GERMANNES, THE NATION, AND ITS OTHER

By

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GERMANNESSE, THE NATION, AND ITS OTHER

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"Germanness, the Nation, and Its Other" explores the ways in which postwar German-identified writers and filmmakers construct competing versions of German national identity, which I refer to as Germanness, through their negotiation of exotic spaces and exotic Others. Following Benedict Anderson’s formulation of the Nation as an “imagined community,” I argue that it is precisely in these abstracted “other spaces,” outside the bounded geography of Germany, where the imagination of Germanness is most powerful, because the landscapes and people who are “othered” in these contexts have no recourse to social and political discourse in Germany through which to contest their reification and fetishization.

After an introduction exploring theoretical models of alterity, I start my study by examining the ways in which the quintessentially German Heimatfilm was invoked in the fifties to extend the imaginary borders of Germanness into a culturally colonized Hungary by doing a close reading of Kurt Hoffmann’s 1955 film, Ich denke oft an Piroschka. In the following chapter I analyze several films by Werner Herzog and show how his portrayals of radical alterity in the exotic jungles of South America continue to contribute to current debates about the proper relations between Germans, non-Germans, and the environment. In the final chapter I examine
the negotiation of space and the role of spatiality in construction of German, Jewish, Mestizo, and Catholic identities in the texts of German Argentinean writers.
 Few markers of identity are more contentious than that of nationality, a concept which by its very invocation has the power not only to drive people to hate and kill other human beings, but also to selflessly offer their own lives to protect a nation’s perceived values and institutions. As a mode of self-understanding which is often accepted as natural until challenged with alternative constructions, national identity has specific ways of injecting itself into discourses which often have little to do with issues of nationalism. Just as writers and artists do with the modes of race, class, and gender, they infuse their works with the values and structures of nationality,” sometimes critically engaging them and sometimes uncritically re-inscribing and thereby naturalizing them. My intent in this project is to unravel the ways in which German national self-understanding, which I will hereafter call “Germanness,” is inscribed and problematized within various texts and films written (and/or directed) by authors who are in some way identified as German.

To be sure, the heated academic debates concerning nationalism have at their core the semantic over-determination of the root term “nation.” In the English-speaking world, the word appears in its oldest culturally relevant context in the book of Genesis: “From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language” (Genesis 10:5, New International Version). In this sentence, the words “peoples” and “nations” are both translations of forms of the Hebrew word “גּוֹיִם” (“goyim”) which can refer not only to nations, peoples, and ethnic groups generally, but can also denote specifically non-Jewish ethnicities. Thus, the concept of nationhood, from at least some of its earliest traceable roots in the Western imaginary, incorporates not only ideas of linguistic unity and ethnic
A cursory survey of the abundant semantic possibilities of the word “nation” seems to necessitate a delimiting of the term.¹ For my purposes, Benedict Anderson’s concept of the nation as an “imagined community,” will serve as a point of departure. According to Anderson, “nation-ness” and its attendant nationalism are “cultural artifacts” invented in the late 18th Century (Imagined Communities 4). The product of these artifacts, the nation, he defines as “an imagined political community” which is both “inherently limited” and “sovereign” (6). Its “imaginary” status derives not from any kind of unreal or made-up nature, but by the fact that in the mind of each of the members of the nation there resides a kind of “image” of communion with fellow members, despite the fact that even well-connected members of the nation have personal knowledge of only a tiny fraction of the entire population, and that image is articulated through language. The nation is limited in the fact that it consciously does not (nor, he argues, should it) contain all human beings and sovereign because it has replaced “divinely ordained” structures of authority (7). Finally, Anderson calls the nation a community because its members imagine themselves, despite all evidence to the contrary, to be “equal” in a strong horizontal solidarity.

¹ In English, the terms “nation” and “nationalism” most commonly refer to sovereign countries. Yet even the most obvious examples are problematic: the Soviet Union was not so much a nation as a union of nations, some of whom had “autonomous” territory (e.g. Russians and Ukrainians), while others (e.g. Germans and Jews) did not. Furthermore, contemporary political and identity movements such as “black nationalism,” Nation of Islam, and “Queer Nation” refer simultaneously to intra and international groupings, whereas terms like “Cherokee Nation” are understood to denote an ethnic group that commands an “autonomous” area within a larger country. It has been pointed out that the Western concept of the nation state has been most problematized in the colonized “Third Word,” where European notions of national borders were imposed upon societies whose borders were fluid. In these contexts, however, the use of the term is often no less haphazard, as demonstrated in the writings of Edward Said, who in different contexts refers both to “Palestinian Nation” (“The Schultz Meeting”) and “the Arab Nation” (“Dignity and Solidarity”).
Important in Anderson’s concept of nationhood is that the narratives of the nation take place in “homogeneous, empty time,” (a concept borrowed from Walter Benjamin) a temporal frame in which, like in a novel, events which physically appear to happen at different times actually occur simultaneously. Thus, from the (invariably) mythological origins of the nation to the present day, members of the nation are united in their simultaneous movement toward the imagined destiny of the nation. The timeless nature of the imagined nation gives the concept its fixity, and stamps national stereotypes with a seal of eternity. Hence, in the national imaginary, the characteristic traits of the German, the Frenchman, or the Native American, are seen as essential and unchangeable.

Drawing on a range of examples, from the writings of Karl Marx to the realities of “nationalist” revolutions in the Far East, Anderson demonstrates how easily artifacts of nationalism can be “transplanted... to a great variety of political and ideological constellations” (4). Nationalism is thus removed from its familiar pairing with fascism and other reactionary political movements and shown to have become a premier mode of identification on all points of the political spectrum. Yet the transplantability of nationalism does not only expose the permeability of leftist ideologies to the seductive allure of the power of primitive nationalist idea-peddling to mobilize the masses. Nor is it limited to the imposition of Western nationalizing instruments—the map, the census, the museum, and the flag—on traditional pre-capitalist cultures—which is perhaps colonialism’s greatest fait accompli. In the course of this project, I will focus on the ways in which the symbols of nationality, the subtle codes of national

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2 The universal adoption of symbols and instruments of the nation does not mean, however, that the function of these symbols is strictly national, regional, or even ethnic, particularly in colonized space where Western metrics have been imposed: When Israel evacuated southern Lebanon in 2000, the first flags raised were not Lebanese flags, but those of Hezbollah. When Fatah was routed from the Gaza strip in the Summer of 2007, the Palestinian flag—the most recognizable symbol of Palestinian Nationalism—was replaced in several key locations by the flag of Hamas.
belonging, are projected by German writers and artists into both their images of self, as well as their depictions of their Other.

**The Other**

**Theoretical Foundations**

Like any linguistic construct, the term o/Other not only carries with it various idiosyncratic semantic associations in each of its users and theoreticians, but it also assumes a variable position within individual webs of meaning, such that its location at any given point can be neither isolated nor fixed. Thus my attempt in this section, as in the discussion on the nation, will be to meaningfully narrow the interpretive field of this term while acknowledging the impossibility of capturing and delineating its full potential and variability. Indeed, it should become clear that the prescribing a definition to the term is itself a kind of othering, which is necessary yet far from unproblematic.

My use and understanding of the term “Other” is informed by several writers and theoreticians. From a psychoanalytical perspective I will rely in part on the theoretical work of Jacques Lacan, whose discussion of the “mirror stage” provides a useful starting point, despite some obvious limitations, which I will discuss below. For me, one of the most important aspects of Lacan’s conceptualization of the Other is the notion that the infant’s recognition of Otherness (as well as specific others) precedes recognition of self. ³ Thus, the infant’s recognition of the mother as a complete being gives the mother (or another other) a primary position against which the infant begins to define himself in the Imaginary order as he misidentifies himself as being identical with his mirror image—that is, his sense of self is already othered in two ways: it is

³ In my arguments I will also adopt Lacan’s differentiation between capital-O Other, which he sees as a central structural position in the Symbolic order (or Otherness as a concept), and the small-O other, which refers to individual others (or objects) perceived by the self as outside itself. See Klages.
subordinated to the other in its belatedness in being (i.e., the other is perceived as chronologically older), and it is derived not in relation to any properties inherent in the infant himself, but in relation to an other which consists of that mirror image upon which the infant projects the anticipation of his own desired wholeness. Another important aspect of Lacan’s formulation is that the infant seeks to restore oneness or wholeness to his universe by merging with the original other, the mother. What is of critical importance to me in both the temporal ordering of self/other identification (i.e., other precedes self) and in the desire to merge with the other are the ethical implications of such a formulation. If the self follows the Other and is derived from it, there is a sense in which it is both subordinated to and dependent upon this other, which is indispensable for the very existence of the self. At the same time, the desire to overcome the isolation that accompanies recognition of Otherness through a merging with the Other (in the form of a particular other) requires the continued existence of this other. The acceptance of the importance of the Other in the formation of the self, as well as the positioning of Otherness as a center point to which all selves seek (albeit unsuccessfully) to return, will serve in my project as a basis upon which to propose an ethical model of national identity.4 Although I disagree with Lacan’s reliance upon hetero-normative assumptions about infant sexuality on the one hand, and with the implied applicability of (already problematic) models of individual psychological development to entire groups of people on the other hand, I think his model can be used in a very basic way as a basis for an ethical understanding (and application) of the process of othering. Yet, however much I might borrow from Lacan in the way of terminology and basic

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4 This model will stand in contrast to the Hegelian formulation that “each consciousness pursues the death of another,” which implies that a synthesis of same and other would entail the annihilation not only of the other but of the self as well.
ordering concepts, I am in no way attempting here to perform a full Lacanian analysis of otherness, as will become clear as the discussion develops.

In postcolonial and subaltern studies, the concept of Otherness is often used to refer exclusively to marginalized groups, both internal to the national body and outside of it. For those who use the term this way, the difference between Same and Other is maintained exclusively through the exercise of direct power. Thus John Davidson, in his analysis of New German Cinema, rejects as fraudulent the postwar German filmmakers’ attempted othering of the West German (qua European) on the basis that colonizers, as the exclusive holders of power, cannot be “othered” at all and that any attempt to do so is nothing more than a deception, a “false othering” (33). Although Davidson recognizes that there are power differentials between individual West Germans (and between West German cinema and Hollywood), he claims that these differences are insignificant when compared to the differences between the West German (and European) as a type and the (neo)colonized peoples. My analysis will show that, at least within the German context, every individual is bound to be both Same and Other, and that this dynamic positioning results from the manipulation of both power and what I will call “antipower.”

Davidson’s refusal to grant the status of Otherness to any and all West Germans is part of a noticeable propensity on the part of several scholars to tie the use of the term “Other” to a totalizing ethnographic map where individuals are branded as Same or Other based on their perceived membership in opposing, mutually exclusive categories (such as Westerner vs. subaltern or man vs. woman). In his preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Jean-Paul Sartre employs a Manichean aesthetics of “us versus them,” which seems to celebrate a supposedly irrevocable, unbridgeable gap between the dying world of the European (and by

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5 Davidson could hardly be more unambiguous on this matter: “The identity of West Germans is not other” (33).
association the American) and that of the newly “national” post-colonized Other. Russell
Berman is correct to criticize Sartre’s rabid anti-Europeanism and his utter rejection of the
Western intellectual tradition (Enlightenment Humanism) in favor of unfettered anti-colonialist
violence. While Berman is appalled that there is no attendant message of “friend, come hither!”
he fails to fully challenge Sartre’s totalizing ethnography which sees every Westerner as always
already guilty in the crimes of colonialism due to his (and and presumably her) having invariably
benefited from colonial exploitation (Enlightenment or Empire 209-211). There is no effort on
Sartre’s part to examine alterity within Europe or the Colony (marginal Western identities, or
philo-Western subaltern subjects such as W.E.B. DuBois), which, at least in the European
context, could easily have yielded a more nuanced understanding of existing power relations and
challenged the simplistic binarisms of Sartre’s universalist poetics.

