, um offene Gräber, Hände, die aus der Tiefe ragten...Das sei nötig erklärte Kunth, die Begegnung mit dem Dunkel sei Teil des Heranwachsens, wer metaphysische Angst nicht kenne, werde nie ein deutscher Mann. Einmal stießen sie auf eine Geschichte über Aguirre...wenn man aufblickte, spiegelte der Himmel Städte, deren Architektur offenbarte, daß ihre Erbauer keine Menschen waren (21-22).

The text understands metaphysics to be a confrontation with the dark side, “dem Dunkel,” what is unknown and beyond the purview of what can be physically sensed. When individuals encounter what is mysterious – what causes fright in that it cannot be contained – they have a metaphysical experience. They sense, for example, cities not made by human hands. In this manner, the narrator indelibly links metaphysics to religious symbols.

For Habermas, metaphysics is the unknown sphere of human representation, which forms at the conscious level of the individual and remains similarly inaccessible to empirical study. Habermas writes: “Die Selbstbeziehung des erkennenden Subjekts öffnet den Zugang zu einer inneren, eigentümlichen gewissen, uns ganz zugehörigen Sphäre der Vorstellungen, die der Welt der vorgestellten Objekte vorausliegt. Die Metaphysik war als die Wissenschaft vom Allgemeinen, Unveränderlichen und Notwendigen aufgetreten”

(21). In the self-reflective act, an individual subject, involved in attempting to know and understand the world, looks inward to those representations belonging uniquely to his or her own self constitution. Prior to the external world, these representations reveal the inherently subjective nature of the individual's interpretation of his or her experience of the world.¹⁰⁴ To think metaphysically is to seriously investigate what is beyond physical space, whether that be space beyond the world or within the inner life of the individual, the spiritual, unseen facets of the human experience. According to Habermas, the explanatory capabilities of the intellectual disciplines of metaphysics and religion have drastically diminished in the modern moment.¹⁰⁵ Metaphysical explanations, religious teachings, and mythical narrations have lost value in the secular age. Aware of this secularized situation, Kehlmann does not avoid exploring such antiquated explanations. Reactivating interest in the metaphysical, he infuses religious semantics into reflections on those possibilities intuited when the limitations of scientific inquiry are perceived. When Kehlmann intimates at metaphysical dimensions of his work, he points to alternative forms of subjective comprehension within the modern, secular age.¹⁰⁶

In an effort to unpack these metaphysical instances, when the figures entertain their own non-empirical, subjective "Vorstellungen," this chapter explores if and how

¹⁰⁴ Kant's epistemological system, as it is contrasted with Gauß', plays a pivotal role in the plot's development. For Kant, metaphysics is that science which seeks to disclose a realm independent of the material one. Unattached to, but still dependent upon experience, concepts form through a faculty of reason actively engaged in constructing the world: "Der Metaphysik...die sich gänzlich über Erfahrungsbelehrung erhebt, und zwar durch bloße Begriffe, wo also Vernunft selbst ihr eigener Schüler sein soll" (*Kritik* 24). Metaphysical explorations distinctly investigate what individual subjects generate.

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of this, see page 25 of Habermas' *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*.

¹⁰⁶ In another interview, linking his text to the movement of German Romanticism, Kehlmann refers to the metaphysical dimension of a landscape: "Eine Landschaft, die einmal vermessen wurde, wird nie wieder das, was sie vorher war. Ein metaphysischer Gedanke, wenn man so will" (*Requiem* 80).

Kehlmann's text presents certain porous spaces, those unveiling the premonition of a "Jenseits," of a curiosity and openness towards unknown realities, within the "Diesseits" of the natural, empirical sphere.¹⁰⁷ While the preceding chapter focused on how Sebald's protagonists subjectively transcendence into their experiences of certain spaces and material structures, Kehlmann's text thematizes how immanent figures, rooted in secular intellectual frameworks, subjectively intuit the possibilities of the transcendent at the borders and limits of scientific inquiry. Endeavoring to generate positive statements stemming from scientific discovery, the figures end up confronting a world whose laws serve the dual purpose of providing explanation and of gesturing to its own incomplete status, a gesture impelling the figures to look beyond. Possessing "German Romantic conceptions of art and science" (Holmes 196) – fitting nicely into a post-Kantian, Schleiermacherian framework – the text offers a 'postsecular' critique of the Enlightenment and modernity's turn to instrumental reason, by developing a narrative revolving around one of the essential themes undergirding the Enlightenment, namely the scientific, rational response to the superstitious.¹⁰⁸ In its explicit engagement with

¹⁰⁷ Commenting on Humboldt's insistence on exploring the unknown, Kaiser writes: "Alexander von Humboldt ist ein Nachfahre der heroischen, ihr Leben aufs Spiel setzenden Entdecker von Kolumbus bis zu Kapitän Cook, dabei ein unersättlicher, verbissen exakter moderner Forscher, der...zeichnend ins Unbekannte vorstößt – ins räumliche Unbekannte der Urwälder, Flusslabyrinth, Steppen, Gebirgsmassive; ins gegenständlich Unbekannte archaischer Lebenszustände und früher Hochkulturen" (79). Presenting pursuits into the unknown, the text unveils an interest in exceeding and crossing over the borders of what has already been epistemologically contained.

¹⁰⁸ In its assessment of Kehlmann's novel the *FAZ* identifies how the text probes the distinct questions regarding the limits and extent of science and to what degree science's advancements lead to an enslaving disenchantment: "Welche Opfer verlangt die Wissenschaft? Warum ist so vielen Genies jedes menschliche Mitgefühl fremd? Was treibt den Forscher wirklich an? Warum sind so viele Söhne genialer Männer die Opfer ihrer Väter? Wo eigentlich liegt der Punkt, an dem das hehre Projekt der Aufklärung in die Entzauberung der Welt umkippte und ihre Bewohner ins Joch von Fortschritt und

science – and, in this manner, unlike the novel analyzed in the preceding chapter – Kehlmann’s text reveals the unique ability to render, through its own porous maneuvers, glimpses into a transcendent realm with its own unique, irrational logic.¹⁰⁹ Doing this, the text calls into question the privileged realm of reason without, at the same time, dismissing the accomplishments provided by the advancements in secularism.

I. Secular, modern figures

Involved in the discourse of secularization, the text critiques those uninterested in employing reason for the purpose of progress.¹¹⁰ Equally, the text participates in the discourse of ‘postsecularization,’ as it critiques those who do not question the claims, endeavors, and strategies of the Enlightenment. Using a “spielerische Umgang mit den Konventionen des traditionellen historischen Romans” (Costagli 265) and developing a narrative based on historical events but filled with “historical inaccuracies” (Holmes, 197), Kehlmann attempts to reconstruct events surrounding historically significant figures in science. In this way he appeals to a secular consciousness, dismayed with traditional religious teachings associated with war and Holocaust and hence intellectually committed to factual positivism. Assessing why this novel is so popular in Germany, existing as it does in “2,3 Prozent aller deutschen Haushalte” (250), Meller contends that it is because such a wide spectrum of the modern German bourgeoisie remains interested in “der

instrumenteller Vernunft gezwungen wurden?”

¹⁰⁹ Tracking the text’s activity of reconstructing a historical event through a fictionalized presentation and emphasizing how the text functions permeably, Costagli contends that the novel has the “Tendenz, die Grenzen zwischen Wirklichem, Wahrscheinlichem und Möglichem in der historischen Erzählung durchlässig zu lassen” (269).

¹¹⁰ The novel portrays in a negative light those who intentionally remain in a position of naivety with no desire to think but instead to simply believe. When Gauß hands his mother a book about Christ’s tears, wishing to explain to her the signs at play, she reveals no interest in attempting to understand: “in diesem Moment begriff er, dass niemand den Verstand benutzen wollte. Menschen wollten Ruhe...Denken wollten sie nicht” (55).

altbürgerliche Bildungskanon.“ However, Meller points out that the major difference with this text is that it dismisses the “kunst-, geist- oder nationalreligiöse Pathos des alten Bürgertums” (251); i.e. the text does not dangerously fuse religion with nationalistic ideology. Placing the text in the secularization discourse, Meller writes:

Es könnte hilfreich sein, den Begriff Säkularisierung auch auf die bürgerliche Gesellschaft anzuwenden: Ihre rest- und parareligiösen Anteile wurden in Deutschland durch die „Aufarbeitung“ der Nazizeit und die antibürgerlichen Achtundsechziger säkularisiert. Das bedeutet nicht, daß ein Neubürger kein Interesse für religiöse Erfahrung entwickeln dürfte...Sondern eben nur, daß er strukturell nicht mehr anfällig ist für quasireligiöse Ideologie. (251)

Rid of religious ideology (and all of its corresponding negative connotations), the modern German middle class has taken interest in a text, fundamentally oriented around the alleged neutrality of science, that latently explores the possibility of secularized forms of religion, unattached to any sort of political or national agenda.

In accordance with the modern bourgeoisie’s interest in an intellectual secularism, Kehlmann presents fictional, biographical sketches of thoroughly modern figures.¹¹¹ They have adopted a scientific approach to the acquisition of knowledge in order to overcome the insecurities associated with the unknown.¹¹² Marcus Herz, the Humboldt

¹¹¹ According to Costagli, Kehlmann’s “Roman [nimmt] als Handlungsgerüst das biographische Modell auf” (265-266). Fictionalizing these historical lives, the narrator demonstrates his own skepticism of being able to accurately reproduce reality; hence, between “Wahrheit und Fiktion” there is “die Möglichkeit einer ästhetischen sowie wissenschaftlichen Wirklichkeitserfahrung” (267).

¹¹² Commenting on the ideologies Gauß and Humboldt represent, Kaiser writes: “Sie stehen für das Neben- und Miteinander von mathematisch-konstruktiver Deduktion und

boys' teacher, remarks at one point: "Wann immer einen die Dinge erschreckten, sei es eine gute Idee, sie zu messen" (22). This becomes not only Humboldt's motivating ideology but also Gauß'; measurement, with the intent at containment, serves as the *modus operandi*. In this sense the text demonstrates parallels to a work believed to have influenced Kehlmann's writing of *die Vermessung*, Thomas Pynchon's novel *Mason & Dixon* (1997), a story about "Charles Mason und Jeremiah Dixon, die zwischen 1763 und 1769 die Grenzen zwischen Maryland und Pennsylvania vermaßen, eine Landmarke, die Nord und Süd, Freiheit und Sklaverei, Vernunft und Wahnsinn voneinander trennten" (Schneider 53). For these land surveyors their mission revolved around differentiating between what is rational and what is irrational. In like manner, Humboldt and Gauß want to do away with the superstitious, those unknown forces with no tangible explanations.

Seeking to think within the confines of his own reason and to come up with a genuinely accurate model of what he perceives, Gauß gives no room in his intellectual system to that unknown force known as chance: "Gauß kam auf den Zufall zu sprechen, den Feind allen Wissens, den er immer habe besiegen wollen" (13). Establishing early the juxtaposition between seen and unseen forces, the narrator presents Gauß operating with the assumption that all knowledge stems from empirical, epistemologically accessible space. Fate, as the enemy of knowledge, must therefore be overcome, as it finds no resonance within understanding (throughout the novel Gauß' perspective is clarified and modified; he ultimately perceives the world as an incalculable, and therefore

empirischer Induktion. Beide Welterschließungsweisen zusammen kennzeichnen den wissenschaftlichen Vorlauf für das technisch-industrielle Zeitalter" (76).

incomprehensible, entity¹¹³). Gradually becoming aware of the vanity of his pursuit, Gauß nevertheless endeavors to understand and unfold natural laws, doing away, in the process, with indescribable forces. In this sense, while ultimately opposing Kant, he adopts a thoroughly Kantian epistemological posture. Describing the secular, rational – and in many ways Kantian – features of Gauß’ personality, Rickes writes: “Im Gegensatz zum reisefreudigen Humboldt versteht er Wissenschaft als abstrakte Erkenntnissuche. Seine Methode ist die gedankliche Lösung von Problemen” (*die lateinamerikanische Literatur* 64). This approach to understanding the world – i.e., limiting knowledge claims to what can be conceptualized in the mind – follows Charles Taylor’s trajectory of the modern individual in the secular age. Identifying this shift to the mind, Taylor contends that for the “buffered self” “all thought, feeling and purpose, all the features we normally can ascribe to agents, must be in minds, which are distinct from the ‘outer’ world” (539). In true Kantian form Gauß remains relatively stationary, exploring the expansive parameters of his own mind.¹¹⁴ In his quest to understand the ‘correct’ construction of space and to generate a more accurate geometric model, Gauß frees himself from the preexisting paradigms regarding space and time, namely Kant’s current model: “daß Raum und Zeit nur Formen der sinnlichen Anschauung, also nur Bedingungen der Existenz der Dinge als Erscheinungen sind, daß wir ferner keine Verstandesbegriffe, mithin auch gar keine Elemente zur Erkenntnis der Dinge haben” (*Kritik* 30). For Gauß, these categories of space and time will become, in his model, and as the novel develops,

¹¹³ The narrator depicts Gauß’ shift from thinking that understanding is possible to doubting whether that truly is the case, when he writes: “Der alte kantische Unsinn...Der Verstand forme gar nichts und verstehe wenig. Der Raum biege und die Zeit dehne sich...Die Welt könne notdürftig berechnet werden, aber das heiße noch lange nicht, dass man irgend etwas verstehe” (220).

¹¹⁴ It should be remembered that Kant never left his hometown of Königsberg.

actually existing entities within the world, and not merely conditions through which individuals perceive the world. Operating, however, in accordance with Kant's essay *Was ist Aufklärung*, Gauß desires to make use of his own reason, apart from the dictates of received tradition or the limitations on thought enforced by both secular and religious authorities; he is firmly convinced "dass man ein Problem nur ohne Vorurteil und Gewohnheit betrachten müsse, dann zeige es von selbst seine Lösung" (57). Freed from custom and status quo thinking, Gauß operates with the conviction that he can solve a problem in a neutral manner, allowing that which is objectively real and true to reveal itself. Unbridled by the reins of authority, Gauß represents a quintessential, secular individual, as he thinks progressively about the future.¹¹⁵

Establishing a secular counterpart to Gauß, the narrator presents Humboldt, "an avowed Kantian" (Pizer 135).¹¹⁶ As an individual engrossed in the secular aim of quantifying, categorizing, and containing knowledge, "Er wolle das Leben erforschen, die seltsame Hartnäckigkeit verstehen, mit der es den Globus umspanne" (26). In his attempt to read and survey the globe, he reveals the ardent desire to understand the earth's complexity and expel superstition in the process; the *FAZ* makes this clear, "Alexander von Humboldt vermißt den Schrecken, um die Angst zu bannen." Consequently, he leaves nothing unmeasured and therefore unknown. Any surrender to uncertainty offends the capacities of reason. It is, for example, an offense to rationality to not know the

¹¹⁵ As a historical figure, Gauß did indeed serve as an indispensable forerunner in the realm of scientific inquiry: "Ohne die von ihm begonnene Geometrie gekrümmter Räume wäre Einsteins Relativitätstheorie nicht möglich gewesen" (*Spiegel* 175).

¹¹⁶ Pizer writes further "The Kantian goal of dominion over the natural world is the primary telos inspiring the Humboldt of Kehlmann's novel...Humboldt's lifelong organization of geography into three distinct frames of reference – the concrete-systematic, the historical, and the chronological – was derived from Kant" (139).

measurements of a hill: “Ein Hügel, von dem man nicht wisse, wie hoch er sei, beleidige die Vernunft und mache ihn unruhig” (42). With this Enlightenment trajectory of thinking Humboldt enters into a non-western framework, South America, with the hope of delineating and disseminating the principles of a rational apprehension of the world: “Alexander von Humboldt tritt also dort als der ‘Abgesandte der Weimarer Klassik’ auf, der das Ideal der klassischen Schlichtheit und der fortschrittsoptimistischen Aufklärung in die unwirtliche Welt des südamerikanischen Urwalds bringt” (Costagli 269).¹¹⁷

Indeed, the narrator presents Humboldt as the paradigmatic Enlightenment figure possessing a thoroughly Kantian worldview, adopting Kant’s models on both epistemology and ethics. Regarding Kant’s epistemology – delineated in *die Kritik der reinen Vernunft* – individuals only have positive knowledge about the phenomenal realm. People obtain this knowledge through an experience of a physical space that activates the categories of understanding inhering in the individual. For Humboldt, this is the same, things only truly exist after he has measured them, after he has experienced them, that is, after he has brought them into the phenomenal realm of comprehension: “Humboldt fixierte die untergehende Sonne mit dem Sextanten und maß den Winkel zwischen der Jupiterbahn und jener des vorbeiwandernden Mondes. Jetzt erst, sagte er, existiere der Kanal wirklich” (136). Discussing the importance of precision when measuring, providing a glimpse into his Kantian approach to knowledge, as well as a Kantian ethical sentiment, Humboldt contends “Es gehe ums Prinzip” (42). This attitude reflects one of

¹¹⁷ Interpreting the historical figure Humboldt differently than Kehlmann, Humboldt scholars, such as Oliver Lubrich (*Cosmos and Colonialism*), perceive him as much more open to indigenous models of knowledge than Kehlmann might make it sound.

Kant's essential propositions in his moral philosophy, the idea that an act is only "good" when it is done out of a sense of duty, and according to principle, instead of when it is done with an incentive in mind. In another instance, after seeing his traveling companion Bonpland engaged in sexual activity with one of the indigenous women, Humboldt, representing the Kantian moral code, asserts, "Der Mensch sei kein Tier," to which Bonpland replies, "Manchmal doch." Then, "Humboldt fragte, ob er nie Kant gelesen habe" (48).¹¹⁸ Here, the reference appears to be to Kant's *die Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, where Kant introduces a model in which individuals are to perceive others as ends in and of themselves and not as means to an end. Representing this viewpoint, Humboldt demonstrates how pervasively Kant's worldview had penetrated into his own thinking.¹¹⁹

Humboldt's adoption of the Kantian epistemological and ethical framework also becomes the focus of the novel's criticism. On one hand, the novel promotes this archetypal Enlightenment figure genuinely interested in scientific pursuits and advancements in knowledge. On the other hand, it calls his underlying ideology into question, as it ironizes his various activities. The text, for example, indicates how far-

¹¹⁸ Speaking about the relationship between Kant's ethical system and the presence of a transcendent God, Kehlmann expresses his own views in an interview with the *Spiegel*. The *Spiegel* asks: "Und woher kann Ihrer Meinung nach die Ethik kommen, die beiden Seiten Grenzen setzt?" Kehlmann responds: "Von Immanuel Kant. Ich finde es zwar beeindruckend, bei Dostojewski zu lesen, ohne Gott gebe es keine Moral. Aber in der Praxis hilft uns das nicht, weil sich die seltsamsten Moralvorstellungen auf Gott berufen. Ich glaube, Kant hat recht, wenn er Gott aus der Ethik begründet – und nicht die Ethik aus Gott" (176).

¹¹⁹ In another instance, inferring again Kant's *die Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Humboldt responds to Don Fernando who says, "Man habe genug Leute... Wer sterbe, könne ersetzt werden." Humboldt is befuddled that someone could think in such a manner – that people are merely means, replaceable in an instant – and "fragte ihn, ob er Kant gelesen habe" (199).

fetched and even absurd Humboldt's presuppositions are, when it presents him as believing that the cosmos will be understood because the world has nearly been measured in its entirety, and that even science will perhaps be able to solve the problem of death (238). Intimating at the ridiculous elements of his thinking, the narrator constructs Humboldt through the use of satire, a term defined in the following way: "The trick [with satire] is to make abstract ideas much more real and compelling than they can ever be in life, and to demonstrate their absurdity by drawing out their logical consequences" (Hodgart 222).¹²⁰ Satirizing Humboldt as a staunchly secular individual bent on epistemologically containing the world, the text offers a critique of this form of Enlightenment thinking. Emphasizing this point, Gerstenberger writes: "Humboldt's view of the world as an ordered space, and the rigidity he applied to proving his point, is at the heart of the critique of this novel, which argues for an acceptance of flux as a fundamental feature of human existence" (113). Identifying the faults with an adamantly secular approach to living in the world, the novel heralds Humboldt as an individual whose particular scientific strategies ought to be observed in a differentiated fashion.

In this sense, the novel offers a critical perspective of someone who wants to control chaos, demonstrating the absurdity of his strategies. For example, when the indigenous people and the Jesuits do not immediately conform to Humboldt's expectations for expediency and efficiency in his endeavor to collect data, he reproaches them by contending that it will take forever for them to reach the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and reason: "Diese Leute seien allesamt so abergläubisch, schrieb er an seinen

¹²⁰ According to Hodgart, the satire aims at a pretense of misunderstanding and at denunciation; it is employed to provide extra attack on one of the main themes (216). It includes straight lampoons or attacks on real people with the ultimate goal of ridicule and fantasy.

Bruder, man merke, welch weiter Weg es noch sei zu Freiheit und Vernunft” (121).

The narrator uses this as more of a critique on Humboldt than on those who still represent a superstitious, anti-economic, worldview. The sentence following this immediately mentioned quote reads: “Wenigstens sei es ihm gelungen, einige kleine Affen einzufangen, die noch kein Biologe beschrieben habe” (121). With this move the narrator seemingly connects the indigenous Indians with the small apes Humboldt is able to identify. The narration infers that Humboldt has linked the South American Indians to apes, revealing his presupposition that these Native Indians have not progressed in the chain of evolutionary development to the same extent that Enlightened Europeans have. As readers we are left with the image of a pretentious Humboldt. In this way, the narrative serves as a critique on Humboldt’s Enlightenment strategies, showing the intellectual perversion wrought when the accumulation of knowledge is an individual’s sole trajectory. As Costagli points out: “Indem Kehlmann Humboldts Logik bis ins Absurde führt, stellt er den Aufklärungs- und Fortschrittsoptimismus in Frage” (271). While portraying the alluring nature of Humboldt’s discoveries, the narrator nevertheless consistently offers a subtle critique of Humboldt’s avowedly enlightened agenda.

Intent on exploring and expanding the realms of scientific possibility with the goal of making advancements, the protagonists start with the assumption that technological progress achieves worldly improvements and simplifies existence. This is Kehlmann’s perspective as well:

dieser Wille zum methodischen Begreifen, dieses Quantifizieren der Welt,
hat auch etwas Beeindruckendes, es hat die größte Erfolgsgeschichte
eingeleitet, die es im Verstehen der Welt und im Meistern des

menschlichen Lebens gibt...Wer zum Zahnarzt muß, ist froh, daß es Quantifizierung, Technik und Fortschritt gibt...Aber durch die Wissenschaft wird die Welt auch farbloser, es geht unendlich verloren”

(*Requiem* 80).¹²¹

Kehlmann’s sentiments closely parallel what Charles Taylor has recognized in modernity as science has helped “disenchant the universe” and opened “the way for exclusive humanism” (*Secular* 27). Mindful of this humanistic turn and how valuable it has been for human advancement to be able to master certain elements of human existence, Kehlmann does not want to set aside the major historical achievements associated with science. However, he is also aware that every step forward in science is also a step away from forms of disenchantment, from the religious, mystical elements of the human experience. Operating under these convictions, Kehlmann does demonstrate in his novel a belief in science’s ameliorating quality and in the benefits of ‘exclusive humanism.’ The importance of progress in medicine, for example, becomes quite lucid, when Gauß has to visit a dentist twice, because the dentist had removed the false tooth the first time (83); on both occasions he undergoes excruciating pain; “...dann faßte die Zange zu, etwas klickte in seinem Kopf, und erst der warme Geschmack des Blutes und das Pochen in seinen Ohren brachten ihn wieder in das Zimmer” (82). With the click of the pliers reverberating in his mind and the corresponding blood swelling up in his mouth, Gauß is convinced of medicine’s brighter future due to the improvements stemming solely from scientific advancements: “Schon in ein paar Jahre würde es Ärzte für das Gebiß geben,

¹²¹ Similarly, Taylor, describing the secular age, writes: “Humanity has shed a lot of false and harmful myths. From another, it has lost touch with crucial spiritual realities” (*Secular* 570).

dann würde man diese Schmerzen heilen können und bräuchte nicht jeden entzündeten Zahn herausreißen” (82). The figures, caught in the dialectic of the Enlightenment, represent and affirm the trajectory of Enlightenment rationality, espousing a steadfast conviction in a radically improved future. They are consciously aware that with advances in rationality the mind will be free from its present constraints.¹²² In Kehlmann’s text progress is a desirable good for which one ought to strive.

While uninterested in reducing to any degree the significance of science, the novel also opens up a space to explore transcendence and a reemergence of the religious in a secular age. Further on in the previously cited interview, Kehlmann contends: “Der Geist kann nicht zurück, er muß durch eine Unendlichkeit gehen. Der Weg geht nur voran. Wenn man das Magische und das Rätsel und das Wunder überhaupt wiedergewinnen kann, dann nicht dadurch, daß man Erkenntnisse aufgibt” (*Requiem* 80). Transcendence, “der Geist” (in Hegelian terms), as it has been historically apprehended and understood, as it has been experienced in previous times, will not be able to make its way back – without being scientifically revised and amended – into a modern culture that

¹²² While pursuing an agenda committed to this rational, neutral unfolding of the world, they still act according to the existing conventions, knowing that they will be overturned in the future: “Gauß machte die Verbeugung, die man ihm beigebracht hatte. Er wußte, daß es bald keine Herzöge mehr geben würde. Dann würde man von absoluten Herrschern nur mehr in Büchern lesen, und der Gedanke, vor einem zu stehen, sich zu verneigen und auf sein Machtwort zu warten, käme jedem Menschen fremd und märchenhaft vor” (61). Similarly, after marking and measuring a shed, Gauß reveals his awareness of a more scientifically-advanced future, when he claims: “Bald würde all das eine Kleinigkeit sein. Man würde in Ballons schweben und die Entfernungen auf magnetischen Skalen ablesen. Man würde galvanische Signale von einem Meßpunkt zum nächsten schicken und die Distanz am Abfallen der elektrischen Intensität erkennen” (191). Similar sentiments regarding the belief in progress and the conviction that life will be greatly improved in the future are found on the following pages: 96, 245, and 260.

has ceaselessly moved forward on the basis of the implementation of new forms of comprehension more consistent with humanity's present state of rationality. Knowledge, associated with progress, cannot be surrendered when one explores those religious, transcendent traces inherent within the various facets of the human experience. Thinking religiously takes into account advancements in knowledge and does not surrender them; hence, representations of religion in the postsecular moment will always be accompanied with critical reflections on the historically transmitted religious traditions.

II. Criticism of religion

Before looking at how Kehlmann's secular protagonists express and experience moments of transcendence, I want to briefly point out how the novel frames 'religious' issues, namely within a discourse quite critical of the historically disseminated teachings espoused within certain religious traditions. In this sense the narration reveals a profound awareness of how claims within religion have resulted in certain intellectual limitations. In a theological exchange with a pastor Gauß represents a critical viewpoint, when he wonders why he should not be proud of his mathematic capabilities: "Der Pastor fragte, ob ihm das Lernen schwerfalle. / Er [Gauß] zog die Nase hoch und schüttelte den Kopf. / Hüte dich, sagte der Pastor. / Gauß sah überrascht auf" (60). Following Christian tradition, the pastor cautions against pride, an injunction which, from Gauß' perspective, seems unfounded and illogical. Even at a young age Gauß does not understand why people have to live in a perpetual state of humility and continually say they are sorry for their abilities, after God has made them exactly as he intended with their own unique gifts and talents: "Gott habe einen geschaffen, wie man sei, dann aber solle man sich ständig bei ihm dafür entschuldigen. Logisch sei das nicht. ... ihm erscheine das wie eine

mutwillige Verkehrung von Ursache und Wirkung” (60-61). Cause and effect do not coincide. God produces an individual talent, which must be perceived as bad, as something for which one must apologize. Indeed, this order of thinking does not seem very logical. This intellectual consideration is one of many examples in the text of a critical discourse running throughout the pages of the novel.¹²³ In this way, *Die Vermessung* follows the example of other texts in Kehlmann’s oeuvre where he questions some of Christianity’s doctrinal statements

We can identify a critical stance toward religion as well in *Beerholms Vorstellung*, a text in which a magician reflects on the relationship between science, religion, and magic. For example, when grappling to understand the infinite nature of ‘pi,’ he experiences a confusion that leads him to theology and then to magic. Religion never provides completely satisfying answers. His decision to not become a priest stems from his distaste for many of the church’s doctrines and the incomprehensibility of religious dogma: “Doch Gudfreunt vermied es, die Sache aufzuklären. Und mit Recht. Es gibt keinen Grund, Kinder mit der schrecklichsten von allen Wahrheiten zu behelligen. Der nämlich, daß Gott auswählt, ohne Gründe zu haben, daß seine Gnade nicht erworben werden kann, durch keine Bemühung, durch keine Tat. Daß Seine Liebe ungerecht ist” (23).¹²⁴ Such offensive theological ‘Wahrheiten’ frequently have no scientific foundation;

¹²³ Pages 88 and 99 contain additional humorous instances to be discussed later.

¹²⁴ The narrator particularly critiques the institutionalized church when presenting Beerholm as he decides to not become a priest. When the narrator shows how awkwardly the church authorities treat him, he demonstrates the exaggerated illusions under which religious officials live. “Geh sofort und für immer. Du tust uns keinen Gefallen, wenn du zu uns kommst, nur wir tun dir einen, wenn wir dich aufnehmen. Man gewährt uns keine Gnade, alle Gnade geschieht durch uns. Ohne uns wird die Welt zu dem engen und öden Platz, der sie für die meisten Menschen schon ist. Sie wissen es nicht, aber sie bekommen

they can be neither proved nor disproved. They involve questions, which, having been discussed by philosophers and theologians for ages, have never found agreed upon answers. Beerholm is convinced that mere speculations have no place in an educational setting. Throughout Kehlmann's works such critical assessments of religion are present.

Turning back to *die Vermessung*, we see in another instance how Gauß questions a traditional theological formulation, or at least expresses the futility of seeking to understand an orthodox position in Christianity. Seated in a church sanctuary, Gauß listens to a Pastor, who “[stellte] ihnen allen die ewige Verdammnis in Aussicht für den Fall, daß sie Christi Leiden nicht zu ihrem, seinen Kummer nicht zu dem eigenen, sein Blut nicht zu ihrer aller Blut machten” (90). Performing the logical confusion of this ‘theological’ statement with a logically confusing sentence, the narration sets up Gauß’ ensuing dismay when considering such absolutely essential religious formulations. In a secular, scientific manner, Gauß has given up questioning “was das heißen sollte” (90), preferring instead to concern himself with logically verifiable statements, systems, and models. The numerous critiques towards religion contained within the novel parallel those sentiments regarding religion the author espouses. In an interview with Kehlmann the *Spiegel* inquires: “Wenn es Wirkungen ohne erkennbare Ursache gibt, ist auch keine allererste Ursache mehr nötig, durch die das Universum einst erschaffen wurde. Hat die Quantentheorie also endgültig den Schöpfergott abgeschafft?” Kehlmann responds, “Zumindest ist dies eine Entdeckung, die alle Religionen in eine tiefe Krise stürzen müsste und hoffentlich noch stürzen wird. Das können sich viele noch gar nicht richtig vorstellen” (176). This “hoffentlich noch” reveals quite a bit about Kehlmann’s approach

ihre Würde von uns. Ohne uns sind sie Affen, die sich für was Besseres halten. Wir brauchen niemanden. Wir brauchen auch dich nicht” (111).

to religion, i.e., that religions must begin to critique and evaluate their claims and to what degree they line up with the findings contained in modern science, particularly when science, with the theory of quantum mechanics, has discovered that certain effects reveal the presence of no specific causes. A critical perspective must always be at play when considering the claims inherent in religious systems. While Kehlmann's figures most avowedly express and articulate this critical vantage point, they, at the same time, demonstrate an ongoing fascination with the possibilities of experiences that temporarily transfer them beyond themselves. Describing Kehlmann's figures and their relationship between traditional religion and moments of transcendence, Gasser writes: "Seine Gestalten, verstoßen aus den Gärten der Kindheit und der Schönheit alter Gottesbeweise, eingekerkert in einer meist nebligen, verspiegelten, verfehlten, dämonenbesetzten Schöpfung, sind... Grenzgänger zwischen der jenseitigen Welt und dem Diesseits" (12). Here, Gasser speaks of how Kehlmann's figures have left behind certain 'immature' ('unreif,' in Kantian terms – *Was ist Aufklärung*) forms of religion, while still maintaining interest in religious issues, namely those having to do with transcendence, being in the world, in the reality of space and time, while having simultaneously the diffuse sense of a reality beyond.

III. Transcendent intuitions

Presented as secular individuals interested in scientific, this-worldly pursuits, these modern figures, Gauß and Humboldt – in so far as their intuitions and perceptions are narratively manifested – integrate transcendence into certain experiences, as they demonstrate the intellectual tendency to move beyond the quotidian realm of appearances

and to become open to what eludes the material.¹²⁵ Cognizant, at times, of the insufficiency of a merely empirical analysis of the world and its operations, these postsecular figures confront incomprehensible situations, when, for example, science, reaching its limits, loses its explanatory function. This then triggers an act of transcending, moving from the real to the intuited (unreal) real. Anderson succinctly describes how this occurs: “Dabei fällt auf, wie häufig diese undramatischen Protagonisten Menschen sind, die aus ihrem Alltag in eine neue, unbekannte, ja geradezu phantastische und „höhere“ Wirklichkeit treten” (Anderson 58). When the world exhibits incalculability, when it cannot be measured and contained, the characters reflect an intellectual movement from the known into the unknown. They offer sentiments that the world’s materiality evinces an illusoriness continually deferring and preventing depictions of reality in its entirety.

Gauß, for example, never satisfied with simple expressions of the world and with preexisting formulas, ceaselessly investigates and ruminates about inaccessible realms. He ultimately acknowledges that the human experience has as much to do with the invisible as it does with the visible, with those spaces remaining always only inferred and yet nevertheless real, as they perpetually elude the faculties of reason. Kehlmann’s text presents this through the display of an interaction between the melancholic Gauß and his teacher, Bartels, who is quite surprised to see Gauß so sad:

¹²⁵ Some critics have referred to these openings as instances of “Poesie:” “Bisweilen werden die beiden Männer mit Magiern oder somnambulen Medien konfrontiert, die den Blick in die Räume der Zukunft eröffnen. Dort erfolgt eine kurze Berührung mit der Poesie” (Schneider 55). While they are indeed poetic moments, these transitional inferences seem to serve a larger purpose in the context of the continual debate between the legitimate spheres of science and religion.

Warum er traurig war? Vielleicht, weil er sah, wie seine Mutter starb. Weil die Welt sich so enttäuschend ausnahm, sobald man erkannte, wie dünn ihr Gewebe war, wie grob gestrickt die Illusion, wie laienhaft vernäht ihre Rückseite. Weil nur Geheimnis und Vergessen es erträglich machten. Weil man es ohne den Schlaf, der einen täglich aus der Wirklichkeit riß, nicht aushielt...Weil die Zeit immer verging (59).

This quote does not immediately unveil its transcendent underpinnings, but upon closer investigation the imagery invoked suggests the protagonist's intuition of two realms. The world, enveloped in a fabric, a "Gewebe," disguises another side and is in that sense illusory. The world is not real (or, at least its physical space does not permit people to perceive the entirety of reality), as there is something behind the world's texture unable to come into appearance.

To understand more thoroughly the meaning of the terms present in this quote – i.e. what their signs indicate –, we can identify how Kehlmann employs them in one of his prior works, *Mahlers Zeit*.¹²⁶ In this text, the protagonist, a young physicist (and metaphysician) named David Mahler, endeavoring to make sense of the implications of the second law of thermodynamics, explores linear time and comes up with four formulae he delineates in his dissertation with the title, "Azyklische thermodynamische Prozesse." At one point in the novel, the "Gewebe," as in *die Vermessung*, comes glaringly into

¹²⁶ Centered on the theme of science, this text simultaneously positions itself in a contemporary dialogue engaged in religious questions: "Die Darstellung eines physikalisch-philosophischen Problems stößt im Roman schnell an sprachliche Grenzen. Der Erzähler bleibt im poetisch ungefähren; entweder gibt sich seine Physik rasch als Metaphysik zu erkennen, oder sie bleibt literarisch spröde...Weil er ins Detail weder gehen kann noch will, hält Kehlmann sich an die äußeren Attribute und subjektiven Empfindungen des Unaussprechlichen" (Halter).

view, and in this context it serves as a location in which an opening occurs. The inside is exposed to the outside; isolated realms dissolve into each other: “Es geschieht ständig: Jede Ordnung stürzt ihrer Auflösung zu, und was getrennt ist, wird eins, und alles, was Grenzen hat, muß diese verlieren...Und die Zeit? Blickt man darauf, scheint sie durchsichtig zu werden. Das Gewebe öffnet sich, und schon ist es dahin, und nur die Bewegung von Gestirnen bleibt, der Wandel von Dingen” (67). The dissolving of complexity continually occurs, as order crumbles into dissolution, an activity resulting in the disbanding of borders. What is perceived as real and fixed, “Zeit” in this case, is actually permeable, as it enables the unfolding and unveiling of a realm that is presented as initially inaccessible. In a manner similar to “Zeit” in *Mahlers Zeit*, the illusory world, according to Gauß’ perception of it, offers suggestions of permeability with a “Rückseite” that remains concealed but intuited. And, to cope with the reality of an ‘unreal’ world, one must be ripped out of reality, suggesting that there is within the reality of space an ‘unreality’ to which individuals can retreat.

Gauß’ sentiment regarding the world’s illusory character has another precursor, evident in Kehlmann’s earlier work, *Beerholms Vorstellung*. At one point Beerholm expresses an idea that finds resonance in Gauß’ thinking. Here, the narrator writes:

Der Himmel sieht fast wie ein Vorhang aus. Ob er sich wohl teilen wird...?

– Doch nein, man weiß ja, daß es bloß Illusion ist. All das Hellblau, die feine Maserung und das Leuchten. Dahinter sind Nacht und unendlicher Raum und dann und wann ein einsamer Stern. Mehr ist es nicht. Mehr nicht. Und der Raum. Diese seltsam geheimnislose Weite. Jeder einzelne Punkt da draußen, wo auch immer, so fern wie nur möglich, liegt auf einer

geraden Linie, die von mir ausgeht. Ein mathematischer Strahlenkranz erstreckt sich von mir über den Horizont in eine sinnlose Unendlichkeit. Unzählbare Kurven gleiten durch die Leere und krümmen sich auf Linien zu, die sie nicht erreichen. Merkwürdige Allgegenwart der Geometrie. Und wenn sich nun nichts in ihr verbirgt? Wenn es nichts darin abzulesen gibt? Nein, es darf kein leeres Spiel sein! Ein Netz aus Zahlen trägt die Welt und diese Sonne, diese Stadt, diesen Himmel. Magie und Mathematik: Sie berühren sich allerorten. (240)

Initially, according to the narrator, nothing lies beyond the curtain presented by the world. Seeing elements of the universe and the cosmos, one may assume the “phenomena” to be illusory and that behind the “phenomena” are the “noumena.” Yet, behind what seems to be only illusory exists infinite, empty, “sinnlose” space, a Nietzschean “Nichts.” However, the narrator immediately reverses this nihilistic strand of thinking. In accordance with a Kantian epistemological framework – in which the subject’s *a priori* categories of understanding are involved in the construction of knowledge about objects within space – this space is filled with lines stemming from us as individuals.¹²⁷ What we perceive to be objectively existing in space ultimately derives from us, and therefore looking outward toward the external world must take into account our inner world, our inner (apriori, mathematical) categories. Hence, to read these lines is

¹²⁷ After listing these categories, Kant writes: “Dieses ist nun die Verzeichnung aller ursprünglich reinen Begriffe der Synthesis, die der Verstand a priori in sich enthält, und um deren willen er auch nur ein reiner Verstand ist; indem er durch sie allein etwas bei dem Mannigfaltigen der Anschauung verstehen, d. i. ein Objekt derselben denken kann (*Kritik* 118 and 119). “Der Verstand” – reason, understanding, intellect – has the concepts of synthesis a priori, and indeed because it has these concepts it is considered pure understanding, i.e. not influenced by anything external. This intellect, with these concepts, is able to bring forth objects.

to be involved in a game that is not meaningless; “es darf kein leeres Spiel sein!”

These subjectively generated lines reflecting a series of numbers involved in holding and supporting the world are as much expressions of external space as they are of internal, unobservable (spiritual and secretive) spaces. How the numbers are connected is based as much on natural laws as they are on mysterious elements perceived to be magical in nature. Hence, to read what is empirical and positive is to ascertain a meaning unfolding both in nature and in subjectively perceiving agents. There is indeed something beyond the curtain of space and it is discovered through reading the various mathematic, scientific configurations available to the senses.

To connect these observations back to Gauß’ perception of the world’s illusory character, we can see similarities between his perceptions and Beerholms’. They both demonstrate a desire to probe what is behind the world, the “Rückseite.” While intensely interested in the world’s phenomena as a mathematician, Gauß also reveals his intuition that the noumena lying beyond the world’s empirical space may be just as real. Suggesting porousness, the text, in another instance, creates the premonition of some sort of space beyond the tangible:

Wie viele Stunden hatte er vor dieser Empfangsanlage auf ein Zeichen von ihr gewartet?...Gauß blinzelte: Etwas mit seinen Augen stimmte nicht, das Firmament schien ihm von Rissen zerfurcht. Er spürte die ersten Regentropfen. Vielleicht sprachen die Toten ja nicht mehr, weil sie in einer stärkeren Wirklichkeit waren...Der Tod würde kommen als eine Erkenntnis von Unwirklichkeit. Dann würde er begreifen, was Raum und Zeit waren, was die Natur einer Linie, was das Wesen der Zahl (282).

Sensing a rip in the veiled order, Gauß intellectually moves to consider reality and where it may exist in a more complete and thorough form. Perpetually dismayed with the world's unsatisfactory nature, he possesses the presumption of something beyond the tangible, a realm comprised of the true nature of things. The essence of empirical objects remains illusory in that realm understood to be the real one. It is for this reason that Gauß, at another point in the text, expresses his clear belief in the incomprehensibility of the world; it cannot be understood. In an anti-Kantian sentiment, Gauß, rebutting Humboldt's presumption that reason and understanding form natural laws, expresses the following: "Der alte kantische Unsinn...Der Verstand forme gar nichts und verstehe wenig...Die Welt könne notdürftig berechnet werden, aber das heiße noch lange nicht, daß man irgend etwas verstehe" (220). Because of the world's unsatisfactory, incomplete, and even inhibiting nature, arriving at meaning is ultimately impossible. Understanding is unattainable. This attitude as well closely reflects the Romantic understanding of religion adopted and propagated by Schleiermacher, who, in his frequently-cited quote regarding religion, writes: "Sie [religion] begehrt nicht das Universum seiner Natur nach zu bestimmen und zu erklären wie die Metaphysik, sie begehrt nicht aus Kraft der Freiheit und der göttlichen Willkühr des Menschen es fortzubilden und fertig zu machen wie die Moral. Ihr Wesen ist weder Denken noch Handeln, sondern Anschauung und Gefühl" (28). With his admission of the world's, at times, inexplicable and indeterminable quality, Gauß adopts a posture reflective of a religious attitude toward his natural environment, willing to exist passively in an act of epistemological surrender that lets the world radiate its limitations. Deeply vested in exploring and uncovering the various scientific formulae the world has to offer, in order to see and identify the laws that govern the world's

physical space, Gauß always remains keenly aware of the world's illusory nature, that it does not surrender and unveil the sum total of the reality out of which it is comprised. It remains disappointing because it does not allow its complete unfolding; there is a backside that does not come into view. Summarizing Gauß' attitude, Gerstenberger writes: "Gauß comes across as the more inspired genius, whose understanding of the ultimate unknowability of the world is valued over Humboldt's positivist belief in its measurability... Gauß, on the other hand, understands early on in his life the limits of his mathematical genius and realizes that "chaos" will prevail over any attempt to render the world and the universe in concise maps" (111). The text uses Gauß' assertions regarding the world's illusory and incomprehensible nature to open up a porous space through which transcendence infuses into the pages of the narration.

Similarly, Gauß demonstrates his intuition of the possibility of a transcendent entity, when reflecting on numbers and what they are capable of intimating. As he perceives the world's structures to be connected by invisible natural laws, he becomes quite cognizant of the important role 'intangible' numbers play in providing the foundation for the world's empirical form. Simultaneously, these same numbers, with their invisible and uncontained dimensions, point beyond the immanent sphere. When he expresses his interpretation of how the physical system has been designed – with numbers acting in a similar manner to atoms – he exposes his sense of some sort of transcendent involvement in the material order. Then, humorously, he calls into question the accuracy of this 'divine' intervention, as if to suggest that humanity only ever experiences the incomplete, deficient version of a world brought into form through faulty engineering. Mixing the transcendent sphere into the immanent one, Gauß reasons:

Auf dem Grund der Physik waren Regeln, auf dem Grund der Regeln Gesetze, auf deren Grund Zahlen; wenn man diese scharf ins Auge faßte, erkannte man Verwandtschaften....Einiges an ihrem Gefüge schien unvollständig, seltsam flüchtig entworfen, und nicht nur einmal glaubte er, notdürftig kaschierten Fehlern zu begegnen – als hätte Gott sich Nachlässigkeiten erlaubt und gehofft, keiner würde sie bemerken. (88)

Physics, rules, laws, and then numbers – believing that the earth’s systems follow this pattern, Gauß understands the world to be logically strung together by empirical components capable of being observed, tested, and then accurately modeled according to certain scientific formulae. Gauß intuits that behind all this is a transcendent instance that attempted to follow a pattern and, at times, failed. Earlier he suggests that the world is composed according to a pattern: “Aus der Nähe betrachtet, sehe man hinter jedem Ereignis die unendliche Feinheit des Kausalgewebes. Trete man weit genug zurück, offenbarten sich die großen Muster” (13). The individual parts, intricately fitting together, ultimately depend upon pattern forming numbers, from which, in his estimation, all reality derives.

Numbers, or mathematics generally – a topic that fascinates Kehlmann – are featured not only in *die Vermessung*, but also in *Beerholms Vorstellung*.¹²⁸ In this text, numbers pave the way to the miraculous: “Auf keine Weise kommen wir dem Wunder so nahe wie in Begleitung von Zahlen. Die grauenhafte Unendlichkeit, die uns vom Jenseits trennt, wurde nur vom Auferstandenen überwunden und von der geometrischen Kurve;

¹²⁸ In one of his interviews, Kehlmann states the following: “Zu den Dingen, die mich an der Mathematik faszinieren, gehört eben das: Jemand, der sensationelle mathematische Entdeckungen macht, wird nicht verkannt” (“Die Fremdheit,” 36).

seltsam und erschreckend der Gedanke, daß sie eins sein könnten” (181). Numbers, endowed with the unique ability to lead individuals to their limits of comprehension, facilitate in guiding people to the miraculous, to those physically and rationally inaccessible occurrences. Infinite in nature, numbers intimate at what extends beyond the scope of what can be sensed. Hence, with numbers, people possess the intuition of infinity. And, this dividing infinity serves as a border between the immanent and the transcendent. According to the scientifically minded metaphysician, Beerholm, these two spheres can be bridged. Overcoming the infinite and gaining access to the transcendent (the “Jenseits”) involves either a supernatural move – an experience of resurrection – or a distinctly natural one – an understanding of geometric forms. By suggesting the possibility that the resurrected and the geometric curve could become one, Kehlmann’s narrator fuses the supernatural with the natural, demonstrating the transcendent features of scientific phenomena, including geometry and mathematics more broadly. The numeric system, rooted in immanence, is capable of inferring transcendence.

In Kehlmann’s *Mahlers Zeit* the narrator directly links numbers to an unseen entity. Numbers, according to the protagonist, move through an infinitely distant understanding, whose composition out of numbers seemingly enables the world to operate: “Durch einen unendlich fernen Verstand bewegen sich Zahlen; und die Welt ereignet sich” (67). Just as numbers lie at the base of all physical laws – as suggested in the previously mentioned quote from *Die Vermessung* – so too are numbers present in a transcendent reason that enables the world to order itself. In this sense Kehlmann’s numbers belong as much to the physical system as they do to the immaterial, unknown forces behind physical space. All numbers, both the visible and the invisible, bring

individuals closer to reality: “Die Zahlen entführten einen nicht aus der Wirklichkeit, sie brachten sie näher heran, machten sie klarer und deutlich wie nie” (*Vermessung* 86). Numbers serve an ordering function; they clarify and enable comprehension. Speaking to Bonpland, Humboldt remarks: “Zahlen bannten Unordnung” (50). Empirically accessible numbers dispel disorder, allowing for increased insight into reality. Hence, in Kehlmann’s system, to the degree that numbers root individuals in immanence and clarify reality, they simultaneously point to the transcendent existing outside order.