These binarisms are no less in evidence in the writings of the classical anti-colonialist
Frantz Fanon, who in Black Skin, White Masks first establishes a racial dichotomy (“For there are
two camps: the white and the black”; 8), essentializes the poles (“The black man wants to be
white”; 9. “There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men.”; 10) then
fixes it in perpetuity (“The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his
blackness”; 9). Yet for all the alienation that this othering seems to imply, Fanon (unlike Sartre)
still sees hope for reconciliation. In order to achieve “authentic communication” the
representatives of these racial poles must turn their backs on the inhuman history of their
ancestors, giving up the notions of superiority and inferiority in favor of an attempt to “touch the
other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself” (231). Importantly for me, Fanon’s Other
is not equated with the subaltern: although there is a clear (and therefore problematic) distinction
between the worlds of the dominant white and subordinate black man, the appeal for
understanding is cast upon each of the “men” with equal weight.\(^6\) The theoretical importance of Fanon’s work for my project is not limited to its importance in establishing an ethical approach to othering (through its appeal to brotherhood and “authentic” communication), but also because it undermines the idea that the social construction of the Other is the exclusive domain of dominant or colonizing cultures. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon writes that “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World” (96). Yet this formulation is bound to have its critics, as it challenges traditional anti-colonialist understandings of subjectivity: Edward Said, for example, calls Fanon’s formulation a “preposterous reordering of things” (*Culture and Imperialism* 197).

Another example of totalizing Otherness, yet one which seeks to eventually “deprive the concept Other of its absolute sense” is to be found in Simone de Beauvoir’s essay “Woman as Other” (de Beauvoir 368). De Beauvoir writes of woman: “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other” (367). What is interesting about de Beauvoir’s pronouncement is that, for her, woman is the last in a long line of Others with no recourse to reciprocity: whereas Blacks and Jews, though the use of the subject(ive) pronoun “we” are able to define themselves, and through their separation from Europeans imagine a world without “white” power (thereby othering whites and subverting the concept of Otherness as the exclusive condition of the subaltern), woman is unable to counter or challenge her alterity in relation to man precisely because of the powerlessness precipitated by her “dispersion” among men. De Beauvoir’s wording evokes the diasporic condition as a cause

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\(^6\) It should be noted that Fanon’s discussion of women is strictly limited to the ways in which women on both sides of the racial divide use and are used by the men on the opposite side. Thus, in describing the process of the othering of the black man, he “others” women by denying their subjectivity.
of permanent othering, which is of interest to me here because, in the texts that I examine, there is indeed a seemingly permanent othering which is precipitated by ethnic/national dispersion, albeit one which more closely resembles that of the blacks and Jews to which de Beauvoir refers than that of the woman whose voice has yet to articulate the subject(ive) pronoun “we,” much less “I.”

The Processes of Othering

Othering is a process by which difference is established, enunciated, inscribed, or simply manufactured in the body of the individual, the community, and the nation, the result of which is the differentiation between a Self/Same/One and an Other. Its genealogy reaches back to at least two sources of Western culture, the biblical story of creation and to Greek antiquity. In the mythology of biblical creation, the genesis of “otherness” is traced to a paradoxically pre-geographical, pre-temporal point when God shattered cosmic unity and prefigured the transgressions of borders, time, and race, and speech by separating the Earth from the heavens, the Sabbath from the other days, the light from the dark, and, finally, one language from another at Babel. The historical violence of othering is normalized through appeal to the mythological: as Adam’s helper Eve is formed through the giving of his rib, so does the European master create his colonial servant through the giving of his culture. Yet no less violent is the othering of the Self, as the chosen One severs his prepuce to cut himself off from the unchosen Other.

Likewise the ancient Greeks, upon whose culture modern Europeans imagine their own culture as being built, saw humanity as being divided between the civilized Greek and the rest of

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7 It must be acknowledged here that de Beauvoir’s understanding of the powerlessness of women, which is predicated on their dispersion among men and the root of their eternal otherness, is inherently heterosexist in nature, as it assumes that it is women’s predetermined role to be sexually subjugated to men. In the moment when women join forces and leave this constellation, they gain the same othering power enjoyed by other “minority” groups.
humanity as barbarian Other, an entity seen as “inferior by nature” and therefore “excluded from all discussion” (Goldhill 6). Classical scholar Moses Hadas puts it succinctly:

From Hesiod onwards every classical Greek author reflects, with greater or less clarity, the conviction that the Hellenes are the elect and the barbarians their inferiors. The Greeks occupy the center of the world, and their usages are the norm by which lesser peoples are judged. Solemn proclamations excluded barbarians, along with criminals, from the celebration of the mysteries and from the national games. Sacred objects and sites, including the domestic hearth, were rendered unclean by contact with a barbarian (106).

The attitude of the Greeks regarding their others was not, however, unanimous. Although the polis fostered nationalist sentiments in order to mobilize its citizens for war, there were also dissenting voices (like that of Hippocrates) that argued for universal human equality (106).

Both ancient Greek and Jewish culture shared an explicit veneration of Self over Other: in a saying attributed by ancient Greek sources variously to Thales, Plato and Socrates, it is supposed to have been stated by one or more of the sages that he regularly thanked Providence for three things: “that I was born a human and not a beast; a man and not a woman; a Greek and not a Barbarian” (Harrison 110). Eliezer Segal has pointed out that Schopenhauer noticed an uncanny similarity between the Greek thanksgiving and the traditional Jewish morning prayer, which includes the lines “who did not make me a Gentile... a slave... a woman” (39).

The fact that much of Western society sees itself as inheriting the cultural legacies of both the ancient Greeks and Hebrews lead to questions about the link between the otherings of ancient civilizations and those of post-Enlightenment Europe, which are so often implicated in discourses of imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and fascism. Some theorists such as Edward Said attribute what they see as a typical, endemic, essential Eurocentrism directly to their cultural inheritance from the Greek rejection of the barbarian (Culture and Imperialism 28). Kenan Malik has raised the objection that Said’s approach is flawed because it essentializes Western culture by representing European history as a series of events which coincide because of an essential
European desire to dominate the non-European Other. In other words, for Malik, Said enacts the very cultural processes that the latter criticizes by attributing to a unified European culture a kind of inner soul that is consistent over thousands of years—precisely the argument that proponents of colonialism have used to justify European domination. A study of colonialism (and the art that is produced in the colonial setting) must take into account that Europe has many faces and histories, a multitude of discourses which compete with the dominant one, and that on a basic level, “otherness” is not exclusively a European invention. An interesting piece of evidence from East Asia should suffice here: Luther Carrington Goodrich, scholar of Chinese culture, notes in *A Short History of the Chinese People* that

China’s civilization of the eleventh and twelfth centuries probably outdistanced that of the rest of the world. Her people might rightfully agree with Shao Yung, who is alleged to have said: “I am happy because I am a human and not an animal; a male, and not a female; a Chinese, and not a barbarian; and because I live in Loyang, the most wonderful city in all the world.” The complacency of such an attitude as this, however, engendered the stagnation and defeat for which China later paid dearly. (163)

Although there has been speculation that the Chinese poet plagiarized the Greek aphorism, many scholars doubt that the dictum actually traveled to China, but insist instead that it developed independently through the similar philosophical doctrines of “ladder of souls” (Needham 155).

**Physiology of Otherness**

The prospect that a Greek and a Chinese thinker, each culturally alienated from the other, could nearly simultaneously invent identical philosophies concerning Sameness and Otherness is hardly surprising, even if it arouses suspicions of plagiarism. The recognition of otherness is not merely a socio-psychological development or a philosophical inquiry; it is the product of a brain function active in all mammals and known to neuroscience as “latent inhibition,” a preconscious filtering of previously experienced stimuli which the organism finds irrelevant to its existence (Peterson 1137). In other words, cognition of difference is a biological adaptation that is essential
to human survival. This fact is, of course, obvious on a certain level, but the implications of it need to be further explored. Jordan Peterson et al have shown that lower levels of latent inhibition are associated—in people with higher IQs—with higher levels of creativity. In other words, the “failure” of the brain to filter out apparent sameness or irrelevance (or to see otherness and its relevance), a trait previously associated with psychotic disorders (Peterson 49), seems in fact to be a facilitator of creative thinking, which was as critical to early human evolution as it is today. Thus, the positive evaluation of the ability to see and recognize the relevance of difference not only implies a rejection of Enlightenment/humanist belief in the inherent equality of human beings—it is a proactive step toward recognizing the necessity of diversity. As I will show in Chapter 3, the failure of Werner Herzog’s jungle heroes to realize their dreams results neither from the imperialist nature of their projects nor from their abuse of natives, but from their inability to see the inherent differences between the landscapes of the Amazon and those of the Western imagination.

The human ability to understand otherness is likewise linked to biological factors in addition to social ones. Numerous studies, for example, have shown that people of one racial group usually have a harder time remembering faces of those of different racial groups, a phenomenon known as the “same-race-effect” (Lindsay).8 Perhaps not surprisingly, people of European decent (“white” people, to use the researchers’ terms) performed consistently worse than those categorized as either (East) “Asians” or “African-Americans” in recognition tests. This deficit correlates proportionally to the amount of experience the white subjects reported having with members of other races. Other studies have shown, furthermore, that faces are

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8 All of the studies cited here attempted to use their participants’ own stated understanding of their own race and those of the faces that they evaluated. There was no attempt to problematize the use of the term “race,” but I have nonetheless decided to maintain the wording of the researchers.
processed holistically, rather than by individual features such as eyes, nose, and mouth (Michel 55). In these studies, the “same-race-effect” was often still salient, with white subjects again having somewhat more difficulty processing other-race faces than (East) Asians who had lived in the United States for some time.

These studies show that, even though distinguishing otherness and discovering its relevance is necessary and beneficial to the human species, its practical aspects are often hindered in the Euro-American experience, most probably because of a lack of cultural understanding regarding other cultural and ethnic identities and a lack of (positive) experience with them. This lack of experience is also compounded with inter-cultural ignorance which leads to misreadings of the faces that we do see. Southeast Asian students, for example, tend to smile (from embarrassment) when scolded, much to the chagrin of their inter-culturally ignorant teachers. In this study, I will be focusing on how the lack of understanding (rooted in lack of positive experience) concretizes the othering of the non-European (or the non-German), effectively diminishing the possibility of effective communication of ideas. For example, in one scene in Herzog’s Fitzcarraldo, the viewer is presented with the silent, expressionless faces of several Indians who have forcefully boarded Fitzcarraldo’s vessel. The Dutch-born captain of the ship claims that “You can’t tell what they really think.” His expression reveals more than just a colonialist totalizing of native otherness or a Western insistence on the superiority of European forms of knowledge: through lack of experience with natives—as far as we know, he has never had any face-to-face encounter with one—he is simply unable to “read” the face of the native or to derive meaning from what he can only see as an empty stare.

While the studies that I have reviewed have shown that experience with other races correlates to an increased ability to remember and holistically process other-race faces, none attempted to differentiate between positive and negative experience with other races, which seems to me to be a crucial component.
If, as Simone de Beauvoir has so succinctly stated, “the category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself” and “Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought” (Quoted in Lemert 368), then it stands to reason that every “nation” (European or not) has the potential of imagining itself as occupying a central location in relation to which its others are organized. The Chinese, for example, understand themselves as geographically centered zhōng guó rén (“middle country people”). The Native American Cherokee and Delaware tribes refer to themselves, respectively, as Aniyunwiya (“principle people”) and Lenni Lenape (“true people”) (Redish). The so-called Hottentots of Southern Africa likewise call themselves Khoikhoi (“true people”) to distinguish themselves from other tribes “who did not own livestock and were therefore considered inferior” (Beck 12).

The ways that ethnic and cultural otherness is created, maintained, and ultimately challenged, are numerous. Of most importance to me in this project are those related to establishment and maintenance of borders (geographical and temporal), languages, and religious practices.

**Geographical Othering**

The demarcation of geographical and political borders, whether based upon supposedly natural geological formations such as rivers, oceans, and mountain ranges, upon such man-made devices as fences, trenches, and walls, or upon abstracted concepts such as the 38th Parallel, all share in the duties of othering and of establishing a Manichean aesthetic of “us” and “them.” This type of othering is of central importance in several of the works I will be examining. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson explains the emergence of modern nationalism as a product of imagined identifications with other inhabitants within a fixed geographical area who share a certain sameness, be it linguistic or historico-cultural. Yet it has been pointed out that while the nation imagines itself as consisting of a generally homogeneous population, it rarely does so in
actuality, which leads to continuous efforts within the nation (or community) to purge itself of those parts which remind it of its fragmentation (Van Houtum 126). The power of stereotype to enforce the process of othering/saming is not lost even to the migrant: when the German protagonist in Annette Schenker’s Was für ein verrücktes Leben (see Chapter 4) is offered a much-needed ride through Argentinean Patagonia by what seems to be a Chilean truck driver, she uncritically (and even proudly) asserts a thinly veiled yet stereotypically Argentine arrogance: “Nein, nichts gegen Ausländer!” It seems clear that in her attempt to identify as Same with the imagined community of her host country she inadvertently validates and reenacts a xenophobic othering of the Chilean, thereby erasing her own otherness vis-à-vis her adopted Argentinean culture.

Anderson stresses the importance of the iconic map in the reinforcement of the sense of cohesion in the imagined community of the nation. Much like a flag, the iconic representation of the othering (and saming) borders of the nation carry great emotional weight, yet they also suggest—in a way that a non-iconic representation cannot—the inviolability of the geography of the country. (One need only look at official maps of Argentina, all of which integrate the Falkland Islands as Argentinean territory, or those in Israel, which seamlessly incorporate the Golan Heights, to understand the importance of the map in delineating geographical difference/sameness.)

In the other works that I examine, the map represents the site of geographic othering and transgression, not because borders are intentionally violated, but because the borders that the maps try to delineate do not really exist for the natives upon whom they are imposed. In his article “Sylvan Politics,” Lutz Koepnick identifies Fitzcarraldo’s unfolded map of the virgin forest territory as an icon of the Western failure to understand the complex topography of the
untamed jungle, reducing a three-dimensional living being to a two-dimensional caricature which is then taken to be more authentic than that which it is supposed to represent. More than anything, the map represents an attempt to border an area which is imagined as being without borders; it is a symbolic tool to establish a territorial otherness in relationship to those more accessible areas which are already claimed by other capitalists. Ultimately, Fitzcarraldo’s project fails and the map’s function as an othering device is unfulfilled.

**Temporal Othering**

While the geopolitical consequences of topological othering can often be violent, there is another othering process which is reflected not only in the works I am dealing with, but also in the current (and ongoing) European search for identity. In his article “Europe’s Others and the Return of Geopolitics” Thomas Diez proposes that the Other against which Europe has largely been constructed since the Second World War is not defined geographically, but temporally: it is othered against its pre-War self (320). This temporal othering is necessarily self-reflexive, constructing an enemy out of one’s own past rather than some outsider, and opening the way for a politics of inclusion in the European Union.10 However, Diez sees a recent shift in European policies, particularly after September 11, 2001, which indicates a revival of policies of exclusion, which are associated with a violent geographically-based politics of othering. Nowhere in Western Europe is his thesis more applicable than in contemporary German society, which perhaps more than any other Western European country has set up its own past as an Other (either Fascist or Communist) against which it imagines its current identity.

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10 Diez acknowledges that geographic and temporal othering are not always separable. In cases where groups are marginalized because of their perceived “backwardness,” there is clearly a temporal component, whether the group is geographically internal to the nation or in a (neo)colonial setting.
Temporal othering takes several forms in the works that I am dealing with. Unlike the Other who is created through appeal to geographical distance or physical difference, the encounter with the temporal Other is most ambiguous in terms of its impact on the constructed identity of the Self/Same/One, because it calls the entire enterprise of identity construction into question. Whereas the myriad differences between a white Briton and an Indian can easily (and incorrectly) be assumed by each of them to be “natural” and therefore inherent and permanent, the confrontation between a new Self and an old one immediately evokes a narrative of change and development on one hand, and a sense of the uncanny on the other.11

One of the more interesting temporal otherings that emerges in these texts develops through the confrontation in *Der Schlangenbaum* between the German (Wagner) and the Russian-German Other. For the modern cosmopolitan Wagner, the *Wolgadeutsche* that he unexpectedly meets are an uncomfortable anachronism, a flashback to a past of religious fanaticism, provincialism, and hostility toward outsiders—precisely what postwar German society wants to suppress. I will argue, however, that this particular temporal othering is directed at a past much longer than the twelve years of the so-called Third Reich. In other words, it is not the othering of the Nazi per se, but of a pre-modern, ultra-conservative irrationalism that, although exploited by the Nazis, is certainly not a specifically German phenomenon.

More important perhaps for the present question of temporal othering in contemporary Germany is the figuring of the Nazi as a totalized, fetishized Other. In the post-war period, both East and West Germany attempted to forge cultural identities that stood in direct opposition to the dominant values of the imagined community of the Volksgemeinschaft, particularly its

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11 I am thinking here of Benedict Anderson’s discussion of how photographs of baby pictures develop into narratives of personal identity, as an essentially fictionalized past mediates between the current person and the baby in the photo. For the purposes of my argument, it might, however, be more appropriate to imagine the confrontation between a current manager of an automobile plant and a picture of his participation in the student protests of 1968.
pathological chauvinism and performance of Germanness. Since the reunification of Germany, which initially evoked exaggerated imaginings of community (“Wir sind das Volk—wir sind EIN Volk!”), the Nazi has been maintained in a state of extreme alterity, largely through discussions and controversies regarding the propagation of images. The strict official control over the manipulation of the signs and symbols of the Nazi (such as the swastika), which is uncontroversially maintained in Germany, lends credence to this argument in two ways. First and mostly obviously, the ban enacts a conspicuous erasure of the not-so-distant Other, in a way that recalls the 41-year ban in Pakistan of all films from India, which was only lifted in 2006.\(^\text{12}\)

Secondly, the recent re-publication of allegedly anti-Islamic cartoons by several of the most important German periodicals (FAZ in November 2005, Die Zeit and Der Spiegel in February 2006) indicates that the urgency of the imperative to other the Nazi trumps both the need to protect the feelings of geographical/religious others and the desire to uphold the Western value of free speech—in this case, Pressefreiheit. Obviously there is a difference in intent between swastikas and caricatures of Mohammad: symbols of Nazism are believed to glorify a Nazi Other (while insulting his victims) whereas the images of Mohammad simply insult an Other, both within German borders (e.g. Turkish-German Muslims) and outside them. It is telling that in spite of the broad legal prohibitions against libel, the concept of free speech triumphs over the prohibition against insult, not only from the mouth of conservative chancellor Angela Merkel (Spiegel Online, 4. Feb. 2006), but also from the pages of the left-intellectual Die Zeit (1 Feb. 2006). In comparison, there isn’t a single voice on the national stage calling for the decriminalization of the unsanctioned display or production of Nazi symbolism.

\(^{12}\) The Indian film industry is the most productive in the world, and the majority of its films are immediately comprehensible to Pakistanis, whose dialect (called Urdu for political reasons) is considered by linguists to be the same language as Hindi (or Hindustani). The underlying reason for the ban is to prevent cultural identification by masking and denying Sameness. See Shahzad.
In my readings, it is Annette Schenker who most clearly re-enacts this othering of the (supposedly previous) Self. Like Wagner, Schenker’s protagonist happens upon her temporal Other by walking aimlessly into a remote village, and just when she least expects it, she is confronted with what on the surface appears to be an idyllic German *Heimat* landscape: a small country farm, inn, and candy factory, which advertises its wares by employing roving blonds dressed in dirndls and lederhosen. Yet when she begins to suspect that hard-working yet hospitable owners are actually escaped Nazis, she is overwhelmed with feelings of the uncanny, and promptly leaves the area.

The last temporal othering I should mention involves the confrontation between old and new ways of life, as imagined by German-born Argentinean writer Roberto Schopflocher, whose writings often reflect profound generational conflicts which are closely associated with national identity. What distinguishes Schopflocher’s temporal otherings from the others that I analyze is that his tend to favor a past, nearly extinct identity while sharply criticizing a contemporary one: In Schopflocher’s displaced Jewish colonies of Argentina, East European Jews live anachronistically, organically tied to the land and their communities, while German Jewish refugees with their modern, unorthodox ways arrive as unwelcome and rootless cosmopolitans. Likewise, younger Jews who leave the land to work in the cities and integrate into mainstream culture are depicted as morally bankrupt while those who stay in the colonies are uncritically celebrated as heroes.

**Other otherings**

Until now I have addressed the notion of geographical and temporal othering, which have been the most salient processes by which German (and German-speaking) writers and filmmakers establish and reinforce identities through their characters in the works I am analyzing. There are of course other strategies of othering which emerge in the various works, of
which linguistic and religious divisions are also worth mention, as are exclusionary practices based on race, class, gender, and physical and mental ability. In Schopflocher’s story “Fernes Beben” for example, the protagonist Juancho is marginalized within his society based on his mental slowness and his physical disability (he has a club foot), and this exclusion is converted into a geographical othering as he is banished to a new job at a remote mountain train station. In “Wie Reb Froike die Welt rettet” the newly arriving German-speaking Jews are shunned not only because of their unorthodox religious practices, but also because of their maintenance of the German language. In this story the community comes together to save a German Jewish woman, a heretofore unseen bride who has been abandoned by her fiancé after he discovers that she walks with a limp and is ready to send her back to Nazi Germany. In Der Schlangenbaum, the Germans other their Spanish-speaking staff by speaking in German when they do not want to be understood. Yet the monolingual Wagner is himself othered when he finds himself stuck with no car and no wallet in an unknown Argentinean town and is unable to communicate with the local population.

Processes of “saming”

Above I describe how Anderson’s concept of imagining the nation involves a process of othering those on one side of a border (geographic, linguistic, cultural) and a saming of those on this side of the border, founded upon a fantasy of homogeneity of the nation. Annette Schenker’s protagonist erases her own otherness by adopting what she perceives to be a xenophobic tendency of Argentineans. Just as Schenker distances herself from her Germanness by adopting Argentine customs, Roberto Schopflocher as an author continually rejects his German identity in favor of a Jewish one. Schopflocher’s protagonists, particularly his first person narrators, are neither German nor German-Jewish. Instead, they are either Catholic Argentines or Eastern European Jews. When his characters describe German Jews, it is always with suspicion or
disdain. I would argue that this practice is one of saming: his implicit denial of his own German heritage, reflected in his othering of the German Jew in his writings, has more in common with the contemporary German othering of the Nazi than it does with his own characters’ rejection of the current materialism and secularism of Argentinean Jews. At the same time, he is writing for a German public in a language which he claims contains the *Urtext* of everything he has ever written, including his Spanish-language publications. Schopflocher’s case illustrates the complexities of identity formation (and performance) and undermines the binary simplicity of “us” and “them” and with it the easy notions of Self and Other.