With an awareness of the role numbers play in the formation of physical laws and how these numbers may have an invisible, arbitrary source, Gauß observes the empirical world and identifies the reality that laws are not permanent and impermeable. When breaks occur Gauß becomes mindful of a transcendent reason not subject to any type of law demanding that it consistently act in a fixed manner. Hence, he arrives at a belief in the incomplete nature of a seemingly connected, self-contained logical system. Sometimes the structures become porous, revealing an inadequate nature, as if there were mistakes, and as if a transcendent entity, “God,” had allowed carelessness into the created order. When the phenomenal realm unveils itself as lacking explanation, these cracks in comprehension become the place where a sense of transcendence is intuited. Kehlmann addresses this topic in *Mahlers Zeit* as well; here, he writes:

Die alte Regel, dachte er. Die Natur hat keine Lücke. Die älteste Regel.
Keine Fugen, keine Sprünge, nirgendwo. Darauf ruht alles. Das weiß jeder
/ Wenn aber doch? Wenn es sie gibt? Sprünge und Risse, fallende
Maschen im Gewebe; wenn das Netz löchrig ist? Gesetze, sie halten alles
fest, ohne sie verschwänden wir im Chaos und in der Dunkelheit /...Nun

besaß er sie ganz und hatte die Lösung, und es war keine Theorie mehr, sondern Gewißheit.../ Ja, es gibt sie – die Zeugnisse der Schwäche. Der Unvollkommenheit im Aufbau, Fehler eines zerstreuten Planers, Beweise eines mangelhaften Entwurfes, schlecht durchgeführt, auf ungeschickte Weise verborgen. Die Regeln gelten nicht überall. Sie können aufgehoben werden. (24-25)

The protagonist David moves intellectually from the idea of stability and logical completeness to the conviction of instability and imperfection through an enlightening moment in which he acquires “Gewißheit.” Starting with an assumption that the world is put together and operates according to finely tuned rules, David begins to question this presupposition through his intuition that there may actually be “Risse,” unaccounted for porous elements within the natural system. Building from this intuition, David arrives at a new model of how the world is constructed, namely in an incomplete manner, with mistakes indicative of a planning entity who had failed to execute and put into motion a complete formation operating at all times according to definite rules. The rules behind the system are indeed, at various moments, “aufgehoben” (perhaps according to the Hegelian model), so that “der Geist” can be unveiled. Commenting on Kehlmann’s exploration of non-material realms lying beyond the empirical and his consideration of the effectivity of invisible, immaterial laws, Anderson writes: “...geht es Kehlmann darum, die verwirrenden Details der äußerlichen Realität zu durchschauen, um nach den unsichtbaren Regeln und Gesetzen einer absoluten Wirklichkeit zu trachten” (58). When, therefore, the narrator speaks of Gauß’ intuition of the presence of a God who had

somehow allowed mistakes to become evident in the created order, he points to the possibility of an absolute reality in which natural laws are precisely observed and upheld.

As he links the field of mathematics known as probability – a measurement of the likelihood, though not certainty, of an event occurring – to the laws of physics, Gauß once again indicates his transcendent predilections. Convinced of the immutability and universality of mathematic formulae, Gauß nevertheless recognizes that exceptions do transpire. As suggested previously, natural laws can be temporarily “aufgehoben;” certain rules are not inherently immune to unexplainable features and abnormalities: “Doch die Regeln der Wahrscheinlichkeit, fuhr Gauß fort...gälten nicht zwingend. Sie seien keine Naturgesetze, Ausnahmen seien möglich...Manchmal vermute er sogar, daß auch die Gesetze der Physik bloß statistisch wirkten, mithin Ausnahmen erlaubten: Gespenster oder Übertragung der Gedanken” (13). For this mathematician the laws of physics, at various moments, seem to be merely statistical.¹²⁹ They are estimates that a specific physical cause will necessarily have an expected effect. Certain physical phenomena will not always occur. However, statistically speaking they will happen more often than not. So, the allegedly unerring laws of physics can be compared with the laws of probability. Consequently, the laws of physics may be broken, when exceptions transpire, when, for example, the absurd takes place, with ghosts arriving and telepathy occurring. The

¹²⁹ In *Mahlers Zeit*, the narrator works with a very similar formulation when he considers the statistical nature of the law of entropy and its relationship to probability, questioning whether nature must act in a certain way: “Aber vergessen wir nicht: Das Entropiegesetz ist ein statistisches. Das Gas *könnte* sich ballen. Ein Eimer kaltes Wasser *könnte* plötzlich sieden. Die Karten könnten sich ordnen und der Affe die Summa Theological schreiben. Was dem entgegensteht, ist die Wahrscheinlichkeit, und nur sie; aber sollten ihre Gebote wirklich so unüberwindlich sein? Und woher überhaupt diese sklavische Neigung der Natur, diese völlige Einwilligung in die Vorschrift?” (76) It is probable that the absurd won’t occur, and yet the likelihood of absurdities not occurring are indeed only probabilities; they may be overcome.

mathematically inclined Gauß recognizes and acknowledges the possibility of such events. In an interview with Kehlmann, Kleinschmidt considers these supernatural possibilities, juxtaposed as they are to the measurable and empirical; he contends: “Und Gegenmächte der Vermessung, der Quantifizierung sind in erster Linie das Erzählen selbst, dazu Magie, Animismus, Zauberei, Theologie. Und in gewisser Weise die Philosophie.” To this comment, Kehlmanns responds:

Spuk müßte man noch nennen. Es treten immer wieder Gespenster in der „Vermessung der Welt“ auf. Der alte Gauß spricht am Anfang in einer halbträumerischen Betrachtung – als er mit seinem Sohn Eugen in der Kutsche nach Berlin reist – über Grenzfälle der Naturgesetze, von seltsamen Dingen, die schwer zu fassen und dennoch existent sind. Er spricht von Geistererscheinungen und von Gedankenübertragung. Eine Art Gedankenübertragung zwischen Humboldt und Gauß geschieht am Schluß ein ganzes Kapitel lang, ohne daß die beiden es merken – nur der Leser merkt es, wenn er aufpaßt (41).

Indeed, throughout his text, Kehlmann lets the haunted appear. Ghosts abound; the narrator writes: “Und erst nach einer Weile schien ihm [Humboldt] ein Gewirr gespenstischer Umriss darin aufzutauchen” (17). The residence where the Humboldt brothers grew up was filled with mysterious elements: “Niemand konnte leugnen, daß es im Schloß spukte. Nichts Spektakuläres, bloß Schritte in leeren Gängen, Kinderweinen ohne Ursprung...Unheimlicher als die Geister aber waren die Geschichten über sie” (21). The narration consistently creates these “Grenzfälle der Naturgesetze,” where the unexpected transpires, where those mysterious elements that cannot be grasped are

intuited as “dennoch existent.” As Gauß reflects on the natural laws of physics, he becomes aware of their ‘probable,’ permeable nature. The fixed laws of physics are, in actuality, border locations, intersections between two realms – the comprehensible and the incomprehensible – that converge when exceptions surface. By questioning the rigidity of the laws of physics, Gauß serves as a filter through which transcendence is perceived within immanence.

To provide an example of an exception to the laws of physics, the narration performs what Gauß presupposes, an “Übertragung der Gedanken;” a supernatural telepathic act occurs. The narrator reveals to the reader how Humboldt and Gauß subconsciously and unexplainably communicate. Humboldt and Gauß’ stories had crossed paths throughout the narration, as one or the other of them became aware of the others’ feats through newspaper articles or through reports provided by friends and acquaintances. Towards the end of the novel they meet in Berlin and then later in Russia. When Humboldt is in Moscow, he receives an award from the rector of the university, “einen Zopf aus den Haaren Peters des Großen” (290). Admitting to his traveling companion that the majority of this ‘science’ was mere nonsense, Humboldt says, “Gerede und Geschwätz, flüsterte Humboldt seinem Assistenten Ehrenberg ins Ohr, keine Wissenschaft. Er müsse Gauß unbedingt sagen, daß er jetzt besser verstehe. / Ich weiß, daß Sie verstehen, antwortete Gauß. Sie haben immer verstanden, armer Freund, mehr, als Sie wußten” (290). While speaking to Ehrenberg, Humboldt becomes aware of an idea he wants to communicate to Gauß, who, without even hearing about this revelation verbally from Humboldt, acknowledges that Humboldt has happened upon an essential epistemological insight. In this scene there is a temporal rupture: without formal

communication, the two scientists experience this transcendent act of reading each other's minds. Regarding this scene, Deupmann writes: "die Gedanken der Protagonisten tatsächlich derart ineinanderschieben, als würden sie auf telepathische Art miteinander kommunizieren... Während die Implikationen eines "seltsamen", unbegreiflichen Kosmos erzählerisch produktiv gemacht werden, geht das paranormale Phänomen bereits auf eine Technik über, die Zeit und Raum schließlich virtuell überwinden wird" (243). What transpires between Humboldt and Gauß proves to be paranormal, an activity moving porously between the bordered realms of space and time. In this sense Gauß' assumption that the laws of physics can be temporarily raised – that a transcendent occurrence within an immanent space can occur – proves to be accurate as it is performed at the text's diegetic level.

Humboldt, as well, though not as frequently as Gauß, manifests the intuition of a transcendent realm, a space not immediately accessible to the senses. While remaining positivist in thinking, he considers elements of the human experience residing beyond the purview of scientific inquiry. For example, when Humboldt discusses with his brother Wilhelm the assertions set forth in the book *L'homme machine* by La Mettrie, his brother contends that a person is a machine "ohne Seele." To this, Alexander responds, "Nein...Mit Seele. Mit Ahnungen und poetischem Gespür für Weite und Schönheit. Doch sei diese Seele selbst nur ein Teil, wenn auch der komplizierteste, der Maschinerie. Und er frage sich, ob das nicht der Wahrheit entspreche" (24). Humboldt's interest in the feasibility of the proposition of a soul belonging to the human 'machinery' – and whether this assertion may actually correspond to the truth – indicates his openness to those unseen, unverifiable elements operative in the human being. A soul, while invisible and

non-empirical, may be a truly existing entity, a necessarily constituent part of the human, one that awakens an individual to the artistic, poetice perceptions inherent in nature. With such considerations, the fictional Humboldt shares similarities with the historical Humboldt, who, positioned within the German Romantic movement, was quite aware of the connection between a person's position within nature and its effect on some inner element within the individual; "[the historical] Humboldt was profoundly impacted by Romantic convictions concerning the landscape of mood and convinced that an immersion in landscape painting and poetry furthered the study of nature" (Pizer 133). Hence, when the fictional Humboldt reflects on the possibilities of a soul and its activity during the human's experience in nature, he also draws a direct correlation to the historical Humboldt, who, in *Ansichten der Natur* (1874) – a text from which Kehlmann drew inspiration for the writing of his novel – recounts his travels in South America.¹³⁰ At one point in these writings he makes a vivid allusion to the spiritual side of humanity awakened when it comes into contact with certain elements of nature's beauty:

Auf gleiche Weise wirken Naturschilderungen stärker oder schwächer auf uns ein, je nachdem sie mit den Bedürfnissen unserer Empfindung mehr oder minder in Einklang stehen. Denn in dem innersten, empfänglichen Sinne spiegelt lebendig und wahr sich die physische Welt. Was den Charakter einer Landschaft bezeichnet: Umriß der Gebirge, die in dustiger

¹³⁰ In the second of his *Zwei Poetikvorlesungen*, Kehlmann reads an excerpt from Humboldt's work, demonstrating how the impressions that the text left on him were, at times, spiritual in nature: "Wie dieser erfüllt die Steppe das Gemüt mit dem Gefühl der Unendlichkeit und durch dieses Gefühl, wie den sinnlichen Eindrücken des Raumes sich entwindend, mit geistigen Anregungen höherer Ordnung" (158). Here, the natural environment moves and effects the inner side of humanity.

Ferne den Horizont begrenzen...alles steht in altem, geheimnisvollem Verkehr
mit gemüthlichen Leben des Menschen (123).

At the very end of this sentence Humboldt uses the word “gemüthlich,” drawing attention to the ‘Gemüt,’ the individual’s soul or disposition. Depictions of nature mirror themselves in the inner, sensory elements of the individual. The soul is in constant contact with those impressions given to it by the outside, natural world, and it is the soul then that opens the individual to the poetic contours of the beauty contained in physical space. Connecting the fictional Humboldt with the historical one, we can see how his serious reflections on the soul signal his interest in the transcendent, unobserved elements within the human experience.

Mindful of transcendent features latently present in the physical world, Humboldt performs his own transcendent experience, a superstitious act that, for the reader, appears both absurd and humorous, as it exhibits a crack in the rigidity of Humboldt’s scientific approach to the world. To the degree that he separates himself from rational thinking, he allows himself to fall into a porous posture, which becomes open to feelings and emotions that cannot be scientifically contained. Charles Taylor, in another context, writes: “the porous self is vulnerable, to spirits, demons, cosmic forces. And along with this go certain fears which can grip it in certain circumstances” (38). To be ‘porous’ is, for Taylor, to deal with one’s fears by resorting to intangible, cosmic forces. In this scene, Humboldt identifies a ‘mystifying’ tree, a “Drachenbaum” (47), that appeared from his perspective to be timeless in nature: “er war dagewesen vor Christus und Buddha, Platon und Tamerlan” (47). This tree temporally transcends historical ages, and, in doing so, resists death: “Alles starb, alle Menschen, alle Tiere, immerzu, Nur einer

nicht” (47). After giving this object a distinct and special coding, ‘hallowing’ it in many ways, he then, in an odd gesture, puts his cheek up against the tree as if to unveil his passive surrender to nature’s timeless forces and then becomes immediately incensed that he had fallen into such an anti-scientific posture: “[er] sah erschrocken um sich, ob ihn jemand gesehen hatte” (48). In accordance with Taylor’s terms, Humboldt wants to remain ‘buffered,’ and his participation in an irrational gesture goes directly against his rational, scientific framework. Describing this scene of Humboldt’s embrace, Kehlmann, in his interview with the *Spiegel*, contends it is a sign of Humboldt’s affectivity, his ability to show “Gefühle” and that he has the opportunity to think about “die Vergänglichkeit des Lebens.” Consequently, he “ist gerührt wie sonst nie.” The *Spiegel* then inquires, “Haben Sie selbst schon einmal einen Drachenbaum gestreichelt?” Kehlmann, adding a mystical, transcendent character to his response, replies: “Nein, aber einen anderen jahrhundertalten Baum in Mexiko. Das war eine ungeheure Erfahrung. Ich habe die Präsenz eines ungewöhnlichen alten Lebewesens gespürt. Ich verstehe seither, warum diese Orte als magisch gelten” (*Spiegel* 174-75). As an author, he explores those realms capable of temporarily drawing a person beyond his or her own ‘buffered’ reality, understanding that certain locations within nature can cause people to have personal experiences of transcendence. To an extent, by including one of his own experiences in the narration, the author demonstrates how a secular individual does not avoid expressing and narrating an irrational moment with no scientific explanation.

Investigating how Taylor’s concept of the ‘porous’ self provides a helpful framework for analyzing this text, I want to look at another incident indicative of how Humboldt demonstrates his awareness of spirits (non-terrestrial forces) and his

inclination to allow himself to be affected by them. Humboldt's curiosity leads him to the "Höhle der Nachtvögel," where "[die Toten] lebten" (72). Because of the legends surrounding this cave, the indigenous people caution against entering it. But, Humboldt is insistent, and the indigenous people concede. In an ironic twist of fate, Humboldt finds himself confronted with a supernatural entity whose origin stems from beyond the terrestrial sphere: "[er] sah die Gestalt seiner Mutter neben sich. Er blinzelte, doch sie blieb länger sichtbar, als es sich für eine Sinnestäuschung gehörte" (74). Presented as real, Humboldt's perception of this image from the dead indicates his openness to an otherworldly perception. Encountering the form of his mother suggests that this rigidly logical individual becomes momentarily porous, as he experiences an external, transcendent entity proving to be more than an illusion. Secured within the realm of immanence, he cannot extricate the supernatural from the parameters of his contained thinking. Towards the end of the novel, Humboldt – who had indeed been raised in a castle that "spukte" (21) – admits "Er sei mit Geistern aufgewachsen und wisse, wie man sich ihnen gegenüber benehme" (260). This Enlightened thinker, insistent on the principles of measurement to demarcate boundaries of knowledge, acknowledges the existence of supernatural, transcendent entities perpetually invading the sphere of immanence. Cast as a paradigmatic, secular figure, Humboldt remains cognizant of the affective capabilities of incalculable, immeasurable forces, and, in this sense, his measurement of the world is both secular – in that it broadens human understanding of physical space – and postsecular – in that it allows for traces of the immeasurable to surface in the measuring process and to thereby participate in the formation of knowledge in the secular age.

During his measuring endeavors Humboldt becomes aware of the world's unreliability – that nothing physical within it is dependable –, and, in these instances, he begins to reflect on the insufficiencies and inadequacies of an incomplete, imperfect realm, which ultimately serves to intimate at the possibility of a more complete space. This is especially clear during his exchange with the Jesuit, Pater Zea. Speaking to Humboldt about an earlier journey embarked upon by La Condamine to find the canal linking the Orinoco with one of the other major South American rivers, Pater Zea provides the proposition that the world's physical form may actually only be the replica of a preexisting (more exact) form:

die kehligen Laute und perfekt gezielten Giftpfeile aus dem Unterholz, die nächtlichen Lichterscheinungen, vor allem aber jene winzigen Verschiebungen in der Wirklichkeit, wenn die Welt für Momente einen Schritt ins Irreale gemacht habe. Dann hätten zwar die Bäume noch wie Bäume, die träge strudelnden Wasser wie Wasser ausgesehen, aber man habe es schaudernd als Mimikri von etwas Fremdem erkannt (117).

When the world becomes momentarily unreal, its illusory nature points to a reality beyond what is physically real. The phenomena serve as an imitation of the noumena. As Humboldt proceeds on his journey of discovery and measurement, retracing La Condamine's tracks, he comes into contact with a world that does, at times, reveal itself to be unreal, the imitation of some foreign entity. After measuring the whole night, using all of his scientific equipment, he comes to the conclusion that nothing is reliable, including the heavens in whatever dimension: “nichts sei zuverlässig, sagte er zu dem ihn aufmerksam beobachtenden Hund. Die Tabellen nicht, nicht die Geräte, nicht einmal der

Himmel. Man müsse selbst so genau sein, daß einem die Unordnung nichts anhaben könne” (129). Here, he clearly challenges many of the premises and foundations of science, suggesting that even the scientific tools meant to elicit new forms of knowledge are by their very nature unreliable. That which one studies and those items used to study what one intends to study are both insufficient and untrustworthy. Hence, in true Enlightenment form he strives for self-perfection, adopting a strict and precise humanism, to eliminate any chaos, any chance at inaccuracy. Yet, it is precisely the chaotic, chance elements of the world’s composition impelling Humboldt toward self-mastery and scientific precision that become those features allowing for the inference of transcendence, the intuition of “etwas Fremdem” – a reliable, transcendent world – within an immanent, unreliable space that, at times, appears to be a mere imitation.

With this secular strategy of scientific precision, Humboldt shares similar sentiments to those expressed by Julian, the protagonist in *Der fernste Ort*, who, as an insurance salesman, is incessantly involved in evaluating risk, and, while reflecting on the duration of life, he desires to eliminate anything that could be left to chance.¹³¹ While in possession of a calculating mindset, he remains quite interested in philosophical questions, believing they elucidate the world. Hence, he frequently reads Spinoza, and, while reading about “Substanz und Attributen, von Modi, die einander begrenzen,” he starts to identify the instabilities inherent within the world’s construction: “Immer wieder in der letzten Zeit hatte die Welt sich unverläßlich gezeigt...Buchstaben hatten ihn durch

¹³¹ Many of Kehlmann’s protagonists adopt this sense of the world’s fragility and unreliability; David, for example, in *Mahlers Zeit*, says: “Die Zeit würde unscharf werden. Weißt du, wir glauben immer, die physische Welt ist so sicher, so fest und durchgeplant. Und die Gesetze sind so verläßlich. Aber das stimmt nicht. Das ist alles sehr zerbrechlich. Sehr leicht zu beschädigen” (108).

geschickte Verrenkungen über ihre wahre Natur getäuscht" (49).¹³² Realizing his inadequacy to summarily cognize the world, Julian engages in introspection and self-conscious reflection. His growing conviction of the world's unreliable nature becomes reflected in his sense that his own body may not be reliable; what he physically is may not be what he actually is: "Zum ersten Mal begriff Julian, daß er selbst etwas anderes war als diese Stimmen in ihm, als die Bilder und Laute, die seine Erinnerung aufbewahrte, etwas anderes auch als seine Gedanken" (51). Keenly aware of the deceptive nature of empirical reality, he experiences a heightened awareness of his own self, wishing to understand what is real about himself and to come to terms with the dualistic mind/body split he senses. As he endeavors to clarify his "Being," he perceives the presence of an external observer. The narrator writes, "Etwas raschelte hinter ihm, aus dem Augenwinkel sah er eine Bewegung; er drehte sich um aber dort war nichts...Und plötzlich wußte er, daß er sterben würde...ein Körper war zerreibar, zerstörbar wie irgendein Ding" (41). Intuitions of a transcendent, furtive entity become linked to increased self-consciousness, his awareness of the implications of his own materiality. In another instance, the narrator writes: "Er horchte. Hatte er etwas gehört? Plötzlich kam ihm der Verdacht, daß er nicht allein war, daß jemand hier auf ihn wartete. Er machte einen Schritt in den Flur, der Fußboden knackte, noch einen. Im Wandspiegel zeichnete sich seine Gestalt ab" (51). Perceptive of a diffuse, vague agent, he reacts in such a way

¹³² Seen from Schleiermacher's perspective, Spinoza was also a genuinely religious individual, who, in many ways, reflected the model of religion that Schleiermacher, in the post-Kantian moment, was advocating: "Ihn [Spinoza] durchdrang der hohe Weltgeist, das Unendliche war sein An-fang und Ende, das Universum seine einzige und ewige Liebe, in heiliger Unschuld und tiefer Demuth spiegelte er sich in der ewigen Welt, und sah zu wie auch Er ihr liebenswürdigster Spiegel war; voller Religion war Er und voll heiligen Geistes" (31).

that he evokes the sense of there being two “Beings.” Then he sees his own form in a mirror, and, at this moment of self-reflection his self is divided; not only is he there but also the intuition of an externally observing agent. While this specific activity of self-conscious reflection may not necessarily be linked to transcendence, there are religious overtones in this pervasive sense of an “Other” when considering that Julian the protagonist wrote his dissertation on Jeroen Veting. This fictional Baroque philosopher and mathematician is, according to Marcus Gasser, derived from the figure, Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish scientist, philosopher and theologian: “Aus der Gestalt und Gedankenwelt Swedenborgs hat Kehlmann die Gestalt des Jeroen Veting hervorgehen lassen, dessen Werke regalschwer in Julians Schlafzimmer stehen” (56). And, like Julian, this Swedenborg had his own encounters with a surreptitious “Other” that revealed its presence at Swedenborg’s intuitive level. Regarding the historical figure Swedenborg, Gasser writes: “in einer Aprilmacht folgte ihm ein Unbekannter schweigend durch Londons Straßen, trat in seinem Haus vor ihn hin wie Hamlets Vater, offenbarte sich als Gott, als der Gott, und trug ihm die Mission auf, der im Atheismus versandeten Menschheit den Glauben an Christus zurückzugeben” (55). While Swedenborg’s confrontation with a revealing “Other” is blatantly religiously coded, Julian’s is not necessarily linked to a religious presence in the strict sense. However, in that he intimates at a presence that is not there, he evokes the intuition of transcendence that stems ultimately in many ways from his initial sense of the world’s instability and unreliability; that is, when the world loses its certainty, the protagonist engages in self-conscious reflection, at which point perceptions of an “Other” begin to surface.

To link this all back to Humboldt, after going on a bit of a tangent, I would say that Humboldt maintains a posture throughout the novel that fervently attempts to eliminate the world's chaos, instability, and unreliability. However, through his own encounters with external, supernatural entities, he too becomes aware that the world may indeed be the mimicry of something foreign; for this reason, towards the end of the novel, he admits: "Er müsse Gauß unbedingt sagen, daß er jetzt besser verstehe" (290). He now understands that the world is as it appears, namely unreliable, unpredictable, and only to a degree measurable; here, he reveals an awareness of his limitations in the face of what cannot be measured and contained, adopting thereby a religious posture, as outlined by Schleiermacher, when he writes: "Und es kann ihm als unrechtes gut nicht gedeihen, wenn er nicht auch seine Beschränktheit sich bewusst wird, der Zufälligkeit seiner ganzen Form, des geräuschlosen Verschwindens seines ganzen Daseins im Unermesslichen" (*Über* 30). Conscious of his own limitations and indeed the world's restrictions in exposing the entirety of what it is, Humboldt, realizing the impenetrability of the world, discloses his intuition of the possibility of another world, a transcendent space, where the immeasurable, the "Unermessliche," may be as real as the measurable.

IV. Transcendent position

When the text thematizes distance and elevation, it generates a transcendent perspective. The narrator presents two characters removed from terrestrial, ordinary space, where they, situated high above the empirical landscape, obtain a transcendent position. From this raised location the protagonist Gauß happens upon his revelation regarding the non-Euclidean nature of space. This 'revolutionary' idea then serves and orients the entire narration; it is the climactic discovery around which much of the novel

revolves. Therefore, looking at this transcendent position and how it is vaguely constructed along religious terms is essential to unfolding the traces of transcendence within *Die Vermessung der Welt*. Gauß enters into a dialogue with Pilatre de Rozier, who had come to town with Marquis d'Arlandes. De Rozier, known as the first aeronaut, and d'Arlandes were the first two individuals to travel in a hot-air balloon.¹³³ Their 25-minute journey on November 21st, 1783 took them 3,000 feet over the Seine and five and a half miles southeast of Paris. Taking advantage of the liberty afforded when writing fiction, Kehlmann uses his narrator to tell the story of how Gauß, as well, ventures with Pilatre into the atmospheric heights. The fictionalized staging must be emphasized here. From the perched vantage point of the hot-air balloon, the two of them look down at the sprawling landscape in front of them, occupying an uninhabited location of increased perception. They share a similar perspective to the one de Certeau describes, when he speaks of how city walkers are transformed into voyeurs when they ascend beyond the city's grasp. Referring to the view from the 110th floor of the former World Trade Center, he writes "His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more" (92). Height and distance make the world more legible, rendering new interpretations of traditionally perceived space. De Certeau points out the

¹³³ Prior to his journey with d'Arlandes, de Rozier had experimented with hot-air balloons on his own. On October 5th, 1783 he rose to a height of 80 feet, and he learned how to make the balloon rise or fall by increasing or reducing the size of the fire. D'Arlandes, a French army officer, persuaded the king to authorize the flight that was originally forbidden due to the potential danger (Smeaton 353).

intricate relationship between distance and knowledge, by suggesting that one knows more and is more ‘godlike,’ when one obtains a distanced viewpoint. He infers the transcendent when he draws into his analysis a divine figure presented as the one whose perspective is in possession of increased, ‘total’ knowledge. When secular, ordinary space is transcended an individual can arrive at new, innovative, and improved readings of the world, approaching, ever so slightly, the epistemological perspective belonging solely to a divine, ‘omniscient’ entity. And, this is exactly what happens when Gauß, accompanied by Pilatre, travels to this transcendent position. Here, Pilatre contends that, from their elevated status, they are able to experience reality from God’s perspective: “Das in die Ferne gekrümmte Land. Der tiefe Horizont, die Hügelkuppen, halb aufgelöst im Dunst. Die heraufstarrenden Menschen, winzige Gesichter um das noch brennende Feuer, daneben die Dächer der Stadt. ... / So sieht Gott die Welt, sagte Pilatre. / Er wollte antworten, aber er hatte keine Stimme mehr” (66). As the narrator describes what they are seeing, namely bent and curved space – space that is, in Bachelard’s words, “[*vast*]...a word that brings calm and unity; it opens up unlimited space” (197) – Pilatre provides an interjection that clearly links their position to transcendence, “So sieht Gott die Welt.” Situated here, Gauß carries out scientific inquiry to arrive at an alternative understanding of space. As the narration generates a transcendent perspective, it simultaneously carves out the space for the perpetuation of scientific discovery.

Gauß, the speechless scientist, excited to have increased access to the natural elements present before him, does not want to descend back to *terra firma*, to a constricted and limited view. Instead, he wishes to reflect further on what is occurring in the space visible before him. As he identifies the abundance of stars and the myriad of

formulas governing these stars' trajectories around the celestial bodies they orbit, he becomes aware of the infinite number of lines connecting objects within the terrestrial and celestial systems:

Und der Raum selbst: eine Gerade von jedem Punkt zu jedem, von diesem Dach zu dieser Wolke, zur Sonne, zum Dach zurück. Aus Punkten Linien, aus Linien Flächen und aus Flächen Körper...Jeder [Stern] verging und alle folgten ihren Bahnen, und wie es Formeln gab für jeden Planeten, der um eine Sonne, und jeden Mond, der um einen Planeten kreiste, gab es auch eine Formel...die all diese Bewegungen beschrieb (66).

Space is comprised of an immense number of points and lines, which, when connected, form the surfaces and bodies evident to the senses. Mathematic formulas stand behind the geometric trajectories observed. Gauß, intellectually fascinated with the phenomenal realm, adopts an extremely philosophical, contemplative approach to space, remaining open to the extraordinary and sacred. Regarding this type of posture, Habermas writes:

Die Philosophie empfiehlt als ihren Heilsweg das der Kontemplation gewidmete Leben – den bios theoretikos...Die Theorie verlangt Abkehr von der natürlichen Welteinstellung und verspricht den Kontakt mit dem Außeralltäglichen. Die kontemplative Vergegenwärtigung der Proportionen von Gestirnbahnen, kosmischen Kreisläufen überhaupt, behält etwas von den sakralen Ursprüngen der Theorie (*Nachmetaphysisches* 39).

Adopting this ‘bios theoretikos,’ Gauß, positioned at a distance from the natural, ordinary perspective of the world, comes into contact with the extraordinary, as he contemplates atypical proportions, participating thereby in the sacred act of theorizing.

Gauß’ particular considerations of planetary space in *Die Vermessung* reveal strong parallels with a previously cited quote from *Beerholms Vorstellung*:

...der Raum. Diese seltsam geheimnislose Weite. Jeder einzelne Punkt da draußen, wo auch immer, so fern wie nur möglich, liegt auf einer geraden Linie, die von mir ausgeht. Ein mathematischer Strahlenkranz erstreckt sich von mir über den Horizont in eine sinnlose Unendlichkeit. Unzählbare Kurven gleiten durch die Leere und krümmen sich auf Linien zu, die sie nicht erreichen (240).

Beerholms’ discussion of “der Raum” serves as a precursor to Gauß’ in *Die Vermessung*, in which there is direct reformulation of certain terms and ideas contained in *Beerholms*. In this text emphasis is placed on the subjectivity of the individual’s perception of the geometric dimensions of space. The reader is exposed to the idea that the curves gliding through empty space bend themselves towards lines they are never able to meet.

These geometric constructions of reality have consistently fascinated Kehlmann, who demonstrates in many of his literary texts explicit interest in exploring how and if lines connect, and whether, for example, specifically parallel lines ever touch. Once again, in *Beerholms Vorstellung*, Kehlmann reveals some of his initial interest in parallel lines: “Ich wollte mir wohl über etwas klar werden, über eine Möglichkeit, die in der Ferne Gestalt annahm, über eine irritierende mathematische Konstellation, über zwei Parallelen, die sich in einer nebligen Unendlichkeit berühren wollten” (37). Parallels

cross paths in a vague, infinite realm. The inference here is that individuals can only access the empirical – that parallels never touch. Yet, an intuition of parallels meeting persists, and this is an indication of possibility lying beyond immediate perception. Kehlmann’s novel, *Unter der Sonne*, similarly presents the possibility of parallel lines touching: “Das Auto zog heran, der Stein fiel, zwei klare geometrische Bewegungen, zwei Linien, die sich treffen würden, die einem Punkt zustrebten, und plötzlich eigenartig langsam” (33). It is therefore easy to see that one of the protagonists in *die Vermessung*, Gauß, is constructed very much out of the author’s earlier expressed interests in determining whether it is possible for two parallels to meet. Finally, in *die Vermessung*, while considering the various dimensions of space from his divine location, Gauß receives insight, and becomes firmly convinced that all parallel lines do indeed meet: “Pilatre hielt sich den Arm und gab Gauß einen schmerzhaft festen Klaps. / Er wisse es jetzt, sagte Gauß. / Na was denn? / Dass alle parallelen Linien einander berührten. / Fein, sagte Pilatre” (67). Gauß, removed from the masses of humanity, has become the voyeur-god described by de Certeau – the pseudo-divine individual who “must disentangle himself from the murky intertwining daily behaviors and himself alien to them” (93). He becomes the nexus of a revelation. As mentioned before, this mathematical revelation underlies much of the story built up around Gauß within the text.

He ends up writing his major tome on this topic, *Disquisitiones Arithmeticae*, and, traveling to Königsberg, he attempts to introduce his ideas to Kant, who does not seem to be interested in his seminal revelations, “seine Theorie des gekrümmten Raumes” (Schneider 54), a theory proving to be radically different from the one advocated by Kant. While Kant resists reading the book and giving Gauß’ thoughts a fair shot, the

count, “der Graf von Ohe zur Ohe,” a divinely coded figure (who will be addressed later in this chapter) does end up reading Gauß’ work and acknowledging its tremendous insights for the scientific community. Ultimately then it is a transcendent figure that identifies the significance of Gauß’ ‘Copernican’ ideas regarding the intersecting of parallel lines. At the diegetic level, as if to confirm the tremendous importance of Gauß’ revelations regarding the eventual intersecting of parallel lines, the narrator mimimetically performs this parallel structure by detailing the story to the reader in such a way that the scientists’ lives analogously correspond to each other until they finally intersect during their meeting in Berlin. According to Pizer, “The two men do not meet until some two-thirds of the way through the novel...Kehlmann employs a somewhat dialectical approach in narrating the lives of the two scientists” (132). Their lives parallel one another and go “in entgegengesetzte Richtungen” (Schneider 54), until just like parallel lines in space, according to Gauß’ model, they meet at one specific point.¹³⁴ Interestingly, their lives do cross beforehand, but their meetings always occur through a supernatural instance of telepathy. Identifying these telepathic acts and pointing to the influences of Magical Realism on Kehlmann’s work, Rickes writes:

Stark vereinfacht, meint es [Magical Realism] jene Eigentümlichkeit der lateinamerikanischen Literatur, das Wunderbare vollkommen natürlich in die Wirklichkeit zu integrieren und – meist in begrenztem Umfang – z.B. Verwandlungen in Tiere oder Pflanzen, Geisterscheinungen oder

¹³⁴ While they do not cross paths until later in the novel, the figures do happen upon each other at various moments, i.e. they confront the other through newspaper articles or through word of mouth. Gauß learns of Humboldt’s activity (63, 87, 151) and Humboldt reveals an awareness of Gauß’ activity (196).

Gedankenübertragungen [my italics] ohne sog. Markierung in das Handlungsgeschehen einzubeziehen (73).

The miraculous is integrated into reality when unexplainable instances transpire within immanent space, when, for example, Humboldt and Gauß' parallel lives intersect through the incomprehensible, transcendent activity of telepathy. For this reason, turning to the topic of Magical Realism in this novel will prove to be profitable in further unfolding those traces of transcendence within the text.

V. Magical Realism: the fantastic as the transcendent

Kehlmann's text – when evoking the transcendent through depictions of the fantastic, the absurd, and the extraordinary – reveals intertextual inspiration from the literary movement known as Magical Realism.¹³⁵ This literary category has been variously defined. For Roh, Bontempelli, and the surrealists emphasis was on the power of the artist to unveil the supernatural determinations of reality. According to Carpentier, this historical literary movement resulted through the clash between the colonized and the colonizers, when European, rationalist practices and institutions faced the significantly different epistemologies and historical experiences of non-Western cultures (*Routledge Companion to World Literature* 349-354).¹³⁶ Based on the two interpretations of this category, this genre then not only emphasizes the unveiling and exploration of unreal realms, but also thematizes the perspectives and feelings engendered through cultural

¹³⁵ According to the *Routledge Companion to World Literature*, Magical Realism is an aesthetic strategy of the postcolonial literary field. For Homi Bhabha it is the “literary language of the postcolonial world,” and for Fredric Jameson, it is an “alternative to the narrative logic of contemporary postmodernism” (349).

¹³⁶ In 1925 the German art critic, Franz Roh, first defined *Magischer Realismus*. He focused not on narratives, but on post-expressionist works of art. *Magischer Realismus* was capable of reconciling impressionism with the “expressionist attempt to project the artist's spiritual subjectivity onto the sensible world” (*Routledge*, 350).

confrontation. Kehlmann's novel plays with the strategies of Magical Realism.¹³⁷

While thematizing the Western encounter of a non-Western environment, the text counterposes a strictly scientific with a radically fantastic sphere: "Kehlmann konfrontiert Humboldts realistische-rationalistische Sichtweise mit dem magischen Realismus, der die Natur in ihrer geheimnisvollen Erscheinung in der Narration mimetisch umsetzt" (Costagli 270).¹³⁸ Configuring nature as a secretive space revealing as much as it conceals, Kehlmann employs a writing style "imitative of the postcolonial expressive technique of Latin America," (Holmes 198) marked as it is by a respect for and fascination with the unknown. Emphasizing the role of Magical Realism in *Die Vermessung*, Kehlmann, in the first of his *Zwei Poetikvorlesungen*, claims:

Und außerdem gibt es darin magischen Realismus in Überfülle: Humboldt ist umgeben von Gespenstern und Monstern, die er nach Kräften ignoriert. Zweimal erscheint ihm der Geist seiner Mutter. Einmal trifft er ein veritables Seeungeheuer. Und in einer fiebrigen Passage sehen er und Bonpland in der Nachmittagshitze über dem Orinoko ein Ufo. Außerdem findet zwischen Humboldt und Gauß ständig eine Gedankenübertragung statt, von der sie beide nichts wissen, die nur der Leser bemerkt (147).

¹³⁷ Considering the presence of magical realism in Kehlmann's prior works, Gunther Nickel writes: "Die beiden ersten Romane Kehlmanns handeln von der Grenze zwischen dem Unwahrscheinlichen und dem Unmöglichen. Wer sie überschreitet, täuscht sich, betrügt oder ist wahnsinnig. Aber es ist nicht immer leicht auszumachen, wo sie liegt und wann sie durchbrochen wird. Bei Kehlmann wirkt sie zudem verstörend durchlässig, in jedem Fall so verschwommen, daß sich ihr exakter Verlauf nicht klar ausmachen läßt. Der dadurch erzielte Effekt ist der eines magischen Realismus" (Ruf, 269). By producing permeable borders between the real and the unreal, the probable and the improbable, the possible and the impossible, Kehlmann's texts create porous spaces in which what is external can be drawn into what is internal.

¹³⁸ Holmes offers a similar analysis: "'Magical' elements of Kehlmann's Latin American landscape contrast with Humboldt's scientific approach to the space" (198).

Here, Kehlmann indicates that his protagonists consistently confront the supernatural as they subjectively experience the absurd and incomprehensible. Consequently, it will be beneficial to analyze how the novel makes use of Magical Realism.

In the novel the hints of Magical Realism become most apparent in the scene when Humboldt travels up the Orinoco River.¹³⁹ From a spatial perspective, this natural body represents a frontier space; regarding this, de Certeau writes:

The river, wall or tree *makes* a frontier...It has a mediating role. But this actor, by virtue of the very fact that he is the mouthpiece of the limit, creates communication as well as separation...he establishes a border only by saying what crosses it, having come from the other side. He articulates it. He is *also* a passing through or over. In the story, the frontier functions as a third element. It is an ‘in-between’ – a ‘space between,’ *Zwischenraum*...Within the frontiers, the alien is already there, an exoticism or sabbath of the memory, a disquieting familiarity (127, 129).

Symbolically, the river, as an actor, represents a transcendent space, where crossing over can and does transpire. The river continually presents anew to those ensconced within a specific location on the river that which is alien, unexpected, and unknown. The river is

¹³⁹ In *Beerholms Vorstellung*, Kehlmann, as an author, demonstrates a strong interest in the magical elements of existence and how they reveal a fusing of the invisible world of forms with the visible one: “Was bedeutet Magie? Sie bedeutet schlicht, daß der Geist dem Stoff vorschreiben kann, wie er sich zu verhalten hat, daß dieser gehorchen muß, wo jener befiehlt. Was unvernünftig scheint, ist in Wahrheit Offenbarung der Vernunft. Was sich als Aufhebung der Naturgesetze gibt, ist eigentlich deren glanzvolles Hervortreten aus dem Gestrüpp des Zufalls. Die unsichtbare Welt der Formen und die nur zu sichtbare Welt des Formlosen verschmelzen für einen kurzen, kaum wirklichen Moment. Die unendliche Macht des Geistes zeigt sich eine Sekunde lang ganz unverstellt. Und mit ihr die Wahrheit, daß kein Ding in der Welt die Kraft hat, seiner inneren mathematischen Pflicht zu widerstehen” (40). Unveiled here is the narrator’s premonition of the distinctly spiritual elements operative within the visible forms apparent in phenomenal space.

able to communicate what is new to experiencing subjects, as it carries the unknown past into the present. It is not insignificant then that the narrator selects this border space frontier, the Orinoco, to be the place where Humboldt picks out individuals who will help guide his expedition forward. He chooses oarsmen whose names are linked to the authors of Magical Realism, that literary movement fluctuating between the realms of immanence and transcendence, that literary movement interested in communicating novel representations of reality: “Die vier sahen einander an, dann Humboldt. Sie hießen, sagte der mit dem Zylinder, Carlos, Gabriel, Mario und Julio, und sie seien gut, aber billig seien sie nicht” (106). In his interpretation of this scene, Rickes makes the connection between these figures and their relationship to Magical Realism when he writes:

Geht man davon aus, dass die vier Ruderer Julio [Cortazar], Mario [Vargas Llosa], Carlos [Fuentes] und Gabriel [Garcia Marquez] die gegenwärtige lateinamerikanische Literatur repräsentieren, treten zugleich die Charakteristika dieser Literatur hervor. Ihre zentralen Merkmale sind die immense Erzählfreude und die Einbeziehung des Übernatürlichen. Die Geschichten, die sich die vier Ruderer „unaufhörlich“ erzählen, handeln immer wieder von der Welt des Wunderbaren, das zugleich – z.B. durch Augenzeugen – als real beglaubigt wird (72).

Magical Realism narrates the supernatural into the natural realm. In the act of continual narration, these oarsmen/authors, associated with Magical Realism, incorporate into secular, ordinary existence episodes of the miraculous, seemingly absurd and yet, apparently believable. In the novel, such supernatural stories, according to Humboldt, include the following: “die fliegenden Häuser, bedrohlichen Schlangenfrauen und

Kämpfe um Leben und Tod” (109). While these images are seemingly utterly fictitious and unreal, they nevertheless gain a degree of feasibility and potentiality, as the protagonists have subjective encounters with unexplainable elements that force them to seriously consider the validity of such supernatural absurdity.

Humboldt, while highly skeptical of the narrations delineated by his oarsmen, has his own supernatural experience. When Bonpland collects plants, Humboldt takes one of his typical walks. Engaged in his scientific pursuits, Humboldt suddenly finds himself standing in front of a jaguar, which instead of attacking him, “legte...den Kopf auf die Vorderpfoten” (107). Humboldt reverses course and makes his way back to the boat where the crewmembers are prepared to use their weapons to shoot the jaguar. Humboldt immediately prevents this from happening, because “Der Jaguar habe ihn gehen lassen” (108). Reacting to Humboldt’s seemingly absurd gesture, “Bonpland murmelte etwas von Aberglauben und machte die Leinen los. Die Ruderer grinnten” (108). Bonpland obviously believes they should have shot the jaguar, and, due to Humboldt’s insistence against the act, he thinks that Humboldt has somehow become superstitious. Why do the oarsmen grin? The Magical Realists perhaps grin, because they find it humorous that an individual from the “scientific” West has been somehow transformed in an environment where the supernatural and miraculous continually occur. However, with an extremely scientific mindset, Humboldt wishes to remove the traces of his own superstitious intuitions. Positioned once again securely within the boat, Humboldt reflects back upon his immediate experience and “die eigene Furcht [kam] schon nicht mehr verständlich vor” (108). He had no reason to be afraid; his life was never in jeopardy. The event could be scientifically explained. That being the case, when considering how he will portray

this occurrence in his journal, he wants to rewrite the events, “wie sie sich hätten abspielen sollen” (108). To a degree he wants to write away his own uncertainty and his momentary superstitious premonitions.

Earlier in the novel, a similar instance demonstrates Humboldt’s desire to exclude mention of the supernatural when recording his ‘scientific’ journey. When he and the rest of his crew experience “ein Seeungeheuer,” they are all fairly convinced that they had only confronted this entity in their imaginations: “Vielleicht die Dünste, sagte Humboldt, oder das schlechte Essen. Er beschloß, nichts darüber aufzuschreiben” (45). Sceptical of the supernatural, Humboldt only records factual events, those that can be empirically experienced, reproduced, and mediated. Regarding this, Holmes remarks: “While Kehlmann’s descriptions of Humboldt and the New World repeatedly present fantastical elements, Humboldt attempts to deny steadfastly all these aspects in his pursuit of scientific truth...Humboldt continues to insist on the truth of what can be measured scientifically, while denying any aspect of the New World that belongs to the realm of art and literature” (200). After coming to a conclusion as to how he would linguistically reconstruct what just took place – i.e., how he would scientifically record an event that had initially been subjectively perceived to be supernatural –, Humboldt reflects more thoroughly on the utter incomprehensibility of what he experienced and his inability to scientifically contain it.

Humboldt and his crew continue up the river, and, on the way, the rowers – i.e., the novelists, the Magical Realists – “hörten nicht auf, einander wirre Geschichten

zuzuflüstern, die sich in seinem [Humboldts] Bewußtsein festsetzten” (109).¹⁴⁰

Overhearing these stories, Humboldt believes them to be crazy, absurd, and to have nothing to do with reality. Yet, when he tries to remove them from his consciousness, to extricate them from his rational mode of thinking, he is subconsciously reminded of the jaguar that had had every opportunity to end his life: “Und jedesmal, wenn er es doch schaffte, die fliegenden Häuser, bedrohlichen Schlangenfrauen und Kämpfe um Leben und Tod beiseite zu schieben, sah er die Augen des Jaguars. Aufmerksam, klug und ohne *Gnade* [my italics]” (109). Adding this word “Gnade” in his interpretation of the jaguar’s appearance, Humboldt incorporates a distinctly religious concept into his experience. He thereby evokes the sense that the jaguar, appearing to be ungracious, had, in actuality, somehow been gracious to him by letting him live. So, no matter how absurdly the Magical Realists may present reality, their interpretations and insights may just have a specter of truth in a world in which small miracles may still occur at the subjective level, where moments of transcendence are felt and experienced by individual subjects.