The process of saming is complex, as it can be understood as internal saming, through either assimilation into the nation or expulsion from it, or external saming, such as the American imposition of democracy abroad or of industrial capitalism on the so-called Third World. It is at the same time an erasure of difference and an erasure of memory. As we have seen, this process is not only an erasure of the Other, but also an twofold annihilation of the Self: inasmuch as the Self is, following Fanon and Lacan, a creation of the Other, it loses its specificity as the Other is erased. And as I have shown in the case of Schopflocher and Schenker, it is an erasure of the personal history of the author in favor of an Other who is, ultimately, also nothing more than another imagination.13

Finally, the process of saming can also be time-bound, as temporal saming serves as a corollary function to temporal othering. Furthermore, when the saming is political and economic in nature, it sometimes ignores national or ethnic differences or order to establish ideological difference. In Chapter 2, for example, I will show how in his film *Ich denke oft an Piroschka* (1955), Kurt Hoffmann attempts to identify an imaginary pre-war, pre-communist Hungary with

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13 This is particularly true for Schopflocher, whose only experience with Eastern Jews was obtained as an adult while he was employed as an administrator of one of the Jewish agricultural colonies.
the Heimat values of post-war West Germany, thereby othering the competing political and economic system which had been in place in Hungary for the last ten years. In this scenario, the invisible other, the still recently established communist society in Hungary, could easily be interpreted as a stand-in for socialist East Germany, which at the time was still not recognized by the West. Yet within the sameness that Hoffmann’s equation of German and Hungarian Heimat seeks to establish, there operates a system of ethnic and social othering that conforms to the patterns of geographical othering I discussed above. Thus, Hoffmann’s film serves as an excellent example of the complicated web of identifications and dis-identifications, of samings and otherings, that informed West German fantasies of national identity, and as I will show in Chapter 3, continues to do so even after reunification.

Who can be othered?

I have already shown how John Davidson rejects the idea that German filmmakers could possibly consider themselves “others” in relation to Hollywood-financed filmmakers. His main reason in refusing this “false othering” is that the Germans, as white Europeans, cannot possibly be othered, because they are in a power position. In other words, otherness is limited in his analysis to groups that he considers subaltern. I categorically reject this assertion, as it is based on the same flawed Manichean conception of power relations that Sartre employs in his anti-colonialist diatribe. Taking de Beauvoir’s argument about the status of Blacks and Jews in America further, I maintain that not only groups who can articulate the pronoun “we” but also any individual who can say “I” is capable of drawing distinctions between it/themselves and others, and of acting upon that difference (real or imagined) in ways that exclude or include the Other that he or she creates. I rely here on the premise that all individuals (and groups by extension) have access to power, either in the form of overt power or as “antipower” which I define as the ability to control a person (or group) with overt power by exploiting the explicit and
implicit obligations, limitations and vulnerabilities of that position of power.¹⁴ For example, the club-footed figure of Juancho in “Fernes Beben” gets a job at the railroad through no overt power of his own, but through the his manipulation of societal obligations toward the physically disabled. In turn, Juancho’s girlfriend, a poor, relatively unattractive village girl with no overt power at all, is able to force Juan Carlos into marriage by letting the entire village know that he touched her inappropriately. The native Indian workers at Wagner’s construction site in Der Schlangenbaum, on the other hand, exercise antipower (in the form of a strike) against the management crew, forcing concessions. However, even though the dispute is settled, the ruling military administration obtains news of the (now finished) strike and sends in its troops to exercise what in this story is the ultimate overt power (the exercise of violence), to which everyone, even rich Westerners, is subjected. Yet my own distinction between power and antipower is sometimes difficult to maintain. The Amazonian natives in Fitzcarraldo exercise overt power in relation to Fitzcarraldo himself and his crew. It is clear from the beginning of the trip up river that, if the natives choose to do so, they can kill everyone in the boat and send it back downstream as a warning, as they have done several times before. But instead they decide not only to allow Fitzcarraldo to pursue his plan, but to volunteer their labor (and their lives in some cases) to help him get the boat over the mountain. In this case it is Fitzcarraldo who uses antipower to avoid death, by exploiting the native belief that his mission is a sacred one. After the boat is hauled over the mountain and is cut loose by the natives to crash down through the white water rapids, the inversion of the power paradigm is made clear: the natives have

¹⁴ One could argue that since the manipulation of someone else’s power is itself a form of power, it makes no sense to distinguish between power and antipower. I would maintain that the distinction is important because it prevents a total relativism that would obfuscate the qualitative differences between the exercise of power that clearly oppresses an Other and that which merely attempts to preserve the Self.
completed their mission (and presumably cleared their land of the curse to which it has been subjected), and Fitzcarraldo’s venture is a failure.

It is important to keep in mind that it is the exercise of power (or antipower) which makes possible the process of othering. Peggy Ochoa has shown that even marginalized groups are able to “other” the dominant culture through what she calls a “hidden power” granted precisely though majority blindness to their space (108). In her analysis, “white” Christianity is othered in Tony Morrison’s Beloved, and this otherness is also perceived in the white Christian reader of the text, who then through empathy becomes aware of him or herself as someone else’s other. It is this inversion of the idea that only white Christians can define what is Same and what is Other that makes possible a self-reflective analysis of white Christian othering practices.

**Real-world Dangers**

The process of othering is in its simplest sense nothing more than the exercise of the human capacity to detect (and manufacture) difference, as shown by de Beauvoir. The establishment of a requisite dichotomy between Self and Other, however, entails certain risks which have to be addressed. It is clear that there are not only many types of others in any cultural landscape, particularly in the (neo)colonial setting, such that to use the label “Other” to designate various types of others is to risk obfuscation of the differences inherent in these otherings.15 Thus the application of the term Other to different groups at the same time entails a paradoxical saming of these others, a reenactment of their original erasure by the dominant culture. It is precisely this concern which prompts my use of the term antipower, which unapologetically refutes the debilitating myth of the powerlessness of the marginal subject while differentiating...

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15 By inherent differences I am not referring to inherent or “essential” differences in people which lead to othering, but to inherent differences in processes of othering. For example, religious othering differs from racial othering in that an individual (or a whole nation) can move between Self and Other through conversion.
between different qualities (and quantities) of power. The concept of Other only makes sense in relationship to Same/Self/One, and intellectual integrity requires that differences be explored to the degree that this difference is relevant or meaningful.

Beyond the question of how to conceptualize the recognition of difference is of course a larger question of the ethics of othering. Most of those involved in the debates about otherness seem to be aware of the dangers of the terms, but find it useful to continue to use them for lack of a good alternative. Many want to limit the use of the term “Other” to refer to what they consider to be marginalized groups, thus downplaying not only the enormous and growing ambiguity of all types of collective identities (here I’m referring to processes of cultural hybridization), but also the limits placed on individual members of any group, including those who are thought to belong to the dominant culture. My use of Lacanian terminology is intended to promote ethical readings of Otherness, which is not so much an adoption of a metaphysical prioritizing of Other before Self such as Emanuel Levinas might demand, but rather a process which Mary Canales has called “inclusionary othering” where recognition of difference prompts a reevaluation of self through empathy.

**Germanness**

An idea of “Germanness” as a mark of identity has been in circulation for at least two millennia, long before the modern concept of the nation came into currency. In his *Germania*, Tacitus tackles the project of defining the Germanic tribes from an outside perspective, extolling their monogamy and battlefield courage while decrying their reputed drunkenness and barbarism. Yet the process of demarcation and identification was not simply imposed on the Germanic tribes from without—as with other ethnic-linguistic groups, the earliest German-speakers defined themselves with the term þiuda (“people”), which later evolved into the word “deutsch,” around
which an ethnic identity was gradually fabricated, maintained, and ultimately exploited to catastrophic consequences.

This is not to say that there has been an unbroken chain of Germanic linguistic and cultural development that ties people who currently identify as German to some originary Germanic forefathers. As Germanist Martin Durrell has shown, German nationalism is grounded in an ahistorical attempt on the part of scholars and ideologues in the nineteenth century to portray various Germanic tribes—groups which were at least as linguistically diverse as the various Slavic tribes—as a single, self-conscious national block, which rightfully deserved its own unified state (92-96). The subsequent imposition upon these “unified” Germans of a standardized Hochdeutsch—which did not directly correspond to any of the spoken dialects in the Germanic linguistic spectrum—was likewise an attempt to forge the type of linguistic unity expected of the nation state. To a large extent, the project was a successful one, as the percentage of Germans speaking Hochdeutsch (rather than dialect) as their first language has gone from practically zero in the late eighteenth century to nearly all Germans today (Durrell 94). However, Eric Hobsbawm notes that:

For Germans and Italians, their national language was not merely an administrative convenience or a means of unifying state-wide communication. . . . It was more even than the vehicle of a distinguished literature and of universal intellectual expression. It was the only thing that made them Germans or Italians, and consequently carried a far heavier charge of national identity than, say, English did for those who wrote and read that language. (102-103)

Hobsbawm’s understanding of the linguistic aspect of Germanness is supported by the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder—known as the father of German nationalism—who prioritized language and—secondarily—culture as the defining components of membership in the German nation (Belgum 31). However, the ethnic component of Germanness—a belief in the racial continuity of the Germans from time immemorial—had already become salient by the second
half of the nineteenth century (52), and has since then been a strong determinant, both officially and unofficially, of Germanness.

Needless to say, the purity of German ethnicity is entirely imaginary, a result of Germany’s geographical position in Central Europe: if today Germany has more bordering countries than any other in Europe, then in the century preceding WWI the even greater contact that German-speaking peoples have had with non-Germanic ethnicities is all the more impressive. During those years, German-speaking populations came into direct contact with Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs, Slovaks, Roma, Hungarians, Romanians, Croats, Serbs, Italians, Frenchmen, and Jews16, which goes a great length in explaining Einar Árnason’s findings, based on detailed analyses of DNA samples from 26 “national” groups in Europe and the Near East, that the Germans are the most genetically diverse national group in Europe.17 The frequent intermarriage in Germany’s former eastern territories even led the editor of the Athenaeum in 1948 to assert that “most Prussians are Slavs” (Murry 230). This declaration, however unscientific, seems to be supported by the work of historian Richard Blanke, who has shown how over a period of just a few years, about 300,000 Protestant Poles in the region of Masuria (a border area of East Prussia) voluntarily Germanized for religious and cultural reasons. Their loyalties to a German identity were so strong that in the elections of July, 1932, the Nazi party received up to 71% of the vote in some precincts (“German-speaking Poles?” 446). Interestingly, these ethnic Poles had largely given up their language and were subsequently

16 Between 1800 and 11900 there were approximately 22,000 Jewish conversions to Christianity in the areas that became the German Empire in 1871. Much higher, however, were the numbers of Jewish-German intermarriages, only about a quarter of which resulted in children who were raised Jewish. (Meyer 15-17). Although not all conversions led to a complete assimilation and loss of Jewish identity, it can be assumed that the vast majority of these conversions did in fact have that result.

17 Árnason, a genetic researcher from Iceland, studied the genetic variation in 26 European and Near Eastern populations in order to determine whether Iceland’s population is, as popular literature has claimed, an ethnically homogeneous group.
integrated seamlessly into Nazi German society, despite their Slavic ethnicity. Even deep inside German ethnic territory, the mixing of Slavic workers and Germans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in an intermarriage rate of up to 40% (Blanke “When Germans and Poles Lived Together” 43). Thus, although there can be no talk of a true German ethnicity, the concept itself has been used as a metric of Germanness to varying degrees by both everyday Germans and the government of the Federal Republic.18

In the years after World War II, both Germanies promoted cultural politics that de-emphasized national peculiarity and promoted egalitarian brotherhood not only with neighboring countries sharing similar political ideologies, but also with those so-called third world countries that were politically compatible. Since reunification and the collapse of Eastern European socialism, Germany’s economically and geographically advantageous position complicates its drive to be just another country in the family of nations, leaving it in the paradoxical situation of being “first among equals.” Yet as the differences between Germans and their former European rivals, against whose cultures Germany had traditionally defined itself, dissolve in the name of the European Union, German identity is increasingly asserted in response to contact with a non-European others on European territory, namely Muslim Turks, “ethnic” Germans from central Asia, and refugees from war-torn countries of the third world. At home, German angst about Überfremdung (“over-foreignization”) continues to play itself out in the form of an insistence in

18 Although the GDR went to great lengths to disavow a sense of particular Germanness in favor of internationalist-socialist orientation, some evidence shows that the East German populace had not completely given up its sense of belonging to a particularly German nation. In 1980, Ronald Asmus reported that 80% of East Germans saw themselves as part of the greater German nation, and that a little over half supported unification with the FRG (12). Furthermore, research on the Stasi files on neo-Nazi activities during the 1980s in the GDR shows that there were over 1,500 known skin heads in East Berlin in the 1980s. Their “commitment to Germanness,” however, far from being strictly racial, focused almost extensively in its clandestine literature on perceived German ideals such hard work, productivity, order, cleanliness, discipline, strength, punctuality, loyalty, and decency (Ross 84).
some circles upon the recognition of a dominant German *Leitkultur* ("leading culture") in the tradition of Western liberal democracy.

The term *Leitkultur* was first coined by the Syrian-German professor Bassam Tibi in his 1988 book *Europa ohne Identität*, in which he argues that immigrants to Europe, particularly from Islamic countries, need to integrate into European society by accepting the common Western values of democracy, Enlightenment, human rights, and secularism. Tibi envisions a specifically European type of cultural pluralism that rejects *Monokultur* (mono-culturalism), *Parallelgesellschaften* (parallel societies of un-integrated foreigners) and *Wertebeliebigkeit* (absolute relativism of values) (Tibi 2004). Later, all of these terms were adopted by conservative German politicians and commentators, most of whom were proponents of a specifically German *Leitkultur*. The controversies surrounding the concept of *Leitkultur* speak to the core of the German national question. On the one hand, left-leaning intellectuals are rightly apprehensive about any approach that arrogantly asserts the superiority of “German” values and seeks to force a reduction in diversity in the name of an essentialized fantasy of Germanness, as the comparison of this process and that of Nazi *Gleichschaltung* seems obvious.

Thus, *Leitkultur* becomes a new focal point for German identity. While some of the *Leitkultur* opponents openly fear the idea of a strong German identity, voices for integration lament what they see as a lack of one. Tibi, who in 2006 emigrated from Germany after a 44-year stay, claimed in his final editorial piece in the *Tagesspiegel* that foreigners in Germany (including ethnic Germans from Kazakhstan) struggle to find an identity precisely because Germany, since Auschwitz, has none of its own ("Warum ich gehe"). The current president of the Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland ("Central Council of Muslims in Germany") Ayyub Axel Köhler mirrored that opinion, claiming that “[f]ür die Integration brauchen wir in
Deutschland zunächst einmal eine deutsche Identität,” (“for integration we need to have in Germany, for starters, a German identity”) first which would necessarily include a “verantwortungsvoller Umgang mit Freiheit” (“responsible acquaintance with freedom”; Rosenfelder 2006).19

As the above examples show, certain practical aspects of German national identity (e.g. press freedom vs. respect for the cultural/religious sensibilities of Muslims) are being negotiated based upon actual interaction with “foreigners” on German territory, where differing concepts of Germanness are competing for hegemony within the current debates regarding citizenship rights, integration, and religious freedom for non-Christians. Yet, if we are to accept Anderson’s idea that the nation is a product of collective imagination, then it makes sense to take seriously those expressions of Germanness projected, as fantasy, onto distant landscapes and remote peoples, where real-world experience at home cannot interfere with the imaginary staging of the European and his geographical and ethnic Other, and where this Other is unable to disrupt or contest his own reification. Thus, although the foreign landscapes which I will examine in this project, from the jungles of South America and Southeast Asia (Chapter 2) to the coastal plains of West Africa, serve in some ways as a stand-in for German and European locations, their dislocated geography allows them to serve as a kind of theater in which, according to William Rollins, “Germans [can] play out hidden worries and unrealized dreams” (188). Yet this type of projection is hardly an invention of post-war German artists unable or unwilling to stage their own recent history at home. As Brad Prager has demonstrated, performance of German identity on geographically displaced, exotic stages is firmly rooted in German artistic history: “Africa is,

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19 What Köhler may be referring to here is the controversy surrounding the Mohammad caricatures, which occurred just a few months after his accession to the top post of the Zentralrat.
in other words, the most distant of backdrops, a screen upon which German filmmakers and
audiences projected their national anxieties” (“The Face of the Bandit” 6).

Since the (Western) history of the third world is largely a chronicle of ruthless European
attempts at domination through colonization, it stands to reason that the narratives which find
their expression on these stages also serve as a comment on, as well as a reenactment of, the
colonial process itself. The delayed emergence of Germany as a nation-state in 1871 meant that
the country’s aspirations to appropriate third-world real estate in the name of empire were largely
frustrated by the fact that a large percentage of non-European land was already claimed, often by
countries much smaller than Germany. Thus, attempts by German filmmakers to thematize
colonial endeavors are invariably marked by another projection—that of the German imagination
onto that of an imagined fellow European.

The various projections of Germanness that I will be dealing with in the following chapters
necessarily have as their object not the relatively more tangible aspects of national belonging that
are the concern of present-day controversies within German borders (language, citizenship,
liberal democracy, etc), but rather the more abstracted notions of Germanness such as Heimat,
Rationalism, and the nature of humankind and the universe. However, although the authors and
artists that I deal with here create meanings with specific relationships to Germanness,
Europeanness, and humanness through the manipulation of these abstractions, their created
meanings also have a political dimension as well, which ties directly back to the real-world
issues to which they all refuse to refer directly. Thus, my intention in the following chapters is to
attempt to reconcile fantasies of Germanness staged abroad with the socio-political realities at
home.
The Complexity of Heimat

The fact that the German word *Heimat* remains untranslated in every work treating the subject is a testament to the complexity of meaning surrounding this term. In its most basic sense, *Heimat* simply refers to something like homeland, home, or country. Thus, the primary dimension of *Heimat* is spatial.\(^1\) Like the term “nation,” which was treated at length in the Introduction, *Heimat* is heavily burdened with highly emotional and often contradictory meanings and nuances. It is not my purpose here to neatly disentangle this semantic knot, but rather to show how notions of *Heimat* are intimately related to the notions of Germanness, the nation, and its Other.

Whereas the nation can be seen as an “imagined community” whose scope is so wide that the connections between individuals cannot be made physically and thus must be imagined (Anderson), *Heimat* can likewise be described as an “imaginary space,” in that it represents, according to filmmaker Edgar Reitz, an essential fiction:

> The word is always linked to strong feeling, mostly remembrances and longing. “Heimat” always evokes in me the feeling of something lost or very far away, something which one cannot easily find or find again… “Heimat” is such that if one would go closer and closer to it, one would discover that at the moment of arrival it is gone. It seems to me that one has a more precise idea of “Heimat” the further one is away from it. This for me is “Heimat,” it’s fiction, and one can arrive there only in poetry, and I include film in poetry. (5)

It comes as no surprise that *Heimat* for Reitz comes to connote something very similar to what the Romantics often depicted as the “blue flower,” which become a symbol of longing and

\(^1\) In *No Place Like Home*, Johannes von Moltke suggests that the English term “country” is perhaps the best translation, if one is needed at all, as it is also used to describe primarily rural areas within the modern state (227).
unattainable beauty and truth during the Romantic period. According to Johannes von Moltke, the “culture” of Heimat originally “found its expression in the writings of the Romantics” (7).\footnote{Interestingly, with the rise of “Heimat culture” there also arose the concept of “das Unheimliche” (the uncanny). Indeed, Freud’s essay on the uncanny uses E.T.A. Hoffmann’s late Romantic text Der Sandmann as his main point of departure in his discussion. The current chapter deals with a popular Heimatfilm that, like most films in this genre, ties German identity to Heimat and “das Heimliche.” In the following chapters, however, I will show how later depictions of German identity are more likely to turn to the uncanny to express the conflicted self-understandings that came to characterize late twentieth-century representations of Germanness.}

Precisely because of its nature as imagined space, Heimat can assume a variety of relationships to the imaginary community of the nation. Celia Applegate, for example, has argued that Heimat functions not so much as a signifier of closed, local communities, but rather plays a mediating role between local and national spaces. For Alon Confino, the term has become, in many cases, a regional metaphor for the entire nation (98). In other words, the term evokes a nationalism that sees Germany as a giant “local” community.

The concept of Heimat may not only relate the local to the national, but also the village to the metropolis. According to Anton Kaes, Heimat began to connote “region,” “province,” and “country” (in the sense of rural landscape) in the wake of rapid industrialization and urbanization in the late nineteenth century (165). As a reaction to the far-reaching social changes brought about by these processes, Heimat began to represent an attempt to recapture those things perceived to be lost:

*Heimat* means the site of one’s lost childhood, of family, of identity. It also stands for the possibility of secure human relations, unalienated, precapitalist labor, and the romantic harmony between the country dweller and nature… From this perspective, the city always remained the “Other.” (165)

Kaes’s formulation situates Heimat unambiguously in the realm of what German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies referred to as Gemeinschaft (community), a set of human social relations characterized by a strong sense of communalism in which individuals see their association as benefitting the collective, the most obvious example of this being the family and
clan. Tönnies sets this type of social arrangement with those of *Gesellschaft* (society), in which individuals voluntarily associate with others based on the rational decision that this cooperation with help them personally. Understood geographically, *Gesellschaft* relationships dominate in the metropolis, the “space” of capitalism, whereas *Gemeinschaft* relationships dominate in the rural agrarian village.

Kaes’s formulation is supported by Kurt Stavenhagen’s understanding of *Heimat* as “personally lived space,” a definition which places heavy stress on the immediacy of experience available to those living in rural *Heimat* settings (von Moltke 10). Furthermore, the lived space of *Heimat* represented in the particular depiction to which this chapter is dedicated could hardly be precisely described than it is by Kaes’s characterization. However, as I will show in Chapter 4, the implicit suggestion that secure human relations and a strong sense of belonging are restricted to rural settings—and that urban and rural spaces constitute stable and well-defined geographies—has been effectively challenged in *Heimat* representations created by Robert Schopflocher.

Von Moltke’s analysis of *Heimat* is somewhat more nuanced that most of the other treatments of the concept. What is perhaps most compelling in his argument is that he refuses to reinscribe the binary understandings of the concept, favoring instead to look at ways in which *Heimat* representations fail to enact an unambiguous separation of the traditional from the modern or a complete rejection of technological innovation or other products of modernity in favor of agrarianism (15)—von Moltke insists instead they do both. For just as *Heimat* can be said to negotiate the local and the national (Applegate), it can also be understood as negotiating “between” modernity and tradition, even as it has traditionally favored the latter.
As useful as von Moltke’s analysis is in challenging what he sees as a routine tendency toward binary simplification in the critical reception of Heimat representations, I believe that this challenge can be taken one step further, particularly in contemporary Germany. As immigration has turned many of Germany’s larger cities into multicultural metropolises, it has become increasingly common to hear the metropolis itself referred to as Heimat, particularly by those traditionally considered “foreigners.” Asked in an interview with the Tageszeitung about her feelings toward Heimat, Yanping Wu, the first female Chinese traditional healer to set up practice in the new federal capital, claims that “Now, Berlin is my Heimat,” suggesting that not only can Heimat also be understood as being embodied by strictly urbanized space, but that it is transferrable as well (Schwab 26). Likewise Idil Üner, the German-born actress of Turkish descent who plays in Fatih Akin’s Im Juni (2000), claims in an interview in Die Zeit that

Old West-Berlin is my Heimat. For me, [the neighborhood] Mitte is a fabrication and the Prenzlauer Berg is already on the other end of the world, a completely different city…I’m not a German, I’m a Turk, that’s the way I perceive it. I have a German passport. Or better yet, I’m a Berliner with Turkish roots.3 (Eidlhuber; my translation)

Üner’s description of old West Berlin as her Heimat is interesting on several levels. First, rather than using the term as a mediator between national and local (Applegate) or as a regional metaphor for the whole country (Confino), Üner uses it to denote what is often considered the quintessential German metropolis—the space in which she is most “at home”—while explicitly rejecting the connection between a feeling for Heimat and German national belonging. Secondly, this Heimat space is limited to the boundaries of her own childhood experience in a small part of former West Berlin, thereby excluding other neighborhoods such as Mitte as “inauthentic.” Thus, Üner’s description lends credence to Kaes’s emphasis on the lost spaces of childhood innocence.