VI. Consciousness of a transcendent observer

Presenting references to the protagonists’ relationship with their “creator,” their “inventor” – the one narrating them into existence –, the chapter, “Die Steppe,” displays

¹⁴⁰ Commenting later on these stories and the Magical Realists’ perpetual tendency to narrate, Humboldt, representing a strictly hermeneutic view, wishing only to arrive at the meaning contained within such abstract stories, reckons: “Er habe den Eindruck, sagte Humboldt, hier werde ununterbrochen erzählt. Wozu dieses ständige Herleiern erfundener Lebensläufe, in denen noch nicht einmal ein Lehre stecke?” (114) Interested in facts and concrete occurrences, Humboldt finds it very difficult to comprehend the meaning and purpose of invented stories. Later, the narrator writes: “Geschichten wisse er keine, sagte Humboldt” (128). Then, he recites “das schönste deutsche Gedicht” (128), a poem by Goethe, in which, according to Humboldt “Es komme keine Zauberei darin vor, niemand werde zur Pflanze, keiner könne fliegen oder esse einen anderen auf” (128). Such a poem resonates with his spirit. Indeed, Humboldt lives – or presents himself as living – in a world diametrically opposed to the one occupied by the Magical Realists.

figures possessing the sense of some sort of transcendent observer.¹⁴¹ While the religious coding is difficult to identify, there is the pervasive sense of distinct realms, a real world occupied by created figures and a space beyond the real, a space in which the creating instance dwells. As the narration merges these two realms, the transcendent is felt within the immanent. A transcendent observer is intuited, or intimated at, in the moment of self-conscious reflection. The episode begins with Gauß contemplating why his beloved Johanna, who had died, does not somehow manifest herself in the material realm. In fact, Gauß senses that the dead, generally speaking, “verschmähnten...diese erstklassige Vorrichtung” (282). At this point in the scene, Gauß is under the impression that he exists in the first-rate, primary order of reality and that the dead, occupying another realm, remain uninterested in terrestrial reality. Then, Gauß’ perception of the world becomes porous: “das Firmament schien ihm von Rissen zerfurcht” (282). After this occurs, he begins to consider another possibility, i.e. that the world of the dead may in fact be more real than the world in which he finds himself: “Vielleicht sprachen die Toten ja nicht mehr, weil sie in einer stärkeren Wirklichkeit waren, weil ihnen diese hier schon wie ein Traum und eine Halbheit, wie ein längst gelöstes Rätsel erschien” (282).¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Two other scenes demonstrate how the narrator identifies an external, observing agent. When Johanna and Gauß engage in intercourse on their wedding night, there seems to be a third being present with them in the sexual act: “So habe sie es sich nicht vorgestellt, sagte sie mit einer Mischung aus Schrecken und Neugier, so lebendig, als wäre ein drittes Wesen mit ihnen” (150). And, when Humboldt and Bonpland traverse across a rock crest, Bonpland, in his pre-delusional state, senses a splitting experience, a division of his person into three parts: “Bonpland stellte fest, dass er eigentlich aus drei Personen bestand: Einem, der ging, einem, der dem Gehenden zusah, und einem, der alles unablässig in einer niemandem verständlichen Sprache kommentierte” (175). In this semi-spiritual, reflective act an observing, external agent is suggested.

¹⁴² Gasser writes: “Für Gauß bedeutet der Tod, dass endlich der Schleier der Maja fällt und er all das zu verstehen beginnt, was ihm auf Erden nur wie ein dämonisches Puzzle erschienen war” (13).

Now, he considers whether it would be more accurate to believe that those who had died are actually in a real place – a stronger, intangible reality – and that for them the empirical world is only a dream, a puzzle they have already solved. The dead may decide to get involved in the world, but “Die Klügeren verzichteten” (282). Then, after sitting down on a rock, Gauß seemingly falls asleep and begins to daydream. Theorizing on the nature of daydreaming, Bachelard, in another context, suggests: “the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the marks of infinity” (183). Continuing on with his analysis of what it means to be in this dream-like state and adding an element of transcendence to his description, Bachelard writes: “[the daydream] is *original contemplation*...In analyzing images of immensity, we should realize within ourselves the pure being of pure imagination...in this meditation, we are not ‘cast into the world,’ since we open the world, as it were, by transcending the world seen as it is, or as it was, before we started dreaming...Immensity is within ourselves” (184). Daydreaming allows an individual to transcend – to access an alternative, transcendent perspective – by moving him or her beyond the world, so that he or she can receive a more expansive impression of an immanent space whose view is typically stifled and limited.

Entering into his own dream, Gauß experiences an inversion, a moment when – becoming aware of the creating instance behind his created status – he questions his created reality, believing that it may not be reality as it is. He is transported out of the world (perceived, as earlier cited, by those who are dead as a dream) into a new reality,

so that in his dream he is actually moved out of a dream (the world), able to experience an unreality that will actually shed light on the reality he has always occupied:¹⁴³

Der Tod würde kommen als eine Erkenntnis von Unwirklichkeit. Dann würde er begreifen, was Raum und Zeit waren, was die Natur einer Linie, was das Wesen der Zahl. Vielleicht auch, warum er sich immer wieder wie eine nicht gelungene Erfindung vorkam, wie die Kopie eines ungleich wirklicheren Menschen, von einem schwachen Erfinder in ein seltsam zweitklassiges Universum gestellt. Er blickte um sich. Etwas Blinkendes zog über den Himmel, auf gerader Linie, sehr hoch oben... Da war auch etwas Unsichtbares, über das er sich keine Rechenschaft geben konnte: ein elektrisches Schwingen, zu erkennen nur an einem schwachen Unwohlsein, einem Schwanken in der Realität selbst (282).

In this dream Gauß conceives a scenario, in which he, upon his death, would have access to the realm of the noumena, the Kantian *Ding an sich*. Moving beyond shadowy copies of ideas and objects, he would become aware of how things exist in reality. He would realize as well that his own personality, his own narrated existence, had been an invention, and an unsuccessful one at that, as it represented only the phenomena, the mere copy of a more real substance existing in the first-class universe occupied by those outside of phenomenal space. Reflecting on the nature of his self, Gauß here clearly participates in a metaphysical consideration – an “Abweisung des Naturalismus und

¹⁴³ In Kehlmann’s system, the “Unwirklichkeit” is often associated with a realm that may be more real than the existing realm; according to Gasser, “So suchen alle Gestalten Kehlmanns das Weite, das Licht und die Leichtigkeit, eine fünfte Himmelsrichtung, ihr Ultima Thule, das die Welt endlich der Unwirklichkeit überführt” (13).

Rückgang in die Subjektivität” (Habermas 19). In this dream state, he is overcome by the sense that his created identity, his invented being, points to some sort of transcendent observer/inventor, which has caused his existence. According to Kaiser, neither Humboldt nor Gauß are happy when they are aware of their existence in reality, one that is perceived to be second class: commenting on the above quote, Kaiser writes, “In diesem Satz wird der Welterschöpfer gemäß einer alten poetologischen Metapher als Deus Artifex, Künstler und Erfinder zitiert, hier aber als zweitklassiger” (85). Gauß’ contemplations in his dream state reveal two insights: one, his perceived createdness, and two, his existence in a seemingly inadequately created order. In this way, both revelations point to the presence of an overarching, transcendent instance. After detailing this dream, “mit einem Schreckenslaut erwachte er” (283). These considerations belong to a dream world; they are not real. This sense of being a semi-real individual created by a weak inventor and being placed in a second-class realm is nothing but a fiction, a dream.

Before assessing the narrator’s next move in this chapter, I want to briefly provide a broadened contextual framework for considering this moment of self-consciousness experienced by Gauß. This is an instance of heightened subjectivity; the self becomes aware of itself. Regarding this activity, and exploring both the philosophical and religious elements operative in such a turn to the inner self, Habermas writes:

Erstens: Das Selbst ist nur zugänglich im Selbstbewußtsein. Da nun diese Selbstbeziehung in der Reflexion nicht hintergangen werden kann, ist das Selbst der Subjektivität nur das Verhältnis, das sich zu sich selbst verhält.
Zweitens: Ein solches Verhältnis, das sich zu sich selbst verhält, als zu dem Selbst im eben angegebenen Sinne, muß entweder sich gesetzt haben

oder durch ein anderes gesetzt sein...Beide Interpretationen verweisen in eine religiöse Dimension und damit auf eine Sprache, die vielleicht die der alten Metaphysik ist (*Nachmetaphysisches* 33).

An individual accesses his or her self in self-consciousness. According to Habermas, one cannot move behind (or, look on the other side of) this act of self-consciousness. Hence, the subjective self always only consists of a relationship, one in which the self relates to its self. In order for this ‘relating’ to occur, to be initiated, there must be something given, and, in Habermas’ estimation, this always has a religious dimension to it. Seen in this light, Gauß, in his moment of self-consciousness participates in an inherently religious activity as he attempts to make sense of his created self situated within an illusory reality.

As the scene continues within the same chapter, the narrator bridges Gauß’ dream-state recollections to another scene occurring at the diegetic level. When conversing at a ceremony in St. Petersburg, Humboldt speaks to the Tsar about the limitations of a scientist: “man dürfe die Leistungen eines Wissenschaftlers nicht überschätzen, der Forscher sei kein Schöpfer, er erfinde nichts, er gewinne kein Land” (291). A scientist is neither a creator nor an inventor. Humboldt acknowledges this and then experiences this. Further in the narration, the narrator muddles everything together and creates a sense of total confusion within the dialogue only to show his own control over the course of the narration, to demonstrate that he indeed is the true inventor:

Er [Humboldt] stand auf, doch während seiner etwas konfusen Tischrede dachte er an Gauß. Dieser Bonpland, hätte ihm der Professor wohl geantwortet, hatte allerdings Pech, aber können wir beide uns beklagen? Kein Kannibale hat Sie gegessen, kein Ignorant mich totgeschlagen. Hat

es nicht etwas Beschämendes, wie leicht uns alles fiel? Und was jetzt geschieht, ist nur, was einmal geschehen mußte: Unser Erfinder hat genug von uns. Gauß legte die Pfeife weg (292).

At the moment when Humboldt thinks about Gauß, the narrator changes the ‘voice,’ or ‘focalization’ (employing the language of narrative theory), and Gauß, as the professor, answers Humboldt, as if Humboldt had just asked him a question, one that apparently nobody has access to except for the narrator/creator. From this point onwards, we are no longer in Humboldt’s frame of reference but Gauß’. And, according to Gauß, he and Humboldt have nothing to complain about; their stories went relatively well in comparison to Bonpland’s. Then, directly addressing Humboldt, Gauß poses a rhetorical question and follows it with a statement regarding the nature of their created existence; both of them are dependent on their “Erfinder,” and have, apparently, become annoying to this narrating, inventing instance, which throughout the entirety of the novel has used ‘free indirect thought’ (indirekte Rede) to generate confusion: “Its characteristic ambiguity can result in interesting and complex confusions over shifting points of view. The relationship between the two voices of narrator and character can cause the well-recognised effects of irony and empathy” (Palmer *Routledge*). Designing this scene, with its uniquely confusing shifts in points of view, the narrator uses his figure Gauß, who had just previously reflected in his dream on his created status (even using the faintly theological term “Erfinder”), to expose the creator behind both his and Humboldt’s narrated, invented existence. The religious, transcendent dimensions of this scene may not be immediately evident. In fact, one could definitely read this narrative intervention in a multitude of ways, without seeing it as indicative of any transcendent instance.

However, based upon one of the categories of transcendence pointed out by Wesel Stoker in his essay, "Culture and Transcendence: a Typology," there is one form of transcendence, "Transcendence as Alterity" (20), which opens up the door for considering the narrator, at least in this instance, as a divinely-coded entity. According to Stoker's definition of this type of transcendence, "The relationship between transcendence and immanence is no longer viewed as an opposition. Rather, one has learned to think beyond the opposition, whereby the wholly other can appear in every other" (20). Indeed, when the narrator presents himself as the "Erfinder," he constructs and lays the groundwork for the existence of a relationship between the immanent realm of the text – the story at the diegetic level – and the transcendent realm that he occupies, over and above the story. Demonstrating the porousness of this immanent/transcendent dichotomy, as he presents himself as the topic of his protagonists' conversation, the narrator opens up the possibility for considering the various ways in which this dichotomy can be transgressed and punctured, as it is observed and experienced in the reality of living within the secular, immanent framework, when, for example, subjects express an intuition of their invented/constructed nature.

Between the two episodes, consisting, at the one end, of Gauß' consideration of his existence in a second-class universe and his placement therein by a "schwachen Erfinder" and, on the other end, of his assertion "unser Erfinder," the creator of the novel seemingly enters into the internal diegetic story world in one of the characters presented to the reader by the narrator. This takes place during Humboldt's wanderings in Central Asia, where he confronts a "kalmückischen" Lama, "der die Unerlöstheit der Natur verkündet" [und] "unterstellt dem berühmten Weltreisenden Allwissenheit und macht ihn

zur Christusparodie, indem er dem Europäer zumutet, ein totes Hündchen aufzuerwecken. Dieser Lama behauptet, auch Humboldts Nichtverstehen der Situation zu verstehen” (Kaiser 85). The author/narrator, at the extradiegetic level, receives representation by the Lama – at the intradiegetic level – who encourages Humboldt to raise his beloved dog from the dead. With all of his “enlightened” capabilities Humboldt ought to be able to accomplish this. However, Humboldt contends that he does not possess these capabilities, that indeed his knowledge is limited and that he is neither omniscient nor omnipotent; “Er könne das wirklich nicht...Er könne nichts und niemanden aus dem Tod wecken!” (286). Instead, revealing himself as the omniscient one, aware of Humboldt’s limitations, the lama/narrator says that he understands what Humboldt is saying: “Er verstehe, sagte der Lama, was der kluge Mann ihm damit sagen wolle” (287). Frustrated with the Lama’s responses – as he more than once says “Er verstehe” when Humboldt asserts his inability to raise his dog from the dead – Humboldt suspects the lama is playing a game with him, a game he cannot withdraw from. In the same manner, these figures, with an omniscient narrator fully aware of where his story will head and what his protagonists will experience, cannot withdraw from the world of the narration. Explaining this aspect of the narration more thoroughly, Kaiser writes:

Hat schon Gauß mit seiner einsamen Selbstbetrachtung einen Spalt aus der autonomen Welt des Romans nach draußen auf den vermutlich zweitklassigen Autor dieser Welt geöffnet, so treibt diese Lama-Episode das Romangeschehen noch weiter, bis zur Begegnung der gedichteten Figur mit dem Dichter. Denn dem zweiten Blick erweist sich der kalmückischen Lama als eine Kostümfigur und zugleich eine Karikatur

des Erzählers...als Lama, was tibetisch der unübertreffliche Lenker und Lehrer heißt, tritt er in seine eigene Schöpfung ein. Letztlich ist der Dichter ja derjenige, der von außen in die von ihm geschaffene Welt eingreift, in ihr schaltet und waltet und seine Figuren durchschaut. Und besonders Kehlmann ist ein leidenschaftlicher Durchschauer (85).

What Gauß performs in the earlier scene in this chapter paves the way for an understanding of what is going on between Humboldt and the Lama. As the narrator relays Gauß' dream sequence, he shows how Gauß' understanding of reality has become porous and that he is open to the belief that there is something such as an author beyond the autonomous realm of the novel. With this precedent, the narrator moves to the next scene, in which he then apparently enters into this fictional realm. The inventor confronts the invented and he does this behind the veil of the lama's performance that has its own unique, religiously coded elements. In this sense, the narrator of the novel seems to show how the real, empirical world may be narrated, formed and constructed by an entity that, at times, reveals itself in the spaces that it has constructed.

As readers we have access to one interpretation of this scene through an interview between Kehlmann and Sebastian Kleinschmidt, who makes the observation: "Gleichzeitig zeigt sich die Spanne der intellektuellen Möglichkeiten, die der Mensch hat. Er besitzt die Vertikale nach unten, hin zum Tier, zur Pflanze und zum Element, und er schafft sich die Vertikale nach oben, hin zur Unendlichkeit" (28). Individuals, with a vertical perspective, can look both downwards and upwards; they can look into unseen, eternal realms. To this observation, Kehlmann responds: "Aber er kann sich diese per Anschauung nicht mehr zugänglichen Bereiche nur mangelhaft vergegenwärtigen.

Allenfalls per Analogie” (28). What is inaccessible, according to Kehlmann, can only be insufficiently represented, or brought into view. Kleinschmidt is surprised that Kehlmann, as an author, would believe that these depictions are somehow flawed: “Was heißt hier mangelhaft. Ist nicht der Künstler ein Schöpfer imaginärer Welten?” (28) And, Kehlmann’s response is the following:

Ja, der Künstler als Schöpfer. Damit habe ich übrigens im Roman immer wieder gespielt. Als Gauß am Schluß der „Vermessung der Welt“ sich in einem besonders hellen Moment plötzlich als ein von einem zweitklassigen Schöpfer in ein zweitklassiges Universum gestelltes Wesen empfindet, geht es um das Mangelhafte der imaginären Welt gegenüber der realen. Meine Romanfigur Gauß kommt sich vor wie eine nicht ganz gelungene Erfindung, wie die Kopie eines ungleich wirklicheren Menschen – was ja auch ganz und gar zutrifft. Der zweitklassige Schöpfer, das bin natürlich ich, das zweitklassige Universum ist mein Buch. Und das Original zur Kopie, das ist der reale Mensch Gauß, die geschichtliche Figur (28).

To some degree, Kehlmann provides an entirely secular interpretation of this scene, contending that his literary work is a self-contained world derived from his imagination, a fictional world reflective of a real world event. Here he calls himself a second-class creator, indicating the flawed nature of his attempt to reconstruct reality. Obviously, this interpretation is entirely plausible, particularly as it stems from the author himself. However, I would contend that the narrator has not coincidentally included transcendent traces pointing in a distinctly religious direction, by very clearly evoking the

creature/creator dichotomy and infusing it with specifically religious phenomena (i.e., raising something from the dead). And, just as these transcendent moments cannot be avoided, there are indeed moments when the imaginary world becomes the real world, when what humans imagine – for example, when a new geometric model representing non-Euclidean space is expounded – becomes real; these are slippery categories that indicate the possibilities of the presence of a transcendent, first-class creator, who may be able to inflect itself into its own created order through those who, exploring their imagination, remain open to a porous realm.¹⁴⁴

In the above-mentioned quote Kehlmann mentions his activity of playing with the idea of author as creator while constructing his novel *die Vermessung*, and he does indeed demonstrate this activity not only in this work, but also in one of his previous works. In *Ruhm*, for example, we see this quite clearly; “Rosalie geht sterben” depicts a story in which an elderly woman approaches her final days. With pancreatic cancer, “eine[r] unheilbare[n] Krebserkrankung” (Hayer 80), she is on the verge of a death that may actually be avoidable, depending on how the narrator, Leo Richter, wants to maneuver the story. At the outset, the narrator has Rosalie make the decision to check herself into a clinic that will assist her with her death. The narrator commences the story with “Von all meinen Figuren ist sie die klügste” (51), clearly delineating his interdiegetic position in relation to the narrative; he, as author, is part of the story: “Ich sollte wohl erwähnen, daß

¹⁴⁴ Indicating the possibilities of this transcendent perspective, Kehlmann states at another point in this interview: “Das Wesen über ihm (der Mensch) ist aber nicht als sichtbares Gegenüber gegeben. Dennoch stellt sich der Hypothetische Gedanke eines höheren Wesens ein, sobald man mit einem Tier zu tun hat, und zwar einfach dadurch, daß einem klar wird, wieviel es gibt, was man dem Tier nicht erklären kann, was es nicht begreift...Und so bleibt es nicht aus, daß man sich qua Analogie fragt: Wie mag einer, der genauso weit von mir entfernt ist wie ich vom Tier, die Welt sehen?” (27).

ich Herrn Freytag erfunden habe...Dazu kommt, daß ich eigentlich nicht die Art von Schriftsteller bin, bei dem die Fakten stimmen" (53). Throughout the diegesis, his main figure interacts with him: "Deshalb, zur frühen Morgenstunde, wendet sie sich an mich und bittet um Gnade. / Rosalie, das liegt nicht in meiner Macht. Das kann ich nicht. / Natürlich kannst du! Das ist deine Geschichte" (55). Later in the story another dialogue between Rosalie and the author occurs: "Gibt es keine Chance, fragt sie mich. Es liegt doch alles in deiner Hand. Lass mich leben! / Das geht nicht, antworte ich irritiert. Rosalie, was hier mit dir geschieht, ist dein Zweck. Dafür habe ich dich erfunden. Theoretisch könnte ich vielleicht eingreifen, aber dann wäre alles sinnlos" (64). Throughout the story Rosalie entreats the narrator to decide to sacrifice the story for the sake of her life. She wants him to let her live; he, on the other hand, wants a creative story. According to Hayer, "er [zeigt] sich im Habitus eines unerbittlichen Marionettenspielers, der literarische Figuren schafft, um sie sodann der Geschichte wegen skrupellos aufzuopfern" (80). In the midst of the story, there are clear references to outside interferences. The "dünner Mann mit einer Hornbrille" (68) – with angelic characteristics, "Ein freundlicher Mann...Ein Suchender, ein Helfer, ein Reisender" (70) – causes Rosalie's creator to question the origin of this foreigner; he wants to know "wer der Kerl am Steuer ist, wer ihn erfunden hat und wie er in meine Geschichte kommt" (71). Allowing these invasive gestures to pour into his story, the narrator demonstrates how creators can generate interferences. Authors are those figures who can open up immanent realms to the transcendent. And, indeed, this author, becoming himself a transcendent reference point, does step into his story and ultimately intervenes; "Obgleich der Autor aus seiner "olympischen Höhe" heraus während Rosalies letzter Reise kaum zu

erweichen ist...übt er sich zuletzt überraschenderweise als Deus ex Machina in göttlicher Generosität” (Hayer 80). He allows Rosalie to live, and then, with deep theological coding, he remarks:

und mir scheint es für einen Moment, als hätte ich richtig gehandelt, als wäre *Gnade* [my italics] das Höchste und als käme es auf eine Erzählung weniger nicht an. Und zugleich, ich kann es nicht leugnen, kommt mir die absurde Hoffnung, daß dereinst jemand dasselbe für mich tun wird. Denn wie Rosalie kann auch ich mir nicht vorstellen, daß ich nichts bin ohne die Aufmerksamkeit eines anderen, ja daß meine bloß halb wahre Existenz endet, sobald dieser andere den Blick von mir nimmt – so wie eben jetzt, da ich diese Geschichte endgültig verlasse, Rosalies Dasein erlischt (76).

Willing to surrender an interesting narration for the infusion of grace, the narrator uses his story as an allegory to express the wish that his own creator would not let him disappear when the creator finishes narrating the story about the narrator. This desire for grace from a creating instance perspicuously reveals the traces of transcendence in this story, and this story serves as a very vivid example of how the created/creator dichotomy makes its way into Kehlmann’s narrations, which frequently deal with protagonists who are conscious of a transcendent perspective.

VII. The Last Judgment scene: a performance with transcendence

Interweaving a scientific discovery into a well-known religious trope, Kehlmann’s narrator constructs a quasi ‘Last Judgment’ scene, by incorporating references to Kafka’s *Das Schloss* into his story, as he connects his figure Gauß – “der staatliche Landvermesser” (183) – with Kafka’s K. – “der Landvermesser...den der Graf hat

kommen lassen" (*Schloss* 7). While Kafka's narrator does not fulfill K.'s existential strivings to approach the count, Kehlmann's narrator situates Gauß in front of the count, Graf von der Ohe zur Ohe, in order to ultimately demonstrate how Gauß' specific scientific perspective on non-Euclidean space and scientific advancements generally speaking are seen favorably in the eyes of this transcendent instance. Earlier in the novel, long before arriving in the count's presence, Gauß expresses his religious cynicism, doubting whether one could rationally adopt a theological worldview, assuming that any sort of God associated with such a perspective would not be able to truly handle the rigors of science, as this being would be unable to answer the questions and theories science had been able to generate and propagate throughout the course of history. While highly suspicious of the possibilities of a Last Judgment, Gauß nevertheless considers how just such an event could transpire: "Er dachte ans Jüngste Gericht. Er glaubte nicht, daß so etwas veranstaltet werden würde. Angeklagte konnten sich verteidigen, manche Gegenfragen würde Gott nicht angenehm sein. Insekten, Dreck, Schmerz. Das Unzureichende in allem. Selbst bei Raum und Zeit war geschlampt worden. Falls man ihn vor Gericht stellte, gedachte er, ein paar Dinge zur Sprache zu bringen" (99). In this hypothetical scenario those accused of discovery and the creation of new ideas would have their day in court, and, at that point, they would be able to defend themselves and their ideas, addressing God with their own questions, which he perhaps would find to be unsettling. Perchance, he would not even be able to provide a response to certain allegations. For example, would he be able to justify why there are apparent mistakes in the construction of space and time? How indeed would God respond to those seemingly unanswerable questions and to the suggestions he had made a mistake? Considering this

scene, the *Spiegel* connects the ideas contained here more directly to the author and asks Kehlmann: “Welche unbequeme Frage würden Sie Gott stellen?” Kehlmann replies: “zum Beispiel würde ich ihn fragen: Wenn wir denn schon unbedingt sterben müssen – warum müssen wir dann vorher auch noch alt werden?” (176). Playing along with the *Spiegel*’s inquiry, Kehlmann reveals his own fascination with religious questions and expresses his scepticism as to whether God has formed a completely logical system and, consequently, whether it is even feasible to adopt a theological perspective of the world. Like Kehlmann, Gauß, if placed in such a position, would be clearly unafraid to call religious claims into question. If, indeed, he were one of these defendants, then he too would most undoubtedly have a few ideas to discuss with God. Ironically, just such a ‘juridical’ confrontation seemingly transpires.

In the chapter, “Der Garten” Gauß moves through various spaces, both intertextual as well as subconscious, before arriving in front of the count, a figure that, in the course of the text’s movements, becomes a divinely-coded transcendent instance.¹⁴⁵ “Wegen der Landvermessung” (181), Gauß arrives “an die Tür des Herrenhauses,” where he, as a government representative, intends to speak with Graf von der Ohe zur Ohe, in an attempt to convince him of the state’s need to acquire from him “einige Bäume und einen wertlosen Schuppen” (181).¹⁴⁶ Seeking to identify this “Graf,” Anderson provides

¹⁴⁵ Regarding this chapter, Kehlmann states: “Das Kapitel „Der Garten“ ist eine Kafka-Umkehrung. Der Landvermesser – dieses Wort fällt übrigens nie, es ist immer vom Geodäten die Rede – kommt zum Herrenhaus und wird abgewiesen” (“Diese sehr ernsten Scherze,” 161).

¹⁴⁶ The historical records show this meeting taking place between these two historical figures: “Im Brief des historischen Carl Friedrich Gauß über den Besuch beim Grafen Peter Hinrich von der Ohe zur Ohe vom 29. September 1822 ist von einem Garten keine Rede” (“Wer ist Graf,” 92). In his account of the mathematician, Biermann, as well, cites one of Gauß’ letters: “Ganz so schlecht, wie ich es gefürchtet hatte, ist der Aufenthalt

one reading of his name, "...könnte man vielleicht das Tautologische im Namen „von der Ohe zur Ohe“ als Kehlmanns Wink auf das göttliche Nicht-Definierbare seiner Figur auffassen: auf einen Gott, ‘der ist wer er ist’” (66). Reminiscent of Derrida’s trace, “unnameable movement of difference itself” (*Writing* 93), this individual is defined by two terms that are not different; the name reveals itself to be constructed circularly, as it moves ceaselessly away from its origin and then back to it. The count’s name therefore remains, to an extent, undefined. Gauß seeks to enter into the presence of this figure whose name carries its own particular traces of transcendence. Unlike Kafka’s figure – who is never allowed to enter the non-existent castle (which, in many ways, parallels Derrida’s idea regarding “the presence-absence of the trace” (*Grammatology* 71)) in order to speak with the “God-like figure” Klamm – Gauß gains immediate access to the count.¹⁴⁷ Upon his arrival, Gauß, possessing a revolutionary, anti-Kantian idea concerning non-Euclidean geometry, finds himself in a space, a “Herrenhaus,” reminiscent of Kafka’s absent castle, which, according to Sussman, “functions as the paradigm of non-Euclidean geometry in which all structural categories are subverted by endless displacement” (*Krauss* 3). Indeed, the count’s servant leads Gauß through just such circuitous, labyrinthine spaces: “Sie kamen eine Treppe hinunter, dann wieder hinauf, dann wieder hinunter. Die Anlage sollte wohl Besucher verwirren, und vermutlich

hier (in Barlhof) doch nicht, ohne Vergleich besser, wie in Ober-Ohe...Dort lebt eine Familie, dessen Haupt „Peter Hinrich von der Ohe zur Ohe“ sich schreibt (falls er schreiben kann), dessen Eigentum vielleicht 1 Quadratmeile groß ist” (103).

¹⁴⁷ Discussing the various images of Klamm, Krauss refers to his divine nature when she writes: “Frieda projects her desire to be with K. into a belief in destiny created by Klamm: ‘Wohl aber, glaube ich, ist es sein Werk, dass wir uns unter dem Pult zusammengefunden haben; gesegnet, nicht verflucht sei die Stunde.’ The landlady even asks K. not to utter Klamm’s name, which can be seen as a reference to the biblical commandment” (24).

funktionierte das bei Leuten ohne geometrische Vorstellungskraft ganz gut” (183).

Finally, they arrive in the count’s sleeping chambers. A brief introduction takes place between Gauß and the count, and then, like Kafka’s *Landvermesser*, he must sleep outside, where he has difficulty sleeping, because “er fürchtete sich vor Geistern, und wie jeden Abend fehlte ihm Johanna” (184).¹⁴⁸ Vacillating between descriptions of Gauß’ perception of reality and unreality, the narrator constructs this sleeping scene in such a way that it provides a transcendent, porous framework, through which the ensuing events can be viewed. The narrator does not let the reader definitively determine whether Gauß is awake or in a dream: “Ein quälender Traum” (184) awakens Gauß and “Er sah sich selbst auf der Pritsche liegen und davon träumen, daß er auf der Pritsche lag und davon träumte, auf der Pritsche zu liegen und zu träumen” (184). These layers of removal reveal the elusiveness of the real from what is unreal and move the narration into a Kafkaesque direction.¹⁴⁹ Regarding this tradition, Kehlmann states: “Die größte literarische Revolution der zweiten Hälfte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, das waren die Erzähler Südamerikas, die an Kafka anknüpften und die Grenzen zwischen Tages- und Nachtwirklichkeit, zwischen Wachen und Traum durchlässig machten. Romane als große

¹⁴⁸ In an interview Kehlmann expresses his interest in those historical figures who are in some way afraid of spirits; regarding Gödel, the Austrian logician, mathematician, and philosopher, Kehlmann states: “Daß der größte Logiker seit Aristoteles Furcht vor Gespenstern hatte, ist ein faszinierendes Thema. Es hat etwas Komisches, aber auch etwas Unheimliches, weil sich für mich sofort die Frage stellt: Wenn Gödel glaubt, daß es Gespenster gibt, wer bin ich, daß ich sagen darf, Gödel ist verrückt, es gibt keine Gespenster. Es ist schon ein ziemlich starkes Indiz für die Existenz von Gespenstern, daß Gödel an sie geglaubt hat” (130).

¹⁴⁹ A similar type of porousness between the real and the unreal is also expressed in *Beerholms Vorstellung*: “Ich habe die Grenze zwischen dem Traum- und Alptraumreich meiner Phantasie und der Wirklichkeit, der sogenannten, immer bemerkenswert durchlässig gefunden. Ich bin nicht imstande, Unterscheidungen zu machen, wo ich keine Unterschiede sehe oder nur höchst unverlässliche” (193). The permeable border existing between dreams and reality makes differentiations difficult.

Träume, in denen alles möglich ist” (*Zwei Poetikvorlesungen* 136). As readers we have no idea where we are, or, better said, we are clueless regarding Gauß’ condition and the state in which he finds himself, when the narrator writes: “Als er schließlich erschöpft auf dem Bettrand saß und in den sonnigen Morgenhimmel sah, konnte er das Gefühl nicht loswerden, daß er jene Wirklichkeit, in die er gehörte, um einen Schritt verfehlt hatte” (185).¹⁵⁰ Having confronted a series of alternative realities in a dream with manifold levels, Gauß awakens from this dream with the lingering supposition that the reality in which he finds himself may not indeed be the actual reality. In this sense he occupies a transitional space, performing thereby a transcendent gesture, before he moves into the physical space of the count.

In this second encounter with the count, Gauß addresses a figure whose divine qualities are inconspicuous. Entering into the count’s presence, Gauß seemingly walks into a hallowed environment; “Als er sich zwischen zwei Palmenstämmen hindurchschob, blieb er mit der Jacke hängen und wäre fast in einen Dornenstrauch gestolpert. Dann stand er auf einer Wiese. In einem Lehnstuhl...saß der Graf” (186). With the “Palmenstämmen” the narrator creates a pseudo paradise and then situates the count in this space. The “Dornenstrauch” compares with the religious symbol of the “Dornbusch,” which “signalisiert die Anwesenheit Gottes” (Rickes 41). Interpreting this scene as an ironic “Jüngste Gericht,” Rickes writes that “Gauß, dem nur scheinbar ein Stuhl angeboten wird, muss barhäuptig vor dem Herrn des ‘Herrenhaus(es)’ stehen bleiben. Der alte Graf...ist Gott, der alles über Gauß und seine Sünden weiß. Graf

¹⁵⁰ The idea of a fusion between two realities also finds representation in Kehlmann’s earlier novel, *Unter der Sonne*, “Ungläubig lächelnd ließ er sich fallen. Und fiel. Die Welt um ihn wich zurück; er fühlte, wie der Augenblick sich dehnte und die Wirklichkeit sich in eine andere Wirklichkeit schob” (122).

Hinrich von der Ohe zur Ohe erweist sich jedoch als ein *deus absconditus* bzw. verborgener Gott, der das Interesse an der Welt und seinen Geschöpfen verloren hat (*Metamorphosen* 41). Identifying the theological symbols inherent in this scene, Ricketts provides an appropriate commentary revealing the underlying transcendent elements operative in this encounter. The count does indeed seem to know everything about Gauß. Knowing for example that Gauß had served under Napoleon, the count says, “Patriotismus...Interessant. Besonders, wenn ihn jemand einfordere, der bis vor kurzem französischer Beamter gewesen sei” (187). Later in the conversation the count reveals his omniscience when he asks Gauß about what kind of questions and complaints Gauß had for him: “Er habe gehört, der Herr Geodät [Gauß] wolle ihm etwas sagen. / Bitte? / Es sei schon eine Weile her. Beschwerden, Ärgernisse. Eine Anklage sogar. / Gauß rieb sich die Stirn. Ihm wurde allmählich heiß. Er hatte keine Ahnung, wovon dieser Mann sprach” (189). It appears as if the count knows what Gauß had previously thought when Gauß was considering the Last Judgment and the types of questions and complaints he would present to God if such an event were to occur. At this point, Gauss grows uncomfortable; this ‘omniscient’ count has too much information.

Going back to Ricketts’ understanding of this scene, I would differ with his final interpretive remark in which he contends that the count, representing an absent God, shows no interest in the created order, and I believe that this is exactly where we gain an understanding of this text’s approach to issues of religion in the postsecular, contemporary framework. While Gauß makes a few scientific observations, the count speaks with him and commends him for his work: “Übrigens habe er [der Graf] große Bewunderung für die Vermessungsarbeit. Es sei eine wunderliche Beschäftigung,

monatelang mit Instrumenten herumzuziehen” (188). This divine-like figure expresses an interest in the practices, procedures, and instruments belonging to science. Where this interest stems from is difficult to determine. However, we are aware of his exile “in der Schweiz” (186) because of “die französische Einquartierung” (186). When he arrives back in Germany life has changed: “jetzt hätten die Dinge sich vorübergehend geändert” (186); society has been secularized. Rickes points this out when he writes: “Allegorisch gedeutet, ist Gott durch Atheismus und Naturwissenschaften, für die Napoleon Bonaparte steht, aus Deutschland vertrieben worden. Die Schweiz wird wegen ihrer christlichen Traditionen als Exil genannt” (*Metamorphosen* 41). His return from exile marks a changed perspective towards the relationship between religion and science. After spending time in Protestant Switzerland, he returns back and experiences his own secularization. He has not emptied his traces of transcendence – as will become clear in his act of grace – while adopting a secularized, scientific framework; with a religious perspective he now genuinely values what science can offer and unfold. This perspective is further affirmed when the two of them begin to speak about Gauß’ monumental work, “*Disquisitiones Arithmeticae*,” the conversation ensues in the following manner:

Er [Gauß] müsse weiter, seine Zeit sei knapp! / So knapp wohl auch nicht, sagte der Graf. Wenn man Verfasser der *Disquisitiones Arithmeticae* sei, so müsse man es eigentlich nie wieder eilig haben / Gauß sah den Grafen verblüfft an. / Bitte keine unnötige Bescheidenheit, sagte der Graf. Der Abschnitt über die Kreisteilung gehöre zum Bemerkenswertesten, was er je gelesen habe. Er habe da Gedanken gefunden, von denen sogar er noch habe lernen können / Gauß lachte auf. / Doch doch, sagte der Graf, er

meine es ernst / Es erstaune ihn sagte Gauß, hier einen Mann mit solchen Interessen zu treffen / Er solle lieber von Wissen sprechen, sagte der Graf. Seine Interessen seien sehr beschränkt. Doch er habe es immer für nötig gehalten, seine Kenntnisse weit über die Grenzen seiner Anteilnahme hinaus auszudehnen (188-189).

There is a lot packed within this sequence. First, Gauß seems to receive his day in court. After earlier pondering whether he would ever have the chance to defend himself and his ideas in front of a divine figure, he now receives the opportunity to communicate his ideas, and he is heard...or at least his book has been read. In fact, this divine symbol has seemingly accepted Gauß' argument and identified its significance for intellectual advancement. Second, and similarly, we have a reversal of the earlier scene between Gauß and the pastor, a scene in which the religious figure encouraged him to not become too proud of his scientific accomplishments. The logic then employed baffled Gauß. Now, he finds a religiously coded figure who says that he should not have "unnötige Bescheidenheit," because the work he had written was truly a scientific masterpiece, which the count had actually read. In fact, after leaving the count's presence, Gauß, with enthusiasm, remarks: "Der hatte also die *Disquisitiones* gelesen!" (190). Then the narrator interjects: "Er hatte sich noch immer nicht ans Berühmtsein gewöhnt" (190), most likely because the lingering effects of his strict religious upbringing were preventing him from doing so. Third, we have a figure, symbolic of some transcendent instance, who takes interest in knowledge to which he had not previously been exposed: Deupmann writes, "Der junge Geodät Gauß begegnet in dem Grafen von der Ohe zur Ohe einer...Figur, die ...umfassende Kenntnis seines Lebens und müheloses Verständnis seiner

mathematischen Überlegungen besitzt und sich explizit als Verkörperung unbegrenzten, interesselosen Wissens einführt" (254). The Count expresses openness to learning and obtaining more knowledge, indicating that ideas and constructions regarding transcendence can be built upon, that they can be expanded and improved. We have a transcendent instance interested in going beyond the borders of what is presently known, desiring to develop new concepts and models in both the realms of immanence and transcendence. In this sense the count's name corresponds well with his interest in expanding the borders of his comprehension: Deupmann further develops this idea when he writes:

Der tautologische Name „von der Ohe zur Ohe“ umschreibt den Kreis einer Allgegenwart und eines Wissens, das weder Anfang noch Ende hat. Daran gemessen erscheint die Vermessung der Welt in der Tat als Vermessenheit („und ihr werdet sein wie Gott“, Gen 3,5). Und doch bezeichnet er eine Koinzidenz von Theologie und höherer Geometrie, wie sie Gauß an späterer Stelle expliziert: „Der Raum biege und die Zeit dehne sich. Wer eine Gerade zeichne, immer weiter und weiter, erreiche irgendwann wieder ihren Ausgangspunkt" (254).

A line, while seemingly capable of moving endlessly into infinity, ultimately connects to its starting point. This circular geometrical form, discovered by Gauß, is reflected in and through the count's name, one containing its beginning and its end within itself. The count therefore, as a transcendent instance in immanent space, represents an encircling of knowledge that is ever expanding.

One more final and significant element of this scene reveals how this transcendent instance is religiously coded. The Landvermesser Gauß had come to the count in order to purchase the count's trees and shed, those items that were hindering Gauß from properly executing his surveying activity. What Gauß ends up experiencing is, ironically, some sort of supernatural act of grace. Towards the end of the conversation this becomes quite clear: the count says "Und was die Bäume anbelange, die gebe er gratis. / Und den Schuppen? / Den auch. / Aber warum, fragte Gauß und erschrak über sich selbst. Was für ein dummer Fehler! / Brauche man immer Gründe? Aus Liebe zum Staat, wie sie einem Bürger wohl anstehe. Aus Wertschätzung für den Herrn Geodäten" (189). Those items he has requested from the count Gauß receives for free, and this gift is based on no specific reason; there is no motivation behind the count's gracious gesture. In many ways this scene parallels the one in *Ruhm*, where, in "Rosalie geht sterben," the narrator hopes for some gracious interfering presence. The scientifically minded Gauß, indeed, seems to experience it, and in that sense a transcendent moment in an immanent space.

VIII. Conclusion

When he addresses the reasons behind the popularity of his novel, Kehlmann contends that it is because people are genuinely interested in the text's "wissenschaftlichen Weltzugang." The novel focuses almost exclusively on questions concerning the role of "Vernunft" in the modern world. Continuing on with his answer, Kehlmann cannot avoid the novel's relationship to religion: "Wir erleben die Wiederkehr von soviel religiösem Fanatismus...Aber es scheint eben doch in dieser Situation eine große Sehnsucht nach Aufklärung zu geben. Das ist es eben, was alle Hauptfiguren in der

Vermessung der Welt gemeinsam haben: Ihr Weltzugang ist geprägt durch Denken und Forschen nicht Glauben” (Vogel 44). As I demonstrated at the outset, Kehlmann’s protagonists are resolutely secular figures, paradigms of the Enlightenment. Hence, issues of faith, fundamentally orientated around those questions contrary to reason, do not emerge. When the narrator does present religious representations, he reformulates traditional symbols, imaginatively placing them in a secular, scientific context. At the same time, Kehlmann’s text assesses these Enlightenment figures critically, identifying, through them, both the positive and negative elements of a movement, which served as a critical step in disenchanting the world. Relating the narration to the secular discourse, the novel operates, in many ways, in a manner consistent with Habermas’ understanding of the current state of modernity: “Auf der anderen Seite hat sich aber auch eine radikale Vernunftkritik ausgebreitet, die nicht nur gegen die Aufspreizung des Verstandes zur instrumentellen Vernunft protestiert, sondern Vernunft überhaupt mit Repression gleichsetzt – um dann fatalistisch oder ekstatisch bei einem ganz Anderen Zuflucht zu suchen” (*Nachmetaphysisches* 16). In its presentation of Enlightenment figures, whose discoveries and ideas are indeed revolutionary, the novel, through gestures of parody and irony, shows how a critical look at the instrumental nature of reason is necessary. At the same time, within the modern moment, reason (along with all of its corresponding accessories) still remains the order of the day. Yet, it would be a mistake to assume that intimations at transcendence have disappeared. These protagonists, whose approach to the world is principally based on a rational, scientific worldview, offer a performance in which they both explore and are influenced by ruptures in the natural system, cracks creating a space of porousness through which transcendence, the “ganz Anderes,” makes

its way into the everyday experiences of these natural scientists dedicated to understanding the immanent realm.

Chapter Three

A Subject and his Projected Image of an Absolute Metaphor

In *Blumenberg* (2011), Sibylle Lewitscharoff – winner of the 2013 Georg-Büchner-Preis – presents a lion as a figure demanding interpretation. Reviewing Lewitscharoff’s text, Ijoma Mangold claims she “verleiht dem Löwen sogar, indem sie ihm keine metaphorische Bedeutung zuweist, umso mehr reine Präsenz” (*Zeit*). Observed in this light and disassociated with metaphor, the lion, endowed with subjectivity, takes on a life of its own, as it exerts an influence through its “pure” presence. While existing, from one perspective, as a subject, the lion is simulatenously presented as an image whose origin lies in the mind of the fictional protagonist Blumenberg, a “Löwenphilosoph” (*Apostoloff* 147), who lives and teaches philosophy in the provincial German city of Münster.¹⁵¹ In this way, the lion stands for what is imaged anthropomorphically. In another review of the text, Löffler perceives the lion as “keine Halluzination, kein Phantom, keine Chimäre. Er ist auch keine Allegorie, keine Metapher und kein Fabellöwe. Er ist eine poetische Fiktion – ein Zeichen, ein Wunder, eine Epiphanie” (*Stimmen*). Here, the lion is not allegorical; it does not represent an abstract

¹⁵¹ The lion in *Blumenberg* is not the first such figure in Lewitscharoff’s oeuvre. In *Apostoloff* (2009), the “I” narrator is fascinated with lions, because they are capable of rendering unique insights. Prefiguring *Blumenberg*, she discusses Hans Blumenberg’s interest in lions: “Welch einzigartige Erkenntnisse vermag ein gezähmter Löwe zu verschaffen. Heilige und Philosophen vertrauen diesbezüglich auf den Löwen. Warum ist Hans Blumenberg so ein aufregender Philosoph? Er war Löwenphilosoph. Nachts hatte er einen versöhnlichen Löwen neben seinem Schreibtisch liegen...In der beständigen Nähe eines Löwen würde selbst ich mir mehr zutrauen” (147). A tamed lion, an inimitable figure, can provide new dimensions of knowledge. The narrator recognizes here, as is the case in *Blumenberg* as well, a lion’s affective capabilities. He, for example, induces trust and provides the philosopher with creative potential. The novel *Blumenberg* seems to be an extension of this tangential thought in *Apostoloff*. The narrator of *Blumenberg* wants to explore more fully the various dimensions of Hans Blumenberg’s lion.

concept. Instead, as a fictitious creation with religious qualities, the lion presents a new idea. Common to both of these reviews is the assertion that the lion is not metaphorical, although Hans Blumenberg himself, according to Windheuser, was “Lordsiegelbewahrer der Metapherntheorie” (*Freitag*).¹⁵² Hence, when considering how to appropriately characterize this lion, one cannot exclude the possibility that it is indeed a metaphor.

What is a metaphor? According to Hamilton, it is “a word or phrase that in literal use designates one kind of thing,” while it is simultaneously “applied to a conspicuously different object, concept, or experience, without asserting an explicit comparison” (33). While the word “lion” literally designates an animal, it simultaneously indicates an abstract concept that has a specific origin, linked as it is to the subject. Numerous questions arise. What is the fictional subject’s relationship to this projected figure? Is this image pure presence, a poetic fiction, a miracle, or indeed, contrary to the reviews, a metaphor? And, if it is a metaphor, to what concept does it, as a literal sign, refer? Is it, in line with the trajectory of this dissertation, a transcendent entity conceived in the mind of its producer and hence reflective of the persistence of exteriority within an individual ensconced in immanence? My thesis is that this lion is an “absolute metaphor” standing for a transcendent “proposition,” as it exists as a “picture” indicating possible forms latent within the human imagination.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Throughout this chapter I will use “Hans Blumenberg” when referring to the ‘real,’ historical philosopher, who lived from 1920 to 1996, and the designation “Blumenberg” when discussing the figure in Lewitscharoff’s text.

¹⁵³ I will discuss these terms throughout the course of the chapter. For now, it would be helpful to know that Hans Blumenberg developed the concept of the “absolute metaphor,” while Wittgenstein discussed the terms “proposition” and “picture” in his philosophical texts.

Presenting an ambivalent metaphor serving as an alternative picture of reality, the text, at first glance, appears to slide into the absurd. The story is seemingly utterly detached from reality. An intelligent philosopher has perhaps become “verrückt” (146), as he has confronted a lion not existing in real space.¹⁵⁴ If the figure were truly present in the material realm, then Blumenberg’s students would see the animal accompanying him at his lectures, and that is not the case: “Wie unerkant der Löwe blieb, zeigte sich unzweifelhaft. Die Hörer in den Bänken sahen ihn nicht” (23). So, the lion is not real. In another instance, the narrator pointedly establishes this by juxtaposing the tangible with the intangible. On a day when the lion does not appear to Blumenberg only the Kantian phenomena are present in real space. By speaking of “berührbare” entities, the narrator infers the lion’s exclusion from this category: “Kein Löwe, nirgends. Was weiter nicht verwunderlich war, denn es herrschte ja heller Tag, ein strahlend heller Maitag, an dem alles leuchtete wie neu geschaffen und nur berührbare Dinge ans Licht traten” (21). Categorized as intangible, the lion is not real and hence does not materialize. Yet, on other occasions, the lion does exist, when, for example, he reveals himself to certain individuals, like Blumenberg and a nun. This picture of a possible reality is never universally accessible; it only shows itself in a limited manner to particular subjects.