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and close family relations while at the same time posing a serious challenge to his assertion that 
Heimat representations necessarily cast the city as the ultimate Other. In essence, Üner 
substantiates Stavenhagen’s understanding of Heimat as personally lived, immediately accessible 
space, yet suggests that this space can be located anywhere people coexist.

Piroschka’s Heimat Abroad

My aim in this study is to show how Germanness is constructed in spaces which are far 
removed from familiar spaces within Germany, where writers and filmmakers are free to 
construct their exotic Others with relative impunity. Yet if articulations of the nation are so 
intimately tied to the concept of Heimat—which implies spatial immediacy—then it seems that 
depictions of “Heimat abroad” are bound to remain, at best, simulations of what is in itself 
already a fiction. However, as I will show below, this is not at all the case. Eastern Europe in 
particular has long been a stage upon which German fantasies of Heimat have been played out.4 
In the case of Hoffmann’s film, for example, it is precisely the distancing that makes the 
simulation possible at all.5

Germany and Eastern Europe

The sometimes peaceful and cooperative, sometimes tumultuous relationship between 
Germany and the countries of Eastern Europe has been the subject of seemingly endless books, 
articles, and films. Starting in the 12th Century and continuing through the 18th Century,

Germans-speaking migrants eager to improve their economic lot or escape religious or political 
persecution began moving from their ancestral home in Central Europe, settling further and

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4 I am not referring here to former German territories in the East, such as East Prussia, Pomerania, or 
Silesia, but rather to areas where German-speakers lived as subjects of any government other than a German or 
Prussian one.

5 In Chapter 3 I will argue that Werner Herzog creates inverted Heimat landscapes. Yet the failure of the 
characters in the films and novels in consideration to recreate Heimat in these settings is not due to geographical 
distance, but to the perceived differences between European and South American societies.
further east. These migrations often occurred at the invitation of non-German principalities wishing to expand the agricultural output of the region. Thus, although westerly migration was difficult due to French containment, Eastern Europe quickly became a space for German expansion. The resulting German settlements that came to dot the map of Eastern Europe became flashpoints of German-Slavic tensions and gave excuse to Prussian (and later Nazi) military advances in previously Slavic areas (Poiger 122), which over the course of a hundred years nearly doubled the size of the German linguistic area in an easterly direction. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire further south—a swath of area that covered territories populated with Czechs, Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians, Croatians, Ukrainians and other ethnicities—the German language enjoyed a high level of prestige and German-speakers (including German-speaking Jews) settled in many areas of the empire for economic reasons. Thus, in both the northern and southern parts of Eastern Europe, German-speakers in great numbers were living interspersed in small linguistic communities within, often under non-German political control. These areas, which stood both outside and in contrast to internal German spaces, came to constitute Heimat for their German-speaking populations.

**German Expellees from Eastern Europe**

A longstanding, seemingly universal notion of cultural superiority among German-speakers in Eastern Europe has long been accepted as fact (Poiger 122). This complex found its most malicious expression in the German adage “Slaven sind Sklaven” (slavs are slaves), an

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6 Kertesz points out that large groups of German-speaking immigrants settled in Hungary as early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. After the Treaty of Trianon significantly reduced the geography of Hungary, descendants of these original settlers found themselves in Romania and Czechoslovakia (181).

7 The affection that German-speakers express for their Heimat outside of Germany is not limited to temperate East European landscapes that are easily interchangeable with German ones. In a 2002 interview with Boris Kunert and Christiane Chichi of the Mitteldeutsche Rundfunk in which he was asked about his feelings about Heimat, Carl List, a German-speaking native of Namibia and descendant of German colonists, responded: “Namibia ist meine Heimat, ich bin ja hier geboren. Ich war ja mit sechzig Jahren zum ersten mal in Deutschland” (Kunert).
notion that has been referred to (anachronistically) as “Bismarck’s cynical doctrine” of Germanization (Paneth 60). During the Second World War, this ideology was put into practice not only by the Nazi government, but apparently also by Germany’s military-industrial complex as evidenced by the posters proclaiming this “truth” which were posted outside Krupp factories which used thousands of slave laborers (Meltzer 274). Given the official German attitudes and actions in Eastern Europe during the war, it hardly seems surprising that the British historian A.J.P. Taylor was able to conclude in 1945 that “no one can understand the Germans who does not appreciate their determination to exterminate the East” (Taylor 3). It is likewise understandable that both Poland and Czechoslovakia were eager to dispense of their German populations after Germany’s final defeat—as it was precisely the existence of these German-speaking communities that had been used to justify the German annexation of parts of both of these countries. The subsequent expulsions, often brutal and bloody and actively supported by the Soviet forces, had already gotten underway in these countries before the Potsdam agreement of 1946 legitimized them.

The fate of the “Germans” in Hungary was similarly “sealed” with the Potsdam Agreement, yet the expulsions were more difficult because there was very little local animosity towards the German-speaking population. In fact, as Stephen Kertesz makes clear, the immediate postwar government of Hungary was decidedly against the idea of “collective punishment” and attempted to resist Soviet pressure to forcibly remove all German-speaking Hungarians, unless these had been actively involved in anti-Hungarian (i.e., “traitorous”) activities (180). These efforts eventually failed, as Hungary was not only occupied by a Soviet army intent on removing

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8 Kertesz was an official with the Hungarian foreign ministry after the war, where he worked until the Soviet Union began purging non-Communists from the government. His government’s rejection of “collective punishment” for the Germans was not based so much upon humanitarian considerations or any sense of brotherhood with the Germans, but rather on a reasonable fear that Hungarians living in Slovakia—stranded there by the Treaty of Trianon—were going to be expelled to Hungary, as was the stated goal of the new Czechoslovak government.
those Germans it had not already deported to labor camps in Russia (182), but was also on the
losing side of the war and therefore not entitled to make any demands whatsoever. In the end
some 150,000 German-speaking Hungarians were moved to the American zone and an additional
50,000 were moved to the Soviet zone (205).9

The position of the expelled Germans in postwar Germany, which numbered some 12
million—almost a fifth of postwar Germany’s entire population—gives a clue to the complexity
of the concept of Heimat. The expellees, who call themselves Heimatvertriebene (“those driven
from their homeland”) have organized organizations to call for their compensation for lost
property and continue to insist upon a “Recht auf Heimat” (“right to homeland”).10 For these
people, Heimat is not Germany, but their former German-speaking villages and towns in Eastern
Europe—even those never under German political control.

Piroschka as Heimatfilm

The Heimatfilm is, according to Heide Fehrenbach, a peculiarly German genre that was the
mainstay of domestic commercial filmmaking in Germany in the 1950s (146). Like its core term,
the word Heimatfilm is largely untranslated in critical literature, thus stressing its uniquely
German nature. Like the Heimatroman of the late nineteenth century, Heimatfilm sought to
represent Heimat values of community and localism cinematically: the setting in these films is
rural and the natural landscape is vast. Local folk music is indispensable, as is the focus on

9 There are many issues that deserved to be mentioned in this context. The plan to remove German-
speaking Hungarians did not revolve around issues of “ethnicity” or the historical geographical ties of the person in
question. Thus, German-speaking Hungarians were to be relocated to Germany, even if their family ties were to
Austria. As far as I am aware, there were no official expulsions to specifically to Austria, although 430.000
expellees did end up there after the war. Even German-speaking Jews—had they been fortunate enough to survive
the murder and deportations organized by Hungarian fascists—were subject to the order (Kertesz). Whether any of
these were actually ever relocated to Germany is unclear.

10 In the 1960s very few of the expellees who were surveyed claimed to actually want to move to Eastern
Europe (Süssner 3). This is understandable in the light of the fact that Germany’s economic miracle was in full swing
while the living standards in Eastern European countries were low. Yet even after the fall of Communism in Eastern
Europe almost none of the still living Sudeten Germans had any plans to return to the Czech Republic.
regional dress and accents (151-2). Despite the regional focus, the political goal of the
Heimatfilm was to portray a German community, sometimes hailing from far very different and
distant areas of the former Reich, living together peacefully and in communion with the land and
the local culture to which it is tied. In the face of postwar social and economic problems as well
as the destruction of the natural environment which had been accruing since the industrial
revolution, these films were also decidedly escapist. And in light of the most recent German past,
they were also agents of forgetting and denial.

What is most interesting about Ich denke oft an Piroschka is not its conformity to so many
standard tropes of the Heimatfilm, but the ways in which it sets itself apart from other films of its
“assigned” genre, combining techniques and motifs from other, no less problematic
cinematographic movements.11 The most important of these differences is that Piroschka is set
neither in Germany, Austria, nor Switzerland, but in a remote village in Hungary. At first, it
seems that this cannot be a Heimatfilm at all in the traditional sense; for even though Germans
may have once populated the region, it is now thoroughly Magyarized. However, the non-
Germaness of the landscape, as I will show below, is precisely what makes the appearance of
this film—as a Heimatfilm—possible at all. A brief summary of the plot will be sufficient to
make the point.

In the film’s opening scene, we are introduced to the protagonist of story, a middle-aged
German business man named Andreas (Gunnar Möller), a frequent passenger on trains whose
rhythmic clanging wheels often remind him of the summer love he once shared with a girl named
Piroschka (Liselotte Pulver) while he was an exchange student in Hungary in 1923. And yet, he

11 The marketing of the DVD as part of the Heimatkult-Reihe (Heimat-Cult Series), while not to be taken as
the final answer as to the genre of the film, it certainly does indicate that the target market is the Heimatfilm
consumer.
tells us, the story doesn’t really begin with this Piroschka, but with another girl he met two days before. The story of his meeting with the sophisticated, blond, German Greta is told through a flashback which will last through the entire film. Greta is on her way to Turkey to take a new job, but not before spending a few relaxing weeks alone at Lake Balaton. Andreas is immediately drawn to her, and within two hours, he tells us through voice over, he was beginning to fall in love with her. Their first evening together, spent in a romantic restaurant, is at first enchanted then ruined by an insistent gypsy violinist, who refuses to leave the couple alone. When Andreas asks if he can take accompany her inside the building where she is lodging, she politely declines, citing the Christian environment of the place, at which time he gives her his address in the small town where he’ll be spending the summer. She says she’ll write.

Once he arrives in Hódmezövásárhelykutasipuszta, Andreas quickly forgets Greta and falls instead for a 17-year-old school girl named Piroschka, the daughter of the local train station manager (Gustav Knuth), who gladly and flirtatiously gives him lessons in Hungarian language, dance, folk customs, and love. When a postcard from Greta arrives, though, Andreas’s passion is quickly rekindled and he hurries down to Lake Balaton to visit her, unknowingly accompanied by Piroschka, who wants to bring him back to the country. As the three spend a day and night together, Greta realizes that Andreas really belongs with Piroschka, and heroically sends him back to her. Back home, the love-sick Piroschka avoids contact with Andreas, and is only reunited with him on the day before his return to Germany, on the occasion of the corn harvest and the accompanying community celebration. He declares his love for her and then proceeds to inform her that he will be leaving the next day. Since she has to take her drunken father home, they are unable to meet that night. The following day he leaves, but due to traffic patterns he actually has to pass by Hódmezövásárhelykutasipuszta one more time, although without
stopping. However, Piroschka activates the stop signal as Andreas’s train is about to pass by and pulls her “Andi” from the train in order to spend an amorous night in the grass next to the tracks. As the sun rises, Andi catches the next train out of town, never to return.