A logical follow-up question would be: is then this lion not merely a projection of the religiously inclined: “Oder war der Löwe...doch nur ein Hirngespinnst, geschaffen von ihm, Blumenberg selbst” (39)? Increasingly alienated from reality, both Blumenberg

¹⁵⁴ Blumenberg himself understands the fictitious nature of the lion. When the lion, or Blumenberg’s representation of it in his mind, is absent, he believes to hear sounds outside his house, and he opens the door to let in the lion: “Hörte er es draußen rascheln, machte er die Tür auf, was ihm gleich unsinnig vorkam” (199). Reflecting on his own activity, he realizes how irrational his behavior would appear to an external observer.

and the nun want a solid image, so they anthropomorphically generate a transcendent figure. In this sense, they follow Feuerbach's logic.¹⁵⁵ He unfalteringly represented the theory that God, constructed through humanity's imaginative capacities, is merely a reflection of humanity's 'best' attributes: "Wie der Mensch denkt, wie er gesinnt ist, so ist sein Gott: soviel Wert der Mensch hat, soviel Wert und nicht mehr hat sein Gott. Das Bewußtsein Gottes ist das Selbstbewußtsein des Menschen, die Erkenntnis Gottes die Selbsterkenntnis des Menschen. Aus seinem Gott erkennst du den Menschen und wiederum aus dem Menschen seinen Gott; beides ist eins" (*Christentum* 68). Interpreted in this framework, the lion always only exists as an expression of a desired form that has been engendered in minds wishing to performatively narrate transcendence into immanence. Viewed in this manner, the text provides a fairly scathing critique of religion, or at least a critique of those religious assertions espousing God's autonomy and objective independence. God is always only in the minds of those involved in inventing it. This may be the narration's "message."

Or, alternatively, the text may demonstrate how a figuration, as a linguistically manipulated image derived from mental processes, depends on the activity of subjects, who, while participating in language games, attempt to understand, form, and shape an alternative reality based more on intuition than on perception. Stemming from the non-empirical, this image appears to be beyond the rational. To create such an image, individuals must therefore speak 'nonsense.' According to Fronda, such nonsensical

¹⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that Hans Blumenberg, in *Arbeit am Mythos*, traces religion's emergence to two possible sources: "Der eine wird durch Feuerbach repräsentiert, für den die Gottheit nichts anderes als die Selbstentwerfung des Menschen an den Himmel ist, seine vorübergehende Darstellung in einem fremden Medium, durch die sich sein Selbstbegriff anreichert und zur Rücknahme der Interimsprojektion fähig wird" (35).

statements, as they endeavor to describe “the boundless ineffable beyond,” cannot be determined as true or false, because they “run against the boundaries of language and try to move into a realm that is beyond sense” (42). Presenting a figure – marked as the irrational projection of a rational being – the narrator draws the reader’s attention to an entity beyond logical space, thereby opening up the possibility of an alternative that potentially provides a palliative function in a secular space of absolute reality.

This chapter represents a shift in focus. In the two preceding chapters I analyzed how nature and the materiality therein provide the stimulus for reflections on transcendence. Here, I assess how a subject performatively produces a figure indicative of transcendence. A certain image depends on its predicates from what a specific subject performs. Consequently, a subject ultimately determines what a projected image can “religiously” reflect. If a certain image reveals transcendence it does so only in so far as it receives this quality through a subject’s representation. To understand how this lion is linguistically constructed, how it functions as a picture that generates a realm of possibility, I will look at two aspects of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s system, his “picture theory” and his “Sprachspiele,” delineated as they are in his two major works, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921) and *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (1953). I critically employ Wittgenstein’s notions, believing that his philosophical ideas frame and undergird the text; he is explicitly cited (37, 128, 129, 197) and implicitly inferred on pages 19 and, to a lesser extent, on 215, and the “Sprachspiele” ensuing in the text shadow some of the issues Wittgenstein considered. Employing Wittgenstein’s philosophical ideas, Lewitscharoff’s narrator herself participates in a “Sprachspiel,” presenting an “absolute metaphor,” a possible picture of transcendence within an

immanent terrain. This “absolute metaphor” corresponds to the definition outlined by Hans Blumenberg in *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* (1960); such a metaphor is “absolute” in that it exceeds logic. Because this lion is represented as an absolute metaphor beyond the bounds of logic, the narrator demonstrates how difficult it is to produce a language to speak of this transcendent instance. The text performs the philosophical idea Wittgenstein suggests when he claims that one must be silent about that which one cannot speak. Nevertheless, in its inaccessibility, this subjective production offers an alternative perspective within the “absolutism of reality,” a concept thoroughly developed by Hans Blumenberg in his work *Arbeit am Mythos* (1979). Here, I explore possible interpretations of this concept, how it is reflective of the secular age, and then how Lewitscharoff incorporates it into her text. Then, I look at how the narrator uses this absolutism of reality to reveal the state of anxiety in which the various characters find themselves. To cope with the anxiety caused by reality’s absolutism, they need a myth to which some have access and others do not. As Lewitscharoff’s narrator demonstrates how this transpires, she shows how the myth of an absolute metaphor within the absolutism of reality provides the possibility or impossibility of consolation through a transcendent instance within an immanent framework.

I. A picture of possibility: Wittgenstein, Lewitscharoff, Blumenberg

After the lion, “groß, gelb, atmend” (9), shows itself to the contemplative Blumenberg, the narration focuses on assessing the feasibility of this religiously coded image Blumenberg experiences. Early in the novel, the philosopher perceives the lion as a picture: “An den Nerv eines Bildes, an den Nerv eines Problems kommt man nur heran, wenn man das einzelne Bild, das einzelne Problem geruhsam sich vorlegt und prüft. Wer

war der Löwe?” (12) To analyze and to seek to understand the “Bild” is to participate in a hermeneutic activity. In accordance with the dictates of science, he tests what is in front of him, as he tries to make sense of this picture. Ensnared in his philosophical system – with emphasis on the absolute nature of reality – Blumenberg endeavors to understand what the image of this lion has to do with the empirical world. Does it belong to the immanent framework, which, according to Charles Taylor, is common to all of us in the modern West, or does it represent an alternative one? Is there any way of perceiving this lion as a viable form in tangible space? Describing the lion as a picture, the narrator suggests that this lion’s image models some sort of reality. This would accord with what Wittgenstein suggests, when he writes: “Das Bild ist ein Modell der Wirklichkeit” (*Tractatus* 15). Reflecting reality, the lion represents a concept existing in a human subject. This concept, as a proposition inhering in an individual, represents the possibility or impossibility of the transcendent.¹⁵⁶

Blumenberg’s lion, positioned in real, immanent space, is a paradigm of possibility.¹⁵⁷ In 2.19, Wittgenstein writes, “Das Bild bildet die Wirklichkeit ab, indem es

¹⁵⁶ For a discussion on the link between a proposition and a picture, see Harrison 114.

¹⁵⁷ In this manner, the lion operates in accord with Wittgenstein’s “Picture theory of meaning” (Harre 214), which is fundamentally concerned with how pictures present circumstances, states of affairs. In 2.11 of his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein writes, “Das Bild stellt die Sachlage im logischen Raume, das Bestehen und Nichtbestehen von Sachverhalten, vor” (14). Within an image, contained in the real world’s logical space, resides the existing or non-existing of circumstances. Considering the lion as a picture, as a linguistically constructed image, it represents a certain circumstance in the logical world, either the existence or non-existence of its factuality. In this case, the fact would be the presence of a transcendent instance within immanence, and whether this either exists or does not exist. As a picture fluctuating between existence and non-existence, both possibilities are contained in this lion, and, as such, it models a possible reality. In 2.1511 Wittgenstein writes, “Das Bild ist so mit der Wirklichkeit verknüpft; es reicht bis zu ihr” (15). To whatever degree, whether large or small, pictures have something to do with reality, providing a model of some potential strand of thinking within reality.

eine Möglichkeit des Bestehens und Nichtbestehens von Sachverhalten darstellt”

(16). Encountering a picture, individuals confront the depiction of how a specific circumstance may either exist or not exist. Approaching the lion, Blumenberg confronts an image representing an underlying circumstance that is either possible or impossible. The lion is either an illusion – in a Freudian framework – or the depiction of a new possibility that receives visual representation through language. The narrator writes:

Hatte er es mit einem Fabellöwen zu tun bekommen, dem *abwesenden Löwen*, der nicht zu dem gehörte, was der Fall ist, also nie und nimmer zur Welt? Aber...dieser ganz andere weltabweisende Löwe kommt doch *in etwas* vor und ist damit auf eine neue und andere Art *der Fall*. Die Sprachspiele der Weltbenenner holen den Löwen ins Dasein und Leben zurück, murmelte er leise vor sich hin (19).

Here, Blumenberg reflects on two ways of interpreting this lion. Either, the lion belongs to a fable and therefore cannot exist in the real world, at least the world defined by Wittgenstein in his opening statement of the *Tractatus*: “Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist” (11). According to Wittgenstein, the “case” is what we see and experience; the case is the only “world” we have. The phenomenal is the case. Lions in fables do not belong to this case and hence to this world. Or, this lion, which is seemingly aloof from the world, not actively engaged in it, is actually present in a specific form, and therefore representative of another type of case and consequently another type of world. This kind of lion does not exist completely outside the world. Instead of being absent, this lion is brought back “ins Leben” linguistically. It therefore exists as a participant in an alternative “case,” a “world” demonstrative of what is possible beyond logic, dependent

as it is on language production, dependent on sentences expressive of possible propositions. This object's existence, as a proposition, depends on the subjective linguistic constructions of those participating in language games, activities performed by both the narrator and Blumenberg. To see how this lion comprises a specific world, we can look at the various language games played in the text, noticing, for instance how Lewitscharoff's text adopts and manipulates Hans Blumenberg's philosophical ideas.

According to the narrator, Blumenberg considers the possibility that the lion could appear "in etwas," that is, within the realm of the phenomena. This lion, in that it inhabits this sphere through what is linguistically performed, represents "auf eine neue und andere Art *der Fall*." As the narrator engages in this textual maneuvering, she reveals an intertextual reference traceable to a section of Hans Blumenberg's text, *Löwen* (2001), which itself can be further traced to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*; Hans Blumenberg writes:

Das bezieht sich auf den Löwen als Fabeltier und zu ihm die Frage, ob Sätze über ihn – also solche der Gattung Fabel – das Kriterium des 'Tractatus' erfüllen, einen Sinn zu haben. Denn zweifellos ist der Fabellöwe ein abwesender Löwe, nichts von dem allen, *was der Fall* ist und damit zur Welt gehört, die eben dadurch im ersten Satz jenes 'Tractatus' definiert war. Der Löwe der Fabel ist nicht die Gattung *felis leo*, auch nicht ein Individuum namens *Leo* (64).

Inquiring about the sensibility of certain sentences, Hans Blumenberg wonders whether a sentence about an entity existing in a fable would fit the criteria of a logical proposition as delineated according to the parameters set forth in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Is it possible to produce meaningful sentences about animals absent from the physical realm,

belonging neither to a particular ‘biological’ species nor to a specific individual? He resolutely acknowledges that the lion in a fable is an absent lion, not part of the case, and therefore not belonging to the world, as Wittgenstein strictly defined it. However, further developing his argument, Hans Blumenberg contends:

Ein ‘rechter Satz’, das hört sich eher Lessingisch an als logisch unter den Bedingungen der Tractatus-Weltrichtigkeit; und es erfordert daher, daß dieser weltabwesende Löwe doch ‘in etwas’ vorkommt, eine neue und andere Art von ‘Fall’ ist: *Das heißt, aber, ich sage: es gibt auch ein Sprachspiel mit diesem Satz.* Nicht in der Welt, doch in einem Sprachspiel der Weltbenenner vorzukommen, holt den abwesenden Löwen in Dasein und Leben zurück (*Löwen* 65).¹⁵⁸

The parallels between this quote and Lewitscharoff’s text are inconspicuous, at both the philosophical and literary level. A proper sentence about an animal in a fable is not logical according to Wittgenstein’s system, and therefore a non-empirical lion cannot come forth in a “logical” sentence indicating facts in logical space. Yet, there is still something about the sentence, not its logical capabilities, but its representation as a game, that allows the lion to become manifest in a different type of form. Divorced from the case, at odds with the logical, real world, the lion becomes a new case, not one within the formal, ‘real’ world, but instead in a world constructed through language games played by those involved in naming. What is absent becomes present in language.

With its ability to disclose new forms of perception and to indicate what is not evident, language can be employed to express alternative possibilities. Reflecting further

¹⁵⁸ *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (24) / *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (48-49).

on the implications of Wittgenstein's thought, Hans Blumenberg claims: "So muß es auch Wittgenstein vorgeblich um 'Höheres' gehen. Etwa darum, daß wir uns selber nicht ganze Reiche von Möglichkeiten verschließen dürfen oder zu verscherzen leisten können" (*Löwen* 66).¹⁵⁹ Because something higher may exist, possibilities may not be precluded. Rooted in the immanent domain, what is in the world – i.e. sentences – can never give expression to what is higher. Wittgenstein states this when considering the topic of ethics, a sphere considered to be "higher;" "Darum kann es auch keine Sätze der Ethik geben. Sätze können nichts *Höheres* [my italics] ausdrücken" (6.42, 83). Sentences about fictitious lions, similar to those about ethics, cannot be indiscriminately dismissed, as they may express a realm whose significance may not be sensed but instead intuited. While sentences describing a non-existent lion may appear utterly nonsensical, they may, at the same time, open up a possible countervailing perspective challenging the absoluteness of the empirical, thereby rendering the absolute world as permeable.

Consequently, in accordance with the trajectory of Wittgenstein's thinking, Hans Blumenberg does not wish to limit reality to one particular world, and he advances the idea that there may be other cases, and consequently other worlds, albeit worlds constructed in and through the language games executed by those existing in the logical world. Indeed, in another one of his works, *Höhlenausgänge* (1989), Hans Blumenberg argues, "Die Welt entstehen zu lassen wird zum Prozeß des Eintritts in sie,

¹⁵⁹ This reference to the 'Höheres' in Wittgenstein's thought alludes, most likely, to section 6.41 and 6.42 of the *Tractatus*, "Der Sinn der Welt muß außerhalb ihrer liegen. In der Welt ist alles, wie es ist, und geschieht alles, wie es geschieht; es gibt in ihr keinen Wert – und wenn es ihn gäbe, so hätte er keinen Wert. Wenn es einen Wert gibt, der Wert hat, so muß er außerhalb alles Geschehens und So-Seins liegen. Denn alles Geschehen und So-Sein ist zufällig. Was es nichtzufällig macht, kann nicht in der Welt liegen, denn sonst wäre dies wieder zufällig. Es muß außerhalb der Welt liegen" (6.41, 82).

gleichbedeutend mit dem Heraustreten aus dem, was sie nicht oder noch nicht ist. Sie ist nicht alles, was *der Fall* [my italics] ist; sie wird es im Maße, wie der Ausgang/Eingang zu ihr hin gewonnen, geöffnet, passierbar gemacht ist" (13). Bringing a world into existence involves a process of entry and exit, and this implies a communicative interaction between two spheres. The already existing "real" world is not complete, as it is in a process of becoming; the case is not fixed, all data is not available. As openings are made to perspectives beyond, a world comes into form that is based as much on preexisting logic as it is on logic that is not yet logical.¹⁶⁰ In a sense, Lewtischaroff's narrator lets her character participate in this "Übergang," allowing Blumenberg to perform this "transcending," "transgressing" activity. In the very last sentence of the novel, he is ripped out of the cave by the lion: "Da hieb ihm der Löwe die Pranke vor die Brust und riß ihn in eine andere Welt" (216). Leaving one world, entering into another world, the protagonist performs the permeability of actually existing cases. In this way, the narrator, providing the notion of something beyond – a potential case – demonstrates how Hans Blumenberg's philosophical system inspires her text.

As she incorporates Hans Blumenberg's reactions to Wittgenstein's "der Fall," suggesting thereby that the experienced "world" is not the only possible "case," the narrator uses the text to explore how an alternative possibility may be refigured in the parameters of language. In this sense, the narrator performs the activity of a "Weltbenenner," participating in her own language game, using textual strategies to reveal her intuition of various realms of possibility. The narrator's interest in exploring

¹⁶⁰ Wittgenstein expresses a similar sentiment in his *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, "Wenn es eine "Lösung" der logischen (philosophischen) Probleme gäbe, so müßten wir uns nur vorhalten, daß sie ja einmal nicht gelöst waren" (16).

the totality of possible cases is reflected in how she situates her protagonist, Blumenberg. He participates in linguistic activity indicative of openness to a case not strictly representative of the logical world. Commenting on his role in the story and expressing how he is engaged in a “Sprachspiel,” Blumenberg reflects on the term “Weltbenenner” and then applies it to himself. The narrator writes: “Die Sprachspiele der Weltbenenner holen den Löwen ins Dasein und Leben zurück, murmelte er leise vor sich hin. Zufrieden mit dem Wort *Weltbenenner*, welches er umstandlos auf sich münzte, ging Blumenberg zu Bett” (19). Aware of the significance behind this philosophically loaded term, “Weltbenenner,” Blumenberg (and the narrator) reveals his perspective on language and its role in constructing worlds. Here, he demonstrates as well the subsequent role he ascribes to himself for the rest of the novel.

With this contextual basis, we can see how the lion becomes an extension of Blumenberg’s naming activity. For example, Blumenberg constructs the lion as he creates sentences: “Den lustigen Löwen stellte sich Blumenberg für einen Moment als Papierjäger, Papierschnapper vor, brach *die Sätze* [my italics], die sich in ihm dazu formen wollten, aber gleich wieder ab, weil er sich nicht im Albernem verlieren wollte” (18). The lion begins to linguistically receive a distinct form – becoming named – before this activity is abruptly halted as writing ceases. As “ein Sprachmagier” (51), Blumenberg reveals a definite connection between his linguistic formations and the lion’s existential construction: “Er *nannte* [my italics] den Löwen einen Meister des unscheinbaren Ausdrucks...einen Possenreißer schläfriger Ewigkeiten” (199).¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ In one instance, he attempts, in vain, to determine the lion’s behavior through his words: “Dann mühte sich Blumenberg vergeblich, mit einer *Satzkanonade* [my italics]

Identified as an expression of what is not apparent, the lion becomes an image linked to transcendence, and this activity transpires through the linguistic endeavors of a philosopher situated in the absolute frame of immanence.

Blumenberg participates in this naming – this activity of narrating into existence – in order to cope with reality’s absolutism. In his chapter “Einbrechen des Namens in das Chaos des Unbenannten,” in *Arbeit am Mythos*, Hans Blumenberg describes the activity of giving names to entities within the world: “Die Welt mit Namen zu belegen, heißt, das Ungeteilte aufzuteilen und einzuteilen, das Ungriffige greifbar, obwohl noch nicht begreifbar zu machen. Auch Setzungen der Orientierung arbeiten elementaren Formen der Verwirrung, zumindest der Verlegenheit, im Grenzfall der Panik, entgegen” (49). Naming involves the process of providing a form, attaching a sign, to that which has not yet been grasped or understood. Through naming, affixing a predicate to an unknown, undetermined entity, individuals can handle the perplexity inherent in the confusion of indeterminacy. The lion, as an imagined and then named identity, provides for Blumenberg just such a stabilizing, orienting instance. In fact, the lion itself directly influences Blumenberg’s approach to language: “Ob über ihm als Nachtwächter eine andere Nacht Wache hielt, mit durchdringender Intelligenz begabt, die ihm den Löwen zu Ermunterungszwecken geschickt hatte, vielleicht aber auch, damit endlich klarer, rücksichtsloser, entschiedener geschrieben wurde, damit er Risiken einging und sein Äußerstes zu Papier brachte?” (123-124). Here, the lion’s derivation is thematized. Is the figure Blumenberg’s projection, or has it been sent by an intelligent, pseudo-omniscient source? Does its origin have a transcendent or immanent source? In that the lion is

mehr Leben in seinem Löwen zu entfachen” (198). While unsuccessful here, Blumenberg does demonstrate the role his words play in how the lion develops its character.

formed in language it stems from the immanent domain; however, in that the lion transforms an individual rooted in immanence (impacting Blumenberg's ability to generate sentences), it possesses a transcendent trace. Sensing the orienting capabilities of the sentences he produces, those stemming from his intuition of a transcendent presence, Blumenberg becomes increasingly dependent on the game he constructs and in which he engages.

Language games, as Wittgenstein presents them in *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, ensue as individuals build sentences with different uses¹⁶² and functions. The numerous ways in which sentences can be employed depend on how the various signs within specific sentences come together. Flexible in nature, ways of use are not fixed; he writes in paragraph 23:

Wieviele Arten der Sätze gibt es aber? Etwa Behauptung, Frage und Befehl? – Es gibt *unzählige* solcher Arten: unzählige verschiedene Arten der Verwendung alles dessen, was wir 'Zeichen', 'Worte', 'Sätze', nennen. Und diese Mannigfaltigkeit ist nichts Festes, ein für allemal Gegebenes; sondern neue Typen der Sprache, neue Sprachspiele, wie wir sagen können, entstehen und andre veralten und werden vergessen. Das Wort 'Sprachspiel' soll hier hervorheben, daß das Sprechen der Sprache ein Teil ist einer Tätigkeit, oder einer Lebensform (250).

¹⁶² In Lewitscharoff's earlier work, *Apostoloff*, the narrator indicates how she participates in a type of "Sprachspiel," as she carefully attends to the way in which words are used: "Ich vergesse meine Angst und staune. Die nüchterne Schwester und das Wort Seele passen überhaupt nicht zusammen, Seele gehört eher in meinen Sprachbehälter. Obwohl es ein zartes Wort ist, gleichsam eins mit zerzausten Flügeln, verleitet es zu exaltem, schwammigem Gebrauch, also bitte Vorsicht beim Verwenden" (58). The dynamic nature of the word "Seele" has effective capabilities that are unveiled as the word is employed.

The variety of ways in which signs, words, and sentences connect is never a complete process. With language nothing is fixed and established. New types of language and language games can and do form through the continual activity of language production. Speaking a language is an activity, a form of existence, in which one engages when testing out new ways of conception. Early in Lewitscharoff's narration we see Blumenberg taking this "Sprachspiel" enterprise seriously; the narrator describes Blumenberg's response to the lion:

Nur nicht die Fassung verlieren, gerade in diesem Falle nicht, sagte sich Blumenberg, vielleicht geriet der Satz weniger korrekt, obwohl Blumenberg auch beim Finden von Sätzen im Kopf eine eiserne Disziplin zu wahren pflegte, weil er sich daran gewöhnt hatte, geordnet und nicht etwa überstürzt sich Sätze zurechtzulegen, und zwar fast so geordnet, wie er gemeinhin sprach, ob er nun eine empfangsbereites Aufnahmegerät vor sich hatte oder die Ohren eines Kindes (9).

Aware that the lion has influenced his emotional state, Blumenberg wishes to maintain composure, in order to maintain acute attention to detail and to find the appropriate words for the sentences forming in his mind. The desire for precision reflects his cognizance that every move in this game counts. The words he decides to use will dictate the direction of the game and determine how he forms this picture of what he has intuited.

For Wittgenstein, use –“Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist sein Gebrauch in der Sprache” (*Untersuchungen* 262) – is the essential component in determining how a

particular language game plays out, i.e. the type of concepts subsequently formed.¹⁶³

In use a new possibility of comprehension is exposed. Emphasizing the correlation between use and possibility, Griesecke and Kogge write, “Nichts in diesem Sinne Gegebenes und Erforschbares, sondern die Möglichkeiten des Gebrauchs sind der Gegenstand der Wittgensteinschen *Untersuchungen*. Diese Möglichkeiten nun sind formiert durch Regeln und Kriterien, die den Sprachgebrauch leiten und die wir sozusagen vor uns bringen müssen.” Continuing on, they contend that it is not the “Sprachmaterial, sondern die Regeln und Kriterien, die im Gebrauch von Worten und im Bilden von Sätzen wirksam werden” (115). Words and the corresponding sentences created through them with specific uses are expressive of what is possible, and hence they are never static. Similarly, the rules guiding language use are flexible, situational, and contextual. Therefore, they cannot be explored, uncovered, and then exposed. Instead, the linguistic devices at an individual’s disposal (words, syllables, sentences) function like building material that can be employed in a myriad of ways depending on the activity of the builder’s imagination when picturing a possible structure.¹⁶⁴ The rules and criteria that direct how sentences are used have a determining function, with the result that these sentences, endowed with new possibilities, render novel forms of perception.

¹⁶³ Elaborating on Wittgenstein’s understanding of “use,” “Gebrauch,” Tatievskaya comments, “Der Gebrauch von Worten ist kein Zug im Spiel, sondern eher eine Aussage über ein mögliches Spiel” (205). Use is indicative of a possible game, and here “possibility” is important to emphasize because of the underlying assumption these games are never finished; they never become a given with established rules.

¹⁶⁴ Regarding this building analogy, Wittgenstein writes, “Es interessiert nicht, ein Gebäude aufzuführen, sondern die Grundlagen der möglichen Gebäude durchsichtig vor mir zu haben” (*Vermischte* 22). Noticeable here is Wittgenstein’s emphasis on laying the foundations of what is possible.

Rules, guiding language use, do not lead back to an externally regulated language game; there is “keine Rückführung auf ein ‘zugrundeliegendes’, ‘ideales’, ‘logisch vereindeutiges’” (Griesecke and Kogge 115).¹⁶⁵ Because there is not “a” language game possessing all the rules and allowing for the arrival at a clarification of these rules, recourse to a metaphysical absolute is impossible in Wittgenstein’s system. Sentences incessantly participate in new forms of representation. If they were fixed, meaning would be stagnant, and language games would not occur. Interpreting the implications of Wittgenstein’s thinking here, Norman Malcolm writes: “Was ich tue, ist, andere Weisen der Betrachtung anzuregen oder sogar zu erfinden. Ich schlage Möglichkeiten vor, an die Sie früher gar nicht gedacht haben” (66). Sentences, expressive of possibility, offer new ways of perception.¹⁶⁶ A word in a specific sentence cannot acquire its meaning from a preexisting usage. A word in use does not conform to one specific definition, but instead it offers a new grammar of perception.

In Lewitscharoff’s text, the pretense is given that the narrator attempts to invent new “uses,” new rules and criteria for speaking about the transcendent. However, the narrator seemingly resorts to the conventional. Under the lion’s oversight, the names ascribed to objects – which ought to perpetually change in that they are indicative of the

¹⁶⁵ Assessing the function of these rules, Tatievskaya writes, “Wittgenstein teilt die These, daß Regeln (insbesondere grammatische Regeln) die Operationen mit einer Spielfigur (mit einem Wort) möglich machen...Auch ein Spielzug ist kein Ausdruck einer Regel...Was Regeln von Figuren, Figurenstellungen und Spielzügen unterscheidet, ist, daß jede Regel eine Richtschnur für Handlung und in diesem Sinn den Sittengesetzen verwandt ist” (214). Rules enable the various operations one can employ with a word. A rule does not express a move, but instead acts as a guideline for an activity.

¹⁶⁶ Lewitscharoff’s text also plays with the relationship between the real and the possible; on one evening, Blumenberg turns on one of his favorite composers, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, who was under the impression that “jeder wirkliche Ton sei noch unendlich weit vom möglichen entfernt” (86). The real is different from the possible, which in this sense is the standard.

dynamic, ever fluid nature of objects and experiences within a reality in constant flux – will vary and develop over time; they will evolve and provide new forms. While presented as an image interested in ensuring this free, scientific approach to language, the lion is nevertheless constructed as a picture of stability, as it assumes and affirms the relative stability of words:

Im geheimen floß aus dem Löwen die nie versiegende Zusicherung, das Netz über Himmel und Erde geworfenen Namen, welches die Menschen zu ihrer Beruhigung ersonnen hatten, sei selbst dann noch *reißfest* [my italics], wenn Physiker, Astronomen, Biologen und philologische Raspelwerker mit feinen Scheren und Schabwerkzeugen emsig an jedem Namen und jeder Metapher, die im Gefolge der Namen heraufgezogen war, herumschabten und –schnitten. Was nicht bedeutete, daß die Wahrheit statisch gegeben war. Sie mußte sich wandeln, aber eher in Form mählicher Metamorphosen, ohne rigide Zersetzung älterer Zuschreibungen und Denkmodelle, die in den Orkus geschickt wurden. (132)

The lion assures that anthropomorphically derived names are not fluid and flexible through time. The net around the totality of invented words and concepts cannot be ripped. As predicates ascribed to entities, as signifiers indicating the signified, linguistic terms have an underlying structure that cannot be deconstructed or erased, and the lion serves as a promise of this preservation. That is, this lion represents new forms of thinking as long as they don't stray too far from the traditional models.

To a degree, the lion represents a position contrary to Nietzsche's. For him, words, and the underlying "truths" behind them, are malleable, constantly shifting and

realigning themselves according to their context: “Was ist also Wahrheit? Ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen, kurz eine Summe von menschlichen Relationen, die, poetisch und rhetorisch gesteigert, übertragen, geschmückt wurden... die Wahrheiten sind Illusionen, von denen man vergessen hat, daß sie welche sind, Metaphern” (374). Because any linguistic construction is only ever metaphorical, truth, for Nietzsche, remains an illusion. The lion, on the other hand, asserts the inherent stability and constancy of words, no matter how much scientists may decide to bend them and manipulate them to arrive at completely new models. For the lion, the truth is allegedly not something static. It metamorphically evolves. And yet, this evolutionary process is rather rigid, in that it does not allow terms to completely sever themselves from existing definitions; new names cannot nullify older ascriptions.

However, the lion itself, constructed as he is in an unstable manner, represents an ambivalent approach to truth. Based upon what was just previously discussed, he provides the surety that names do not stray too far from their initial, ‘true’ meaning. However, at another point, the lion reveals himself to be uninterested in ascertaining what is true. While coded as religious, a transcendent trace in immanent space, this metaphysical object, unlike its creator, has no interest in truth; “Das Tier beherrschte sein [Blumenberg’s] Denken und Fühlen, und es machte ihn nervös, dass sich der Löwe so ruhig aufführte oder vielmehr nicht aufführte und sein Benehmen indifferent blieb in bezug auf Wahrheitsproben oder rhetorische Märchenspiele oder werweisswasimmer” (38). The lion here reflects back to the subject that it is the subject, which is the one genuinely absorbed in questions related to truth. Uninterested in truth, the lion represents openness, not wishing to be confined to restrictive and binding truth postulates.

Consequently, he does not find it necessary to leave proofs of his assumed status, presuming that any traces he leaves behind would constrict him to one specific identity: “Er tauchte auf und verschwand, ohne Spuren zu hinterlassen, hatte es nicht nötig, die Tatzenabdrücke mit dem Quast seines Schwanzes zu verwischen, um die allegorische Christusnähe unter Beweis zu stellen” (32). In this way, the narrator shows how this transcendent symbol’s fundamental concern does not revolve around truth claims.

The narrator shows both the lion’s stance towards truth as well as Blumenberg’s. Recognizing his limited access to truth, Blumenberg realizes he is closest to a new type of truth, a different “case,” when he cannot grasp the figure, in order to empirically establish its presence. At one point he has the overwhelming desire to stand up and touch the lion. The lion would not be antipathetic to such a gesture. However, in the last second, remembering the command “*actio per distans*,” he decides against such contact.

Zu große Nähe konnte alles zerstören. Der Vorteil der Distanz lag darin, daß er sich nur in gehörigem Abstand zutrauen durfte, für ein im Metaphysischen zitterndes Wesen das Gemeinsame der Verständnisweise und der ihnen beiden zugrundeliegenden geschöpflichen Wahrheit zu erkunden. Vielleicht war jetzt zum ersten Mal, indem er den Löwen nicht berührte, die Möglichkeit zur Wahrheit überhaupt gegeben (35).

Maintaining distance to the lion allows Blumenberg to investigate and identify their commonalities, how they innately understand each other and how they are both constructed truths detached from any metaphysically essential form.¹⁶⁷ Expressing this

¹⁶⁷ Considering Wittgenstein’s ideas on the importance of “viewing” a language game to understand the rules at play, we can see how Blumenberg’s distance enables him to better see the language rules established by the lion. Wittgenstein writes in his *Philosophische*

realization that they are both creaturely productions, Blumenberg deconstructs the lion's assumed divine status. While a transcendent symbol, the lion is, nevertheless, anthropomorphically conceived. Narratively separated from this object, Blumenberg is alienated from truth's stability, and this becomes reflected in his thinking:

Ein schwerwiegender Irrtum, zu glauben, die Wahrheit mache frei, gleichgültig wann, gleichgültig wo, gleichgültig von wem geäußert. Alles kam auf den Zeitpunkt an, wann eine Wahrheit überhaupt vertragen werden konnte und wann nicht; wurde sie zum falschen Zeitpunkt, am falschen Ort an die Öffentlichkeit gebracht, sorgte sie nur für Verwirrung und trotzig Abwehr. Die Wahrheit erfüllte sich in der Zeit; auf langen Um- und Abwegen kam sie allmählich zum Vorschein (153).

Blumenberg does not believe transcendent objects have an autonomous truth-value, independent of human ascription. Instead, truth manifests itself over time, remains perpetually in flux, and arrives only intermittently, if at all. Unable to grasp a truth subject to ever changing time, Blumenberg resigns himself to non-possession. This view is reminiscent of Hans Blumenberg's philosophical position stated in *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*:

Nicht die Wahrheit, in deren Besitz irgendein Mensch ist, oder zu sein vermeinet, sondern die aufrichtige Mühe, die er angewandt hat, hinter die Wahrheit zu kommen, macht den Wert des Menschen. Denn nicht durch

Untersuchungen: "Sag nicht: Es muß ihnen etwas gemeinsam sein, sonst hießen sie nicht „Spiele“ – sondern schau, ob ihnen allen etwas gemeinsam ist. – Denn wenn du sie anschaust, wirst du zwar nicht etwas sehen, was allen gemeinsam wäre, aber du wirst Ähnlichkeiten, Verwandtschaften, sehen, und zwar eine ganze Reihe. Wie gesagt: denk nicht, sondern schau!" (277)

den Besitz, sondern durch die Nachforschung der Wahrheit erweitern sich seine Kräfte, worin allein seine immer wachsende Vollkommenheit besteht. Der Besitz macht ruhig, träge, stolz (75).

The Blumenberg in the novel follows this trajectory of thought; the possession of truth is unnecessary: “Vielleicht war es sogar die Einsicht, niemals im Besitz der Wahrheit zu sein, die frei machte und ihr gerade dadurch am nächsten kam, ganz im Gegensatz zur Verheißung, der Wahrheitsbesitz mache frei” (154). Striving for possession is replaced by acknowledging limitation. To step back, to distance oneself, to maintain a position of neutrality allows for the possibility of understanding the various dimensions of truth, how it is symbolized and how these symbols can be deconstructed and shattered upon closer analysis. This stance of separation, of non-possession, is quite indicative of the post-secular approach to religion, which would identify all truth claims about the non-empirical as highly questionable and suspect. Non-possession of objects reflects an epistemological awareness. There is the long-standing presumption that the acquisition of truth makes one free. However, according to Blumenberg, the freedom arrives upon the realization of truth as a concept one can only approach and never comprehend, define, or empirically situate. In this sense, how the lion is constructed mimics Blumenberg’s approach to truth. Constructed within the professor’s language games, the lion acquires a specific “use,” namely one that is not fixed, in that the lion resorts to no concrete rule.

Presented as a “Weltbenenner,” Blumenberg participates in language games, in order to explore new uses that would result in the propagation of novel concepts and forms. He encourages his students to take part in this same activity. Richard, for example, assumes that he failed to finish his dissertation, because he did not take the professor’s

words to heart. He did not generate sentences that sought to probe alternative language uses that would render the unveiling of what was different: “Was aber Blumenberg seinen Studenten von Vorlesung zu Vorlesung lässig vorgeführt hatte, genau das war Richard versagt geblieben: auf etwas anderes hinzublicken, um zur Erkenntnis des einen anstelle von einem vagen Einerlei zu gelangen” (165). How Blumenberg uses words tremendously affects his students. Listening to him, they attempt to execute his philosophical system and wrestle with its implications. In many instances, they fail. Yet, the professor continues to perform these language games. In one of his lectures focusing on the connection between language and its influence on perception, he shows how employing a specific grammar rule enables one to arrive at new paradigms of possibility:

Gerhard verstand nur die ersten Sätze Blumenbergs. Sie handelten vom Konjunktiv als einem meisterlichen Instrument, verschiedene Zeiten im *Irrealis* an das Denken heranzuführen, um die mit Hilfe von Meßinstrumenten captivierte Zeit und das, was sich in den Erinnerungen als abgelaufene Zeit und darin scheinbar gesicherter Bestand abgelagert hatte, zu durchkreuzen und in andere Modelle zu überführen (134).

As a linguistic tool, the subjunctive transfers entities from the unreal and exposes them to new models of thought, to what could be. How this sentence is “used,” the linguistic maneuvering at play, becomes quite lucid. Gerhard, one of Blumenberg’s students, witnesses how Blumenberg plays out a language game. As the professor writes “das Wort *Irrealis*” on the “Wandtafel” (135), the young student cannot help but think of Isa, who “wieder und wieder im weißen Kleid an ihm vorbeiradelte” (135); this is an inference to Isa and Gerhard’s last encounter before her dreadful suicide. Blumenberg’s play with the

word “Irreal” causes Gerhard to think of that individual which had slipped into the “Irreal:” “Der Fall Isa scheint zunächst klar. Wir haben es mit einer Verliebten zu tun, die sich im Irrealis verfangen hat” (82). She had indeed become so infatuated with Blumenberg and his philosophical worldview that she ultimately detached herself from reality. She wanted to probe that “Irreal” realm that Blumenberg linguistically investigated in his language games.

Keenly aware of the implications of language use, Blumenberg remains unaware of how he plays with the “Tiefe” (the inner emotions and feelings) of his students. For example, he has no idea of his role in Isa’s suicide: “Was geschehen war, erfuhr Blumenberg am übernächsten Tag aus der Zeitung, blieb aber ahnungslos, welche Rolle er in dem Drama gespielt hatte...weil er...nicht einmal ihren Namen kannte” (120). Communicatively disconnected with his students, he is oblivious to what his students actually think and feel; he is utterly unacquainted with their fears. Taking a cue from Wittgenstein, he even cautions himself against engaging in such activity, believing, as an instructor, he has a certain responsibility to delicately handle others’ fears:

Er hatte sich bemüht, keinen Menschen mit der Angst zu belästigen, die er früher empfunden hatte und die später in manchen Nächten zurückgekehrt war. *Spiele nicht mit den Tiefen des Anderen*, an diese Aufforderung Wittgensteins hatte er sich intuitiv zu halten versucht, auch wenn ihm das nicht immer gelungen war. Man mußte den Anderen vor der eigenen

Angst verschonen und durfte die Angst des Anderen nicht mutwillig hervorlocken (128).¹⁶⁸

With the desire to shield his own existential fears, Blumenberg wishes to avoid raising unnecessary insecurities within his students. While assuming the appropriateness of playing with language, he does not wish to play with his students' deeply embedded anxieties and fears.

To understand Wittgenstein's potential meaning behind the "Tiefen des Anderen," it is helpful to look at the connection he makes in *Philosophische Untersuchungen* between language and the hidden, cavernous elements of the constitution of an individual. In paragraph 594, he writes, "Aber die Worte, sinnvoll ausgesprochen, haben doch nicht nur Fläche, sondern auch eine *Tiefendimension* [my italics]!' Es findet eben doch etwas anderes statt, wenn sie sinnvoll ausgesprochen werden, als wenn sie bloß ausgesprochen werden" (459). Because the way in which words are used is significant, some of them have a deeper dimension when meaning is infused into them. In paragraph 110 he indicates a similar sentiment: "Die Probleme, die durch ein Mißdeuten unserer Sprachformen entstehen, haben den Charakter der *Tiefe*. Es sind tiefe Beunruhigungen; sie wurzeln so tief in uns wie die Formen unserer Sprache, und ihre Bedeutung ist so groß wie die Wichtigkeit unserer Sprache" (299). When language is used, misinterpretation necessarily transpires, because there is always a slip between what is intended and what is received. Problems arise due to the inherent dissonance built into language. Consequently, language has depth, because it carries with it an array of interpretive possibilities. While cognizant of the fact that language always fails and therefore causes

¹⁶⁸ Drury, M. O'C. "Gespräche mit Wittgenstein." In *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Porträts und Gespräche*. Ed. by Rush Rhees. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987. 192.

disruptions, Blumenberg cannot necessarily see the connection between his words and their affective qualities. As he remains detached from his students – “er [hatte] aber nie direkten Kontakt zu seiner Studentin” (120) -, who slowly slip into the “Irreal,” he plays with words that deeply impact his students. Paradoxically, he remains communicatively disengaged from them. However, he continues to maintain close contact with the lion, whom he understands and with whom he relates, because he needs the picture of the lion, his own linguistically constructed figure, to remind him of his ability to communicate and to continually engage in language games.

In his *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Wittgenstein explores how communicative understanding can transpire between two subjects. He concludes that only a shared context, a common “Life Form,” can bridge together those inhabiting distinctly different discourses and modes of thinking. To participate in a language game involving two partners, the subjects must be able to relate through mutual experiences. And, because there is a “radical incommensurability between humans and animals” (Churchill 308), Wittgenstein believes that humans cannot understand lions; “Wenn ein Löwe sprechen könnte, wir könnten ihn nicht verstehen” (*Untersuchungen* 568). Speaking alone does not guarantee the arrival at understanding. A word spoken does not infer that a meaning is known. Words, consistent with Wittgenstein’s logic, take on meaning through their experience-based use. And, because we, as humans, have not had the same experiences as lions, we do not employ terms with agreed upon meanings.

Because humans, according to Wittgenstein, cannot access a lion’s thoughts, they cannot understand him. Blumenberg, however, in Lewitscharoff’s narration, can

understand his lion.¹⁶⁹ For him, “Der Löwe funktionierte anders, als Wittgenstein geglaubt hatte. Wenn ein Löwe sprechen könnte, könnten wir ihn nicht verstehen, hatte er behauptet. Blumenberg verstand ihn sehr wohl. Der Löwe fungierte als Zuversichtsgenerator, der die Härchen des Protests, die sich in Blumenbergs *Denken* [my italics] immer wieder aufstellten, ein wenig glattbürstete” (129). In keeping with Wittgenstein’s argument, Blumenberg understands the lion because they have some sort of shared life form.¹⁷⁰ The similarities existing between the subject and the subject’s projected image have generated a set of common experiences. While paradoxical, the lion indeed has access to Blumenberg’s thought life. This image has, to some degree, transformed into a type of subject with parallel structures, reflecting thereby its anthropomorphic construction: “Der Löwe vernahm alles, überprüfte alles und achtete mit hoheitsvollen Ohren, die selbst im Keim verworfene *Gedanken* [my italics] hören konnten” (129). This projected figure takes on a life reflective of human status in and through the novel’s textual strategy.¹⁷¹ As an image of the human imagination, a

¹⁶⁹ In her first major work *Pong* (1998), Lewitscharoff broaches the topic of the possibility of understanding between humans and animals: “Pong hält für wahr, wenn vom Löwen gesagt wird, er verstehe den Sinn der an ihn gerichteten Bitten, insbesondere Bitten aus Kinder und reiner Frauen Mund” (35). Pong believes that lions do understand the meaning conveyed when requests are directed at it. Consequently, he speaks with the Lion, “Löwe, bitten seine von Sorgen welligen Lippen, scharre du für mich ein Grab, wenn ich eins brauch, und wach darüber in Schönheit und mit Ernst, wie du in längst verflogener Zeit über das trockene Häuflein der Maria Ägyptica gewacht hast” (35). Pong feels that he has able to give a command to a lion, which could respond to his request because of the communicative connection existing between the two of them.

¹⁷⁰ Here, it is also important to note the author’s fascination with animals and her seemingly extremely close connection to them; in her semi-autobiographical *Apostoloff*, she writes: “Mir blieb der Dakel. Seither haben im tiefsten Kummer nur Tiere die Kraft, mich abzulenken” (199).

¹⁷¹ The partridge speaking in the cave at the end of the novel is an indication of the status of animals in this text. Animals, like human subjects, have feelings: the partridge contends, “Der Mensch bildet sich immerzu ein, nur er leide” (210). Blumenberg

proposition of possibility, the lion becomes a significant subject within the text, not playing a mere ancillary role. This product of human invention, endowed with characteristics that derive from the human experience – for example, it becomes “schläfrig” – is of equal status as the protagonist Blumenberg. In this sense, the text thoroughly nullifies any claim of divine status. Commenting on Wittgenstein’s *Untersuchungen*, Churchill writes, “‘Only of what behaves like a human being can one say that it has pains.’ More generally, the whole range of ascriptions of psychological states and activities hinges on resemblance to human physiognomy and action” (316). Blumenberg can understand the lion because he is a human construction. He can empathize and feel pain; he can console and inspire, because he derives these features from a human who has ascribed these qualities to him.¹⁷² Transforming propositions into sentences, Blumenberg has attributed the lion with certain characteristics, actualizing within his realm of experienced reality an inner picture reflective of possibility.

II. Absolute metaphor

Uninterested in “Wahrheitsproben,” not wishing to prove what he may represent, the lion is nevertheless associated with truth and its dynamically changing character

confirms the validity of the partridge’s statement: “Ganz recht...Er leidet und bildet sich darüber ein, er sei mehr als die übrigen Geschöpfe. In seiner anthropozentrischen Eitelkeit ist er nicht zu bremsen” (211).

¹⁷² Regarding the lion’s consoling attributes, the narrator writes: “Jetzt tröstete der Löwe ihn, aber der Schweigepakt, der ihm dafür auferlegt worden war, ließ sich nur schwer einhalten. Außerdem schien der Löwe allmählich etwas von seiner tröstenden Kraft einzubüßen” (152). The lion, as well, reminds him of his capabilities, strengthening and inspiring him, “Er war sich seiner außerordentlichen Fähigkeiten bewußt. Seine Dienstgeschicklichkeit als bestallter Philosoph trat leuchtend zutage. Mit Blick auf den Löwen sprach er beseelt” (26). In close proximity to this lion, Blumenberg has clarity of purpose, understanding what his aptitudes are. Most significantly, the lion has a direct influence on his ability to engage in language games, enabling him to speak more vibrantly.

(132). To inquire about the lion is to reflect upon those weighty themes of truth and absolutes. How does the lion situate himself towards these issues? As a metaphor, he represents that which resists containment; he eludes reduction to one particular truth-value. The lion is an “absolute metaphor.”¹⁷³ At one point, Blumenberg directly links the lion to the absolute: “Der Einbruch des Absoluten war nicht mitteilbar” (146). Communication about the absolute cannot occur. Hence, the absolute metaphor remains enigmatic. It does not disclose what it is; it has no definition. In this vein, Campe writes: “[Hans] Blumenberg refrains from giving his own, actual definition of metaphor in *Paradigmen* as much as he does elsewhere” (108). While Hans Blumenberg does not provide a concise definition of an “absolute metaphor” in his work *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, he nevertheless traces its contours and outlines its characteristics. Acting in accordance with what Hans Blumenberg outlines, the lion, without specific meaning or designation, comes to appear like an “absolute metaphor.” One, the lion is the product of the creative process transpiring in Blumenberg’s mind. Two, while he cannot enter into logical space, he nevertheless speaks to and even informs the thinking transpiring in logical space. Three, he cannot be consigned to one distinct form of correspondence. I would like to discuss these points one at a time in the context of Hans Blumenberg’s text *Paradigmen*, which unveils the various dimensions of “absolute

¹⁷³ Concerning the relationship between the absolutism of reality and the absolute nature of certain images, Hans Blumenberg writes, “Der *homo pictor* ist nicht nur der Erzeuger von Höhlenbildern für magische Jagdpraktiken, sondern das mit der Projektion von Bildern den Verlässlichkeitsmangel seiner Welt überspielende Wesen. Dem Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit tritt der Absolutismus der Bilder und Wünsche entgegen” (*Arbeit* 14). According to the philosopher, absolute pictures, as human projections designed to deal with the unreliability of the world, can surface in absolute, tangible space. Lewitscharoff’s text suggests just such an absolute image, conceived in the mind of a subject, appearing within the phenomenal world, as it is linguistically generated.

metaphors,” those “primal figures that comprise the very substructure of thought yet resist translation into logic” (Reynolds 78).

First, absolute metaphors do not have preexistence. They do not precede the creative imagination. Instead, they stem from mental faculties.¹⁷⁴ Hans Blumenberg writes, “Was bleibt dem Menschen? Nicht die ‘Klarheit’ des Gegebenen, sondern die des von ihm selbst erzeugten: die Welt seiner Bilder und Gebilde, seiner Konjekturen und Projektionen, seiner ‘Phantasie’ in dem neuen produktiven Sinne” (12). Individuals do not have access to what is given, what is a priori. Images do not exist in the mind without the activity of what the mind does to produce them. As one of these created images, the lion is not an objective given. The narrator succinctly indicates that the lion is a “geschöpfliche Wahrheit” (35). With his imaginative capabilities, Blumenberg mentally produces the picture of the lion. To arrive at this image, his mind uses, or is informed by, various other pictures: “Das Bild [ein spilleriger Löwe], vom italienischen Meister [Antonello da Messina]...führte Blumenbergs Gedächtnis...mit fabelhafter Präzision heran” (16). To create his own projected image, Blumenberg takes advantage of a plethora of visual stimuli, which become the catalyst behind the image he constructs.

Second, while these absolute metaphors have no tangible connection to the logical world, they nevertheless exert an influence, and this influence becomes evident in the thought that is generated. Existing as productions of the human imagination, they reflect how thinking has historically developed. These metaphors point to the various concepts that have accrued within the ever-evolving intellectual spirit; Hans Blumenberg writes:

¹⁷⁴ Indicating how subjects produce these metaphors, Fliethmann writes, “Blumenberg’s ‘metaphor’ sits somewhere between a hermeneutic-anthropological approach and an abundant displaying of historical-philological knowledge” (64).

Dann aber können Metaphern, zunächst rein hypothetisch, auch Grundbestände der philosophischen Sprache sein, ‘Übertragungen,’ die sich nicht ins Eigentliche, in die Logizität zurückholen lassen. Wenn sich zeigen läßt, daß es solche Übertragungen gibt, die man ‘absolute Metaphern’ nennen müßte, dann wäre die Feststellung und Analyse ihrer begrifflich nicht ablösbaren Aussagefunktion ein essentielles Stück der Begriffsgeschichte (14).

These metaphors, with an “Aussagefunktion,” say something about the concepts at work in human understanding. Metaphors (like literature itself), standing between two realms, cannot neatly flow into logical space. They intimate at concepts, which will never receive adequate expression. These metaphors become absolute when the metaphors become the expression of concepts indispensable to thought. While seemingly illogical within the world – which, in Wittgenstein’s terms, is the case – they still have a declarative function; they tell us something about underlying concepts.

Third, the lion, as an “absolute metaphor,” does not directly correspond to what it is presumed to correspond. Its pointing to a definite concept is halted and obstructed. In this sense, it is very much like Derrida’s trace, always eluding a direct connection to what it seemingly infers.¹⁷⁵ Exploring where the “absolute metaphor” is positioned, Hans Blumenberg contends that it is situated between an individual’s reflection on an intuited object and the corresponding concept underlying the object; he writes, “Unsere ‘absolute Metapher’ findet sich hier als *Übertragung der Reflexion über einen Gegenstand der Anschauung auf einen ganz anderen Begriff, dem vielleicht nie eine Anschauung direkt*

¹⁷⁵ Fliethmann contends: “Perhaps no other approach comes closer to and is at the same time further removed from Blumenberg’s project than Derrida’s *deconstruction*” (62)

korrespondieren kann” (15). When individuals reflect on an object they have either observed or intuited, they transfer it to a concept, and this concept itself never corresponds to the initial observation or intuition. The absolute metaphor reflects this transfer process that occurs as a continual missing. Lewitscharoff’s Blumenberg has an intuition of the transcendent and reflects on this (non-existent) object, because it is only an intuition. He then transfers this intuition to a completely different concept, the lion, which is supposed to correspond to the transcendent, but never does so directly.

The lion, an “absolute metaphor” with religious coding, infers that it is stylized after that to which it does not have direct access, the concept, which reflects the subject’s intuition. That is, the subject has an intuition of the transcendent and seeks to find a concept, a picture, which images this inner sense. Then, the object, the absolute metaphor, visually presents the picture. Hence, to look at the form of the object is to understand elements of the initial intuition. We see this performance of linking the object to an intuition in the following quote:

Die Ungeheuerlichkeit des Löwen kehrte dann mit voller Wucht zurück.
 Ein Löwe! Ein Wunder! Ein Löwe! Zwar beruhigte sich sein Herz schnell,
 aber seine Gedanken gerieten ins Trudeln, und ein Gefühl, das zwischen
 Angst und Entzücken hin- und herschwankte, ließ ihn mit leicht
 gerunzelter Stirn nach oben schauen, wo sich allerdings nur die Decke
 befand und keine Himmelsschneise. Ob vielleicht doch alles, was er
 schrieb und dachte, von oben beäugt, kommentiert, überwacht wurde? Ob
 über ihm als Nachtwächter eine andere Nacht Wache hielt, mit
 durchdringender Intelligenz begabt, die ihm den Löwen zu

Ermunterungszwecken geschickt hatte, vielleicht aber auch, damit endlich klarer, rücksichtsloser, entschiedener geschrieben wurde, damit er Risiken einging und sein Äußerstes zu Papier brachte? (123-124).

Here, Blumenberg has the intuition of a higher instance. He connects this with the image he confronts, or constructs. This picture then represents what the subject intuits. The figure, a subjective construct, mirrors the disruptive nature of the intuition. As the intuition exerts a definite disturbing effect on the subject, so too does the image unsettle the subject: “Immerhin hatte ihn der Löwe so durcheinandergebracht” (13).¹⁷⁶ This religiously-coded entity disrupts his thinking because it resides precisely between the logical and the illogical; it cannot be contained, and yet it begs to be interpreted. Consequently, when the prototypical absolute metaphor enters into language, it does so in a halted and inexpressible manner.

III. The (im)possibility of transcendent language

Due to their similarities Blumenberg understands the lion. However, he cannot speak about the lion with other figures in the novel. The narrator writes, “Jetzt tröstete der Löwe ihn [Blumenberg], aber der Schweigepakt, der ihm dafür auferlegt worden war, ließ sich nur schwer einhalten” (152). With a contractual agreement in place, the lion consoles Blumenberg, giving him surety in an ambiguous, absolute reality. In exchange, Blumenberg agrees to remain silent about the lion’s presence. Why this is the case remains uncertain. Nevertheless, the text does vividly demonstrate this silence, when Blumenberg converses with his editor on the telephone. In the midst of their discussion

¹⁷⁶ Considering Hans Blumenberg’s concept of “absolute metaphor,” Fliethmann contends that it is “first of all a disturbance” (63) in that “it does not tell us how it came about – and at the same time it inspires us to go out and search” (69).

about various philosophical issues, Blumenberg, at one point, wants to speak about the lion. But, he refrains from doing so; he “hatte den brennenden Wunsch, dem Redakteur vom Löwen zu berichten...Der Einbruch des Absoluten war nicht mitteilbar” (146). While absent from the discourse, the lion still has an effect on the conversation; he shapes Blumenberg’s words. Blumenberg knows the editor can sense this: “Wahrscheinlich war der Löwe im Spiel. Der Löwe sorgte für Irritationen, die der Redakteur durch die Leitung hindurch gespürt haben mußte” (149). Impacting the aura of the conversation, the lion himself never enters into the conversation.

With Wittgenstein’s ideas we have a philosophical framework for interpreting this scene. In the *Tractatus* he investigates the limitations of language. When language cannot say it must show.¹⁷⁷ When employing words to speak about certain ideas, concepts, or objects, individuals inevitably fall short of ascribing to them all their necessary predicates. Because language falters when it intends to express, it must take recourse to showing.¹⁷⁸ As he elucidates the sharp division between showing and saying, he suggests that there are certain entities and ideas about which one can speak and others on which one must remain silent; “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen” (*Tractatus* 85). What can be spoken about are those entities existing within the logical realm, the world as the case.

¹⁷⁷ In 5.61, Wittgenstein, indicating his persuasion that saying is limited to those entities that can be thought, writes: “Was wir nicht denken können, das können wir nicht denken; wir können also auch nicht *sagen*, was wir nicht denken können” (67). Reflecting on the said, one can access the known.

¹⁷⁸ “Showing” becomes evident, according to Tatievskaya, during the playing of the language game: “Durch das Spielen des Sprachspiels wird also die symbolische (zeigende) Funktion der Sprache erst ermöglicht” (206).

In Wittgenstein's "logical symbolism" clear divisions demarcate what can be said from what has to be left unsaid.¹⁷⁹ For example, with regard to logic itself, aspects of it can be indicated through language and other aspects can only be shown. In 4.121, Wittgenstein states, "Der Satz *zeigt* die logische Form der Wirklichkeit. Er weist sie auf" (33). A sentence reveals logical forms in reality and therefore the logical elements of reality. Sentences present what we perceive to be logical in the world. However, a sentence is unable to speak about the logical form of a sentence, logic as an entity or governing concept: "Der Satz kann die gesamte Wirklichkeit darstellen, aber er kann nicht das darstellen, was er mit der Wirklichkeit gemein haben muss, um sie darstellen zu können – die logische Form" (4.12, 33). A sentence, limited to showing logical forms, cannot represent the concept of that which it presumes to be using when showing reality; it cannot show the principle.¹⁸⁰

Taking the step toward the religious – as a potential world outside of logic – Wittgenstein suggests that expressions of the transcendent can only be shown and not spoken: "Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies zeigt sich, es ist das Mystische"

¹⁷⁹ Goppelsröder defines the "Sagbar" as "die situationsabhängigen Handlungen des Sprachspiels, die von den Mitkommunikanten wahrgenommen und in der einen oder anderen Weise, nie aber vollkommen willkürlich fortgesetzt werden können" (72). What can be said are the situationally dependent activities of a language game; those activities that can be perceived by dialogue partners and can to some degree be continued although never completely. A person can speak of only that which is perceived by both individuals in a particular situation. In this sense, Blumenberg follows the rules of the language game in that he does not speak about the lion around his students, because they do not have perceptive, sensual access to this situation, to this phenomenon. The lion must therefore remain "Unsagbar."

¹⁸⁰ Delineating Wittgenstein's conception of showing, Hansen writes: "That which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent. That which expresses itself in language, we cannot express by language. The propositions show the logical form of reality" (146). Sentences can present logical forms, but they cannot speak about the logical forms that undergird them.

(6.522, 85).¹⁸¹ What cannot be spoken can only be shown. The mystical becomes evident as words, displaying their inadequacy, prove themselves to be unnecessary. Considering the mystical in Wittgenstein's thought, Fronda suggests: "The point of note in this notion of mysticism is the suggestion of indescribability and ineffability. Where there is indescribability and ineffability, silence is called for" (18). Like logic as a principle, religious, mystical forms cannot receive representation through language constructions, as there is nothing about them that belongs to a logical world capable of being materially accessed.¹⁸² So, when people existing in the logical world intuit a transcendent unspokenness, they cannot speak about this intuition, but can instead only demonstrate their intuition by showing how they are unable to speak about it.

Seeking to communicate the experience of his transcendent premonition – to translate it into logical space – Blumenberg demonstrates this incapability of indicating, naming, that about which nothing can be spoken; "Alles in ihm drängte, schob, verlangte, ja, schrie fast danach, endlich, endlich vom Löwen zu sprechen" (150). And yet, he still cannot do so. Blumenberg is caught between two incompatible vocabularies, unable to linguistically reconcile two worlds equally real to him. Consequently, he questions the limits of the ordinary language employed in depicting aspects of the empirical realm.

¹⁸¹ Wittgenstein defines this "Unaussprechliche" in his text *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (1977) accordingly: "Das Unausprechbare (das, was mir geheimnisvoll erscheint und ich nicht auszusprechen vermag) gibt vielleicht den Hintergrund, auf dem das, was ich aussprechen konnte, Bedeutung bekommt" (38). Emphasizing the subjective nature of the encounter with the unsayable, Wittgenstein mentions that it appears to him secretly and provides meaning to the sentences he speaks.

¹⁸² Describing the scope and limits of the *Tractatus*, Hansen suggests "In the *TLP*, Wittgenstein claims that the totality of true propositions – the totality of facts that makes up the world – leave untouched the topics of value and sense of the world, of what is higher and ultimately, of God" (144). Religious forms do not belong to the body of data able to express propositions comprising the logical world.

Restricted to exclusive expression of what is tangible, this language remains limited.

When preparing his lectures, he painstakingly endeavors to formulate logical, philosophical sentences. While doing so, he becomes resolutely convinced of the deficiencies of logical language, going so far as to call it dead, inferring thereby the possibility of a “living” language that could indicate transcendence. The narrator writes, “Manchmal überkam ihn das Misstrauen, dass all die Worte, die er Nacht für Nacht auf die geduldig fortrückenden Bänder der Stenorette sprach, tote Worte waren, tot, tot, tot, weil sie für das Wesen auf dem Teppich nicht galten” (122). The language employed in the logical world is dead as it cannot indicate another, “living” reality. It fails to provide the signs, the effective quality, to indicate the activities and characteristics of a being shrouded in religious symbols. Consequently, the positivistic language concerning facts in the world delineated in his lectures differs from the propositional language of possibility existing in his mind and yet unable to be communicated.

The narrator shows how this occurs, as she provides access into a mind – Blumenberg’s – that is situated between two cases, two worlds, the logical world and the possible world. Operating in this way, the narrator adopts Wittgenstein’s trajectory of thinking, specifically when he writes: “*Wie* die Welt ist, ist für das Höhere vollkommen gleichgültig. Gott offenbart sich nicht *in* der Welt” (6.432, 84). The narrator presents two figures, a subject, unable to delineate his intuitions of the transcendent, and an image, unable to universally reveal itself in that it is the product, a picture, of an isolated individual. As he confronts obstacles in his desire to speak about the “Der Einbruch des Absoluten” (146), Blumenberg demonstrates an inability to speak about the unspeakable. In this manner, he performs the logic of the *Tractatus*:

The theological tenor in the *Tractatus* clearly is that God is transcendent and thus cannot be named, predicated or described. A name is a designation of an object; a predicate is ascribed to an entity; and a proposition describes a fact. But God is neither an object, nor a complex entity, nor a fact. All objects, complex entities and facts belong within the logical space. God belongs beyond it (Fronza 38).

What is beyond logical space cannot be “named, predicated or described,” and therefore language, capable only of unveiling propositions about entities in the world, cannot enable knowledge about the unnamed. When Blumenberg lectures, he speaks only philosophically, discussing such topics as the “Kunststücken der Zeitverlängerung, der Zeitverwandlung” (26). In his lectures he never addresses issues concerning the lion, because about him nothing can be known. While the lion shows himself to Blumenberg – “Der Löwe ist zu mir gekommen, weil ich der letzte Philosoph bin, der ihn zu würdigen versteht, dachte Blumenberg” (11) – he does not show himself to his students: “Wie unerkant der Löwe blieb, zeigte sich unzweifelhaft, Die Hörer in den Bänken sahen ihn nicht” (23).¹⁸³ Having access to Blumenberg’s philosophical ideas through his language, the students do not see the image allegedly inspiring his lectures. The lion remains an unspeakable element unable to be transmitted linguistically.

¹⁸³ Throughout the text the lion becomes visible not through words, but through a performance, through his “showing.” “Ob der Löwe ihm folgte? Nein, der Löwe zeigte sich nicht” (31); “Er mußte nicht aller Welt zeigen, daß er ähnliches tat wie Christus” (32); “Der Löwe zeigte sich wieder in seiner vertrauten Altersform” (35); “Oder war der Löwe, so wirkmächtig er sich auch zeigte, doch nur ein Hirngespinst[?]” (39); “Aber nein. Kein Traum. Der Löwe war am Ende ein so freies und unbedingtes Wesen, daß ihm das Recht, zu sein, was er ausdrückte zu sein, nicht streitig gemacht werden konnte” (122).

Nevertheless, the lion does show himself to one other individual in the novel, a nun. When Blumenberg meets her on the way to his friend's house to whom, he attributes to her a distinctly religious coding; she is "*eine ruhmreiche, gloriose Erscheinung*" (66). In the ensuing garden scene, during which the two of them engage in a pleasant conversation, he does not initially speak about the lion, as he is unaware of the lion's presence. However, the nun recognizes the lion accompanying Blumenberg, because he apparently shows himself to her: "Als er [Blumenberg] sich mit einem Abschiedsgruss zum Gehen wenden wollte, fragte sie: Wen haben Sie denn dabei? Blumenberg drehte sich überrascht um – und Tatsache – der Löwe hatte ihn begleitet, war hinter ihm hergeschlichen, ohne daß es ihm aufgefallen war" (66).¹⁸⁴ It is implied that the words spoken in the conversation create a pseudo-religious aura. The "Unaussprechbare" instance unveils its presence, and the nun acknowledges this, as she links the lion to the transcendent: "ein zu Gottes Lob erschaffenes Wesen habe überall seine Wohnstätte" (68). Revealing his image to some figures within the novel, and refraining from doing so to others, the lion links his appearing, or lack thereof, to language. The narration demonstrates this as it proceeds, juxtaposing this scene with the succeeding one.

After his brief encounter with the nun, Blumenberg continues on to meet with his friend. Quickly, he discovers he cannot stand the way his friend uses language:

¹⁸⁴ Later in the novel, when Blumenberg speaks with his editor, he wonders if the nun is a legitimate witness to mention when trying to provide evidence for the existence of his lion: "Die Nonne – jaja, ohne Zweifel, sie war eine handfeste Zeugin, eine beeindruckende sogar. Trotzdem hatter er den Fall liebend gern mit einem belelenen Kopf besprochen, die die beweiskräftigen Indizien kannte" (151). Here, the narrator juxtaposes the religious with the rational. Represented as religious, the nun is not a strictly rational thinker, who, according to Blumenberg, would be able to assess the irrational from a more neutral, objective perspective.

sein gurgelndes Reden...seine Sätze, die ausgerechnet jetzt, da es ihm schwerfiel, sie herauszubringen, in Plapperei ausarteten, begleitet von Ungeduld und Unmut, mit denen er die Frau, die emsig alles zum Kaffee herbeischaffte, immer wieder versuchte wegzuscheuchen. Blumenberg empfand diese Szenen als peinigend. Er schwieg. Der Löwe zeigte sich nicht (69).

An aesthetically unappealing conversation keeps the lion at bay. He remains estranged, uninterested in manifesting himself. He chooses to not connect himself to this specific form of language. Blumenberg then compares his friend's words with the person whom he had met immediately beforehand, the nun, "Käthe Mehliß...Die Kargheit und Bestimmtheit, mit der sie ihre Worte wählte. Nichts davon beim Freund" (70). While the logical conclusion may be a bit simplistic, the text does seem to communicate the idea that the lion, as representative of the transcendent, reveals himself to those invested in carefully selecting the words they employ and reflecting on how they engage in the language games they play. With this being said, one would wonder why the lion accompanies, reveals itself to, and even inspires Blumenberg, when he engages in philosophical language games that seemingly lead his students into confusion and desperation, perhaps even causing at least one of the students' deaths. To some degree, one could even say that Blumenberg is the proximate cause and the lion is the ultimate cause of these deaths. I am not sure if the novel offers an appropriate answer, or interpretation to this dilemma. Perhaps the lion, in this sense, points to a paradoxical, incomprehensible, and even unappealing transcendent instance that cannot be comprehensively qualified. What does seem to be evident is the fact that when the lion

unveils itself to individuals, the confrontation occurs without language, and instead within the strict confines of revelation. Yet, the lion always demonstrates his influence on language and his association with language, i.e. as it becomes the linguistic expression of a subjectively inspired, internally existing proposition representative of a range of possibility. Blumenberg's language produces the lion, and the lion simultaneously influences the way Blumenberg uses language to explore the unbounded realm of possibility. For the entirety of the text, language is critical, because it is one of the few means of coping with the absolutism of reality in which the figures in the novel find themselves. In language individuals are able to find the metaphors to represent alternative realities within a reality that would be unbearable if reduced to the mere austerity of logical propositions.

IV. Context – the absolutism of reality

Two worlds collide when this image, the lion, meets this subject, Blumenberg, the philosophy professor ceaselessly endeavoring to resist the logically unsettling world, by residing in the absolute, impermeable realm of reason. Confined to this sphere, Blumenberg eschews porousness, as he suppresses the urge to open himself to a picture that, even if it were to exist, would belong to another system. Hence, Blumenberg insists on residing in the rational world; the narrator writes: “Den lustigen Löwen stellte sich Blumenberg für einen Moment als Papierjäger, Papierschnapper vor, brach die Sätze, die sich in ihm dazu formen wollten, aber gleich wieder ab, weil er sich nicht im Albernem verlieren wollte” (18). Beginning to construct a sentence that would reflect a possible proposition inhering in his categories of thinking, he abruptly ends this quest, realizing

the absurdity of his activity. Avoiding this conceptual, unrealistic language game, he focuses once again on rational language.

In numerous instances Blumenberg reveals how the expectations of his secular environment and his personal demands for precise thinking constrain him to that empirical philosophical system in which he had been schooled.¹⁸⁵ In this regard, the narrator writes:

Die Übereumpelung durch das Wunder lehnte er ab...wozu hatte er ein sublimes Geistgehäus um sich herum aufgebaut...wozu war ihm ein scharfer Verstand verliehen worden und ein grundlegendes Misstrauen gegen Erregungszustände, die den Menschen in die Irre führten, wozu besaß er ein überragendes Gedächtnis – alles nur, um wie ein Kind die Hände zu falten und mit glänzenden Augen seinen Löwen anzugucken?
(88)¹⁸⁶

Here, the narrator presents Blumenberg as a paradigmatic figure of the secular age, a buffered, rational self, resisting a porous posture. In this manner, he also closely parallels another one of Lewitscharoff's figures in her oeuvre. In Lewitscharoff's earlier, semi-autobiographical work *Apostoloff*, the narrator presents a character, her sister, who is

¹⁸⁵ In this sense, Lewitscharoff's protagonist reflects aspects of the real Hans Blumenberg; regarding this philosopher, Harrington contends: "[Blumenberg's] ethos of 'human self-assertion' arises from a response to uncertainties of life unleashed in the wake of frustration with a world apparently abandoned by an arbitrarily distant redeemer God" (14). He maintains a buffered self, resolutely confining himself to the rational, in order to secure and stabilize himself in a world that has lost its certainty that had formerly been guaranteed through a more resolute conviction in God's existence.

¹⁸⁶ In another instance the narrator makes note of Blumenberg's excellent memory: "Das Bild, vom italienischen Meister starkschattig nach Art der Niederländer angelegt, führte Blumenbergs Gedächtnis, das jetzt wieder tadellos funktionierte, mit fabelhafter Präzision heran" (16). This flawless memory provides an additional attribute suggestive of Blumenberg's mental exactness, his buffered personality.

ensconced in her own house of rationality unable to bring herself to believe icons have some inherent capability of transferring a spiritual quality:

Darüber ist mit meiner Schwester schwer zu reden. Ihr weiches, gutmütiges Herz sitzt im Stahlgehäus des protestantischen Atheismus fest. *Bilder* [my italics] nimmt sie grundsätzlich für Kunst, je nach Wert hoch oder niedrig einzuschätzen.... Was Menschenfinger gemacht haben, hat für sie keinen Anteil am Zauber des Unerklärlichen...meiner Schwester ist einfach nicht beizubringen, daß es Räume gibt, die den Menschen einladen, sich zu verwandeln (64-65).

Like Lewitscharoff's sister, Blumenberg continually endeavors to prevent pictures and images from breaking through into the tightly constructed regions of his rational thinking. He has the felt duty to avoid entertaining disruptions, those punctures of permeation initiated from an external source, those entities not in accord with the logical form of the world. With a Cartesian worldview, he is steadfastly convinced of his existence as a thinking entity, an individual fundamentally concerned with the empirical.

Blumenberg's personal commitments to rational thinking coincide with the overarching message he wishes to convey in his lectures: humanity cannot escape reality as an absolute, and it therefore needs consolation as it has no sense of a way out (similar, in this regard, to a theme highlighted in Sebald's *Die Ringe des Saturn*). What the narrator does is to show how Blumenberg embodies and performs the philosophical system he espouses, a system that points out humanity's tendency to desire and obtain what it perceives to be greater forms of rationality. In one lecture he states: "Die Bewußtseinsprogramme, die wir uns verschrieben haben, die Ansporne, mehr

Bewußtsein zu schaffen, sie nötigen uns dazu, unsere Entscheidungen nach Maßgabe des Realismus zu treffen” (23). Modern individuals have prescribed to themselves the duty of growing in consciousness, in order to become more aware of their orientation within the real world. Consequently, they assume they have to make every decision according to the strict standards of realism. Reality, therefore, becomes more and more the absolute.

One aspect of this absolute reality is the fact that individuals have access to only a limited amount of time. The narrator describes how the philosophy professor “holte...den nächsten Satz aus der Tiefe seiner gewölbten Brust: Denken Sie an den Zeithaushalt des Menschen, die verwundbarste Stelle seiner Existenz” (26). Participating in a language game, grabbing another sentence from among that array of propositions existing within his subjective categories, Blumenberg announces that individuals are most existentially vulnerable when they consider the limited nature of time. The realization of this absolute is terrifying. At least, this absolute reality terrifies him, Blumenberg; the narrator presents him as always battling to bring back “die entrissene Zeit” (64). In this sense he exemplifies humanity’s struggle against the absolute dimensions of time as outlined by Hans Blumenberg, when he speaks of a prototypical figure in this battle: “Faust ist die Figur einer Welt unabschließbaren Fortdrängens, in der man nie genug Zeit haben und nie schnell genug sie nutzen kann. Man braucht mehr als ein Leben” (*Arbeit* 314). The novel demonstrates this fight against time, when it presents Blumenberg as he begrudgingly visits his friend who seems to be stealing time from him. The narrator writes: “Gerade von diesem Freund, der nun selbst in äußerster Dringlichkeit mit dem Phänomen der Zeitknappheit konfrontiert wurde, wäre zu erwarten gewesen, daß er

seinen, Blumenbergs, prinzipiellen Kampf gegen die Zeitknappheit verstünde und darauf Rücksicht nähme” (64). It is as if this friend has no conception of one of Blumenberg’s fundamental teachings. Blumenberg lives according to what he teaches, specifically regarding time, and he expects others to make a concerted effort to do so as well. The narrator lucidly shows Blumenberg’s mindfulness of his position within the absolute, secular sphere. He incessantly endeavors to advance his intellect, in order to cope with the absolute time constraints he knows he cannot escape.

Further elucidating the concept of the “absolutism of reality,” Hans Blumenberg discusses how it frames and regulates human existence. Because individuals cannot manipulate it, they remain passive to its operations. He writes: “Er [Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit] bedeutet, daß der Mensch die Bedingungen seiner Existenz annähernd nicht in der Hand hatte und, was wichtiger ist, schlechthin nicht in seiner Hand glaubte” (*Arbeit* 9). Individuals cannot control the conditions of their existence, those unknown, determining elements operative and yet incomprehensible. Cognizant of reality’s contingency, they are all too aware that the arbitrariness of existence has no explanation. Reality itself prevents humanity from looking behind reality to understand the underlying reasons behind its construction. Harrington interprets this “absolutism of reality” running through all of Blumenberg’s work in the following way:

All human existence orients itself around ideas, images, projects and experiences of the absolute, with which human existence must come to terms, attempt to overcome or diminish. Human cultures desire the absolute, strive for the absolute and invoke the absolute, and are at the same time crushed, overwhelmed and thrown into violent conflict with

one another by the absolute – and in consequence constantly find themselves impelled to seek to control, manage, overcome, reduce or in any other way ‘domesticate’ this absolute (8).

Humanity is keenly familiar with absolute realities, inescapable events and factors – those that are both empirical and non-empirical – lying beyond its capacities of management. Endlessly striving to contain these, to bring reality under control, to understand the contingency inherent in reality, humanity endeavors to tame and control the absolutes, in order to position itself within a realm of certainty.

Designing the intellectual setting in which her protagonist exists, Lewitscharoff’s narrator employs the “absolutism of reality” to express the world in its attributes of ambiguity, anonymity, unfathomability, and incomprehensibility. Looking closely at a few passages will clarify the narrator’s use of the term. One of Blumenberg’s students, Isa – the one who becomes infatuated with Blumenberg, mentally creating the image of a life together with him, an illusion completely disconnected from reality – converses with Biggi, her roommate. After momentarily daydreaming, she arrives back in reality and challenges the contention “daß wir alle füreinander geschaffen wären” (60): “Wir müssen alle finalen Rezepte überwinden, schließlich sind wir ja nur Vorzeichnungen von dem, was aus uns werden soll. Man muß den *Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit* [my italics] abbauen und zu einer Figur der schönen Resignation werden” (60). Here, the “absolutism of reality,” a constricting force, inhibits arrival at new forms of being. From her philosophical perspective, which is an embodiment of Blumenberg’s, humanity is currently only a trace, or rough sketch, of what it will become. Immediately following this quote is an allusion to Nietzsche’s *Also sprach Zarathustra*, – “Wir müssen sehr, sehr

achtgeben, damit uns *der letzte Mann* [my italics] nicht auch von Bord geht” (60).¹⁸⁷

In her estimation, there are no fixed identities and definite recipes, formulas to arrive at those identities. A new form of humanity can, and ought to, develop. The absolutism of reality, in which identities are fixed, must be done away with; one must instead resign oneself to a flexible sphere, detached from a debilitating absolutism. Eventually, Isa attempts a performance of this belief, jumping off a bridge in the hope of escaping the constraints of reality, and arriving at a new sphere of comprehension.

In a second instance of the term’s use, it is connected with the absolute reality that death is inescapable. The narrator writes,

Das vergangene Ägypten blickte unbeteiligt auf das gegenwärtige herab. Seine Anstrengungen, dem *Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit* [my italics] zu entkommen, waren immense gewesen, mit nichts zu vergleichen. Wertsteigerung des Ziels, dem Tod das Leben abzutrotzen, durch enorme Erschwernis seines baulichen Vollzuges. Von den heutigen Landesbewohnern und den auswärtigen Besuchern konnten solche Kraftakte zur Daseinssteigerung nicht mehr erfaßt werden (98).

Desiring to escape an absolute, death, the end of its civilization, ancient Egypt expressed the yearning to be eternal, to physically inscribe itself into life through the construction of its extraordinary monuments. The Egyptians exerted tremendous efforts to circumvent the absolutism of reality and thereby obtain the status of immortality. Alas, to no avail; the narrator, quoting Edna St. Vinceny Millay, writes: “*Their will was law; their will was not to die: And so they had their way; or nearly so*” (99). Employing these two references

¹⁸⁷ In Zarathustra’s 3. Vorrede, he boldly states: “Seht, ich lehre euch den Übermenschen! Der Übermensch ist der Sinn der Erde” (8).

to the “absolutism of reality,” the text presents the picture that individuals, and civilizations for that matter, cannot escape certain absolutes. Consequently, humanity lives in an incessant state of fear and agitation, as it knows that imprisonment within the material is humanity’s existential circumstance.

V. Anxiety

Living within the strict confines of reality’s absolutism causes anxiety and evokes the desire to flee this predicament. Blumenberg is all too familiar with this. When night arrives, he confronts repressed memories. As these recollections surface, he is relieved to have the lion’s presence: “Aber der Löwe sorgte dafür, daß es [the onslaught of memories] ohne Angst geschah...Der Löwe beschützte ihn vor der Todesfurcht” (126). The lion removes Blumenberg’s anxieties, assuring him of the preservation of his existence. His students have a different experience. As an instructor, he senses a certain responsibility to delicately handle his students’ fears; to repeat a quote previously cited:

Er hatte sich bemüht, keinen Menschen mit der Angst zu belästigen, die er früher empfunden hatte und die später in manchen Nächten zurückgekehrt war. *Spiele nicht mit den Tiefen des Anderen*, an diese Aufforderung Wittgensteins hatte er sich intuitiv zu halten versucht, auch wenn ihm das nicht immer gelungen war. Man mußte den Anderen vor der eigenen Angst verschonen und durfte die Angst des Anderen nicht mutwillig hervorlocken (128).

While he wishes to shield his existential fears, he nevertheless elicits his students’ fears. They become the ones who particularly suffer under reality’s absolutism. The novel juxtaposes Blumenberg with his students, contrasting an individual who cannot escape

the presence of the illogical with individuals who cannot escape existence in an entirely logical world. His students are presented as those who are trying to find refuge from Blumenberg's philosophical system, from the absolutism of reality they are confronted with in his lectures. Isa, for example, wants to go to Paris to be analyzed by Lacan, in order to finally be free from Blumenberg's influence: "Sie wollte zu Lacan nach Paris, um dort bei ihm, und nur bei ihm, eine Analyse zu machen. Lacan war der einzige, der sich auf ihre Art von Verrücktheit verstand und sie von Blumenberg befreien konnte" (109). Exposed to a philosophy centered on rational articulations of the world, she wants freedom from a reality that does not open up to the irrational. Unable to fulfill this desire, because "kurz darauf war Lacan gestorben" (109), she ends up committing suicide.

Similarly, Richard, after receiving an inheritance from his grandmother, flees from Münster, deciding to travel to South America in an attempt at self-discovery. When Richard is in Manaus, in the northern part of Brazil, on one particular evening he heads out to a bar, has a bit too much to eat and drink, wanders through the streets until he discovers he feels a bit lonely, and then returns to his hotel only to discover that he is unable to sleep. In this condition, "aus Verzweiflung," he begins to read excerpts from Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and happens upon the following passage, which he applies to his current situation:

Die Grundbefindlichkeit der Angst als eine ausgezeichnete Erschlossenheit des Daseins, und blieb an einer Stelle hängen...an der es hieß, daß die Flucht des Daseins Flucht vor ihm selbst sei, aber im Wovor

*der Flucht komme das Dasein gerade hinter ihm her.*¹⁸⁸ Richard ließ das Buch auf seinen Bauch sinken – unzweifelhaft, etwas kam hinter ihm her, etwas zutiefst Angsterregendes kam hinter ihm her. Aber die Angst war diffus. Wie Heidegger sich ausdrückte, *fungierte nichts von dem, was innerhalb der Welt zuhanden und vorhanden war, als das, wovor die Angst sich ängstete; die innerweltliche Bewandnisganzheit des Zuhandenen und Vorhandenen war für die Angst ohne Belang. Sie sank in sich zusammen* (185).¹⁸⁹

In this section of Heidegger's work anxiety is a type of affectivity, "Befindlichkeit," allowing and enabling disclosedness. With affective quality, anxiety incites a being to disclose itself. When a being tries to escape – when being flees from being, because being is afraid of what it is – when it tries to avoid disclosure, this same being is unable to escape in front of itself; "Dasein "[kommt] gerade hinter ihm her."¹⁹⁰ Consequently, being cannot escape, or get out from under the eyes of being.

¹⁸⁸Heidegger's full quote from *Sein und Zeit* is the following: "Existenziell ist zwar im Verfallen die Eigentlichkeit des Selbstseins verschlossen und abgedrängt, aber diese Verschlossenheit ist nur die Privation einer Erschlossenheit, die sich phänomenal darin offenbart, daß die Flucht des Daseins Flucht vor ihm selbst ist. Im Wovor der Flucht kommt das Dasein gerade "hinter" ihm her. Nur sofern Dasein ontologisch wesentlich durch die ihm zugehörnde Erschlossenheit überhaupt vor es selbst gebracht ist, kann es vor ihm fliehen. In dieser verfallenden Abkehr ist freilich das Wovor der Flucht nicht erfaßt, ja sogar auch nicht in einer Hinkehr erfahren. Wohl aber ist es in der Abkehr von ihm erschlossen "da"" (184-185).

¹⁸⁹ Heidegger's full quote of this section is the following: "Nichts von dem, was innerhalb der Welt zuhanden und vorhanden ist, fungiert als das, wovor die Angst sich ängstet. Die innerweltlich entdeckte Bewandnisganzheit des Zuhandenen und Vorhandenen ist als solche überhaupt ohne Belang. Sie sinkt in sich zusammen. Die Welt hat den Charakter völliger Unbedeutsamkeit. In der Angst begegnet nicht dieses oder jenes, mit dem es als Bedrohlichem eine Bewandnis haben könnte" (186).

¹⁹⁰ Isa, as well, acts out this fleeing; in one of her dreams, she leaves Blumenberg's house after a brief encounter with him: "Sie war der lebendige Gegensatz zur Welt und auf der

Anxiety, with its affective quality, leads an individual to understand that his or her being in the world is the fundamental source of the tendency to flee from the decaying self. Important to note here is that this desire to flee is never based upon something inside the world: “Die Abkehr des Verfallens ist deshalb auch kein Fliehen, das durch eine Furcht vor innerweltlichem Seienden fundiert wird” (*Sein und Zeit* 186). Anxiety stems from being anxious not because of what exists in the world, but because of what exists outside of it. For that reason, it has no explanation; there is no physical, empirical entity one can pinpoint as the cause of a specific anxious feeling. Anxiety is unfounded: “Das Wovor der Angst ist kein innerweltliches Seiendes. Daher kann es damit wesenhaft keine Bewandnis haben” (*Sein und Zeit* 186). In this sense, Hans Blumenberg’s thinking follows Heidegger’s very closely; we have existential anxiety not because of something we can see and experience phenomenally, but because of something “Absolute,” which exceeds our capacities of thinking, that which exists beyond the world. Heidegger makes clear that this anxiety does not derive from the here and now, “Daher ‘sieht’ die Angst auch nicht ein bestimmtes ‘Hier’ und ‘Dort’, aus dem her sich das Bedrohliche nähert” (*Sein und Zeit* 186). In this sense, it is explainable why Richard feels the presence of a “diffus” anxiety; it is cloudy and mirky, because it is not based within the empirical. For Heidegger, “Das Drohende kann sich deshalb auch nicht aus einer bestimmten Richtung her innerhalb der Nähe nähern, es ist schon “da” – und doch nirgends, es ist so nah, daß es beengt und einem den Atem verschlägt – und doch nirgends” (186). The anxiety is not present, i.e. something in the world, and yet it is

Flucht, auch Fliehen ist Handeln, und Blumenberg – Blumenberg hatte ihr diesen Gegensatz angesonnen” (78). Convinced of Blumenberg’s teachings, that all people are “Gefangener” (79), she flees from her existence by jumping off a bridge (80).

always already there. It is, in a sense, absolutely there. Anxiety is anxious about being in the world: “Das, worum die Angst sich ängstet, enthüllt sich als das, wovor sie ängstet: das In-der-Welt-sein” (188). A person’s status as being in the world provides the anxiety, not the phenomenal world itself.

Upon this revelation, Richard experiences what it means to be in the world, to be unable to escape from the absolutism of reality, to experience an anxiety with no particular, tangible cause. The narrator again allows the reader to see how this transpires. Peacefully spending time on a boat floating down the Amazon River, Richard gets to know a friendly woman named Maria, and he begins to grow affectionate towards her. While he believes there is something between them, she apparently has a different conception of their relationship, and she eventually leads him into an ambush, in which a “schwarze Kompaktmann rannte auf ihn zu und stieß ihm ein Messer ins Herz” (189). This unexplainable death is about as unexplainable as being in the world, two realities from which Richard is unable to escape. Attempting to flee from the “absolutism of reality,” all four of Blumenberg’s students face tragic deaths. Blumenberg, on the other hand, with an intuition of the transcendent and a personal language enabling him to construct a picture of this object that cannot be communicated, senses no inclination to find a way out of – to flee from – the dominant forces of reality.

VI. The continuation of myth

When he forms the image of the lion – or, asks the question “Wer war der Löwe?” – Blumenberg considers characteristics drawn from many mythical traditions: “Agaues falscher Löwe. Die Fabel vom Hoftag des Löwen. Der Löwe des Psalmisten, brüllend... Maria Aegyptiaca und ihr Begleitlöwe. Das fromme Tier des Hieronymus im

Gehäus” (12). Situated amongst a long line of mythical figures, Blumenberg’s lion becomes a myth in its own right. As a myth, the lion serves as a countervailing force against the insurmountable natural forces associated with being in the world. Pointing out the function of myth, Harrington writes: “Myth expresses a mode of coping with a surrounding existential environment that encroaches on human subjectivity like an overwhelming, overpowering force” (16). To deal with the existential state of impotence in the face of materiality’s impenetrability, individuals, according to Hans Blumenberg, invent myths, fictional stories functioning to provide orientation in a reality absorbed in rationality. As a part of mythmaking, people attempt to bring the unfamiliar into the realm of the familiar in order to live with a greater sense of ease in the natural world’s familiar spaces. Seeking to understand the unfamiliar is to provide greater clarity about the familiar. Hans Blumenberg claims: “eine der Funktionen des Mythos ist, die numinose Unbestimmtheit in die nominale Bestimmtheit zu überführen und das Unheimliche vertraut und ansprechbar zu machen” (*Arbeit* 32). Individuals feel more comfortable with the uncanny when they can situate it in some sort of form. Through myths people cope with the indefinite by presenting it in a definite – although, always abridged – form. Individuals create myths to protect themselves against nature’s sublime, uncontainable elements: “Der Mythos läßt den Menschen leben, indem er die Übermacht depotenziert” (*Arbeit* 38). In Lewitscharoff’s work, the characters are all too aware of those powerful forces within nature.¹⁹¹ According to Recki, Lewitscharoff’s protagonist Blumenberg, situated as he is in the “Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit,” sees humanity characterized with a helpless consciousness “im Blick auf den überwältigen Charakter

¹⁹¹ See for example 179, where Richard confronts “Alle Kräfte” at night.

undurchschaubarer und unerreichbarer Mächte" (323). Observing what happens to the figures in the novel, the reader identifies this helplessness in the face of unexplainable forces associated with being in materiality, existing within the absolutism of reality.

Mythmaking in the text operates at two levels. On one hand, Blumenberg creates his figure to find relief within the shackles of his absolutely logical system. On the other hand, the narrator's story presents a myth as a counternarrative to the modern, secular narrative of absolute rationality. First, while Blumenberg's students tragically fall captive to nature's unexplainable forces, Blumenberg, with his absolute metaphor, carves out a location of security, shielding himself from reality's overwhelming indomitability. In one particular scene the narrator positions her protagonist in his office standing next to the window. The narrator juxtaposes the natural – the empirical, secular realm – with the supernatural, a figure that has become an absolute metaphor through the linguistic projection based on an intuition. Here, the lion exudes more of an effective power on Blumenberg than the powerful, experiential forces within nature:

Sobald er sich vom Fenster abwandte, mußte Blumenberg zugeben, daß er in seinem Zimmer unter einem wirksameren Einfluß stand als dem des Mondes, einem gewaltigen sogar, der ihn aus einer Welt zog, in welcher Erfahrungstatsachen galten, durchdrungen und erfaßt von logischem Denken. Umformung der Materie in die reine Erscheinung unter Wegziehung aller Substanzen, die gemeinhin zur Materie gehörten, gab es das? (122)

He senses inside his office a non-empirical entity more real than those entities capable of being experienced and logically understood in the tangible world outside. In the world's

absolute reality, Blumenberg, through his own myth construction, has access to another absolute that exerts more of an influence upon him than the world dominated by logic.

Second, Lewitscharoff's narrator, presenting the lion as a permeating, transcendent instance, uses the literary institution to participate in the activity of mythmaking. In order to deal with the anxiety connected to the internally and externally felt pressure in the secular age to maintain a strictly logical and rational posture in an, at times, irrational and illogical world, individuals continue to form myths, providing alternative absolutes. Expounding on Hans Blumenberg's definition of myth in *Arbeit am Mythos*, Wetters writes: "Myth, like all human institutions, has the function of distancing and containing the absolute" (105). Myth as a social institution presents alternative pictures of reality, and this institution is essential in that it enables individuals to identify reality as it is by juxtaposing it with what it is not.¹⁹² Myths, and the institutions in which they are promulgated (this would include both religion and literature), help clarify reality. This could perhaps explain why "den Glauben hatte Blumenberg zwar verloren, nicht aber die Liebe zur Kirche" (35). He still values religion as an institution, seeing it as capable of perpetuating myths in a world that would be debilitated if left with the perceptions of sheer materiality. The narrator shows how Blumenberg needs that which gives pretense of coming from the outside: "Man darf den Löwen daraufhin als einen Einbruch des Absoluten in die behütete Welt des zurückgezogenen Denkers deuten, ein Zeichen der Gratifikation aus dem Jenseits" (Recki 324). This performance of a sign of transcendence manifesting itself in Blumenberg's protected world is narrated to us as a

¹⁹² For extended discussion on this point, see Yack 246.

new type of myth, and the narrator is quite cognizant of the myth's fictionality.¹⁹³ In one instance, she confesses: "Ein Erzähler hat aber die Pflicht, auch das Unwahrscheinliche wahrheitsgetreu zu verzeichnen" (197). The improbable mentioned here is the fact that the story has included four horrifying deaths up to this point. In reality, the narrator acknowledges that such travesties are unlikely to happen. At another point, when discussing Isa's suicide, the narrator admits that there are no definite facts: "Dem Leser steht naturgemäß frei, zu denken, was er will" (83). These narrative interventions offer the reader an insight into the fundamental mythical, fictional nature of these narrated and, at times, absurd inventions. This myth, however, still speaks to humanity's existential predicament; there is something rational about it. And, to understand the 'rational' element of myth a brief look into Hans Blumenberg's thinking will be helpful.

Ensnared in an absolute reality filled with contingencies, individuals endeavor to control the unforeseen by espousing rational arguments, thinking in a consistent manner, and eliminating contradictions. They want to develop logical models of the world, in order to eradicate uncertainty. Yet, within this logical realm, people still form myths due to the sense that all efforts at complete rationality remain incomplete. Due to the persistent feeling that intuitions of what is unknown will always remain, individuals, according to Hans Blumenberg, possess apprehension. To cope with this apprehension, people act rationally by forming myths.¹⁹⁴ Commenting on Hans Blumenberg's ideas on the rationality of mythmaking, Wetters writes, "He thereby excludes himself from the set

¹⁹³ The narrator intervenes at three moments in the novel, providing her assessment of how the narration has developed, or will develop, and giving her indication of the strategies employed to record the events.

¹⁹⁴ For a discussion on myth as a coping strategy, see Wetters 117.

of philosophers who assume a simple progression ‘from myth to reason.’...His discourse is no longer self-proclaimed to be on the side of reason. The possible continuity of myth and reason...[i]s the basis of his own discourse” (115). In this sense, Hans Blumenberg, identifying myth as a legitimate participant in rational discourse, serves as a forerunner of the postsecular moment, assuming that the religious, “mythical” voice essentially belongs in the language games of rational public discourse (Habermas).¹⁹⁵

In an unexplainable world (in its totality) myth-making persists as a logical activity. In an extended, but important quote, Hans Blumenberg makes this argument:

Hier wie dort, in ihren weltweiten wie zeitweiten Übereinstimmungen, zeigt der Mythos die Menschheit dabei, etwas zu bearbeiten und zu verarbeiten, was ihr zusetzt, was sie in Unruhe und Bewegung hält. Es läßt sich auf die einfache Formel bringen, daß die Welt den Menschen nicht durchsichtig ist und nicht einmal sie selbst sich dies sind. Das besagt noch nicht, daß die Erklärung der Phänomene immer schon den Vorrang gehabt habe und die Mythen so etwas wie frühe Verlegenheitsformen für den Mangel an Theorie gewesen seien. Wären sie Ausdruck des Mangels an Wissenschaft oder vorwissenschaftlicher Erklärung, so hätten sie sich spätestens mit dem Eintreten der Wissenschaft in ihre wachsende Leistungsfähigkeit von selbst erledigen müssen. Das Gegenteil war der Fall. Nichts hat die Aufklärer mehr überrascht und ungläubiger vor dem Scheitern ihrer vermeintlich letzten Anstrengungen stehen lassen als das

¹⁹⁵ In this vein of thinking Yack suggests, while reflecting on Hans Blumenberg’s strategy in *Arbeit am Mythos*, “once we recognize our continuing need for myth, we no longer need to oppose myth and reason” (247).