**Piroschka as Colonial Film**

Inasmuch as we are dealing on one level with the interaction of a privileged German man with relatively impoverished Eastern European “Others,” it makes sense to ignore temporarily the *Heimat* claims of the film and focus instead on the social relationships which seem to resemble very closely those in the colonialist setting. In doing so, it seems clear that *Piroschka* owes a certain debt to the German colonial film of the early twentieth century, which included non-fiction films such as travelogues and ethnographic film. The colonial film sought to inform the German public about the newly acquired colonies in Africa, principally German East Africa (hereafter GEA) and German Southwest Africa (hereafter GSWA) and East Asia, with a focus on the African colonies. To this end, the films emphasized the cordial, mutually beneficial relationship between the colonial masters and their subject populations, who are depicted as helpless children eager to emulate and please their European parents. As Wolfgang Fuhrmann has noted, the DKG (*Deutsche Koloniegesellschaft*) worked closely with independent film makers such as Carl Müller to shore up support of the colonial movement, which was suffering from bad publicity after accusations of German atrocities during the Herero war in Namibia and the Maji-Maji rebellion in GEA. Wilhelm Liebknecht picked up on popular concern with the possible moral decay of colonial Germans when he defined the fruits of colonial politics and culture as “murder, robbery, homicide, syphilis and schnapps” (quoted in Furhmann, 294).

Not surprisingly, Hoffmann’s depiction of the happy “aboriginals” of Hungary is quite similar to the aesthetic of the colonial film, particularly in its representation of the exaggerated friendship and cooperation between those in power positions and the natives, the child-like
nature of the locals, and the perceived intelligence gap between the two groups. Hoffmann’s natives often demonstrate a childlike, endearing lack of sophistication. Only nominally concerned with those signs of cultural maturity that mark the German economically (punctuality, hard work) intellectually (university education), and morally (the bourgeois virtues embodied by Greta), the Magyar natives are unconcerned with time, easily distracted from work, quick to skip school or drink on the job. Indication of their intellectual simplicity is evidenced most notably in the figure of Sandor, the mailman and station assistant. In his first appearance at the train station he tries to both impress and entertain the newly arrived German *Herr Student* by reciting his repertoire of German greetings, suggesting that he doesn’t know much more than that. In later scenes the ridiculous string of greetings is repeated several times, word for word and with the same enthusiasm, suggesting a childlike compulsion to repetition. In another scene, when Sandor is sent to ring the station bell, an act which he undoubtedly performs every day, his inexplicably large smile and bobbing head call to mind the behavior of a mentally challenged child. Finally, Sandor shows his puppy-like excitement when he thinks he is going to get some food from a set dinner table, only to have his childish hopes dashed as he is sent away from the meal as an uninvited guest, but not before grabbing a sausage or two from the table and conspicuously hiding them in his pockets.

The relationship between physical and mental immaturity and the colonial ascription of these qualities to the subject people in general, and to their women in particular, is made clear in both explicit statements within the film and in its symbolism. For instance, when Andreas first runs into Piroschka while attempting to take photos, he calls her a *dumme kleine Zicke* (dumb
little she-goat), not knowing that she understands German. Later, as he is trying to explain Piroschka’s sudden appearance at Lake Balaton to Greta, he refers to her as a \textit{Schulkind} (school child) who happens to be very \textit{anhänglich} (clingy). The ubiquity of geese in Hoffmann’s imagined Hungarian landscape likewise lends itself to symbolic interpretation: in Germany the goose is associated both with Hungary (Hungarian goose is highly coveted for its meat as well as its feathers and down) and with stupidity: hence the saying “\textit{dumme Gans}” or “dumb goose” to refer to a stupid woman.

The alienation of the native from bourgeois German values (and prudishness) is evident not only in the astounding sexual aggressiveness of the seventeen-year-old Piroschka (and more shockingly in adult obliviousness to it), but also in the carefree and jovial manner in which the townsfolk discuss the bodily functions of both humans and animals. For example, during Andreas’s first train ride in Hungarian territory, an old man sharing the crowded compartment continually pronounces the word \textit{scheußlich} (hideous) as \textit{scheißlich}, thereby calling to mind not only the strong local dialects of the countryside, but also excrement (Scheiße) which covers it. Later, the jovial Hungarian men preparing a community-size barrel of goulash joke that, properly prepared, the national dish should burn twice: on the way in and on the way out. Even the beautiful Piroschka is not immune to the course scatological humor: on two occasions she refers jokingly to the \textit{Gänsedreck} (goose droppings) caked to her bare feet. In a further assault on bourgeois values, both Piroschka’s father and Sandor are prone to loud and excessive drinking, yet their lack of self-control seems to bother no one except Andreas himself, who is robbed of

\footnote{In “Imagining Eastern Europe in East German Literature” Thomas Fox argues that the German insistence on equating East Europe to pure nature, and its Slavic inhabitants to animals, was also a feature of GDR representations of Poland and the Poles.}

\footnote{One popular illustrated children’s book in Germany is called \textit{Blöde Ziege, Dumme Gans} (“Silly Goat, Dumb Goose”), which is about two daft barnyard animals who get in a fight with each other over a silly misunderstanding. \textit{Zicke} (Andreas’ word for Piroschka) is the gendered (female) form of Ziege.}
Piroschka’s company on what is supposed to be his last night in town. Piroschka’s immoderate drinking likewise seems to be designed to induce embarrassment in the German audience: devoid of any sense of (adult) bourgeois respectability, she drinks her wine straight from the jar in long, suggestive, full swallows. Her excess at Lake Balaton proves an annoyance and embarrassment for both Andreas and Greta, as she clumsily breaks her glass in an attempt to offer a toast and bursts into uncontrollable laughing.

Perhaps most shockingly reminiscent of colonial film is Hoffmann’s startling depiction of the family of gypsies on the road. The scene is comprised of short cuts and close-ups of individual, dark and utterly alien faces, while the narrator reports, with some uneasiness, that “strange faces stared at me.” This scene recalls not only those ethnographic films designed to educate Germans as to the physical makeup of the colonial natives, but also those Nazi films attempting to chart the physiognomies of both racial inferiors and the mentally ill. It is important, however, to keep in mind that the goal of the German colonial film was not to arouse its viewers’ antipathy toward the childlike alien culture, but to inspire them with it so they would continue to support the colonial economic model, and perhaps even consider settling in the territories (Fuhrmann). Although Hoffmann’s stated goal with this film, as he described in interviews, was simply to provide light-hearted entertainment without making any political statement, the film itself seems to fight the director’s intention, for who could watch this film in 1955 and not have been reminded of the diagrams of racial difference (with a concentration on typical facial features of different “races”) which were not only standard school book material during the Third Reich, but also in the years after?¹⁴

¹⁴ The *Duden-Lexikon* from 1962 still had an entry called “*Menschenrassen*” (races of men) which showed typical faces from several national and racial groups.
Piroschka as Colonial Fantasy

Whereas German political imperialism outside of Europe had a relatively short and unfruitful lifespan between the founding of the German Reich in 1871 and the loss of the first World War, the same cannot be said of German cultural expansion within Europe, particularly in Eastern European countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania, which, as I have mentioned, hosted millions of ethnic Germans, as well as large numbers of German-speaking Jews. Susanne Zantop has traced the development of the German colonial imagination even further back than the founding of the Reich and the establishment of actual colonies, to a time when Germans, locked in the political disunity of the “Holy Roman Empire—German Nation” stood by and watched from the global sidelines as other European powers conquered and colonized vast regions of the Earth. Zantop argues that “the desire to venture forth, to conquer and appropriate foreign territories, and to (re)generate the self in the process formed in subtle and indirect ways. Ironically, this desire often appeared under the guise of an anti-colonialist stance” (2). According to Zantop’s analysis, “virgin territory” is conquered in colonial fantasy within the literary trope of the love affair between the (male) native and the virgin female native, which always occurs on colonial territory. Zantop highlights the “purely imaginary, wish-fulfilling nature” of these stories as well as their “unconscious subtext, which links sexual desire for the other with desire for power and control” (3). Just as with colonial film, in representations of colonial fantasy both women and colonized subjects are defined as “immature children” (6). Although Zantop refers to a period of cultural and literary production which long precedes both the production and the setting of Ich denke oft an Piroschka, as well as to a geopolitical situation which has changed significantly, a surprising number of elements in the film invite its reading as
another iteration of the German colonial fantasy. The German desire to “venture forth,” a long-celebrated and romanticized wanderlust, is depicted most stereotypically in the figures of Andreas and his fellow students. Whereas his comrades’ boisterousness and insistent singing of German folk songs is clearly coded as a negative aspect of German tourism, Andreas’s flirtations with foreign languages (and women) is meant to convey a sympathetic image of a innocent, young, imaginative German who is genuinely interested in other cultures—which, not surprisingly, is completely consistent with the post-Nazi image that Germany sought to project to its own population and the rest of the world. Yet in some ways Andreas’s adventure is less innocent even than that of his fellow students, as the colonialist project inherent in his endeavor (i.e., the conquering of the native female and subsequent uncompromised return to civilized life) remains obscured behind good intentions and abundant humor.

The Self and Other in Piroschka

Although German colonial film positively (although inauthentically) imagined the exotic Other and its culture for economic reasons, and German colonial fantasy emphasized the romantic and sexual relationship between German master and native female as wish-fulfillment, this highlighting actually served to separate German from non-German in the mind of the public, promoting segregated and unequal, yet ostensibly friendly and cooperative relations between the two. The German Heimatfilm, on the other hand, had always fictionalized and idolized a specifically German landscape and culture, to the exclusion of any other, taking its cast of characters from various parts of the former Reich and uniting them in an imagined small-town or

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15 It is also important to acknowledge not only the role played by political-military colonization in the realization of Germany colonial fantasy, but also that played by German cultural-economic colonialism. At the end of the nineteenth century there were more than two million ethnic Germans in Hungary, most of whom had been attracted from rural farms in Swabia by the ruling Hapsburgs. This economic base was fortified culturally (not only in Hungary but worldwide) by the Goethe Institute, Alexander von Humboldt foundation, and the DAAD. For further information on Germans in Hungary or “Danube Swabians,” see http://www.banaters.com/banat/intro.html.
village community, characterized by an organic union between the Volk and the rural landscape that is commonly understood as an invocation of the ideals of Gemeinschaft. One of the goals of National Socialist ideology had been to (re)infuse this Gemeinschaft with a sense of the heroic. A newly reestablished Teutonic mythology, replacing pacifist Christianity, was to elevate the relationship between Volk and land to a quasi-religious level. This Teutonic order, called Volksgemeinschaft, found its reification in the politics of Blut und Boden, blood and soil.