Überleben der verächtlichen alten Geschichten, der Fortgang der Arbeit am Mythos (*Arbeit* 303).

Myth demonstrates that humanity is editing, revising, and processing those worrying and destabilizing facets of existence, as it seeks to come to grips with the unexplainable realm of phenomena. Furthermore, myths reveal that the world, for humanity, is not clear and transparent; it remains undivided into essentially ascertainable and comprehensible components (Myth reminds people that the world is not fully known and serves as an impetus and catalyst for continual advancement). At the same time myth reminds individuals that the world is not left to a completely arbitrary power.¹⁹⁶ And, myths, as perceived stand-ins for the absence of scientific theory, do not cease to be produced and reproduced. Their persistence does not depend on a lack of scientific advancement. In fact, as scientific discoveries have increased, myths have maintained their importance. However, in as much as people create myths, they also deconstruct preexisting myths, in an attempt to bring myths to an end, to arrive, ultimately, at more rational forms of thinking. This transpires, according to Hans Blumenberg, as new myths replace old myths: “In jeder präntendierten Zuendebringung eines Mythos wird die umfassendere, wenn auch implikative Präntention zugänglich, den Mythos zu Ende zu bringen, indem ein letzter vorgewiesen wird” (*Arbeit* 319).

Adopting Blumenberg’s understanding that myths are created out of humanity’s inability to access the world in its entirety and are invented therefore as a palliative response to reality’s absolutism, Lewitscharoff constructs another myth, definitely not the last one, using an absolute metaphor to provide an alternative picture for a secular world

¹⁹⁶ Hans Blumenberg writes: “Der Mythos ist eine Ausdrucksform dafür, daß der Welt und den in ihr waltenden Mächten die reine Willkür nicht überlassen ist” (*Arbeit* 50).

existing “unter den Bedingungen des Rationalismus” (Mangold). Blumenberg and his lion become the mythic expression of a concept that cannot be expressed: “Der Mythos ist in seinen Anfängen die Überwindung der Sprachlosigkeit im Angesicht des Schreckens. Seine Funktion besteht darin, die Angst, die aus der Konfrontation mit dem “Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit” resultiert, zu mindern, sie zur Furcht zu rationalisieren. Erreicht wird dies im mythischen Sprechen durch “*Kunstgriffe* [my italics], wie den der Supposition des Vertrauten für das Unvertraute, der Erklärungen für das Unerklärliche, der Benennung für das Unnennbare”” (Kranz 45). Unable to speak directly of any type of transcendence, the narrator shows that she is only able to artistically depict inferences to the unfamiliar, the unexplainable, and the unnameable.

VII. Consolation and the cave

Emphasizing the topic of consolation, the text explores how its story, with its transcendent traces, may be capable of either providing or preventing a form of consolation. Unable to access pictures associated with transcendence, the students are without comfort and consolation in the absolute reality of Blumenberg’s logical philosophical system. They attempt to take his words seriously; Hansi, for example, opened “eine philosophische Beratungspraxis” (191). Yet, they die horrendous, macabre deaths. Blumenberg’s experience is different. The lion consistently consoles (152) him, protects him from “Todesfurcht” (126), gives him the strength to speak “beseelt” (26), and enables him to sense, think, and speak well: “Es brauchte Empfindungen, um gut zu denken, Empfindungen, um etwas Präzises zu sagen” (118). As Wenzel puts it, “Der Denker (kann) ohne die Gegenwart des zwar ein wenig schläfrig, beinahe indifferent wirkenden, aber augenscheinlich irgendwie doch mitfühlenden Wesens nicht mehr recht

denken” (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*). The empathetic lion comforts and supports Blumenberg: “Der Löwe war gekommen, ihn in seinem Wesen zu hegen, wie dies kein Mensch je für ihn getan hatte oder je würde für ihn tun können” (35). But, Blumenberg does not console his students: “Aber nach und nach war ihm das Interesse an den Studenten...abhanden gekommen” (28-29). Directly after his lectures he avoids speaking with them; “Wie immer hatte er den Besuchern keine Gelegenheit geboten, anschließend mit ihm ins Gespräch zu kommen” (27). Preventing his students from participating in the language games, he leaves them enveloped in pain, unable to be consoled.¹⁹⁷ Demmerling discusses the repercussion of not having access to language when he writes the following:

Innere Vorgänge wie Schmerzen, gleiches gilt für alle affektiven Phänomene, insbesondere auch für Gefühle, stellen ...natürliche und primitive Reaktionen dar, die in der Interaktion eines Organismus mit seiner Umwelt entstehen...Erst durch seine Verbindung mit Sprachspielen erhält das Innere seine charakteristische Kontur und Schärfe. Die Sprache verleiht dem Inneren Gehalt und Substanz, indem Bedeutsamkeitsbezüge hergestellt und aufgespannt werden (243).

With language an individual is capable of expressing that which is deep within. When language goes unused this inner realm of feeling and emotion remains unexplored. Language enables individuals to access the depths of their being and then offers the necessary signs to reveal the meaning of these inner processes. Unable to engage

¹⁹⁷ Providing her interpretation of the narration, Recki states: “Liegt hier nicht eher eine drastische Metapher für die Art und Weise vor, wie die Höhenflüge der Philosophie den Menschen, den jungen Menschen zumal, untauglich für die Realität und dem Leben abspenstig machen?” (325) I would disagree with this, contending that it is not philosophical discourse that drives the students into the depths of despair, but instead their prohibition from entering into the discourse.

linguistically with their professor, the students cannot participate in a true dialogue, a language game; they can only hear his words and mimic back what they hear. For example, “beherrscht” (48) by Blumenberg’s thought, Isa “wiederholte ... Blumenberg-Sätze wie ein Papagei” (48).

Instead of giving his students the chance to speak, Blumenberg does the speaking; he controls the language game. Ironically, he uses language to discuss the importance of finding consolation in a seemingly impermeable terrestrial sphere. Vividly aware that the more one becomes ensconced within reality, the more one needs consolation, he contends in one of his lectures:

Er führte aus, insofern sich die Menschen wechselseitig immerfort zum Realismus nötigten, seien sie zwar wie eh und je trostbedürftig, reell jedoch untröstlich. Sie hätten die Wunschherrschaften und die Fähigkeit zur Illusion fahren lassen und sich damit eines weiten Feldes der Tröstung beraubt, das sie aus der angsterregenden Verschlungenheit des Werdens und Vergehens befreien könnte (24).

Wanting to free themselves from their wishes and their illusions, people rob themselves of the chance to access an abundant source of consolation. They do this at their peril. Being able to tap into these illusions would free them from their fears aroused by the realization that they are being continually engulfed by a process of becoming and vanishing that is entirely outside their control. Employing such words in his lectures, Blumenberg indicates the importance of consolation, but he withholds this consolation, in that he does not speak to his students personally, perhaps because of his belief in the insufficiency of words: “Das herrische Einfallen der Sachen in die Worte beraubt uns der

Fähigkeit, Trost zu spenden, Trost zu empfangen” (23). Yet, this is exactly what his students need.

What Blumenberg cannot, or does not do, the narrator does; the narrator performs what he lectures, using the contours of the story as an art form, drawing the unknown into the known. In one of his lectures Blumenberg states: “Denken Sie an den Zeithaushalt des Menschen, die verwundbarste Stelle seiner Existenz – denken Sie daran, wie schwierig es ist, an die unaufstockbare Endlichkeit und Unwiederbringlichkeit wirksamen Trost heranzuführen. Um etwas gänzlich Unvertrautes ins Vertraute zu ziehen, dazu bedarf es raffinierter *Kunstgriffe* [my italics]” (26). Within humanity’s temporality, finite existence cannot be prolonged or in any other way augmented. Similarly, in this time framework it is impossible to bring back a past occurrence; certain realities cannot be reversed or in any other way amended. To cope with the unknown absolutes related to time – to provisionally manage contingency – one stratagem is to employ various forms of art to integrate the transcendent unfamiliar into the immanent order of familiarity.

Using her narrative as just such a “raffinierter Kunstgriff,” the narrator offers a perspective of possible consolation, one possible “case.” Presenting new forms of representation gives viewers the chance to look beyond the stifling, inflexible material realm that reinforces preexisting modes of thought. This idea that art can serve a consoling function finds resonance in one of Lewitscharoff’s earlier works; in “Schwerzense Männer,” she writes: “Die Bibel tröstet niemanden mehr. Kafkas Erzählweise tröstet hingegen sehr, weil uns die Meisterschaft der Kunst heute mehr tröstet als die Rede von Gott” (86). Operating on this assumption, Lewitscharoff’s novel attempts to provide a masterpiece of art, by introducing the reader to two absolute

metaphors, the lion – which, up to this point, has been discussed at great length – and a cave, which, according to Moss, “is one of the most significant absolute metaphors in [Hans] Blumenberg’s oeuvre” (91). The cave scene at the end of the novel provides an artistic expression ultimately pointing to, and offering a glimpse into, a transcendent realm, articulating thereby the consoling idea that the world of materiality is not the only possible case.

After describing in detail their dreadful deaths, the narrator gathers the deceased a final time and situates them in the interior of a cave, where they philosophize and converse. According to the narrator, in this constricted space, the characters nevertheless occupy an open, uncontained realm: “Beckett hatte einen zylindrischen Behälter vor Augen. Oben zu. Kein Entkommen...Im Kopf des Lesers muß jetzt ein davon verschiedener Behälter entstehen...groß, der Raum, wandelbar groß und größer, kein Raum der Einsperrung...Licht” (203). Spatially, they exist in a domain of possibility, of the hope that they can exceed their prior and present forms of existence. While only one of the individuals eventually leaves the cave, Blumenberg, they all have access to the idea, the “Licht,” that moving beyond their temporal states is truly feasible.¹⁹⁸ Hans Blumenberg clarifies the metaphoric nature of the cave and its association with the possibilities of human fulfillment when he writes, “Der formale Grundriß des Höhlenmythos, auf dem ein Prozeß des menschlichen Sicherfüllens, ja Sich-übersteigens eingezeichnet wird, hat also die Verwurzelung in einer mythischen Urvorstellung und

¹⁹⁸ In this sense, by leaving the cave, Blumenberg mimics Hans Blumenberg’s intended purposes of disclosing the absolute metaphor, “And Blumenberg’s goal of ‘bringing to light’ (*ans Licht bringen*) the absolute metaphors latently operative within the philosophical tradition remains an essentially Platonic gesture of ‘anabasis’ – a departure from the cave” (Reynolds 97).

zugleich die Funktion einer absoluten Metapher” (*Paradigmen* 113). The cave myth contains the foundational idea that an individual is in the process of exceeding itself, moving beyond its temporary, unfinished, unfulfilled status.

Offering a paradoxically permeable yet closed space, in which a person can explore the unbounded realm of his or her imagination – “Der *geschlossene* [my italics] Raum erlaubt die Herrschaft der Wünsche, murmelte Blumenberg matt” (210) – the cave symbolizes a location where new pictures can be born, where new perceptions of reality can come to fruition. According to Harrington, “Decisive for the fragility of the subject are pictures, dreams and illusions about the world, which can acquire an absolutism of their own in competition with the absolutism of reality. Like paintings on the walls of caves, pictures and fables are the beautiful illusions that hang in the caves of the human mind as it takes refuge from reality” (17). The narrator, in presenting this particular cave, provides the reader with just such an illusion, generating a new picture of Blumenberg as he struggles to linguistically maneuver his way through reality. Here in the cave, Blumenberg’s lifelong ability to effectively manipulate language to arrive at new ways of perception, to “name” the world, begins to unravel, and this becomes quite clear as his capability to find words, to sense their structure, to recall names, and to generate useful sentences begins to falter:

Was in Blumenberg noch an Geistesgegenwärtigkeit war, wurde allmählich trüber, Bilder, Halbsätze drifteten in Schwallen an ihm vorbei, und darin entschwammen einzelne Wörter...er merkte, daß er sich nicht mehr an seinen Namen erinnern konnte, auch an die Namen der anderen nicht...Wie durchziehende Vogelschwärme kreuzten Wörter in ihm,

sanken, erhoben sich, pfeilten vorüber, er tastete an den Wortleibern herum, die er kurz zu fassen bekam, probierte Silbenkombinationen aus, ohne Erfolg. Wie hieß noch? – vage hoffend dachte er, würde ihm der Name eines anderen einfallen, kehrte auch der eigene zu ihm zurück, aber das noch hatte den Namen bereits entführt (215).

This master of language, this “Weltbenenner,” who, throughout the novel, had been able to carefully craft words, molding them into sentences with an effective strength that frequently went unnoticed by him, now finds himself becoming separated from the game in which he had so (un)successfully played. As words fall out of his grasp, his ability to name diminishes and his identity as Weltbenenner slips away. Losing the ability to engage in language games, he recalls Goethe’s poem, *Selige Sehnsucht*: “nicht mehr bleibest du umfangen / in der Finsternis Beschattung, / und dich reißet neu Verlangen / auf zu höherer Begattung - ” (216). This poem reflects the fact that he is no longer bound to mere shadows, to those inadequate representations of the ideal, “Platonic” forms. Now, he can directly access the forms; the shadows for him have disappeared. Instead of using terms without knowledge of the genuine ideas undergirding particular signs, he can now adopt a new language, as he can finally come into direct contact with the real ideas and forms. When this happens, he ironically slips into the state of being unable to speak, unable to name – “Wie hieß noch?” – moving thereby into that realm “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen” (*Tracatus* 85).

Intimations at the loss of language occur simultaneously with his transferal from one world to another: “Da hieb ihm der Löwe die Pranke vor die Brust und riß ihn in eine andere Welt” (216). According to Hans Blumenberg, such an exit may be indicative of a

new beginning: “Anfang, wie er hier genommen wird, ist Ausgang. Ausgang aus dem Zustand der Abwesenheit von der Welt, der nicht festgehalten werden kann, in dem sich nicht leben läßt, obwohl das Leben in ihm ‘aufzugehen’ scheint” (*Höhlenausgänge* 18).¹⁹⁹ Exit from the world involves leaving a space with a similar structure to those words (just mentioned) used to construct it; both cannot be grasped. Unable to hold on to linguistic materiality, Blumenberg is equally incapable of embracing his material existence. The world he has named proves to be elusive. The world, appearing to be the location of genuine experience, is actually a debilitating space consistently proving its limitations in providing certainty. Leaving this space, Blumenberg can approach and experience that which is absent in material space, namely that concept reflective of an intuition unable to find correspondence. According to Hans Blumenberg, “Die Gefangenen der platonischen Höhle sind nicht sprachlos...Sie sind dennoch begriffslos, weil sie das ihnen Gegenwärtige nicht auf Abwesendes beziehen können. Sie haben auch nicht, phänomenologisch gesprochen, den Auffassungsmodus der Bildwahrnehmung. Sie wissen nicht, was Bilder sind und wie mit ihnen umzugehen wäre” (*Höhlenausgänge* 26). Those in the cave are without concepts, because they cannot draw connections between what is absent and what is present. With this being said, the narration does not allow for a concrete interpretation of this scene; various perspectives are possible. Perhaps Blumenberg leaves the imprisoned behind in order to arrive at the ‘true’ picture of the object which has affected him and of which he has tried to speak. He then eventually comes back to his students with the ‘true’ forms and the ability to effectively name the

¹⁹⁹ This would follow Wittgenstein’s idea on death presented in 6.4311 of the *Tractatus*: “Der Tod ist kein Ereignis des Lebens. Den Tod erlebt man nicht. Wenn man unter Ewigkeit nicht unendliche Zeitdauer, sondern Unzeitlichkeit versteht, dann lebt der ewig, der in der Gegenwart lebt” (84).

transcendent, finally offering them access to a consoling instance. Or, entering a transcendent realm, he leaves his students within materiality, where they remain without concepts, unable to access pictures indicative of an intuition perpetually absent.

VIII. Concluding remarks

The final scene, resisting a definitive interpretation, operates like much of the narration, as it demonstrates how individuals must constantly question whether they have complete access to “der Fall,” the world as the case, the totality of all possibilities. Throughout the novel, as the narrator relates Blumenberg’s experiences to the reader, she demonstrates how the text explores those possibilities beyond what the known world represents as the “case.” In this sense, the narration is involved in the same activity as the one in which Blumenberg is engaged, as he looks for new possibilities through his sentences that generate a transcendent image corresponding to his intuitions. Both the narrator and Blumenberg project pictures reflective of underlying subjective propositions indicative of the impossibility or possibility of a circumstance. With the lion, we do indeed have a distinct picture, which according to Hansen, “both says and shows something: It says how things stand in the world, and it thereby shows something about the form of reality and language” (146). The lion says that he is a metaphor, in that he shows himself to be uncontained and unable to be referenced back to a specific concept; as such, he is an absolute metaphor. It is this term with which the philosopher Hans Blumenberg wrestled, as he attempted to come to terms with what it means to be a rational being ensconced in an absolute, immanent domain while simultaneously aware of elements beyond comprehension. Confronted with this “beyond” – this foreign, transcendent intuition – Blumenberg endeavors to form a metaphor, to arrive at a picture

that would allow him to control, to organize, and to contain in an absolute space filled with contingency. Involved in this activity, Blumenberg arrives at a new picture of a concept which individuals and religious traditions throughout the historical record have been unable to directly access. Questioning whether he can really believe in the miracle of the lion confronting him, Blumenberg recalls his identity and his purposes in life: “glaubte er an die Beweiskraft des ihm widerfahrenen Wunders, das ihn – Blumenberg, Sohn einer Jüdin, einen katholisch getauften Agnostiker – mit Macht an die beiden Testamente band, nein: fesselte? Der sein Anliegen, das Gottesbild beider Testamente nicht auseinanderbrechen zu lassen, in immer neuen Anläufen zu Papier brachte?” (87-88). Blumenberg, an agnostic, has made it his life’s goal to not disrupt the image of God delineated in the Old and New Testaments, but instead to provide new attempts and new approaches to this image. In the same manner, Lewitscharoff’s narration, participating in its own language games, represents a text open to exploring new pictures, performing its own porous gesture in a secular age insistent on emphasizing the immanent.

Chapter Four

The Intuition of Transcendence Unveiled through a Subjective Performance

In *Der Große Fall* (2011) Handke's narrating subject, an actor, moves through and within various spatial categories: "Sphäre," (253), "Sektoren" (253), "Zentren" (160, 209), "Bezirken" (125), "Schwellen" (57).²⁰⁰ As he crosses from the edge of a forest into the center of a city, he reveals an identity linked to transcendence. In this way, he becomes one of Handke's many mythical characters in a demystified world.²⁰¹ Postured as a figure intent on investigating how specific interactions and various environments shape and affect his subjectivity, Handke's protagonist maintains a "porous," instable subjectivity.²⁰² Like Sebald's narrator in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, he reveals interest in redeeming some aspect of his present historical time. While Sebald's narrator wants to "save" the literary archive by inscribing it into his own work, Handke's actor desires to "save" those ensconced within an "Endzeit" (246) scenario, those who have been effaced by a political system expecting them to participate in a war based upon the president's agenda. While Sebald's text constructs the prospects of an aesthetic redemption, Handke's text – similar to many of the works in his oeuvre focused on "geistigseelische Orientierungsversuche" (Gottwald 136) – probes the question of existential redemption,

²⁰⁰ The actor frequently approaches and passes through "Schwellen" (126, 197, 219, 220, 222), confronting within them crucial moments on his journey. Early in the novel, the actor awakens at a threshold, framing the consequent trajectory of the narrative: "Zwar bin ich nicht erwacht im eigenen Bett, aber auch nicht in einem fremden" (9). Residing in an unknown space, he is unable to cling to secure categories. In the modern moment he is vulnerable, open to an identity and categories of which he is not yet aware.

²⁰¹ Commenting on Handke's overarching use of myth in his works, Gottwald writes: "Der Mythos wird ihm [Handke] zum Potential ästhetischer Formung, in der entzauberten, entmythisierten Welt auf poetische Weise quasi-mythische Bereiche wieder- 'einzubürgern'" (136).

²⁰² For Taylor's discussion in *A Secular Age*, on the "porous self" and the "buffered self", see pages 38 and 539.

identity orientation in an ambivalent present. To obtain this orientation, Handke's actor explores his perceived "salvific" identity as he enters into various spaces, slowly coming into contact with his own "Dasein."

As he considers the constituent elements of an individual, Handke's actor assumes the body consists of more than its materiality. He subtly intuits the possibility of a soul that can be saved; "Recht bedacht, war es weniger dieses mit Händen und Füßen eingreifende Retten, auf das er so besonders aus war. Als einen inneren Retter stellte er sich vor. Zum Seelenretter sah er sich, wenn es darauf ankäme, fähig...einfach durch sein Dazwischentreten als er selbst und sein *Dasein* [my italics]" (151). Convinced of his own "Being's" affective, "salvific" capabilities, the actor spatially moves from the outside, "waldauswärts" (115), to the inside, "stadtein" (103).²⁰³ As a walking one – "Ich bin ja unterwegs" (9) – he takes on the qualities of a mystic, a pseudo-spiritual figure, looking for a revelation, a new performance.²⁰⁴ In a manner similar to Handke's other "Spaziergängertexte" (Hummel 36), the narrator focuses on the actor's movements.²⁰⁵ The narrator writes: "Zu erzählen: Seine Gehweise und sein Blick, sie entwaffneten und stimmten heiter" (90). Resisting the instrumentalization and mechanization of his body, he adopts a "Gehweise" indicative of a postsecular mood, in which, according to Taylor,

²⁰³ Emphasizing the actor's certainty of his salvific identity, the narrator writes: "Und für eine Rettung war er, der Vater, der Richtige, auch das war einmal Gewißheit. Auf ihn kam es an" (210).

²⁰⁴ Discussing Labadie's ideas in *La Fable Mystique*, Bocken writes: "the famous 'definition' of a mystic as the one who cannot stop walking and who, living with the awareness of what is lacking, knows of every place and every object, that it is not *that what he is searching for*" (115).

²⁰⁵ Elaborating on these texts, Hummel says that they are primarily "Zeugnis eines offenerzigen privaten Nachdenkens, wofür sich das Gehen als mobilisierende Strategie wie zirkuläre narrative Struktur besonders eignet" (36). Indeed, throughout the text, the actor, while walking, exposes his inner, politically and spiritually charged, reflections.

there is “a reclaiming of the place of feeling, against the one-sided pre-eminence of reason, and a reclaiming of the body (*Secular* 507). With his body the actor demonstrates his existential interest in wishing to disarm and to comprehend; he wants to challenge the secular order.

In the previously mentioned quote the narrator employs the term “Dasein” (151).²⁰⁶ Using this specific concept, the narrator presents the actor’s approach to the center as an effort to understand his identity, and he seemingly evokes a reference to Heidegger.²⁰⁷ Handke additionally makes an allusion to Heidegger through his frequent citations of Alaska (89, 217, 245, 249, 274), mentioning at one particular point “Nome, Alaska” (267), a place where Handke, in 1978, read Heidegger’s essay, *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken*.²⁰⁸ In Heidegger’s short text there is an important concept that appears much later in *Der Große Fall*. Envisioning the spatial trajectory of Dasein, Heidegger writes: “Das Ent-fernen ist zunächst und zumeist umsichtige Näherung, in die Nähe bringen als beschaffen, bereitstellen, zur Hand haben...*Im Dasein liegt eine wesenhafte Tendenz auf Nähe*” (Dünne 142). Drawing near the city, the actor involves himself in this process of approaching, desiring not only to save but also to distance himself, “Ent-fernen,” from an incomprehensible identity, to obtain an understanding of his “true” identity, his

²⁰⁶ At another point, the narrator writes of the actor’s “Lust auf das Dasein” (39).

²⁰⁷ Speaking of Handke’s reliance on Heidegger, Bülow writes that “Handke entwickelte unabhängig von Heidegger eine eigene reflektierte poetische Schreibpraxis, für die er dann in wesentlichen Punkten eine theoretische Bestätigung bei Heidegger fand” (132).

²⁰⁸ In his research on Handke’s relationship to Heidegger, Bülow states that “Peter H. [reiste] 1978 an einen ihrer Schauplätze nach Alaska. Im September befand er sich in der 4.000-Einwohner-Siedlung Nome südlich des Polarkreises, direkt an der Beringsee...In dieser menschenleeren Gegend las er am 25. September Heideggers Aufsatz *Bauen Wohnen Denken*” (140).

“Dasein.”²⁰⁹ At the novel’s outset, in the midst of a violent storm, thunder and lightning awaken the actor and lead him “in eine vollkommene Geistesgegenwärtigkeit, und in noch etwas anderes: eine Bereitschaft; Bereitschaft, sich zu confrontieren, zu stellen, einzugreifen” (8). Set within this framework, the novel presents an actor whose fundamental goal is to unfold his existential identity. This activity is consistent with the other figures constructed by Handke: “Handkes Charaktere entwickeln sich nicht im Laufe einer Geschichte, sondern erleben schmerzhaft und doch existentiell notwendige Häutungen, die einen neuen Zugriff auf die sich immer wieder entziehende Welt in Aussicht stellen” (Carstensen 172). This particular text explores how the actor unravels the various dimensions of his instable, religiously denoted identity.

On the day of “der große Fall,” Handke’s narrator watches “his actor,” “Mein Schauspieler” (30) from the moment he wakes up in the bed of a businesswoman – “die ihm gut war” (10) – until he arrives at the central square of the city.²¹⁰ After she disappears to her work, he is left to consider how he is going to make his way into the city, in order to receive a reward – to be “gefeiert” (38) – for his acting successes and to

²⁰⁹ Considering de Certeau’s ideas on the writing of otherness, Füssel contends: “The I constitutes itself through the longing to be one with the other. Thus identity formation works in dissociation from non-identity. According to Hegel this has a ‘double significance. First it has lost its own self, since it finds itself as another being; secondly, it has thereby sublated that other, for it does not regard the other as essentially real, but sees its own self in the other’” (30). The actor demonstrates this longing as he proceeds towards the city to reconcile with the woman, to become one with her. In the process, he loses his own self, only to later recognize himself as one related and indelibly connected to others. When he is among others on a subway train he looks into a window, sees somebody’s reflection, thinks it is another individual, and then recognizes that it is actually his very own image.

²¹⁰ What “der große Fall” actually is remains unknown. There are numerous allusions to a “Fall” (9, 19, 31, 42, 43, 50, 103, 173, 188, 213, 219), without complete clarification as to what it actually consists of. A teaspoon falling out of a hand could be a parable “für einen größeren Fall” (19), and the actor contends “[wir] sind geworden und gewesen, was der Fall ist” (31).

reconcile himself with the woman he had not loved: “Er liebte die Frau nicht, hatte es ihr auch gesagt” (30). In this same city he will also star in his next cinematic performance, adopting the role of a gunman intent on assassinating the president in an act of protest against the president’s schemes to carry out a justified war:

Es handelte sich um eine Kriegserklärung, die sich nicht so nannte, sondern „Eingriff,“ „Intervention“, „Gegenschlag“, „Reaktion“... Und wörtlich sagte der Präsident zuletzt: „Es bleibt uns keine Wahl, als gegen die Feinde unserer Zivilisation und Religion zu intervenieren...unsere Bürger sollen, das ist mein heiliger Schwur, nicht umsonst gestorben sein! Die Geschichte verlangt ihr Recht und hat ihren gottgewollten Gang zu gehen. Gott helfe uns dabei! Unser Gott ist groß, Großer Gott, wir loben dich... (235).

To prevent these wars and to accomplish a greater form of justice, the actor must leave the forest, “Vom Waldrand aus” (45), and enter the city, where he hopes to save those who have fallen captive to, and become convinced of the president’s words.

What the narrator demonstrates is that the actor, like the president, appeals to some transcendent entity outside the law to carry out what he believes to be just. The narrator does this by cloaking the actor in a messianic identity, one repeatedly constructed and confirmed as the text develops. For example, during the actor’s short stint in a church, a priest gives him a special name with divine connotations – an activity that further situates the text’s mythical status – and entrusts him with a divine

commission: “Christoph – den Sie tragen, du trägst das Gewicht der Welt!” (185).²¹¹

Just as the president contends his war is “gottgewollt,” the narrator similarly receives the burden of executing a divinely sanctioned justice to prevent this war. Whose actions are truly “just?” Commenting on Walter Benjamin’s understanding of the appropriate, “just” means of violence, Weigel writes, “When the category of *justice*, as exemplified in the figure of ‘just ends’, is introduced into existing law in the interest of providing a counterbalance to violence, what it involves is taking recourse to a sphere prior to or outside the law. The concept of justice, meanwhile, originates from yet another sphere: not myth, but religion” (236). As the actor’s conception of justice stems from his perceived religious identity, he offers a counterperspective to the divine law established by the president. As the novel unfolds we come to find out the type of justice the actor represents, one infused with traces of the “religious,” the “transcendent,” a performed form of thinking represented by movement in entirely secular space.

Assessing this messianic character intent on employing violence, I will rely on Benjamin and Agamben’s understanding of the messianic, assuming that their respective categories challenge traditionally received salvation narratives and portray the innerconnectedness between religious assumptions and political activities, providing thereby a legitimate and productive framework for interpreting Handke’s figure. The actor’s “just” mission, with its distinct messianic coding, does not depend on an activity; the narrator presents the actor not “bei seinem Tun” (14) but by his “Gehen.” This is

²¹¹ Regarding the mythical facets of naming within Handke’s texts, Gottwald writes: “Im mythischen Denken hat Sprache prinzipiell ein magisches Potential: Worte und Namen ‘bezeichnen und bedeuten nicht, sondern sie sind und wirken.’ ... Ebenfalls mythisch konnotierbar sind die häufigen Motive der Namensgebung, Namensuche und Namensveränderung: Handkes Taufen oder Umtaufen, sein Benennen insgesamt, erscheint ebenfalls zumindest mythosanalog” (141-42).

contrasted with the “just” activity of a president who believes “Handeln ist alles!” (80), who greets with the words, “Tätig!Tätig!Tätig!” (92). He is counted among those who do not heed the injunctions: “Gebt Frieden...da sein ist groß” (171). Providing a story of the opening up of being, the actor offers a counter narrative, a salvific act that saves by opening eyes, “der Geschichte zum Augenaufgehen verhelfen” (19). By becoming the narration of his story, the revelation of his identity, he represents the justice inherent in a counter-hegemonic way of thinking, “ein anderes Wissen” (267). Historical redemption becomes existential, the quest to understand identity, as opposed to the material redemption offered and advocated by the hegemonic power. That is, the saving, which never seems to physically transpire, becomes more of a continuous development toward raised consciousness, an inner awareness that one’s identity is not fixed but instead performed, always reliant on external “others” to maintain any sense of inner coherence.

Adopting the categories provided by Benjamin, I contend that the actor’s salvific act is the participation in a divine law-destroying violence that is uniquely juxtaposed with the president’s mythical violence. Regarding these two types of violence as conceived by Benjamin, Weigel writes:

(1) on the one hand, *mythical violence*, which he describes as a law-making violence, a violence that sets boundaries, that brings at once guilt and retribution, and that is threatening and bloody; (2) on the other hand, *divine law-destroying violence*, which he describes as perpetually destroying boundaries, as a violence that expiates, that strikes, and that is lethal without spilling blood. (238)

Handke's actor, a mythically constructed figure, undermines mythical violence, by performing the messianic, offering a new revelation through his participation in a divine law-destroying violence. Doing so, he seemingly disempowers the hegemonic forces, as his story is narrated, a story that discloses an identity ultimately dependent upon the faces of others for its own hope of any type of salvation: "So war er, der auf das Retten aus war, selbst, zumindest einmal, gerettet worden? Ja, von einer Frau" (217).

To understand the type of faces constructed in Handke's text and the effect they have on the actor, I employ Emanuel Levinas' ideas on the face of the other, an ontological system delineated in *Totality and Infinity*. In this text, faces, informed by an absolute "Other" that enables "others" to be revealed, are endowed with ethical force in secular spaces void of the transcendent. As the actor confronts the faces of others, he reveals his own identity, which, in as much as it sees itself as messianic, actually needs the messianic intervention of others. Ultimately, this demonstrates the incompleteness, or inadequacy of the actor's messianic endeavor and further destabilizes the actor's identity, evoking the sense that it is only faces indicative of destabilized identities in secular space that can serve as objects capable of carrying out a divine, law-destroying violence.

I. The context: the vanishing of revelation

The actor finds himself in a historical moment in which narrations no longer reveal entities endowed with greater meaning; artistic (re)productions stick to representations of the empirical. Focusing only on depictions of the tangible, the verifiable, these same stories have stopped revealing faces, expressions of the entirety of "being," and, in doing so, they have failed to disclose "the other." With no more stories there are also no more roles for the actor; the narrator writes:

Nur hatte er, wie er sagte, die Gewißheit (wieder seine „Gewißheit“...), von einem Moment zum nächsten, „mit einem Schlag“, es sei für einen Schauspieler, und nicht bloß für einen wie ihn, nichts mehr darzustellen, zumindest in einem Film. Zwar gebe es Rollen, noch und noch, und nicht nur die bekannten, typisierten. Aber es seien keine Geschichten mehr zu erzählen, und mit Geschichte meine er nicht das üblich gewordene „nach einer wahren Geschichte“, sondern Offenbarung, ob das nun die Offenbarung des Gesichts eines Menschen sei, wie einst in den Filmgeschichten von Carl Theodor Dreyer, Robert Bresson, Maurice Pialat, John Ford, Satyajit Ray, oder das Offenbarwerden eines, des Anderen, eines Größeren, des Großen, in dir und mir. (18)

In many ways the narrator here situates the actor within a secular age, one void of moments and interactions endowed with higher meanings. Describing such a milieu, Taylor writes, “there was a shift from the enchanted world to a cosmos conceived in conformity with post-Newtonian science, in which there is absolutely no question of higher meanings being *expressed* in the universe around us” (446). According to the actor, stories must offer a revelation, the disclosure of something greater within the individual – the profound, the incomprehensible. Desiring an atypical role, one not based upon a “wahre Geschichte,” or a preexisting structure, the actor wants to participate in a production in which either faces become known or the multidimensional other becomes manifest. Consequently, his performance – spatially exhibited as movement from the outside, the “Grenzbezirk” (132), to the inside, the perpetually elusive center, “auf der Schwelle zur Stadt” (126): “In die Stadt, wohin sonst” (191): “querstadtein” (226) –

explores the activity of finding others, both the external other and the internal other, through the faces he confronts.²¹²

Throughout the text the actor happens upon certain nondescript, unrevealing faces. Unable to expose their being, they provide no existential information. They are powerless faces. On one occasion, for example, he discusses his travels from “den äußersten Rändern stadtein” (103), during which he confronts a man, with whom he quickly develops a friendship. He is one of those “wie die übrigen aus der Gesellschaft Geschiedenen“ (103). Marginalized, this man has lost the ability to reveal himself; the actor is unable to read anything from his face, “Schon die vorigen Male hatte der Schauspieler das Gesicht des Mannes jeweils ruckartig verändert gefunden. Heute aber war nichts mehr von seinem Gesicht, überhaupt einem Gesicht zu sehen, vor allem keine Augen” (104). This particular face is unable to generate any sort of narration. Similarly, when the actor finds himself in a subway train, he looks around at the other passengers only to notice that their faces provide no information about their individual stories; their faces are illegible, “und als darauf sein Blick durch den Waggon schweifte, erschienen ihm die Gesichter der Fahrgäste, auch die der Telefonierenden...Sie blieben im übrigen allesamt undurchdringlich und ließen nichts, aber auch gar nichts ahnen von ihrer Existenz, ihrer Vorgeschichte, ihrer Geschichte, ihrem Um und Auf“ (230). Continually suppressed, without the ability to articulate their existence, to narrate their lives through their expressions, they are prone to violence: “Gleich würde einer von ihnen ein Messer oder sonst etwas ziehen und auf die übrigen losgehen” (230). As the actor spends more

²¹² Seen as a mystical figure, the actor is “one [who] learns through encounters with alterity – otherness, other people – to seek ceaselessly a God who is always ‘more’” (Sheldrake 81).

and more time among the people within the city, he becomes increasingly aware of the muteness of their faces. To these faces, which had been erased by historical narrations written by political sovereigns, the actor feels called: “Bei all den für die Gesellschaft Verlorenen, zu denen mein Schauspieler sich hingezogen fühlte, hatte er an ihre Gesichter von früher, aus deren Kindheit denken müssen, und noch keinmal war es ihm aber gelungen, sich einen von ihnen als das einstige Kind vorzustellen” (118). Directing his path to those within society’s interior, isolated into a peripheral status, the actor moves resolutely to silenced faces, seeking to reconcile and recover faces from the past by confronting and interacting with living, “ethically” revealing faces in the present.

On his one day journey the actor meets two other faceless individuals. They, however, are those who have typically been associated with authority. An invisible individual – “Einer aus der Menge, unsichtbar bleibend” (237) – one of society’s “Verlorenen,” looks at a T.V. screen with the president on it. To others standing in close proximity, he quips, “Seht ihr Idioten denn nicht, daß er [the President] kein Gesicht hat? Und auch keine Macht? Daß es keine Macht mehr gibt, nur noch den Mißbrauch? Und der [the President] da mißbraucht sie!” (237). This is a revolutionary voice. This invisible individual represents the “klassenlose Gesellschaft,” to which, according to Benjamin, “ein echtes messianisches Gesicht wiedergegeben werden [muss]” (Bock 332). To this unrepresented individual, acutely cognizant of the fact that with no face there is no power, the actor moves in a representative fashion, enabling him to express himself. Keenly aware of power structures, the invisible one speaks with honest clarity about the present situation. Presumably defaced due to actions taken by the hegemonic powers, he recognizes that this traditionally assumed powerful individual, the president, is actually

without power, because he has misused his power and effaced himself. He therefore advocates a paradigm shift, asserting that those people who had taken the president's words seriously need to understand that the president has lost his legitimacy. In this profane world, the president has lost his divinely-backed power; in a world without God – “die Erde hatte aufgehört, die Welt Gottes...zu sein” (171) – the president can no longer legitimately say, “Die Geschichte verlangt ihr Recht und hat ihren gottgewollten Gang zu gehen” (235). The president, finding himself in a profane world, can no longer theologially justify his claims. Instead of looking to the unseen face of the transcendent he must turn to the face ensconced within immanence, which has become invisible and unexpressive.

Like the president, the actor's father is also perceived to be faceless. “Der einzige von früher, den der Schauspieler kreuzte, war sein Vater. Er erkannte ihn, werweißwarum, an seinen weißen Haaren...Und er bekam seinen Vater auch nicht zu Gesicht” (239). Those in authority, those typically associated with the law, have lost the ability to express themselves; their faces have lost symbolic power. Consequently, the old law can be replaced with a new law, represented by faces that can effect legislation appropriate to the historical moment. As the actor participates in the unveiling of faces, he exposes new forms of authority, and seemingly undermines the traditional law's power. Considering Agamben's messianic “figure of thought,” Liska suggests that it “would interrupt the eternal deferral of the end and the unbounded reign of the Law” (161). Representing this figure, Handke's actor interrupts and undercuts the law's supremacy, as he perceives those associated with the law as defaced. Those who move towards a new law, able to provide ethical orientation in profane space, possess

communicative, legislative faces. A woman, for example, employing her facial gestures, exerts a determining influence on the actor's direction: "Das eine Gesicht, das der Frau, hatte genügt, und er nahm in der Folge noch und noch solche wahr...Er ging jetzt den Weg der Frau" (257).

While the woman's face is evident, the actor's as well is gradually unveiled throughout the narration. He becomes recognizable. He moves from being seen by his "Zuschauer" (82) to being recognized, "erkannt," due to his "Profil" (254). His being, as it moves and speaks – "Sein Gehen, es sprach, es erzählte" (103) – serves as the locus of a new revelation. Traversing through various spaces, his body produces the text that is read. Commenting on this frequently used strategy within Hanke's oeuvre, Hummel writes, "Es heißt, eine Schrift hervorbringen, die unmittelbar mit dem Körper des Schreibenden verbunden ist. Es heißt ferner, den Körper selbst zum Mittelpunkt dieser Bewegung zu machen; dergestalt, dass der Schreibende in seiner Schrift eingeschlossen bleibt; dass er zugleich Ursprung und Ziel des Schreibens ist" (18). The body presented to the actor's various viewers is the body that is writing, creating specific signs, textual marks that must be interpreted to understand the actor's being. Early on the narrator mentions that the actor, quite noticeable in his films, remains unrecognized in public life: "Mit seinen Filmen war er zum Star geworden, ohne daß ihn auf den Straßen...jemand erkannte. Alles an ihm, seine Gestalt, seine Haltung, seine Bewegungen, war unscheinbar" (16). Marked as one who is recognized in his films, the actor, as he moves towards being identified throughout the course of the text, demonstrates that he is moving simultaneously into a film. Drawing the actor's movements on to center stage, the narrator brings the actor's body into the focal point, a body that ultimately discloses a

face whose eyes generate genuine contact. At the outset, the narrator suggests that the actor's story of the unfolding of his being intends to accomplish the opening of eyes: "Wenn nicht das Buch, so würde er, mit seinem Spiel, seinem Dasein, Stehen, Umsichschauen, der Geschichte zum Augenaufgehen verhelfen" (19). As his "Dasein" is "entlarvt" (82) in front of his viewers, the actor "plays" with communicative signs that become the language he speaks. Within a Derridean context this play generates contact and confrontation without allowing for the closure provided in absolute presence:

From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We *think only in signs*. Which amounts to ruining the notion of the sign at the very moment when, as in Nietzsche, its exigency is recognized in the absoluteness of its right. One could call *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence (*Grammatology* 50).

As the signifiers grounded in transcendence are deconstructed in the text, the actor's decentered body and face play a more critical role. His eyes generate a contact that results in the true confrontation of two beings, the exposure of two uniquely different identities: "In dieser Helligkeit begegnete er einem Sterbenden...Obwohl der Schauspieler nirgends stehenblieb, war es eine Begegnung. Es begegneten sich ihrer beider Augen" (261); and the result, "Ich erkenne dich. Du bist erkannt!" (261). Eyes have been opened; facial expressions have begun to speak; a mutual recognition has occurred. Through his movements he has narrated himself into recognition: "Das Spaziergehen und das Wörterfinden unterwegs ermöglichen...seine [Handke's] häufig auch schreibenden

Helden das Gehen als individuellen Erkenntnisweg” (Hummel 8). Through genuine confrontation with an “other” on his journey into the city, the actor experiences self-recognition. In this unveiling, this disclosure of his face, the actor becomes aware of his profane identity, marked as it is with traces of transcendence. My contention will be that this reemergence of the face, invested with saving power, coincides with Levinas’ turn away from Heidegger’s emphasis on the ‘truth of being’ towards the ‘face of the other.’ This is simultaneously a turn away from the purely metaphysical/transcendent towards the secular, infused, as it is within Levinas’ system, with traces of the religious. According to Carstensen, many of Handke’s texts participate as well in this activity: “Anstatt das ohnehin aus dem Alltag Herausgehobene weiter zu erhöhen, wollen Handkes Texte ‘die Normalsachen...in den Schein des Besonderen’ stellen. Diese Zielsetzung geht einher mit einer ausdrücklichen Absage an die Kontemplation metaphysischer Fragen, denn durch die Hinwendung zu den einfachen Dingen verlagert Handke das Transzendente in die Immanenz der Erscheinungen” (80). The faces confronted by the actor, normal objects emerging in secular spaces, remain fixed to the realm of immanence, while carrying the traces of a transcendent “Other.”²¹³

II. Intuitions of an extraordinary observer

In an environment in which “interior” identities have become concealed, the actor demonstrates a keen awareness of being seen, sensing that he is unfolding his identity among an entourage of viewers: those people whom he meets on his journey, Handke’s narrator, the readers of Handke’s text, and another “perceived,” though unidentifiable

²¹³ At one point the narrator writes: “Die unversehens still wiederkehrenden Orte, Dinge und Wesen waren Gesichte, die für die Zeit jetzt entsprechenden, Gesichte, die den Namen verdienten” (267).

viewer. Oscillating as he does between ordinary being in the real world and acting in fictional spaces, he executes his particular performance with the cognizance of a viewing instance eluding the spatial-temporal terrain: “In seiner Vorstellung gab es neben ihm, dem Zwangszuschauer, noch einen, der wiederum ihm zuschaute, und jetzt auch zuhörte...ein Wesen von einem anderen Planeten, auf jeden Fall kein Mensch“ (81-82). Here, the actor reveals the consciousness of existing, in Taylor’s words, “porously,” “in a space which takes [him] beyond [himself], which is porous to some outside power, a person-like power” (36). Continuing on, the narrator indicates that “die Vorstellung, einen Zuschauer und Zuhörer zu haben, und zwar schon die längste Zeit, einen, der hinter ihm stand und still den Kopf schüttelte, war so stark, daß er sich umdrehte. Niemand. Nur das hohe Gras wehte. Und trotzdem blieb sie, die Vorstellung. Er dachte sich weiter beobachtet, von einem Unsichtbaren” (82). Presence is inferred and then erased; only a trace, the “Unsichtbar,” remains. What happens here is similar to what Derrida suggests when he writes: “the value of the transcendental arche must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased” (*Grammatology* 60). This textual moment coincides well with Derrida’s understanding of how transcendence may be depicted in the empirical realm: “Categories must be missing for the Other not to be overlooked; but for the Other not to be overlooked, He must present himself as absence, and must appear as nonphenomenal” (*Writing* 103). Intuiting a non-human, non-present, invisible entity, the actor reveals the consciousness of the extra-empirical. He possesses a feeling, whether it exists as a mere projection, or self-production, indicative of, in Schleiermacher’s system, a subjective consciousness of identity reflective of “divided human existence in relation to absolute

being” (Hollands 298).²¹⁴ This “religious” feeling, linked as it is to the perception of an unseen, transcendent instance, is coupled with the sense that this extra-empirical instance is some sort of affecting agent beyond the tangible realm. This external force makes its presence felt without coming into visibility. It exerts a particular effect on the acting subject. As he performs the role of the actor, he is inspired by this entity, which has clearly positioned itself as a member of his audience: “Da freilich tat das Bild von solch einem Beügt-und-Gehört-Werden eher gut; es kräftigte, es klärte, es – lichtete, während es ihn jetzt, an diesem Tag, in diesem einen Moment, von Grund auf in Frage stellte” (82).²¹⁵ This perception, or fantasy, of being observed and being heard strengthens him, as it does for so many religious people who feel empowered, when they believe themselves to be performing in front of the divine. The actor’s intuition of a transcendent entity inspires him to his creative activity.²¹⁶ The abstract sense of being-

²¹⁴ Derrida similarly elaborates on this sense of divided human existence when he writes: “Ever since I have had a relation to my body, therefore, ever since my birth, I no longer am my body. Ever since I have had a body I am not this body, hence I do not possess it...And who could the thief be if not the great invisible Other, the furtive persecutor who *doubles* me everywhere, that is, redoubles and surpasses me, always arrives before me where I have chosen to go” (*Writing* 180-81).

²¹⁵ Carstensen, providing a slightly different interpretation of the actor’s experience, contends that the actor reveals the awareness of “eine überbewusste Selbstwahrnehmung,” which serves to destabilize him: “das Erlebnis der Depersonalisation hat unmittelbare Auswirkungen auf seinen Umgang mit den Dingen. Die existentielle Verunsicherung des Schauspielers, ‘der sonst für alles einen umstandslosen Zugriff’ besitzt, äußert sich in einem grotesken Verlust natürlicher Anmut” (41).

²¹⁶ To those situated within the secular age, Charles Taylor directs a poignant rhetorical question: “how can one account for the specific force of creative agency, or ethical demands, or for the power of artistic experience, without speaking in terms of some transcendent being or force which interpellates us?” (597) Handke’s actor performs an answer to such a question, representing as he does a creating agent that seemingly derives inspiration from an unknown, transcendent entity.

seen and being-heard thrusts him into the light, inciting him towards his art, which is presented as a performance of self-disclosure among a multitude of viewers.

Paradoxically, in as much as this intuited activity of a non-present entity strengthens him and mobilizes him towards the light of self-awareness, it simultaneously destabilizes his sense of self, causing him to question the very foundation of his identity. It is within this insecure, yet empowered, posture, void of any dogmatic sense of identity – there is no sense of “a clear boundary, allowing us to define an inner base area [for the porous self]” (Taylor, *Secular* 38) – the actor begins to unfold himself: “Es war, als habe er sich vor dem unsichtbaren Beobachter, und vor aller Welt, entlarvt” (82). Through his performative movements, the actor begins to reveal his identity in a milieu absent of further revelations. As the actor is narrated, a revelation comes into view. As he reveals his face, he exposes his “true” identity, a deferred “messianic” identity dependent upon both the immaterial and the material for its subsistence. Disclosing his “face,” becoming the Levinasian “other” with an ethical, “salvific” force, he initiates a performance transpiring between the transcendent and the immanent, between the invisible observer and the material audience. He becomes an individual marked by the tension of existing between two realms. When Agamben, in another context, writes about how an individual reveals religious qualities in that he or she possesses “an awareness that the individuated being is not completely individuated but still contains a certain nonindividuated share of reality...living in the intimacy of a strange being, remaining constantly in relation to a zone of nonconsciousness” (12), he provides a helpful framework for seeing how the actor exists with this awareness of a strange being. As the narrator speaks of the actor’s “Entlarvung,” he evokes the sense of a self in the process of individuation, one that

unmasks itself in front of two forces, the invisible and the visible. This results in the revelation of a messianic identity that is messianic in so far as it is instable, incoherent, and, in a Derridean sense, deferred.²¹⁷

While regarding himself as messianic, possessing the will and intent to save – “Die Not des Sohnes, vereint mit dem Opferwillen des Vaters” (212) –, he, the father, does not possess a great deal of self-cohesion, lingering on the verge of losing control: “Er war nicht der, als der er ansonsten, auch jenseits seiner Filmrollen, erschien. Er war ganz und gar nicht der Seelenruhige, Unerschütterliche, Geistesgegenwärtige, die Dinge im Griff Habende” (82-83). This instability derives, in large part, from his ambivalence on how to act – i.e. how to perform – how to be an “Amokläufer,” in an ethically appropriate manner. At various moments he expresses a desire to find a third instance capable of giving him an ethical framework, to provide prohibitions.²¹⁸ In an internal monologue he states: “Ich darf nicht so reden. Ich verbiete es mir. Nur: sich selber etwas verbieten, wirkt nicht – bewirkt nichts. Ein Dritter muß mir verbieten. Aber wer?” (125) Because, as Taylor contends, “God is not present in public space as in past centuries” (426), the actor cannot search for this third entity in traditional religious systems. The narration has created the context of an age in which authoritative texts have disappeared: “Die Worte Gottes oder seines Orakels würden vergehen, oder sie waren schon vergangen, seit wann? seit den Völkermorden? seit den Atombomben auf Hiroshima und Nagasaki? oder schon seit den Totenmillionen des Ersten Weltkriegs? oder noch vorher?

²¹⁷ Deferral, stemming from the play of *différance* present in the trace, “does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present” (*Grammatology* 66). In the trace *différance* transpires, and “*différance* defers-differs” (66).

²¹⁸ “Nur wie? Sie sich verbieten? Brauchte man, damit so ein Verbot auch wirkte, nicht jemand andern als sich selber, einen Außenstehenden, einen Dritten?” (47)

und mit den Worten Gottes würden Himmel und Erde vergehen, oder waren schon längst vergangen” (171).²¹⁹ In this secular climate he cannot look to a conventional, transcendent figure for self-regulating principles. Positioned in this modern moment, absent of the voice of God, the actor endeavors to find an authoritative form of communication. Consequently, he performatively ensconces himself securely in the immanent realm, constructing an identity that is incoherent, outside the law, and messianic in its capability of bringing in a new ethical system that takes into account the face of the other as opposed to those antiquated faces that have become faceless through their faulty, illegitimate, divinely-backed use of power.²²⁰

III. A messianic figure

To construct his actor’s characteristics and movements, the narrator employs numerous allusions to a type of Messiah.²²¹ This is principally evident through the actor’s identification of himself as a savior who proceeds to a city in order to save. However, this salvation never transpires. Yet he still possesses this identity, which, in my estimation, can be linked to another type of Messiah, one espoused and constructed by Benjamin. Commenting on Benjamin’s ideas, Hamacher writes: “The Messiah could not come if his coming were assured and that means: if the Messiah himself would be certain as the one he is, if he comes. The Messiah is only the one who can also not come and can also not

²¹⁹ Here, Handke’s narrator directly reverses Christ’s words in the gospel of Luke: “Himmel und Erde werden vergehen, aber meine Worte werden nicht vergehen (Lk 21,33).”

²²⁰ Incoherent in that he allows himself to walk into unknown spaces. He, at times, avoids orientation, opting for ambiguity: “und dann war es ihm sogar recht, sich zwischendrin zu verirren; er versprach sich etwas davon” (156).

²²¹ Consistent with Christian tradition, the narrator establishes the Father/Son motif. Communicating with his father, the actor establishes himself as the son: “Hallo, Vater. Da sitzt er, dein Sohn, in einem fremden Land und grüßt dich wieder einmal” (38).

be the Messiah. The Messiah is only he who, even in his coming, might as well not come. Only he, who in his not-coming can still come” (66-67). When the Messiah arrives, he is no longer the Messiah. He must always be in the act of approaching to still be the Messiah. Hanke’s actor operates in a similar manner, as he abides in a process of perpetual nearing, inferring an arrival that never transpires. Employing Benjamin’s ideas on the “Messianic,” which I believe offer a helpful starting point in making sense of who this actor “is” and “becomes,” I intend in this section to analyze the actor’s perception of his self as Messianic: his angelic status, his turn to humanity and the ethical face, his revolutionary mission, his divine violence, and his sacrificial role.

a. angelic

Coupling his actor with an angelic identity, Handke’s narrator draws a conspicuous connection to Benjamin’s “Angel of History,” a figure that plays a critical role in effecting a Messianic moment. With an understanding that he is the one who saves, or, who wants to save, the actor readily accepts the angelic status ascribed to him:

er [ließ] sich von seiner Überzeugung, ein Retter zu sein, sein zu sollen, nicht abbringen, nicht abbringen. Seine Alaskafrau einst: ‘Du hältst dich wohl für einen Engel.’ – Mein Schauspieler darauf: ‘Obwohl ich nie einen gespielt habe, auch keinen spielen könnte, und obwohl ich, wie gesagt, bisher nie einen Menschen richtig gerettet habe: ja.’ Helfen allein genügte nicht; Helfen allein konnte eine Art von Verrat sein. Retten! (152).

Yes, he believes himself to be an angel, at least in his status as an actor, although, as he indicates, he has never received this particular role. Here, he does seem to contradict himself, as the narrator earlier indicates that he had held such a role: “Und trotz seiner

Jugend stellte er fast nur die Alterslosen dar, den Odysseus, den Engel” (14).

Nevertheless, when he performs, his being undergoes a transformation; he becomes an angel. As he begins to act, he adopts a persona with a sacred aura, experiencing a change in the affective capacities of his being. Falling into a “spezifische mythisch-religiöse Blickrichtung” (Gottwald 140), he carries out a religious function, after setting aside his “day-to-day” being, his “alltägliche Daseinsinhalt” (Gottwald 140). Indeed, according to a few of his viewers, he has “fallen” into a religious trajectory of perception, as he has saved them; “Wenn das so war, schien es ihm das natürlichste, nicht bloß zu helfen, sondern womöglich den einen, den andern, sogar zu retten...Und doch hörte er von vielen seiner Zuschauer, er habe ihnen geholfen, ihnen gar das Leben gerettet, durch – wie auch immer – sein Spiel” (149). His performance is the operative aspect of his saving capability. And, he admits this; outside his work, when he is not an angel, he is unable to save anybody: “Und weiter fiel ihm ein, daß er außerhalb seiner Arbeit, des Spiels, des Darstellens, draußen im Leben, bis zum heutigen Tag keinen einzigen Menschen hatte retten können” (150). To exist as an angel he is dependent on his occupation, his performed social role. In this manner, he is very similar to the priest he confronts in the cathedral before he executes his mission. The priest acknowledges that he too is a performer, and that is why he is able to recognize the actor: “Du bist weder ein König noch ein Desperado, Bruder Christoph. Du bist ein Schauspieler. Woran ich das erkannt habe? An deiner Unauffälligkeit, an deiner Unperson...An deiner Geradheit, Unverstelltheit. An deiner Unbedingtheit. Und warum ich das erkannt habe? Weil ich, als Priester, selber so ein Schauspieler bin, es zu sein habe” (186). Carrying out his clerical duties involves a performance. The priest, in so far as he fulfills a role, is able to save.

The text demonstrates and emphasizes the performative nature of the actor and the priest's saving acts. My suggestion is that the actor carries out an angelic role closely replicating the one Benjamin constructs for his "Angelum Novus."

Benjamin's angel of history wants to save those individuals who have been forgotten and neglected due to the catastrophes of history. They have slipped out of memory, unattended to and therefore lost, left behind, and unredeemed. While desiring to awaken the dead, to revisit them and their stories, the angel is prevented from doing so as he is pushed forward by the winds of progress. He is unable to save those within history, because he cannot remain with them:

[Der Engel der Geschichte] hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet.

Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor uns erscheint, da sieht er eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert. Er möchte wohl verweilen, die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen. Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her, der sich in seinen Flügeln verfangen hat und so stark ist, daß der Engel sie nicht mehr schließen kann. Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist dieser Sturm. (697)

Progress prevents the angel from continuing to hover around the scene of catastrophe. Unable to close its wings, the angel is propelled into the future, to which its back is turned. As the angel flies backwards into the future, it looks at the past and watches the unredeemed debris of history pile up before its eyes, unable to save. Handke's actor finds

himself in the same position, as he too is prevented from saving. He feels himself called to the lost, but he cannot sacrifice himself for them: “Es war danach jetzt angesagt, er solle sich auf den Weg machen und opfern.” Yet, he is hindered from doing so because his shoes are stolen, “Die Schuhe, die er zum Ausruhen ausgezogen und neben sich ins Gras gestellt hatte, abhanden gekommen, gestohlen worden waren...Er könne nicht weiter, er könne nirgendwohin, habe an Ort und Stelle zu bleiben bis zum Sankt-Nimmerleinstag” (212). This reference to Sankt-Nimmerleinstag, indicative of an appointed time that will never arrive, infers that the actor will never be able to fulfill his sacrificial mission. In this manner, he remains, like Benjamin’s Messiah, the coming one, the one who is Messianic in that he is always going towards those he wishes to save.

Similar to how Benjamin’s “Angelum” moves backwards into the future, unable to save the past, Handke’s actor, as well, looks back, walking, as he frequently does, backwards: “Das war ihm immer noch anzusehen...an den Bewegungen – einem häufigen Zurücktretten, *Rückwärtsgehen* [my italics]” (13). Later in the text the narrator describes a scene in the following manner: “Als der Schauspieler die Lichtung waldaus, stadtwärts, verließ, ging er die letzten Schritte *rückwärts* [my italics]...Einen König *Rückwärtsgeher* [my italics]: So einen möchte ich spielen” (102-103). In another instance, the narrator suggests: “Die ersten Schritte stadtein tat der Schauspieler wiederum *rückwärts* [my italics]” (128). His eyes are not directed towards the city where he expects to receive his reward. Instead, his eyes are on the forest. He continually sees in his mind’s imagination “den Waldmenschen,” which represents faces from past, “Gesichter von früher” (118). He carries these “historical” images with him as he makes his way into the city, seeing, along the way, the oppressed, whose faces and expressions have disappeared. Like

Benjamin's "Angelus Novum," he sees the past, which he, during the time of his backward proceedings, is unable to save.

The backwards movement towards the city is similarly a movement away from transcendence, the forest, towards immanence, the immediate present.²²² According to Bachelard, "Forests, especially, with the mystery of their space prolonged indefinitely beyond the veil of tree-trunks and leaves, space that is veiled for our eyes, but transparent to action, are veritable psychological transcendent" (185).²²³ Exiting this realm representative of the transcendent, the actor approaches an immanent order:

Statt dessen kletterte er die Böschung hinauf, und zwar *rückwärts* [my italics], so wie er die Wälder *rückwärts* [my italics] verlassen hatte. *Rückwärts* [my italics] klettern, war das denn möglich? Und mit Bestimmtheit *rückwärts* [my italics] gehen? Ah, das so besondere Geräusch der Schritte *rückwärts* [my italics], Geräusch wie nur je aus einem Diesseits, einem frischen, einem neuen! Geräusch eines Pochens, eines Pochens an des Diesseits Tor. Und er stellte sich dazu einen Film vor, mit dem Titel 'Das neue Diesseits' (193).

²²² This symbolic departure from transcendence can also be observed as an infusion of the transcendent realm into the immanent one: "Die frühere Weltferne oder Wildnis spielte freilich noch in die Welt da hinein" (85).

²²³ While Handke's narrator does not overwhelmingly envelope his forest with religious codes, he does provide certain symbols that would evoke considerations of the transcendent. For example, at one point, the actor observes various types of trees, "Buchen, Eschen, Birken" (52), and concludes that they form "eine natürliche Laubhütte" (53), a structure associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, a festival commemorating the Israelites' wanderings in the desert following their departure from Egypt.

Climbing backwards, he maneuvers himself into a present realm, a “this-sidedness.”

Fixing himself more resolutely within immanence, the actor nears the execution of his “divine violence.”²²⁴

In Benjamin’s system this “divine violence” “follows a different conception of time and history, and Benjamin characterizes this as *Gegenwärtigkeit* or existence in the present moment” (Weigel 240). Divine violence occurs in moments of immediacy. Connecting Handke’s “Diesseits” to Benjamin’s “Gegenwärtigkeit” reveals how the divine violence inferred by the actor results in a type of salvation that follows the Benjaminian model:

Erlösung ist bei Benjamin nicht als vulgarisierte biblische Jenseitshoffnung gedacht...sie [Erlösung] wird nicht als existierende Entität und metaphysische Prämisse gesetzt, sondern als eine Kategorie des Denkens...Nach dem bisher Gesagten ist Erlösung damit durchaus eine für Benjamin ‘jenseitige’ Entität allerdings innerhalb der Sprache....Es geht ihm...um die Denkbarkeit des ‘Diesseits’ (Wunder 120).

Within Benjamin’s system, salvation does not exist as definitively established in some other outside realm that can only be hoped for. Nor is it fixed as a real entity in space and

²²⁴ The divine violence depicted in Handke’s text takes on the form of a non-violence. This violence, which is supposed to transpire in the center of the city, is juxtaposed with a real violence that could be carried out on the periphery. Before entering the city, the actor considers the possibility of murdering someone: “Ihm das Hackbeil...aus der Hand gerissen und ihm mit dem Scharfen Ende den Schädel gespalten bis auf den Schreihals! Zu seinem Glück kam ihm...im letzten Moment eine Szene aus dem Drehbuch...und ohne sein Glück besonders zu spüren, ging er weiter stadtein” (170). Avoiding physical, actual violence, the actor decides for a metaphysical type of violence, symbolized by “being” within moments of immediacy.

time. Instead, salvation is an external entity that has entered into thought. Within the immanent order traces of this transcendent instance are then revealed and experienced in and through language. “Erlösung” transpires when transcendence seeps through into the immanent domain of thinking, when, for example, a reflective being, aware of some transcendent source, narrates and writes itself more concretely into immanent space. In Handke’s text this occurs when observing the language the actor employs: “Das alles sagte der Schauspieler unhörbar, und er drückte es einzig aus mit seinem Gehen, wie ja überhaupt sein Gehen eine Spielart des Sprechens war” (103). His movement towards immanence, the “Diesseits,” expresses his form of thinking, one reflecting more resolutely on the immediacy of the moment.²²⁵ Proceeding along the spatial trajectory of Benjamin’s “Angelus Novum,” the actor enters into an urban location where saving does not transpire; it never becomes an “existierende Entität.” Without reconciliation, the actor and the woman remain “verloren” (278).

While a transcendent salvation remains absent, transcendence nevertheless receives a subtle form within immanent this-sidedness; as Bachelard emphasizes “‘This side’ and ‘beyond’ are faint repetitions of the dialectics of inside and outside: everything takes form, even infinity” (212). Indeed, within the immanent order there are traces of transcendence in that a forest, symbolic of “psychological transcendentals,” ultimately finds itself in metropolitan space. The narrator gives a form to the “Jenseits” by using religious symbols to establish it within the “Diesseits” sphere: “Der kleine Platz der Kathedrale ausgeleuchtet wie die ganze innere Stadt. Doch die vielen Vorsprünge und Einbuchtungen des Gotteshauses sorgten für Schattenbahnen, und daneben standen drei

²²⁵ Commenting on the inherent thinking behind movement, de Certeau writes, “Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it ‘speaks’” (99).

Bäume so dicht zusammen, daß sie zu dritt einen Wald, einen dunklen Wald mitten in der Weltstadt, bildeten” (276). While that which is symbolic of the transcendent receives form within immanent space, the actor does not infer the presence of a traditional, Christian soteriology. The type of “salvation” that the actor represents is manifested in his method of thinking, which centers increasingly on the humanity he confronts in moments of absolute presence.²²⁶

b. the turn towards humanity, the unveiling of ethical faces

Benjamin’s Angel of History reveals the desire to be with humanity: “Er möchte wohl verweilen, die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen” (697). Similarly, performing this messianic type, the actor moves “mit Bestimmtheit” (191, 193) towards individuals who have become incapacitated, silenced, “das Zerschlagene,” who are without expression due to historical processes. The actor’s urge is evident as he feels himself called to this world; “Bei all den für die Gesellschaft Verlorenen, zu denen mein Schauspieler sich hingezogen fühlte” (118). Likewise, in an internal monologue he says to himself: “Du darfst nicht so denken. Du darfst nicht. Zeit, dass du unter die Leute kommst” (56). Crossing the border between the forest and the city – between the “entvölkerte” (155) periphery and the “Zentrum” (155) (“hier spielt es sich ab”) – the actor intimates at his sensed obligation to be with humanity, those at the mercy of an

²²⁶ The narrator, indicating the type of salvation the actor envisions, writes: “Aber es war zu spät, die Gelegenheit, den andern zu retten und in die Welt unter dem großen Himmel, ins Jetzt und Jetzt, zurückzuholen, sie war vorbei, ein für allemal” (154). Leading people and objects to present times comprises one aspect of the actor’s conception of salvation. He also perceives a spatial component of his salvific purposes: “Im entscheidenden Moment könnte er, so seine Überzeugung, gleichwelchen Verzweifelten...von der Grenze zurückholen in eine zittrige, aber erst einmal sichere Mitte“ (151). Endeavoring to lead individuals and entities into an immediate present, the actor seeks to save those who have been spatially and temporally displaced.

unjust regime.²²⁷ Describing the trajectory of Benjamin's "Messias," Faber writes:

“mit der messianischen Zeitbewegung „im Rücken“ *folgt* messianische Existenz der Richtung, in die der Messias *geht*: auf die Welt zu, der Vergangenheit entgegen, den Verlorenen nach” (76). Following the Messiah's path involves proceeding towards the world, which simultaneously includes going towards the faces of the past, to those who have become entangled within its destruction and erasure. Benjamin's angel is, after all, turned towards “das Antlitz der Vergangenheit” (697). Carrying with him the faces from his personal past – “[er] hatte an ihre Gesichter von früher, aus deren Kindheit denken müssen” (118) – the actor indeed goes towards the past, seeing continually in his imagination these “historical” faces, as he proceeds towards “die Welt,” those people “auf der Lichtung” (87), endeavoring to unfold their identities. As he begins to focus on others, he discovers how historical occurrences have somehow defiled them, rendering them without a genuinely appealing form: the narrator writes, “Von ihnen, den Händen, den Nägeln weggeschaut. Hinauf zum Himmel, oder sonstwohin? Nein, nirgendwohin als zurück zu den Leuten, die kreuz und quer allmählich die ganze Lichtung besetzten. Er konnte nicht mehr von ihnen wegschauen, wie sehr er es auch wollte. Was sie von sich sehen ließen, war nämlich nicht schön” (73-74). While the past remains imprinted in his imagination, he localizes his attention on the present, on those who have fallen out of favor. This becomes a Levinasian, “secularizing” moment. As the actor confronts the opportunity to look upwards towards the transcendent, “zum Himmel,” or outwards, “zu den Leuten,” he opts to share the realm inhabited by those who are attempting to reveal their disgraced faces, motivated as he is by a question he poses to himself: “Vom andern

²²⁷ He does not always reveal a genuine interest in actually being with people; “Er freute sich an dieser Menschenleere” (48). This indicates, as well, his torn, divided personality.

das Gesicht nicht zu sehen, keinen Schimmer von Augen...den Schimmer nicht sehen zu dürfen, kann das gottgewollt sein?" (241) These individuals captivate the actor's attention, not only drawing him to themselves but also into secular space. Considering the spatial coordinates suggested here, the reader identifies the actor's interest to dwell with humanity, as he distances himself from the transcendent and nears the immanent.²²⁸

In Levinas' system, people, instead of a transcendent, non-empirical other, provide ethical orientation. They serve as the divine instance in a world in which the transcendent remains inaccessible. According to Catherine Heszer, "Für Levinas gibt es keinen transzendenten Bereich außerhalb dieser Welt, zu dem nur einige religiöse Menschen Zugang hätten. Das Transzendente ist stattdessen voll in das alltäglichen Leben integriert und auch nur dort erkennbar" (203). Seeing the face of the other is when the transcendent emerges. Turning towards humanity, the actor becomes aware of the palliative effects of the face: "Ah, Bedürfnis nach einem Antlitz, fernweg von den Verschleierte hier und falsches Versprechenden dort...Gesicht des andern als Medizin" (241). The actor's yearning for a face reflects his interest in obtaining a panacea to his existential problems. He wants someone to prevent him from carrying out an act that would carry with it grave consequences. While many of the faces mentioned in the text remain concealed, providing for no illumination, the woman's face manifests her soul; she discloses herself through her face's expressions: "Aber wie sie sprach, ohne eine einzige Geste, ohne eine Miene zu verziehen und dabei das Gesagte doch leichthin begleitend mit einem Mienen-Spiel, das ihr Gesicht mit einem Zusatz versah, welcher es

²²⁸ The actor expresses a similar sentiment when he, in an internal monologue, states: "Du bist genug im Zickzack gegangen, es ist jetzt die Zeit fürs Geradeaus, her mit dir, hier spielt es sich ab, im Zentrum, und nicht dort oben an den entvölkerten, von Gott und der Welt und sogar von den Igel und Bienen verlassenen Randbezirken!" (155)

durchleuchtete und in ein Antlitz verwandelte. Die Frau, wie sie so sprach, äußerte sich mit ihrer ganzen Seele...Was sprach sie? Sein Lippenlesen, bei ihr versagte es” (247). When the actor confronts a face that speaks, the words that are produced become incomprehensible. Her countenance becomes her language. And, it is this woman’s face, which, throughout the course of the novel, prevents the actor from carrying out particularly unethical activities. Contemplating the possibility of jumping from a cliff, the actor is influenced by this woman: “‘Ich werde jetzt springen!’, und glaubte danach, so zum Sprung verpflichtet zu sein, und liess sich am Ende doch ohne weiteres, und dankbar, von der Frau zurückhalten” (206). As he confronts the face of the woman, he confronts a force that can prohibit. It is a face vested with power: “Und was hatte er ihrem Gesicht abgelesen? Daß es, dieses Gesicht da, die Macht war, die wahre, die rechtmäßige – ein Mißbrauch undenkbar” (250). The woman’s power prevails. The narrator juxtaposes her face with the powerless face of the president, one who only plans to misuse power. The woman’s face carries a true power incapable of missuse. The woman becomes the ethical instance, which the actor longs to find. In this sense the text takes a distinctly Levinasian turn.

c. a brief excursus into Levinas’ thought

The linguistic markers within Handke’s text indicate a Heideggerian influence. However, while exploring the dimensions of “being,” Handke’s narrator vitally draws faces into a place of prominence, inferring thereby an alternative to Heideggerian thought. Heidegger singularly insists on the exploration of one’s own “Dasein” for

obtaining an ethically coherent identity.²²⁹ Handke's novel reveals, as well, this obsession with "Dasein" (19), as the actor expresses "eine Bereitschaft, sich zu konfrontieren, zu stellen, einzugreifen" (8). However, the actor quickly discovers that confronting his own being impels him towards confronting others, which, as opposed to one's own "Being," serve a more significant orienting function.

Seeing the deficiencies in the Heideggerian system, Levinas reformulates an ethical paradigm by elevating the position of the "other" over the status of an individual's being. That is, the ethical prohibition comes from outside and not from inside. This third entity, which the actor ceaselessly seeks to find, will not be discovered within himself, within the "truth" of his "Dasein," but instead outside himself, in interaction with the "other" experienced through the image of the "face," which, in Levinas' system, is comprehended as another "being," similar to one's own "being;" consequently, it is granted respect and dignity. As status is given to the "other," it can challenge the subject's personal identity and momentary resolutions. Analyzing Levinas' work in re-envisioning being as one that takes into account the being existing opposite the subject, Manning writes:

²²⁹ Commencing his work, *Letter on 'Humanism'*, Heidegger writes: "Soon after Be [-ing] and Time had appeared, a young friend asked me: 'When are you going to write an ethics?' The way in which the essence of man is thought <of> so essentially, namely, solely in terms of the question about the truth of be [-ing] must awaken <in man> the longing for a compelling direction, and for rules, that is <as to> how man, experienced in terms of <his> ek-sistence for be [-ing], should live in a way becoming <to him>" (33). Particular behaviors are necessarily linked to the quality and nature of one's being. Further in this work, Heidegger writes, "More essential for man than all establishment of rules is finding his place in the truth of be [-ing]" (40) and then again, "The truth of be [-ing] provides the support for all <ways of> behaving" (40). Heidegger insists on "Being's" role in generating an ethical life.

Comprehension of the Other's being is, as Heidegger insists, part of our own Dasein, and Levinas takes this insight over without ever trying to deny it. What is primary for Levinas, however, is the fact that the Other is *more* than our comprehension of him/her. Levinas wants us to look not at our own understanding, but at the manifestation of the Other itself, at the way in which the infinite otherness of the Other overwhelms and exceeds our powers of comprehension (112).

Handke's actor, residing in a form of Levinas' thought, expresses fundamental interest in *manifestations* of this "Other." He wants to experience "das Offenbarwerden eines, des Anderen, eines Größeren" (18). Desiring not merely a comprehension of the other, Handke's actor wants to experience and witness the other as it reveals itself. Participating in this turn to his own being – this "Bereitschaft, sich zu konfrontieren" (8) – follows a Heideggerian trajectory. However, this inward turn, as the text progresses, is not fundamentally about comprehending the other, but about confronting a manifesting other. It is not until later in the text that a "Begegnung" occurs, and the disclosure of identity transpires: "Obwohl der Schauspieler nirgends stehenblieb, war es eine Begegnung. Es begegneten sich ihrer beider Augen;" and the result "Ich erkenne dich. Du bist erkannt!" (261). The actor's play thus becomes a performance of what Levinas emphasizes. The radical turn to the "other" is not just a comprehension of the "other," but instead an expectation that the "other" transcends and stands existentially at a distance from the experiencing subject, while existing simultaneously next to this individual, and in direct relation to him. Two aspects of Levinas' "other" will be important for this analysis. One, it is infinite, transcendent, extending beyond the realm of immanence; "The face is

present in its refusal to be contained" (*Totality* 194). Two, it exists temporally, present in everyday reality; "The face is still a thing among things" (*Totality* 254). The multidimensional face over and above us is simultaneously present among us.

Deriving from a transcendent "Other," the "other," whose face is confronted in dialogue, has divine attributes. Regarding this transcendent "Other," Levinas states, "The absolutely other is the Other" (39). The inaccessible, absolute "Other" informs and shapes the "other," who carries traces of the absolutely "Other." Consequently, there always remains a chasm, a gap, between one subject and the "other." It is as if this "other" standing across from a subject is as distant from the subject as the completely transcendent "Other;" "He and I do not form a number" (39). A sublime respect exists between "other" individuals, because the "Other" breaks into the world through the face of the "other;" Levinas writes:

This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: 'you shall not commit murder.' The infinite paralyzes power by its infinite resistance to murder, which, firm and insurmountable, gleams in the face of the Other...in the nudity of the absolute openness of the Transcendent (199).

As the actor confronts the various faces on his journey he becomes vividly aware that the infinity contained within these faces is capable of paralyzing a powerful regime bent on carrying out murder. When it comes to ethical discourse, for Levinas and for Handke's actor, the transcendent "Other" must be left aside and replaced with the "other," with whom we have direct correspondence.

While transcending present reality, the “other” also exists as the intimate neighbor and, as such, makes ethical claims on the individual. Establishing presence, the “other” “remains commensurate with him who welcomes; it remains terrestrial” (Levinas 172). A subject confronts the “other” through a face with whom it interacts; the infinite has localized itself in a particular situation. Moyn writes, “Levinas concretized the infinite in the face” (253). Faces, pointing to transcendent purposes, become the source for constructing ethical categories. Expressions, endowed with meaning beyond themselves, carry ethical force. Levinas writes, “To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it” (51). Experiencing the “other’s” expression, an experience of the infinite within the finite face, a subject exposes itself to an ethical discourse established in the immanent domain. The actual “other” is “the one who commands me and the one to whom I am infinitely obligated” (51). As Handke’s actor moves increasingly into profane space, he becomes more and more cognizant of these revealing faces capable of providing an ethical, ordering principle.

The woman, who absorbs the actor’s thoughts and determines the actor’s path, acts consistently as an ethically stabilizing identity. When the actor confronts the woman’s face, when “ihr Gesicht mit einem Zusatz versah, welcher es durchleuchtete und in ein Antlitz verwandelte” (247), she reveals her whole soul, “ihre[r] ganze[n] Seele,” in her expressions, and he experiences a “Staunen...Danksagen...Sichbelustigen” (248). Her profane, this-worldly presence, on the one hand, demands his respect, “Staunen,” and, on the other hand, imparts a moment of satisfaction, temporary relief, “Danksagen,” as she speaks “ohne je ein Urteilen!” (248). By offering him an inner sense

of spiritual realignment, she fulfills a messianic function. In a conflicted world without resolution, she provides a unique moment filled with “Glück.” When Benjamin considers how the messianic transpires, he associates it with the presence of a sense of “Glück.” Regarding this, he writes,

Der geistlichen restitutio in integrum, welche in die Unsterblichkeit einführt, entspricht eine weltliche, die in die Ewigkeit eines Untergangs führt und der Rhythmus dieses ewig vergehenden, in seiner Totalität vergehenden, in seiner räumlichen, aber auch zeitlichen Totalität vergehenden Weltlichen, der Rhythmus der messianischen Natur, ist Glück (204).

Within the rhythm of eternally passing time, felt and experienced within the immediacy of the present world, there are moments that correspond to a spiritual restitution, to some sort of unified sense of being that results in happiness. When the actor intimates at his sense of happiness, his feeling of affirmation in the presence of this woman, he indicates the rhythm of the messianic.

Her face in the profane realm replaces any sense of needing to revert to a transcendent, unknown realm. He no longer needs to look for a third instance: “Was für ein Geschenk. Es gab nichts Drittes. Man brauchte nichts Drittes” (248). In the presence of a face allowed to speak and communicate there is no necessity to look to a third, transcendent instance, to acquire the logical unity obtained in an ethical framework. Her face suffices to incite him to follow her way: “Das eine Gesicht, das der Frau, hatte genügt, und er nahm in der Folge noch und noch solche wahr...Er ging jetzt den Weg der Frau” (257). In his confrontation with this woman’s face, the actor experiences the

inward sense of a more coherent identity, as he begins to follow a specific “Weg.”

Seen within the entirety of Handke’s works, this is an epiphanic moment, which Gottwald describes in the following manner: “Epiphanien sind mit mythischer Bedeutsamkeit aufgeladene, scheinbar außerzeitliche Zustände, durch die das betreffende Subjekt Stabilisierung, Zusammenhang erfährt” (147). The woman, with whom he experiences this extraordinary, mythical moment of self-confirmation, does indeed provide a stabilizing instance, reminding the actor of his performative identity. As he overhears the conversation that transpires between this woman and another woman, he quickly finds out that she had actually enjoyed her time with him the night before. He immediately feels ashamed, because his intent in going into the center of the city was to interrogate her. Instead, he discovers that he had actually offered the woman a type of salvation; “[er] entzifferte jetzt ihre Worte: ‘Mit ihm: öffnet sich in mir ein Flügel, von dem ich nicht wußte, daß er da war. Ohne darauf aus zu sein, rettet er mich, und rettet mich wieder, und rettet mich von neuem’” (250). Just as she saves him from utter identity disorientation, providing him with a stabilizing path, he too saves her, giving her the sense of her own angelic qualities. In Handke’s texts, Carstensen observes, “Phasen der Destabilisierung und Momente der Erlösung [wechseln] einander ab” (172). They are both involved in offering “Glück” within the messianic rhythm of an eliding present.

Making his way towards the center of the city, the actor participates as well in the unveiling of his face. At various moments, for example, his face reveals an expression: “zugleich bekam sein Gesicht, zum ersten Mal seit einer Ewigkeit, einen Ausdruck” (117). He increasingly becomes recognizable. “Zum ersten Mal an diesem Tag war der Schauspieler erkannt worden. Wie das, im Dunkeln? Oder hatte ein Wetterleuchten dem

ändern sein Profil gezeigt? So muss es gewesen sein: an seinem Profil” (254). At this moment of recognition, he realizes his face has become visible; his identity has been exposed. Not only do others recognize him through his face, but he also begins to recognize himself through his face, for example, when he stands among the faceless mass of people on the subway train: “Er sah den auch schon, erkannte den, der still und hoch aufgerichtet dastand, an seinen starren Augen und, deutlicher noch, an seinen verspannten Wangen. Und indem er ihn auf sich übergehen ließ, merkte er, daß das da er selbst war, sein Spiegelbild in den schwarzen Waggonfenstern” (230-231). His face begins to facilitate a personal encounter with his own identity. While he had, at the outset of the novel, intended to save, he realizes more and more that he experiences salvation in that he is recognized, through the unveiling of his face. Seeing a man dying on the side of the road, the actor experiences a genuine encounter with this individual; “Obwohl der Schauspieler nirgends stehenblieb, war es eine Begegnung. Es begegneten sich ihrer beider Augen...Diese reglosen, aber noch nicht gebrochenen Augen hatten ihm bedeutet: Ich erkenne dich. Du bist erkannt!” (261). The actor does not save the dying man. Instead, he realizes his identity through the dying man and continues on his journey, representing this man, as he proceeds “zur Stunde seines eigenen Todes” (261). As Heszer writes, “Jeder Mensch kann selbst zum Messias werden, wenn er sein essentielles „Sein-für-Andere“ realisiert, d.h., wenn er seiner eigentlichen menschlichen Natur entsprechend lebt und die Verantwortung für das Leiden anderer auf sich nimmt” (202). Nearing the moment of his death, the actor realizes within his “Being” this messianic identity, existing as he does within an immediate presence of both saving and being saved, being there for others and becoming the other.

As we have seen, both the woman and the actor's faces serve salvific purposes. They have affective qualities within messianic moments of immediacy. Additionally, the narrator attributes faces to objects from the historical past, giving them representation within the present. He writes: "Wie kam es zu solchen Bildern aus fernen Zeiten und Räumen? Weiß nicht, will es nicht wissen. Fest stand: Die unversehens still wiederkehrenden Orte, Dinge und Wesen waren Gesichte, die für die Zeit jetzt entsprechenden, Gesichte, die den Namen verdienten" (267). In the rhythm of repetition, when objects and activities in past times and places reoccur in the present realm of decay and dissolution, certain pictorial entities produced from these objects are continually confronted, and, as these elements from the past arrive in the present, they too obtain faces that correspond to the "Jetztzeit." Such object-images accord with moments of a completely present time; as they have been redeemed out of the past, they, like the other faces in the text, produce a palliative effect within moments of immediacy.

These resurrected objects brought into the present function to demonstrate a reconciliation that occurs between the actor and the deceptive objects from which he, at the outset, had been estranged. Handke's narrator gives objects their own faces, in that the actor transfers objects from the past into the present, redeeming them through his recognition. Operating within a Heideggerian framework, he employs his "Dasein" to decrease his distance between entities: "Das Dasein hebt nach Heidegger "entfernend" den Abstand zu den Dingen im Raum sozusagen auf, indem es zu dem dadurch "entfernten" in einem räumlichen Bezug gelangt: Das Dasein läßt hierdurch "Seiendes in die Nähe begegnen. Ent-fernung entdeckt Entferntheit"" (Gölz 171). Spatially, "Dasein" reduces distance from that with which it is separated and confronts "Being" in close

proximity. At the outset, the actor demonstrates how he is separated from objects, revealing his “Abstand zu den Dingen:” “Das setzte sich an anderen Dingen fort. Die Tasse, die er an sich heranziehen wollte; der Löffel im Honigglas; die Zitronenscheibe...es gelang ihm nicht einmal, sie mit den Fingerspitzen zu berühren, geschweige denn, sie anzufassen” (24). A border exists between the actor and the objects he would like to approach. As the novel develops these same objects become deceptive, “diese vorgetäuschten anderen Dinge” (62). Desiring to cut the distance between his “being” and the deceitful objects he confronts, the actor makes the “Irrtumsgegenstände” into “Studienobjekten” (64). In order to reconcile with these objects, he participates on his journey in an “achtsamen Betrachten” of the entities he confronts.

Momentary pauses with objects at border locations unveil spaces where a convergence between the transcendent and immanence emerge. Spending time with objects, he ascribes them with value: “Der Wert seiner Betrachtung: unschätzbar. Er läge in der Betrachtung, im Betrachtenkönnen, im Übergang vom achtlosen Hinschauen zum achtsamen Betrachten, und in der Folge eben Lernen, anders gesagt, Insichaufnehmen der zum ersten Mal, mithilfe des Irrtums, offenbar werdenden Formen” (65). Engaging in this type of focused concentration on specific objects, he remains and abides momentarily with entities, allowing thereby the spaces in which his acute observations transpire become the places where, in the Heideggerian system, the unified “Geviert,” mentioned repeatedly in *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken* (a text Handke read while in Alaska), transpires; Heidegger writes, “Der Aufenthalt bei den Dingen ist die einzige Weise, wie sich der vierfältige Aufenthalt im Geviert jeweils einheitlich vollbringt” (153). This “Aufenthalt im Geviert” occurs in a place where four entities come together in unity: “Erde und

Himmel, die Göttlichen und die Sterblichen in eins” (151). By delaying his movements and entering into a close analysis of objects on his path, the actor positions himself within a spatial moment where traces of transcendence emerge, as earth, heaven, the divine, and the mortal combine into one. Such moments serve as ruptures on his walk into the city.

As he spatially continues to distance and separate himself – “Ent-fernen” – from the past, the forest, he brings distanced objects into the present, so that “Ent-fernung entdeckt Entferntheit,” and the actor can reconcile with the objects: “Der Held des am Morgen gelesenen Buches dagegen, nah dran, aus Wut über die Tücke der Objekte...zum Amokläufer zu werden, hat sich am Abend mit den Dingen versöhnt” (268).²³⁰ Reconciling himself with deceptive objects, the actor accomplishes a reunification that was ultimately dependent on his act of separation performed throughout the day. Commenting on Benjamin’s understanding of the salvation of objects, Bock writes: “Der Aspekt der Destruktion als erster Teil der Form (ist), in der das Göttliche ins Profane

²³⁰ Commenting on Handke’s portrayal of reconciliation with objects, Hummel writes, “Denn Versöhnung mit den Dingen hieße, über Begriffe zu verfügen, die den Dingen gerecht werden, sie nicht einseitig in die Sprache einbinden, ihr Wesen nicht negieren und ihrer Konkretheit keine Gewalt antun. Versöhnung hieße, so gesehen, letzten Endes: Aufhebung der Natur des Begreifens und damit des Begreifens selber. Dieses macht den Weltstoff nur erkennbar, indem es ihn durch Segmentierung, Selektion, Abstraktion, Individuierung „zurichtet.“ Versöhnung hieße also entweder Stilllegung des Begreifens oder Einswerdung von Begriff und Ding – was beides vielleicht auf dasselbe hinausläuft, auf den Tod des begreifenden Subjekts” (82). Perpetually repeating objects in successive moments of immediacy have faces that are constantly adjusting, adapting as they do to the various historical moments. Consequently, they cannot be understood in their entirety. Instead, they must be allowed to continually speak; objects are freed up, redeemed, in order to correspond to every time. Carstensen reflects on Handke’s ideas regarding humanity’s alienation from objects and the necessity of an ensuing reconciliation in the following manner: “Handkes Erzählen versucht die von Simmel beschriebene Konsequenz der Modernisierung – dass Dinge und Menschen “auseinandergetreten” seien – rückgängig zu machen, indem es die Dinge aus ihrem Warenkontext löst und ihnen eine neue Naturhaftigkeit verleiht” (85).

eintritt, hervorzuheben...Der Bruch ist die Verbindung zwischen dem Verfall der Gegenstände und ihrer Errettung; er stellt das Moment der Destruktion dar, das...notwendig zum Messianismus dazu gehört” (Bock 340). Ruptures occur in order to save deteriorated objects. Engaging in various spatial breaks, the actor symbolically destroys borders, the “Schwelle” he confronts and overcomes, arriving at an immediate present, in which objects from the historical past can be redeemed.

c. revolutionary

The actor is aware of the times, “Es war eine Endzeit” (169). Violence abounds. Ethical codes have vanished – “Ein Mann trat vor seine Gartentür, und sein Nachbar ging mit dem Weltkriegssäbel seines Vaters oder Großvaters auf ihn los” (167). As faces have been effaced, the actor wishes to carry out a revolutionary act “für seinen Angehörigen” (211). Adopting this revolutionary posture, he intends to establish a new order, a new way of thinking – “Und dieses andere Wissen ist Macht” (267) – a counterhegemonic view towards “being” in the world.²³¹ As a gunman, an “Amokläufer” (88), the actor mentally conceives of executing the political sovereign, ending the reign of one eager to carry out wars that he believes to be divinely justified. He intervenes. He represents another way of viewing the human condition, one that calls into question the idea that humanity has an inherent, natural disposition to engage in battle – “Waren die Menschen zum Kriege verurteilt, bis ans Ende der Zeit?” (266). With this type of “revolutionary” thought, he steps in among the people and begins to listen to their voices. This is most vividly portrayed as he listens to, and seemingly takes seriously, the questions posed by the three “Unsichtbare” (237) people, who make such inquiries: “Wer hat wohl den

²³¹ As an example of one of his contrarian viewpoints he plays with the following idea: “Laßt die Welt statt von den Staatsmännern von den Bürgermeistern regieren!” (226).

Staatsmännergang erfunden, den heuchlerischesten aller Gänge, den Geschichtsfälschergang?" (237). For these people, he allows his face to be seen and his corresponding voice to be heard in a society that has become faceless. Following Heideggerian thought, his alternative thinking is the impetus behind his drive to open himself: for Heidegger "das andere Denken" is "jene Art von 'Denken und Dichten,' das die erwähnte 'Bereitschaft des Sich-Offen-Haltens' vorbereiten könne" (Bülow 138). In a representative gesture he opens himself, discloses his face, for the classless society unable to do so. This act is thoroughly reflective of Benjamin's messianic model; regarding this, Bock writes, "Dem Begriff der klassenlosen Gesellschaft muß sein echtes messianisches Gesicht wiedergegeben werden, und zwar im Interesse der revolutionären Politik des Proletariats selbst." Bock further contends that, according to Benjamin, the revolutionary, messianic face emerges (becomes evident) when there is a "Zerreißungsmetapher" and the "Synthese von Kontemplation und politischer Tat als ein erweitertes und aktualisiertes Verhältnis von Religion und Revolution" (332-333). Metaphoric cuts signal the presence of the revolutionary messianic. Distinct tears dispense with past traditions. Additionally, this messianic face reflects the synthesis of contemplation and political activity, the coupling of religion with revolution. Constructed as a revolutionary figure, the actor (1) moves from contemplation to action, offering an alternative thought model within the present order and (2) participates in abrupt tears and breaks, performing the artistic, creative unveiling of an identity in transition.

While his politically motivated action never transpires – "leider nur in Gedanken" (272) – the actor is continually in the act of moving to execute his theoretical crime, proceeding from moments of stillness – beginning his day, for example, "Im Haus der

Frau...im stillen Haus” (39) – to inferred activity, from contemplation to political handling. The text most notably demonstrates this when the actor enters a “Gotteshaus...es war eine Kirche” (176), directly before he journeys further into the city to execute the president, of course, “nur in seinen Gedanken.” This religious structure is demarcated as a “still” place. The priest reads “eine Stille Messe” (177). No additional sounds enter the “Kirchenraum” other than “die gelegentlichen Lippenlaute des Priesters beim stillen Memorieren” (178). The priest sends out the “Kreuzzeichen...stumm in den Besucherraum” (178). Within this aura of silence the actor is empowered. He hears the priest’s message on the omnipresence of God as indicative of God’s power, which is imparted through “Der Leib der Frau” (179); “die Frau, sie kommt über mich, und mein Fleisch wird Geist” (180). Receiving the woman’s body (which is also how he began his day), the actor obtains God’s power. Spiritually filled with these words in this moment of contemplation, the actor moves into the political sphere. His silence results in action. This sacred space serves as a threshold between the exterior “forest” and the interior “city.” From the distant, transcendent world, the actor crosses into the immanent, indelibly political realm, marked as he now is with sacred traces: “Jeder noch so alltägliche Daseinsinhalt kann den auszeichnenden Charakter der Heiligkeit gewinnen, sobald er nur in die spezifische mythisch-religiöse Blickrichtung fällt” (Gottwald 140). Moving in and through spiritual spaces, he becomes coded as a quasi-sacred figure, which, while separating itself from the world through moments of silence, does not refrain from participation in the political realm. According to Gandler, “Dieses Abstand-Nehmen von der Welt in ihrer gegenwärtigen Realität bedeutet für Benjamin nicht ein Zurückziehen von den wirklichen Kämpfen in eine rein kontemplative Haltung, die implizit durch das

Nicht-Antasten Komplizin der herrschenden Realität ist” (19). Although the actor distinctly distances himself from the reigning agenda, unable to agree with the president’s desire to shed blood, he does not forsake the political order and opt instead for a place of pure contemplation. Instead, his contemplative, “still” moments empower him to engage the political order with a different form of thought. Stillness, the absence of activity, becomes the actor’s activity expressed through his movements.

The actor experiences stillness not only in religious places, like the church, but also in secular spaces, when, for example, he is firmly ensconced in the city center. In this thoroughly immanent, material realm – “zum Zentrum gehörte und selber, der Kirchtürme, Minarets, Banken, Telefon- und TV-Zentralen” (206) – he continues to experience moments of stillness: “Er stand lange still da, inmitten der Stadt, und zugleich entrückt in etwas...eine Sphäre” (252).²³² Being at the center, he senses he resides in a sphere momentarily removed from the center. Temporarily existing at the periphery, while remaining nevertheless within the bounds of a secular, material cityscape, he momentarily inhabits a space associated with mythical thinking. Common to Handke’s linguistic practices is the tendency to link a transcendent strategy of thought to tangential spaces: “Handke zitiert und imitiert offensichtlich grundlegende Strukturelemente genuin mythischer Weltauffassung. Ein kulturanthropologische Lesart z.B. der Peripherie-Motivik käme zu folgenden Übereinstimmungen mit dem mythischen Denken” (Gottwald 141). Here, “in der Sphäre” (252), he experiences “die Momente der Windstille” (252), noises associated with nature, which are contrasted with metropolitan

²³² Such moments are suggested and experienced by the actor throughout the text: “Wobei er auf der Türschwelle, unter der Traufe, innehielt” (29); “An einer dieser Stellen hielt er sich lange auf” (51); “Aber ein Innehalten, das war etwas anderes” (78).

sounds. According to Carstensen's understanding of Handke's narrative devices, in such a moment, the actor encounters the immediate present: "Gerade im verlässlichen Zusammenspiel von Natur- und Zivilisationszeichen offenbart sich die "mythische ewige Gegenwart" des größeren Jetzt" (96). The silence he experiences exemplifies the peripheral status he occupies while residing within the center. He is, in a sense, always elsewhere, while still being in a distinctly secular realm.

In Benjamin's messianic system these moments of stillness express and reflect a distinct type of thinking; regarding this, Hering writes:

Denn allein in der Denkform des „Stillstandes“ vermag sich geschichtliche „Gegenwart“ wieder als unabgeschlossenes und widersprüchliches Produkt menschlicher Praxis zu kristallisieren, und nur insofern die Zeit im „Stillstand“ eben nicht mehr immer schon automatischer und permanenter „Übergang“ ist, existiert in jedem ihrer Augenblicke die prinzipielle Möglichkeit, ein herrschendes Kontinuum aufzusprengen und es durch ein qualitativ anderes zu ersetzen. (140)

Stillness of thought is the necessary precondition for crystalizing the historical present, for seeing the present as the "Gegenstand" that it really is, an "unabgeschlossenes" product created through human endeavors that can be reconfigured and realigned according to new forms of thought.²³³ When figures engage in this "Stillstand," they call into question automatic transitions, and the actor endeavors to bring his viewers to these halted instances in which the normal order can be questioned: "Half es, sein

²³³ The narrator demonstrates here how moments of heightened immediacy enable the thorough investigation of objects: "Der Blitzmoment, der die Erkenntnis des Irrtums begleitete, hätte den Blick geschärft, und die Irrtumsgegenstände gewannen den Anschein von Studienobjekten" (64).

Zuschauerspiel, zum Innehalten?“ (112). These moments of crystalization prevent the unreflected process of sliding between borders; hence, the “innehalten” “auf der Türschwelle” (29). At these moments there is the possibility of disrupting, exploding the reigning time continuum, which is controlled and written by those in positions of power.

The narrator eventually concludes the story of his actor with an allusion to stillness – “Auf dem Platz Stille” (279). According to Bachelard “There is nothing like silence to suggest a sense of unlimited space” (43). Indeed, in this moment of stillness the actor realizes the unlimited, infinite dimensions of “being” in the present. His narrated existence obtains no sense of closure in that this stillness precedes an opening and continuation. The stillness crystalizes the moment – “Er stand, und stand, und stand” (279).²³⁴ Then, the actor commences with “den zweiten Sanften Lauf.”²³⁵ He falls back into time’s historical repetition, the endless participation in ritual activity indicative of the religious.²³⁶ He remains the walking one, isolated within the sphere of perpetuation: as Certeau suggests: “To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper place” (103). To act would be to participate in finality; to move, to walk is to participate in the opening up to new forms of thought.

²³⁴ According to Hummel, “Das als ‘Beseligungsmoment’ verstandene mythische Erkenntnismoment des *nun stans*, ‘Augenblick der Ewigkeit, stehendes Jetzt,’ entlehnt Handke der Terminologie des christlichen Mystikers Boethius” (101).

²³⁵ Handke’s use of “sanft” corresponds well with the type of gentle walking emphasized throughout his works; Hummel writes: “Durch Langsamkeit und Bedachtsamkeit entsteht erst die Voraussetzung für eine besondere Anschauung, die sich blitzartig im Moment des Innehaltens unterwegs ereignen soll” (80).

²³⁶ Discussing Handke’s interest in the relationship between “Kunst und Religion” (145), Egyptien contends that Handke, from his earliest works onwards, looks for an impersonal connection between the two; Handke wants to see the transcendent in a “Form, die diesen Zusammenhang konstituiert,” which, for him, is found in “das Ritual” (146).

Acting in revolutionary fashion, the actor performs metaphoric forms of breaking and cutting. To arrive at the center – which are myriad “von jedem der Zentren unten” (209) and deferred, “Bis zu der Stunde...wanderte der Schauspieler von einem Zentrum ins andere” (256) – he crosses numerous borders, severing and separating himself from prior spaces, suggesting the movement into something new. Considering such spatial movements, de Certeau suggests, “as we have seen, this being-there acts only in spatial practices, that is, in *ways of moving into something different*” (109). The manifestation of the actor’s being is exposed through his movement into various spaces. Commenting on Handke’s textual strategies with regard to bodily movement within space, Luckscheiter contends that “Die Körperbewegungen sind immer auch Text-, Signifikanten-Bewegungen, Bewegungen von Lettern und Leere, Zeichen und *spatium*. Die ergangenen und geschilderten Räume sind kaum mehr geographisch bestimmbar, Territorien zuzuordnen, es sind Sprachräume und nicht ‘unmittelbar’ aufgeschriebene Natur- oder Kulturlandschaften” (207). Viewing the signs inherent within the direction of his body, we notice that he resists continuity, as he believes fundamentally that his artistic performance possesses some type of panacea for human cravings in that it offers a new perspective to a world fixed to past productions. Instead of imitating, he creates: “Der Schauspieler war weder in seinem Fach noch außerhalb je ein Mann der Nachahmung gewesen. Er verachtete das Nachahmen und die Nachahmer...Nachmachen war für ihn keine Kunst, und er glaubte an die Kunst, auch wenn er nicht, jedenfalls nicht aus dem Stand, hätte sagen können, was die war” (74). Resisting imitation, he proceeds along a path that, at one particular point, breaks with his traditional form. This discontinuous moment suggests the possibility of an alternative to strict linearity. He represents the

commencement of a new time: “Unten an der Schwelle zur inneren Stadt angekommen, hätte der Schauspieler...wieder ein paar Schritte rückwärts tun können. Aber das kam nicht mehr in Frage. Er würde bis ans Ende seiner Geschichte nicht mehr rückwärts gehen” (220). He decisively breaks with the trajectory of Benjamin’s “Angelus Novum.” Instead of being unable to linger at the places of historical catastrophe, “die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen” (697), Handke’s actor seemingly moves towards reconciliation and restitution: “Der Held des am Morgen gelesenen Buches...hat sich am Abend mit den Dingen versöhnt” (268). Creating a discontinuity with the historical narrative, he is able to bring the unredeemed elements of the past into the present, giving them a face, representation, and an identity.

Furthermore, by becoming a location of discontinuity he is able to carry out a messianic critique of modern society’s insistence on progress. Clarifying his understanding of the revolutionary within Benjamin’s work, Faber claims, “*Gegen Fortschrittsbegriff und Historismus, Kontinuität und Konformismus setzt Benjamin nun den Messias, den Inbegriff der Schaffung von Diskontinuität*” (71). Certain instances in Handke’s text generate a critique of progress. As the actor makes his way through the subway he notices “Passagiere mit stumm hinter den Plexiglas-und-sonst-was-Helmen verzerrten Gesichtern” (227). Their faces have been distorted due to the new, technologically advanced helmets they wear. With veiled faces, they no longer speak: “Keiner von denen sprach” (228). In the past, he had observed people who had read books. He saw their lips move as they engaged in the process of “Entziffern und Lesen” (228); their faces spoke. To resurrect these past faces, erased as they were through

history's march towards progress, the actor elects the role of "Amokläufer" to violently call into question unreflected continuity.

d. divine violence

In his revolutionary pursuit, the actor reveals hostile traits; he is "zum Menschenfeind bestimmt" (172). He possesses violent tendencies, desiring to overturn the existing social structure. The narrator portrays him as a "Menschheitsfeind" (88), and in this manner he resembles Benjamin's angel, which, according to Eberlein, is depicted "mit negativen Zügen: Er nimmt, er ist ein Menschenfresser, er ist ein Unmensch" (30). What occurs in the actor's mind speaks to his latently violent attitude; "Und daß ihr nicht mehr zu helfen war, erfüllte ihn statt dessen mit wilder Wut, auf sie, die Verlorene. Sich auf sie stürzen und ihr ein Messer in den Leib rennen, wie, 'leider nur in Gedanken,' am Vormittag dem Präsidenten. Und um ein Haar hätte er das getan" (272). Consistent with many of Handke's characters, the actor possesses "Gewaltphantasien" (Gottwald 136), which are indicative of a figure's attempts to gain orientation in society. Others whom he confronts recognize his violent ambitions as well. The police believe him to be a martyr, and he is therefore suspicious. They stop to interrogate him: "Welche Gewalttat planen Sie von hier aus? Gesteh: du bist ein Attentäter. Du bereitest hier einen Mordanschlag vor, womöglich auf unseren Staatspräsidenten...Das ist ein öffentlicher Ort, Selbstmörder verboten" (200-202). His vicious motivations do not remain unnoticed. Intent on assassinating the president, he plans to participate in a "theoretical" act of killing, which would eradicate the "real" act of war intended by the president.

Assessing how his revolutionary, "violent" act transpires it is helpful to keep in mind the categories Benjamin establishes in his essay, *Die Kritik der Gewalt*, where he

juxtaposes mythical violence with divine violence: “Ist die mythische Gewalt rechtsetzend, so die göttliche rechtsvernichtend, setzt jene Grenzen, so vernichtet diese [die göttliche] grenzenlos, ist die mythische verschuldend und sühnend zugleich, so die göttliche entschuldigend, ist jene drohend, so diese [die göttliche] schlagend, jene blutig, so diese [die göttliche] auf unblutige Weise letal” (62). Employing divine violence, the actor uses his play as a form of resistance against the reigning, secular order. Fulfilling the criteria of divine violence outlined by Benjamin, he counteracts the mythical violence represented by the president. First, the president establishes law – “Die Geschichte verlangt ihr Recht” (235) – to exact retribution, sanctioning an “Eingriff” as a “Reaktion.” The actor, on the other hand, undermines the law – to the Priest he appears to be “ein Gesetzloser” (184) – by relocating power in faces that possess “die wahre Macht” (250), namely the woman’s, and in alternative forms of knowledge, new ways of thinking, “Dieses andere Wissen ist Macht” (267). Challenging status quo thinking, he calls into question the prevalent, historically adopted forms of thought: “Waren die Menschen zum Krieg verurteilt, bis ans Ende der Zeit?” (266). He honestly wonders whether this reality is a necessary aspect of the human condition.

Second, instead of constructing borders – as the president does through his rhetoric, painting others as “die Feinde unserer Zivilisation” (235) – he breaks through borders. Demonstrated in his spatial movements, he consistently crosses thresholds, arriving in new spheres: “im Übergang von einer Sphäre zur andern” (87); “Er würde zu Fuß die Autobahn überqueren” (195); “Die Schwelle zu den inneren Bezirken” (220); “Er stieg aus dem Untergrund hinauf in den Tag” (233); “Dazu passte, dass er sich, eine kurze Strecke weg vom Zentralplatz, mit dem einen Schritt hinaus, obwohl mitten in der

Stadt, in einer ganz anderen Weltgegend befand” (251). Transgressing borders, he moves incessantly to new forms of being and thinking. In a Heideggerian manner, he uses borders to create new spaces in which his “Being” can unfold itself: “Die Grenze ist nicht das, wobei etwas aufhört, sondern...die Grenze ist jenes, von woher etwas *sein Wesen beginnt*” (*Bauen* 156). While the president fixes borders and erects boundaries, limiting the possibilities within identity, the actor employs borders to discover his “Being,” operating under the assumption “dass Räume nicht einfach gegeben und unveränderlich vorhanden sind,” but instead that spaces form a “Netzwerk, in dem sich immer wieder neue Verknüpfungsmöglichkeiten eröffnen und das von den Benutzern-Begehern immer neu konstruiert wird” (Luckscheiter 38). Demonstrating their permeability, the actor explores the opening qualities of borders and the inherent givenness of such exclusive, established spaces.

Third, instead of shedding blood, as the president intends to do – “Noch heute nacht werden die Operationen anlaufen” (235) – he abstains from the assassination. Everything takes place only “in Gedanken an den Präsidenten” (236). And fourth, while the actor does, according to the priest, carry the weight of the world, and is in that sense “verschuldet,” he offers a sacrifice that is not judged, but instead received. His sacrifice is not “sühnend,” but instead “entsühnend,” absolving. In front of the woman’s face, the actor feels himself received, absolved: “Was auf ihn überging, war einzig ein Staunen, zugleich Klagen, Sicherbarmen (ein kindliches), zugleich Danksagen...Sie sprach in einem fort, ja. Was für ein Sprechen freilich, ohne je ein Urteilen! Ein Erzählen” (247-248). The woman does not judge him, encumbering him with guilt, but instead narrates and affirms his identity. Continuing with his juxtaposition of these two types of violence,

Benjamin writes, “Die mythische Gewalt ist Blutgewalt über das bloße Leben um ihrer selbst, die göttliche reine Gewalt über alles Leben um des Lebendigen willen. Die erste fordert Opfer, die zweite nimmt sie an” (63). Abiding by a mythical conception of violence, the president expects that people will sacrifice their lives on behalf of those who lost their lives; he demands sacrifice, the further shedding of blood. The actor represents a pure form of violence, becoming a sacrificial offering on behalf of the living. Disposing of death, he surrenders to a life of repetition, to living in the constant state of perplexity and ambiguity.

e. sacrificial agency

Alluding to the “sacrificial” elements of the actor’s play, the narrator constructs his actor’s intentions within a distinctly religious discourse.²³⁷ Evoking the transcendent traces underlying his journey, the narrator presents his actor as resolute in his desire to offer himself: “Er rettete ihn, brachte die geballte Faust im Innern seines Angehörigen zum Verschwinden, machte sie gewichts- und gegenstandslos, indem er sich opferte, recht gehört, opferte....Aber opfern würde er sich allein für seinen Angehörigen” (211). In sacrificing himself, he will put an end to the balled fists eager to engage in violence. For this reason, he realizes that he must resign himself to his immanent death: “Zwar würde auch er sein Leben aufs Spiel setzen...er wüßte, er würde dabei sterben” (211). In the following paragraph, the narrator speaks of the “Opferwillen des Vaters” (212), which, in this sense, is the actor’s sacrificial will. Further in the narration, we discover that “Riesenkräfte zurückkehrten in den Momenten der Selbstaufgabe” (232). Proceeding to

²³⁷ Thematically, sacrifice is present throughout the text, providing, in many ways, a context for the actor’s sacrifice. Meandering through the forest, the actor confronts a young man who had died for himself: “Er war gestorben, nicht für die und jene anderen, sondern für sich selber, ob nun ein toter Toter oder ein lebender” (54).

the center of the city, into the “Holy of Holies,” where the sacrificial altar awaits, where violence will be concentrated, in order to offer himself for his “Angehörigen,” the actor moves “zur Stunde seines eigenen Todes” (261) and to a pseudo-reconciliation with the woman whom he had mistreated, because he had not reciprocated her love; “Er hatte ihre Liebe verraten” (249). Depicted as the one endeavoring to reconcile, to initiate realignment, and to dismantle the urge to violence, the actor gains an identity as the sacrificial one.

As the actor walks to the altar where his sacrifice will transpire, certain textual markers contextualize his performance through the lens of Christ’s sacrifice. For Handke this is common in his narrations; he states the following: ““Der Gekreuzigte, wie auch immer, gehört zu meinem Alphabet; er ist eine Letter meines Alphabets”” (Egyptien 147). Exactly how Handke employs the crucified Christ in creating the actor becomes evident in numerous ways. First, as he moves closer to his moment of divine violence, he recalls the alleged time of Christ’s crucifixion: “Oder war es drei Uhr am Nachmittag, und das Glockenschlagen sollte an den Kreuzestod auf Golgatha gemahnen? Er wollte das nicht wissen, und hielt sich davon ab, nach der Uhrzeit zu schauen” (176). At this point, his time has not yet come; he has not yet received his divine commission. Suppressing this thought of his personal Golgatha, he enters into a church. Here, he participates in a second act textually performed by Christ. Finding himself present at a “Last Supper” of sorts, he eats the bread and drinks the wine. He receives his ordination to carry out his task. As he drinks the communion wine, he symbolically drinks and partakes of the blood of Christ. He will, according to the priest, carry the weight of the world as he makes his way to his pre-ordained cross: “Christoph – denn Sie tragen, du trägst das Gewicht der

Welt! Wozu paßt, daß du einen Zug um den Mund hast wie einer, der die Bitternis getrunken hat fast bis zur Neige, und nicht einmal ungerne” (185). The actor experiences a certain pleasure in participating in this sacrament. After this interaction with the priest, the actor proceeds from the church back into the world. A third allusion to Christ’s sacrifice occurs, when the narrator reinvents a Scriptural scene, combining the virgin birth with Christ’s cry on the cross to his father: “Zwei Jungfrauen, selbstbewußte, und wie! Ja, gab es das denn noch? Das gab es. Daneben in einem Körbchen ein Neugeborenes, das zu ihm heraufschaute und ihm bedeutete: ‘Vater, warum hast du mich verlassen?’” (233). In this scene, the actor is on a subway train; he meets two virgins (Mary and Elizabeth perhaps), and next to them a Christ-like baby, who looks up to the actor (the father), wondering, through his gestures, why he had been abandoned and forsaken. Directly after this interaction, the actor, with the face of the forsaken Christ in his imagination, the face of those who had been effaced in the society of violence, leaves the subway and continues on his journey to the hour of his death. Drawing connections between his actor’s sacrifice and Christ’s sacrifice, the narrator provides a reference point for the type of sacrifice in which the actor engages.

While alluding to sacrifice in the Christian tradition, the narrator nevertheless presents his actor’s sacrifice in a language divorced from classical Christian renderings. This too follows typical patterns evident in Handke’s texts: “Handke geht es also darum, eine äquivalente neue Sprache zu entwickeln, die – wie Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf formuliert – ‘den konnotativen Horizont religiöser Erfahrungen in ihren Dienst’ nimmt” (Egyptien 147). Referencing a prior religious model, Handke integrates certain signs to recall a precedent. At the same time, he moves towards the unprecedented; he looks to

shift religious experience onto another plateau, within a new epistemological framework. Specific textual markers link the actor's sacrifice to Christ's. However, their respective sacrifices diverge, and, as readers, we are left with the task of considering the type of sacrifice that emerges in this text. How does the actor's sacrificial performance transpire? How can the narrator use the term sacrifice, when no such event blatantly occurs?

To gain an understanding of how the actor's sacrifice ensues, we can take advantage of Agamben's ideas in his work, *Profanations*, where he explores the significance of sacrifice for religion; he observes, "Religion can be defined as that which removes things, places, animals, or people from common use and transfers them to a separate sphere. Not only is there no religion without separation, but every separation also contains or preserves within itself a genuinely religious core. The apparatus that effects and regulates the separation is sacrifice" (74). According to Agamben, religion fundamentally involves shifting the quotidian into a different plane, transferring the profane into another order. The participation in religion transpires as a subject separates and divides, sacrificing (surrendering, disposing of) an object's meaning in one sphere, in order to endow it with a new meaning in a different sphere, to "make" (*faciō*) an object "sacred" (*sacer*). Seen in this context, the actor participates in a religiously coded act by posturing himself as the one who is the sacrifice, the catalyst behind the separation. Indeed, throughout the text, his body divides and separates spaces; "der Schauspieler [wanderte] von einem Zentrum ins andere, über den Fluß und über die nächste oder übernächste Brücke wieder zurück und so fort" (256). Distinct centers become evident when tracking his movements. The actor creates new spaces by separating them off from

previously inhabited places. Hence, the actor's "sacrificial" performance ensues as he separates, moving from the forest into the city. Then, when he is within the city, he moves into other distinct centers, indicating an inward directional course.

His identity formed in the outside sphere passes through distinct borders, and, as the actor performs this, he severs himself from an external identity in order to adopt one more resolutely localized within internal, immanent space. Elaborating further on sacrifice, Agamben writes, "Sacrifice always sanctions the passage of something from the profane to the sacred, from the human sphere to the divine. What is essential is the caesura that divides the two spheres, the threshold that the victim must cross" (74). When Handke's actor crosses various thresholds – "Desgleichen streifte er sich, vom Wald auf die Fahrstraße getreten, auf der Schwelle zur Stadt den Schlamm von den Sohlen" (126) – he performs a dividing act; his body's movements become the visual representation of his awareness of different spheres and sectors: "Zeit, zurückzukehren aus der Sphäre in die 'Sektoren'" (253). My contention would be that the actor reverses the order suggested by Agamben. Instead of moving from the profane to the sacred, he moves from the sacred, the external spheres on the periphery of the forest, to the profane, the metropolitan, internal spaces. Unlike Christ, who makes sacred those for whom he sacrifices, the actor carries out a sacrifice in that he separates himself, through his movements, from his divine identity, his angelic status (Important to remember here is that he, at one point, stops moving backwards, indicating that he no longer identifies with Benjamin's *Angelus Novum*). The dividing he has executed results in the attainment of an identity that is never coherent and stable. In the end he has become fully human, unable to save, entirely dependent for his restoration on an outside, external, merciful force; he

finds himself with the woman in a completely desperate state: “Miteinander so ringen, bis sich der Himmel, oder sonst ein Dritter oder wer oder was, sich ihrer beider *erbarmte* [my italics] und sie zeitlebens ineinander eingeränkt wären” (278-79). The concluding image we have of the actor is as one who needs mercy as opposed to one who can be merciful. Earlier in the text he had clearly associated his identity with the messianic. As an angel, he had saved his “Zuschauer.” However, over the course of the novel, he has become not the Messiah that saves, but instead the Messiah that is aware of his inability to save, and it is this that makes him a uniquely transcendent, postsecular figure within the realm of secular space.

IV. The messianic figure within messianic time

To interpret how the actor experiences time, I want to employ Benjamin’s construction of messianic time, the eternally vanishing recurrence of the present. Handke’s narrator uses numerous time markers to frame the actor’s performance.²³⁸ Before carrying out his crime in the city center, he decides to enter a church. At this point he still has a sufficient amount of time: “Er hatte Zeit, “noch” (176). Within the church, he has the sense that he has a sufficient amount of time. However, the aura quickly changes after the actor has metaphorically received his commission and resolutely intends to sacrifice himself: “An dem Tag des Großen Falls überfiel ihn die Zeitnot aus einem besonders heiteren Himmel” (213). Moving closer to the city, to reconciliation and political activity, he experiences a sudden break in his typical sense of time. His alternative experience of time is epiphanic in nature, and this is common to many of Handke’s texts, as it indicates the presence of the mythical: “Mythisches Denken

²³⁸ For example, when he finds himself securely in the house of the woman, he has “alle Zeit auf Erden” (12), and, before he leaves the house, “Er hatte Zeit” (26)

kennt...die Idee der Entwicklung am Leitfaden der Kausalität nicht...nicht-lineare Erzählstrukturen, a-kausale Zeitvorstellungen...An den erzählerischen Weichstellen von Handkes Romanen kommt es häufig zu abrupten psychischen Einbrüchen, Erweckungs- oder Zusammenbruchserlebnissen” (Aman 149). Suddenly creating “Zeitnot,” the text generates an “a-kausale Zeitvorstellung.” Unaware of what has caused the nature of time to change, the actor finds himself in a temporal state that has psychologically drawn him out of a sense of equilibrium. The perception of necessity incites him to act differently within his immediate present. A sense of urgency replaces his sense of ease: “Bis heute inszenieren Handkes Texte deshalb Phasen der Zeitnot, in denen dem Ich die „Begabung zur mühelosen Gegenwart“ abhanden kommt” (Carstensen 41). The moment of necessity causes confusion and the disintegration of compartmentalized thinking. His perceptions of both time and space become muddled: “In Zeitnot geraten, das hieß Durcheinander. Es war ein Durcheinander in jeder Hinsicht, in der Zeit wie im Raum, an Leib und Seele, an sich und mit den anderen” (214). Having fallen into an alternative type of time, the actor finds himself in an extraordinary moment, in which everything is reversed: “Zeitnot, Notzeit: ohne es eilig zu haben, hatte man es eilig. Oben wurde unten, rechts wurde links...und so fort im Durcheinander” (215). With obfuscation disrupting ordinary times and spaces, the grounds are established for the erasure of traditional divisions and the envisioning of a new order. In this “Agambian” state of emergency, this moment of disarray, the narrator decides to act. Ironically, his actions are no true actions; he accomplishes nothing.

Finding himself in this state of emergency, confused with regard to time and place, the actor remains debilitated and incapacitated until, in a moment of raised self-

consciousness, he becomes immediately aware of his performance. In a sphere of complete ambiguity, the only thing that matters is his acting, his role, within the present: “Was ihm in solcherart Zeitnot wieder Beine machte, das war dann der bewährte Gedanke, sein eigener Zuschauer zu sein” (218). That is, self-reflection on his performative personality incites him to move to the center, to the present. While his purpose may be to assassinate, he does not accomplish this. In this sense, he follows the trajectory of many of Handke’s writings, whose “Erzählungen bleiben aber dem Romanexperiment verpflichtet handlungsarm” (Hummel 73). His (non)act, his performative personality, becomes revolutionary at the political level in so far as it is based upon a goal that is not executed. This political “Nihilism” follows Benjamin’s conception of the messianic: “Das Ziel der Politik ist Glück; ihre Methode aber, wie es abschließend heißt: „Nihilismus“. Indem sich Politik auf das Profane beschränkt, sind ihre Zielsetzungen letztlich nichtig” (Dubbels 53). Firmly situating himself in the profane realm, the actor provides a face within the political order that resists the setting of goals that could only be justified and achieved by resorting to a divine agenda. Linked to this actor’s face, to this “Dasein,” is an activity of thought that consists of repetition, the continual affirmation of life in the present: “Diese war es, jedenfalls für den Augenblick jetzt, und was gab es Herzhafteres als das Jetzt” (126). At another point the narrator refers to the actor’s insistence on action, or “Being,” within immediacy: “Er wollte nur geben, augenblicklich” (269). Insisting on movement into present time, he performs the messianic. For Benjamin, the messianic transpires in “Jetztzeit,” “non-flowing time, time without continuation or consequence, a continuous present” (Heszer 195). When the actor stops moving backwards, he looks no longer over his shoulder towards the past, but

instead moves “schnurstracks geradeaus” (220), signifying his entrance into a complete presence, in which individuals have no access to a future. The past condenses into a moment of immediacy, an immediacy that is characterized by a hopeless perspective in which arrival is always deferred.

Instead of letting past moments flow ceaselessly into irresolution, the messianic figure collects the past within the present, and the present exists as a state of permanent irresolution.²³⁹ An eternal downfall is experienced in the immediate moment. According to Dubbels, “Der ‘Untergang’ der ‘profanen Ordnung des Profanen’ ist nicht einmalig, kein Bruch als Ende eines alten und Anfang eines neuen Äons, sondern ein ‘ewiger Untergang’” (46). This eternal downfall becomes apparent in Handke’s text. The actor finds himself perpetually ensconced within an “Endtime” milieu: “Es war eine Endzeit” (169). On his journey, the actor confronts numerous feuds between neighbors: “Einer hieb mit der Eisenstange auf ein Autodach...Einer stürmte mit dem Preßlufthammer auf eine in den Regenbogenfarben bemalte Mülltonne los...Einer sprang an der Grundstücksgrenze auf und nieder und zerstückelte die Feindesluft mit einem Peitschenknallen” (168-169). Remaining in this “Endzeit” context, the actor proceeds towards the city, looking for a degree of resolution, for arrival, “Näherkommen ans Ziel” (260). He tries to move towards a reconciled future with the woman, but finds that both he and the woman are unable to escape the present. They too find themselves engaged in

²³⁹ This deferral of presence calls to mind Derrida’s ideas: “To make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words ‘proximity,’ ‘immediacy,’ ‘presence,’ is my final intention of this book. This deconstruction of presence accomplishes itself through the deconstruction of consciousness, and therefore through the irreducible notion of the trace (*Spur*)” (70). Handke’s text, through its reference to numerous centers, similarly questions the possibility of arriving at something like “immediacy.”

perpetual battle, in an “Endzeit” milieu: “er hier und sie dort...ein jeder für sich wie auch für den anderen. Sie umrennen mit aller Kraft. Sich von ihr umrennen lassen. Übereinander herfallen und einander bekämpfen, einander zerfleischen, bis aufs Blut, bis zum Gehnichts, auf Leben und Tod” (278). Unable to break out of the eternal downfall, the actor always points to a future that remains violently elusive. This nearing, this coming towards the center, represents the messianic; it infers a Messiah who only exists as Messiah in that he perpetually approaches and never arrives: “Die messianische Zeit ist als *athid la-bo* eine ‘Zukunft, die kommt’ – eine Zukunft, die als Zukunft immer schon im Kommen begriffen und als solche gegenwärtig ist” (Dubbels 49). Observing the actor’s steps, the reader senses that he, while crossing specific borders, is moving into a future with some sort of closure. Instead, however, the actor’s movements paint the picture of an arriving future, one that he always moves towards, while remaining resolutely within a present, a center, that is itself constantly deferred: “Dazu paßte, daß er sich, eine kurze Strecke weg vom Zentralplatz, mit dem einen Schritt hinaus, obwohl mitten in der Stadt, in einer ganz anderen Weltgegend befand” (251). There is always an approaching and never an arrival; “der Schauspieler [wanderte] von einem Zentrum ins andere” (256). Consequently, the trajectory of downfall in the present prevents the arrival at reconciliation.

In the text’s final scene the actor and the woman find themselves in an immediate present. They exist only with the hope of restitution: “Der geistlichen restitutio in integrum, welche in die Unsterblichkeit einführt, entspricht eine weltliche, die in die Ewigkeit eines Untergangs führt und der Rhythmus dieses ewig vergehenden Weltlichen, der Rhythmus der messianischen Natur, ist Glück” (Benjamin 46). This “restitutio in

integrum” is defined as a “Wiedereinsetzung in den vorigen Stand.” According to Benjamin, this transpires at the spiritual level as restoration leads to immortality. As well, this restoration, this setting back into place, occurs in the world, as an individual experiences an eternal downfall. The messianic is sensed through the experience of an eternally vanishing world. Indeed, the place where Handke’s actor ends in the novel demonstrates the desire, or need, for a “restitutio in integrum,” which does not arrive in the present. The actor and the woman are not brought back together:

Wie verloren sie beide waren, wie – *ausgerenkt, ausgerenkt* [my italics] an Leib und Seele, er hier und sie dort, verloren unter dem Himmel, ein jeder für sich wie auch für den anderen. Sie umrennen mit aller Kraft. Sich von ihr umrennen lassen. Übereinander herfallen und einander bekämpfen, einander zerfleischen, bis aufs Blut, bis zum Gehn nicht mehr, auf Leben und Tod. Miteinander so ringen, bis sich der Himmel, oder sonst ein Dritter oder wer oder was, sich ihrer beider erbarmte und sie zeitlebens *ingeränkt* [my italics] wären, jetzt und bis zur Stunde ihres Todes (278-79).

They find themselves in an eternal present consisting of fighting and division. They are dislocated from each other, divided and separated. Prevented from obtaining reconciliation, the actor and the woman exist only with the hope of a merciful third instance, an entity that could affect restitution, a rejoining that, on their own, remains eternally elusive. Yet, such a hope is seemingly real. The narrator has situated them in a resurrection framework. The narrator writes: “WAS SUCHT IHR DEN LEBENDEN UNTER DEN TOTEN?” (278). This direct quote from the New Testament makes a

blatant allusion to the sacrificed Christ's resurrected nature; no longer dead, he is among the living. The actor, the "Attentäter" (200) as sacrifice, finds himself as well among the living, ensconced indeed in a life of endless repetition²⁴⁰ - "Zeit für der zweiten Sanften Lauf" (279) – in a present that incessantly exhibits the characteristics of a downfall.

V. Conclusion – the profane angel

Endeavoring to confront himself, to understand his identity, to make sense of his messianic inclinations within the context of a secular realm, in which "niemand mehr gerettet werden wollte" and "niemand und nichts mehr zu retten war" (150), the actor sets out on a journey to perform an assumed identity that is at once challenged through the faces confronted along his path. Consequently, he experiences a secularization that corrects the existential understanding of his identity. By the end of the novel he has become one of the many faces – marked with traces of transcendence – able to offer orientation in an ambivalent present. Empty of his divine status, he still possesses angelic traces. Hence, we must pose the question: what kind of angel do we have? Perhaps he resembles most closely a figure depicted by Agamben. In his chapter on Assistants in *Profanations*, Agamben describes a type of being who comes along and provides help, but doesn't seem to really help in any tangible way:

But they look like angels, messengers who do not know the content of the letters they must deliver... More intelligent and gifted than our other

²⁴⁰ "Auch in der mythenfernen Moderne, so Eliade, könne der Mensch durch Rituale und bedeutsame Tätigkeiten die "Öffnung zur Großen Zeit, zur heiligen Zeit" des Mythos erneuern. Handkes Texte suchen den Zugang zur "Großen Zeit" wiederherzustellen, indem sie "die tyrannische alltägliche" Zeit mythisch überformen, ohne dabei die materielle Gegenwart zu verlassen" (Carstensen 46).

friends, always intent on notions and projects for which they seem to have all the necessary virtues, they still do not succeed in finishing anything and are generally idle. They embody the type of eternal student...And yet something about them, an inconclusive gesture, an unforeseen grace, a certain mathematical boldness in judgment and taste...all these features indicate that they belong to a complementary world and allude to a lost citizenship or an inviolable elsewhere. In this sense, they give us help, even though we can't quite tell what sort of help it is. It could consist precisely in the fact that they cannot be helped (29).

Unable to help, incomplete, laden with violent tendencies, idle and inactive, confused with regard to an identity that he thought he had possessed, the actor still employs his "Being" to open eyes, to offer assistance by presenting a revelation in the realm of immanence. In the novel's final scene, the actor dwells "auf dem Platz," where he "stand, und stand, und stand" (279). Re-signifying this "Platz" as a "Geviert" – "Die Häuser in dem Geviert bis auf die Kathedrale gleich niedrig" (279) – the narrator once again evokes a reference to Heidegger, bridging Heidegger's use of this term in *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken* with the actor's performance on this public square. For Heidegger the "Geviert" emerges when "Erde und Himmel, die Göttlichen und die Sterblichen" (151) unify: "Im Retten der Erde, im Empfangen des Himmels, im Erwarten der Göttlichen, im Geleiten der Sterblichen ereignet sich das Wohnen als das vierfältige Schonen des Gevierts" (153). Viewing Handke's actor "in dem Geviert," the reader identifies a "Being," which, in his living and existing in secular space, preserves traces of transcendence.

Concluding Remarks

The Postsecular in the Contemporary German Novel

Why did this project initially interest me? Why did I set out to interpret these specific texts as postsecular, assuming they offer a counter perspective to the West's dominant story of secularism? My background in theology at religious institutions, including Wheaton College and Princeton Seminary, and my time spent in various church settings throughout the United States decisively shaped the lens through which I perceived European culture and its religious climate. I had been exposed to a sentiment seemingly still pervasive throughout America: Europe is a resolutely "secular" environment. Europeans, and Germans specifically, think philosophically. Immune to predilections for entertaining intuitions incapable of being tangibly demonstrated, they approach the world objectively. They are not as religious as Americans. With these clichés and assumptions to which I had been exposed, I could not help but view German culture through this framework. However, being inquisitive and slightly skeptical, I wanted to explore if this was indeed the case. Is German culture as "secular" as Americans perceive it to be? This is, of course, not the question, my dissertation addresses. However, what the project does do is question the extent to which one can *carte blanche* ascribe the term secular to all elements of German culture. Particularly, this project has focused on examining German literature and to the degree that it, as one element of culture, indicates the intellectual currents prevalent throughout German society. Concentrating on this cultural sphere, I have looked at how religion is addressed and whether these texts possess postsecular components indicative of an underlying

inclination to provide transcendence with some form of representation in a narrative environment rooted in the secular.

To speak about the transcendent within a modern outlook indelibly constrained to a framework of immanence – approving as knowledge only that which can be tangibly experienced or scientifically proven – contemporary German texts, while acknowledging their commitment to secular ideals and the construction of a rational public voice, infer that about which they know they cannot linguistically locate. Commenting on what can be known in the modern context, Höhn writes “Was zuvor außer oder jenseits der Welt vermutet wurde, fällt buchstäblich ‘aus,’ d.h. findet nicht (mehr) statt, weil es keine ‘Stätte’ mehr für es gibt. Was *in* der Welt ist, muss auch *von* der Welt sein” (19). Modern, secular individuals, interested in pursuing knowledge, limit themselves to the phenomena evident in the world. The transcendent therefore does not exist without the intervention of that which comes from the world. The ideas contained in literature have their origin in the immanent framework, stemming as they do from the minds of individuals located in tangible terrain. When the transcendent appears in the secular age, it arrives in the world as that which derives from the world. This project has analyzed how certain contemporary German texts demonstrate what creative minds are capable of producing as they reconfigure the transcendent with representations that account for the shifting sentiments regarding religion caused by secularism’s advancements. Through their performative gestures, the narrators demonstrate how intuitions of the transcendent continue to emerge from those ensconced in immanence.

These texts provide new ways of conceptualizing religion. They creatively explore forms that have not yet been divulged. When Taylor speaks of “the creative

imagination” (Taylor *Sources* 379), he points specifically to the power lying within individuals to probe the depths of an unconscious realm that has not yet been fully exhausted nor ever will be. The texts that have been investigated demonstrate the activity of narrators as they imaginatively manifest reality as it is or may become. In this process they are involved in “the creation of new forms which give articulation to an inchoate vision, not simply the reproduction of forms already there” (Taylor *Sources* 379). I have looked at these forms, identifying how the texts have addressed religion and come up with new ways of perceiving religious representations. What I have determined is that the narrators, as they imaginatively create pictures of how reality could be, inflect their narrations with philosophical considerations and religious symbols, moving in a distinctly postsecular direction and challenging thereby an un-reflected acceptance of secular strategies of thinking. Commenting on the postsecular sentiment, Allesch writes: “Auf dem Erlebnismarkt der Gegenwartskultur sind stets neue Bilder und Mythen gefragt, nicht Regeln, nach denen sich individuelle Sinnsuche zu vollziehen habe” (139). These texts carry out a function in constant demand. They come up with new pictures, new ways of perception, providing alternative ways of looking for meaning in a society absorbed in rationality, technology, productivity, efficiency, and economic security. They have shown how it is possible to continue to grapple with the unseen in an environment in which the unseen has disappeared from discussion. Adopting an exploratory approach to represent what cannot be definitively represented, the texts – with a Derridean trajectory – produce traces of transcendence, generating signs that can be incessantly interpreted and reinterpreted. The linguistic marks with religious coding infer and then defer. Meaning remains just beyond the scope of the texts’ purview.

As the texts deal with an abstract concept difficult to concretize in a secular environment, which places considerable stress on thinking rationally and approving only those ideas capable of being empirically observed and demonstrated, the texts prove themselves to participate in the secular agenda. The voices, apparent in the texts, are secular, as they participate in the construction of larger public discourse. Acknowledging what the Enlightenment and the secularization of society have accomplished, they nevertheless take a post-Enlightenment turn. They appeal to those sentiments associated with religion emphasized in Schleiermacher's Romantic understanding of religion. Regarding Schleiermacher's significance as a Romantic thinker who reflected on religion, Habermas writes: "His famous argument begins with the inner-worldly position of a subject who is characterized by responsiveness and autonomy and by an alteration between passive and active relations to the world" (*Between* 233). What Habermas saw in Schleiermacher's thinking is what I have stressed throughout this project, the intricate relationship between the subject and the world, or subjectivity and materiality. When figuring transcendence and evoking the religious, the texts – with this post-Enlightenment, "postsecular" turn – move their narrations forward on the basis of what nature does (what it reveals) and what the subject does (what the subject unveils about those religious dispositions inhering within). As the narrators relate what nature evokes and what the subject performs, they demonstrate how these two categories can be perceived as the place where religious feelings transpire. Schleiermacher points to these two categories when he writes: "So die Religion; bei den unmittelbaren Erfahrungen vom Dasein und Handeln des Universums, bei den einzelnen Anschauungen und Gefühlen bleibt sie stehen" (*Über* 83). Religion occurs where there are immediate experiences of

nature and when an individual reflects on his or her intuitions and feelings in these specific instances. Taylor captures well the sentiment apparent within Romanticism and equally evident in the modern, postsecular milieu, when he writes the following: “God, then, is to be interpreted in terms of what we see striving in nature and finding voice within ourselves. A slide to pantheism is all too easy, and this we see in the Romantic generation with the early Schelling, for instance, and later in another form with Hegel” (*Sources* 371). People intuit the transcendent in nature and then they proceed to subjectively reconstruct their initial intuitions and feelings. This is the model I have used when demonstrating how the transcendent comes into form and receives representation within the parameters of contemporary German texts. I have suggested that these texts can be read as postsecular, because they too are “A set of narratives about secularized protagonists who undertake a kind of turn to the religious which is not in any simple sense a return, but rather an attempt to discover a space between dogmatic religiosity on the one hand and dogmatic secularism on the other” (Fessenden 158). A brief summary of where we have come will be helpful for identifying the way in which the texts represent transcendence and allude thereby to secular society’s persistent attempt to reenvision religion.

The first chapter explored two of Sebald’s texts, *Schwindel. Gefühle* and *Die Ringe des Saturn*. It looked specifically at how Sebald’s narrating subjects interact with the material environments they encounter, how they adopt, in Schleiermacher’s terms, a form of passivity, as they allow nature and that which nature contains to operate on them. At heightened moments when nature’s impressions are particularly poignant, the protagonists experience intuitions they narratively portray through recourse to religious

language. Doing so, the narrators transform specific natural spaces into places infused with transcendence. In *Die Ringe*, Sebald presents a resolutely rational and secular figure with a genuine interest in unraveling and unfolding the historical record, wishing to understand reality as it was/is. At the same time, he manifests porousness and performs permeability by generating in his text transitional spaces that stem from his reflections that indicate an intellectual movement from the immanent to the transcendent. Recounting his approximately 30-mile journey through the English region of Suffolk, taken a year earlier, the narrator details spatially situated historical and contemporary encounters that document ubiquitous destruction. As he does this, he presents momentary glimpses into transcendent realms that offer the prospect of being untarnished by the strict confines of immanence. What he encounters on his journey leads him to reflect on his debilitating melancholy and to consider how he can overcome it. To find a way out he looks for the possibility of some sort of continuation within the immanent framework of destruction. He finds the prospects of perpetuity as he writes, weaving into his text elevated reflections on nature and meditations on historical figures that, in the process, become textually immortalized. Doing so, he follows the pattern of the religiously coded silk motif, symbolic of the transcendent, that threads together the various elements of the text.

Sebald's narrator in *Schwindel. Gefühle*, as he visits various European cities, while endeavoring to remember and record past memories, reveals similar interest in exploring the transcendence evoked in certain spaces. Through writing he attempts to access those spatially connected experiences deeply embedded in his consciousness, and, as he executes this task, he remains vitally aware of the sacred, religious dimensions

operative in those spaces in which his remembrances are most vivid. My analysis explores the relationship between the narrator's construction of significant European spaces, of the manifestations of the sacred within them, and of his process of remembering. Revisiting places endowed with certain qualities enables him to reflect on experiences imbued with religious dimensions, and, as he retraces his footsteps, the narrator explores the still vital role of religion in secular space. The narrator, reflecting on both his memories and his failed attempts to remember, employs religious symbols – both positively and negatively connoted – that frame the entire movement of the text. The protagonist narrates transcendence into his experience of certain spaces, as he emphasizes and articulates the sacred dimensions of these spheres.

The second chapter analyzed Kehlmann's *Die Vermessung der Welt*, a text in which nature also plays a crucial role. This novel particularly focuses on looking at how scientists access the natural environment, how they utilize all the scientific tools at their disposal to arrive at certainty. In specific moments the text demonstrates how these protagonists arrive at the limits of what their scientific practices can accomplish. When the text presents the scientists approaching the borders of what can be known through scientific inquiry, intuitions of the transcendent emerge. Exposing nature's inconsistency – “wenn die Welt für Momente einen Schritt ins Irreale gemacht habe” (117) – and its resistance to the circumscribing forces of science, the text opens up to an indication of what is beyond, so that the world itself is recognized as a “Mimikry von etwas Fremden” (117). When they possess the sense of something beyond the empirical world, the protagonists have an intuition of transcendence, the perception of noumenal realms eluding the scope of the phenomenal. This chapter explored and unveiled the, at times,

vague and diffuse references to religion, to those transcendent moments when the adamantly scientific protagonists revert to the supernatural to explain how they experience their natural environment. Confronting the limitations of science, these protagonists become aware of and experience porous moments within the natural order, cracks in their own fixed and rigid logical systems. During such moments, the characters, Friedrich Gauß and Alexander von Humboldt, express intuitions of a transcendent instance or undergo a transcendent experience, in which they are transported out of their ordinary, everyday perspective of the natural realm.

The third chapter investigated Lewitscharoff's text *Blumenberg*. This work establishes a religiously coded symbol representing a possible picture of transcendence within the terrain of immanence. As the text sets aside "God," or any other type of familiar theological/divine symbol, it inserts in its place the image of a lion, a figure laden with supernatural characteristics. The narrator presents this lion ubiquitously appearing to the prominent German philosopher Hans Blumenberg, who, while lecturing in Münster, incessantly confronts this image. As the text narrates the lion into form, it demonstrates how the lion is always a product of language. It derives from the language games the professor performs. It therefore becomes the projection of what Blumenberg desires. As it is bound to language, the lion is bound to that which is in a state of constant flux. Hence, the lion and what it represents cannot be summarily grasped through linguistic maneuvering. The image remains an absolute metaphor, that which resists circumscription. It remains a transcendent instance, a figure about which both the narrator and Blumenberg cannot speak, and yet remains intuited. Hence, the narration positions it in the realm of the miraculous: "Natürlich war das Auftauchen des Löwen ein Wunder.

Blumenberg lag es fern, Wunder zu belächeln...auch wenn er sich nicht dazu bringen konnte, an sie zu glauben. Aber der Löwe verkörperte das Wunder” (87). With the presentation of this lion – this miracle – the narrator incorporates a break in the capacities of rational thinking, challenging the degree to which a rigidly secular stance can be maintained. Taylor points to this break when he writes, “the mechanical outlook which splits nature from supernature voids all this mystery. This split generates the modern concept of the ‘miracle’; a kind of punctual hole blown in the regular order of things from outside, that is, from the transcendent” (*Secular* 547). The lion represents this “punctual hole,” a transcendent picture that reveals the secular subject’s incapacities of grasping and comprehending those linguistically incomprehensible entities intuited within the immanent framework.

The fourth chapter analyzed Handke’s *Der Grosse Fall*. In this text, the protagonist generates a premonition of transcendence, as he performs the crossing of spheres, moving symbolically from the transcendent to the immanent. The actor (a gunman and potential savior) acknowledges that there are no more stories or revelations to narrate. Consequently, his performance becomes the new revelation. As the text tracks his movements from beyond the periphery of a city to the inside of a city, it emphasizes his subjectivity as one involved in a transcending process. The crossing of spheres he performs provides visual representation of how he moves into a new understanding of his identity. Handke’s actor wants to “save” those ensconced in the “End Times,” those who have been effaced by a political system expecting them to participate in an unjustified war based upon the president’s agenda. Convinced of his “Being’s” affective, “salvific” capabilities, the actor spatially proceeds from the outside to the inside, from the spiritual

to the material, in order to carry out his redemptive gesture. Drawing near the city, with the intent to save, the actor, in the process of approaching, distances himself from an incomprehensible, transcendent identity, and obtains an understanding of his “true” identity, dependent as it is on the transcendent rooted in immanence, on those individuals he confronts in his performance. He himself has become a religiously coded figure that has moved between two locations and become aware of the traces of transcendence inscribed on those faces fixed in the immanent domain. When the narrator expresses the following sentiment – “Die Vorstellung, einen Zuschauer und Zuhörer zu haben...er dachte sich weiter beobachtet, von einem Unsichtbaren...Es war, als habe er sich vor dem unsichtbaren Beobachter, und vor aller Welt, entlarvt” (82) – he points to a subject that is keenly aware of a transcendent instance beyond and transcendent traces within those immanent faces he has confronted on a journey that has led him to the realization of the traces of transcendence contained within his own unique identity.

Do contemporary German novels, in a thoroughly “secular” culture, represent transcendence? And, if they do indeed represent transcendence, do the representations in the text say something about broader sentiments ubiquitous in German society? While definitive statements are difficult to espouse, I would assert, on the basis of my observations and analyses, that interest in exploring religious representations has not subsided in Germany’s secular environment. The texts demonstrate how they philosophically and creatively reimagine transcendence – which, while unable to be empirically accessed, is poetically suggested – offering thereby postsecular counternarratives to the narrative of secularism.

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