Hester Baer has argued that the Heimatfilm became obsolete because the tensions that it thematized (and minimized) had been reduced by the economic miracle (189). Additionally, it could be argued that idea of Gemeinschaft itself, as it was associated with National Socialism in the form of Volksgemeinschaft, began losing credibility as the historical amnesia of the immediate post-war years began to wear off. Yet the empowerment that membership in the Volksgemeinschaft offered the individual—a strong, stable sense of self-worth based on genetics instead of accomplishment—could not simply be abandoned. Instead, I would argue, Volksgemeinschaft was projected onto and relived vicariously through an Other, in the case of Ich denke an Piroschka, onto the Gemeinschaft of the Hungarian countryside. Yet, in order for this transfer to remain a projection—in order for the German public to be able to identify with the subject, thereby sharing in the cultural bounty, and at the same time pass the historical burden of Gemeinschaft onto an Other—a dual system of codes had to be employed by which the German audience could be both participant and spectator. Within this system, individual groups and figures in the narrative are coded in one of three ways. The first is what I will call an unambiguous Same, a subject coded for unambiguous (German) viewer identification.¹⁶ In this

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¹⁶ In the breakdown that follows, I will classify characters based on their identity position in a national, that is German, sense. I am not pretending to offer a model of gender identification, which would be interesting and important, but ultimately beyond the scope of this paper. One question that such an inquiry into gender-based identification might ask is how a female viewer might find in Piroschka a figure with whom she can more easily
category I would place the figures of both Andreas and his fellow German exchange students, as well as his German love interest, Greta. None of these characters is identifiable as alien in any way—for even when they are portrayed as stereotypically German (i.e., their standoffish attitude toward foreigners, their aversion to the Hungarian custom of kissing, or their loud singing of German folk songs), this is presented as self-criticism, a playful making fun of the peculiarities of their own culture. Greta is merely passing through Hungary as tourist, never really showing interest in the native language or people. She is on her way to Istanbul to take a job, and the phrase book she is studying is Turkish rather than Hungarian. Her positive identification as part of modern German Gesellschaft is confirmed not only by her impeccable manners, her enlightened decision to take a job in a foreign country, her financial independence (she pays for Andreas’s first meal), but also by her physical presence, as a prototype of blond German purity. Although Andreas is ostensibly more interested in experiencing the “foreign” culture by learning the Hungarian language and customs, he is never able to identify with it fully. For him, the trip is about experiencing the exotic, and the German audience/spectator experiences the exotic vicariously. Yet in the end, Andreas never learns to think like a Hungarian. In his last conversation with Piroschka, she asks him if he can hear the old Hungarian Miklós playing his woodwind tárogató. When he says that he cannot, she chides him for only being able to hear that which is real. Here the audience is reminded of Andreas’s (as well as its own) separation from the child figure who lives in the imaginary. His separation from the “foreign” culture is finalized in his departure. The voice-over is superfluous at this point: it is obvious that Andreas can never identify than with Greta, particularly at a time when open identification with “Germanness” was at least as likely to cause shame as pride. It makes sense to keep in mind here that the effect (if not the goal) of Heimatfilm is forgetfulness and the return to an imaginary and pristine past, that is, back to a time before Germany’s national shame.
go back to Hódmezövásárhelykutasipuszta, as his role as tourist and the audience’s role as voyeur are fulfilled.

On the other extreme of the scales of identification that I am proposing are the gypsies, who fall into the second mode of character identity, which I will refer to as absolute Other. From the annoying fiddler in the Budapest wine tavern, to the mosaic of alien(ated) gypsy faces, and even to the more entertaining mariachi-like bands of musicians, the figure of the gypsy invites both disdain and wonder, but never identification.

Most interesting are the figures of the Hungarians themselves, who appear on the stage in the guise of native “children.” The film sets these figures as both subject and object, both same and other. This feat is most notably accomplished through the use of language. The German which is spoken by the majority of the Hungarians is a delightful invention, seemingly derived from the Swabian dialect, but not consistently employed—Piroschka sometimes says “schön,” sometimes “scheen.” This makes sense historically, because of the heavy concentration of German settlers from that region. In Hungary, as in Germany, there is a difference of dialect between the educated classes, represented by the doctor with whom Andreas lives, and that of the common folk, which in such a small town is just about everyone else. The invocation of this dialect is a clear reference to typical Heimat representation, as the use of strong local dialects can be interpreted as a sign of authenticity, if not sophistication. At the same time, there is an otherness in the dialect, called forth by the accent, grammar, and word choice, which add humor and sexual innuendo, but which impede identification with the speaker. Three examples will suffice to demonstrate how a grammar mistake accents the otherness of the speaker. When Piroschka is sitting in the restaurant on Lake Balaton with Greta and Andreas, she insists on clinking the wine classes in a toast. Instead of using the verb anstoßen, she says aufstoßen, which
means to burp—another reference to bodily functions which serves to establish contrast between the civilized German and the more “natural” childlike native. In another scene, Piroschka fantasizes about telling her father that Andreas has kidnapped her. But instead of using the verb *entführen*, she uses *verführen*, which means to seduce. Here, the blatant sexuality of a Hungarian school girl stands in stark contrast to the proper behavior of Greta, who has earlier refused to allow Andreas to accompany her to her room in the Budapest hotel. Finally, in the scene where Andreas attempts to photograph the two girls, Piroschka tries to tell Greta that Andreas is bringing them into focus, saying “*Er macht uns scharf.*” However, the audience understands that her words actually mean “He’s making us hot.”

The simultaneous identification and othering occurs in the music of the film as well, although in this matter the need for projection seems to outweigh the one for identification. German folk music is presented twice, but only related to events which are annoying for Andreas: the signing of his fellow students on the boat (which interrupts his conversation with Greta) and the fiddling gypsy which has the same effect later in the film. The Hungarian folk music is not only light and merry, but also somber and melancholic, recalling the great deeds of Prince Arpad, a historical figure living around AD 820 who is considered the greatest of the old *Helden* (heroes), the mythical father of the Hungarian nation. Within the German imagination, the idea of mythical heroes recalls not only Siegfried of the *Nibelungenlied*, but also the entire Nordic pantheon. But the historical burden of the mythological Nordic tradition was too besmirched by its Nazi (mis)appropriation to be a comfortable object for veneration, even in a *Heimatfilm*. In its stead we are offered the supposedly more innocent mythology of the Magyars. Andreas alludes to this German dilemma when Piroschka asks him if old German heroes also ride their horses across the Milky Way. Answering in the negative, he says that they “want their
rest.” This is formulation is ripe with interpretive possibility, since in German alte Helden can also refer to the war dead.

The silence of the German Heimatfilm in regard to the most recent historical past is one of its better-known characteristics. Yet the amnesia of Piroschka seems equally pervasive, if not more so, even though the film is set in another country. Perhaps this was unavoidable, since the magic of being able to identify with an other while still maintaining his otherness requires that this other not be so different after all. Hungarians have a long history of contact with German-speakers and German culture through immigration as well as its political union with Austria during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Additionally, Hungarians are able to claim a non-Slavic ethnicity, which made them particularly valuable allies to Nazi Germany in World War II (“Slaven sind Sklaven”), thus giving Hungary its own historical burden to deal with in the postwar period. Another silence highlighted by the film is that concerning the fate of the gypsies so crudely “documented” in the film. Since the film is set in 1925, an audience watching in 1955 might well ask itself what had happened to those “never-I” figures in the mean time. Were this a just another Heimatfilm, the question itself would be pointless, as the Heimatfilm paints an harmonious picture of an imaginary world, which through its depiction becomes an eternalized nostalgic fantasy, against which the harsh realities of modern life can be unfavorably compared. Yet the opening scene of Ich denke oft an Piroschka precludes the establishment of a static understanding of the characters—thereby challenging the assumptions of Heimatfilm—as the narrator, now middle-aged and no longer physically attractive, reminds us that thirty years have passed since that summer, that Piroschka probably has her own children now, and that she probably makes a much better memory than a reality. Yet this reminder that Piroschka has since grown old simultaneously invites speculation about the fates of all the characters in the story.
While no answer is offered directly, one can be derived by reading the symbolism of the film itself. As Ralph Blumenthal of the *New York Times* pointed out in his review of a German film series at Lincoln Center in April of 2002 (which included *Ich denke an Piroschka*), “an inordinate number of trains seem to course through the films,” which he reads as a torrent of bad conscience “seeping through” (1). Finally, there is the obvious silence about Piroschka herself. The middle-aged Andreas tells us that it is better that he never returned to Piroschka, since now he can always remember her as a beautiful 17-year-old. There is not a thought as to whether his sexual encounter with her, which seems to be the goal not only of that summer, but of the film itself, has resulted in anything more than just a fond memory of youth, although there is a hint in his refusal to learn more about her that he is afraid of what he might learn.17

**Changes from the Book**

Since the film is based upon a book of the same name (published just a year before) and was co-written by the author of the book, Hugo Hartung, it seems appropriate to mention a few major differences in the two stories and to speculate as to the reasons for the changes. One of the major changes in storyline is that, in the book, Greta is not on her way to Istanbul to work, but rather on her way to Athens to marry a rich business associate of her father. Although the original version may have made a better *Heimatfilm*, Hoffmann’s version seems much more palatable to a modern audience, where respectable women seek out their own careers and do not need to be married off by their fathers. In the book version, Andreas never actually gives up on the German Greta (even though at first her Germanness ruins his “*exotische Träumereien*” (exotic daydreaming) and until the end continues to confuse both women in his head, although it

17 Ironically, the same forgetfulness that defines Gunnar Möller’s character (and indeed the film as a whole) revisited the actor later in life. In 1979 Möller was charged with manslaughter in the death of his wife and served 26 months in prison. According to Hilmar Bahr of the *Deutsche Presseagentur* (DPA, 6/25/03), the actor was able to “seamlessly carry on with his acting career” following his release. Furthermore, he refuses to discuss the incident publicly.
seems clear he feels his best chances are with Greta. However, in the film this would have been difficult, as Liselotte Pulver, a darling of the German screen, would have been seen by the public as a much better win for Andreas than Greta. In the book, Andreas’s “win” is somehow even more bountiful, though. As they stand under the stars and contemplate the heroes, they reveal to each other their zodiac signs: both are Jungfrau (virgin or Virgo), which a Zantopian analysis might well have predicted. In the film, the scene is tamed: both are Steinbock (Capricorn).

Another element absent in the film version is the recurring reference by the friendly (though drunk) Hungarians to the treaty of Trianon, which ended World War I and left Hungary stripped of two thirds of its former territory. Andreas understands the treaty as the Hungarian version of Versailles, but in reality it more closely resembles Germany’s unconditional surrender at the end of World War II, when Germany lost huge territories to Poland and Russia. Yet in 1955, public mourning of either of these historical losses would have been uncomfortable, if at all possible. Furthermore, the Hungarian characters in the book, particularly the old men, often refer to the Germans as Kriegskameraden (“comrades-in-arms”), another uncomfortable subject not broached in the film. It seems that the need to silence reference to Germany’s (and Hungary’s) immediate past outweighs any desire there may have been to stay true to the source material.

**Conclusion**

The continuing popularity of *Ich denke oft an Piroschka* in Germany deserves some mention, particularly in light of the fact that there is very little academic writing which makes

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18 Interestingly, it Andreas’ host mother, the only other native German speaker in the village, who explains that Trianon is denounced by the Hungarians with the chant “No! No! Never!” a reference to the triple negation suggested by the word Trianon.
more than a passing mention of the film.\textsuperscript{19} Certainly the film’s function in heterosexual male wish fulfillment contributes significantly to its success. During the Cold War years, the airing of the film in West Germany also served an ideological function, as the idyllic images pre-communist Hungary of 1925 could be actively compared in the public’s mind to the desperate images of the Hungarian revolution against Soviet domination, which began and was crushed just a year after the release of the film in West Germany. Furthermore, the film’s images contrasted the officially sanctioned images of communist Eastern Europe, which tended to focus on urban decay, artless utilitarian architecture, and ecological devastation. According to Zantop, the continual recycling of “seductive master fantasies” of the late 1700s and early 1800s led to their acceptance in German collective imagination as “factual reality” (3). The same could be said of the colonial fantasy of \textit{Ich denke oft an Piroschka} two centuries later, as Piroschka has become as fixed in the German iconography of Hungary as paprika and the \textit{puszta} itself.

\textsuperscript{19} The film continues to be shown regularly on German television. In 2003 the story was even brought to the theatrical stage with Gunnar Möller, at age 75, in the role of Sandor.
CHAPTER 3
IMAGINING THE EXOTIC FROM GERMANY

Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyze works which deal with questions of Germanness from the perspective of German writers and filmmakers who choose exotic landscapes and peoples as a backdrop against which notions of German identity are contrasted. My focus will be on the Amazonian films of Werner Herzog and Uwe Timm’s Argentinean jungle novel, Der Schlangenbaum (The Snake Tree; 1986). These works, I will argue, follow the path first laid by Ich Denke Oft an Piroschka, in which models of Germanness are portrayed not in Germany proper, but in less industrially developed foreign landscapes. Yet Herzog and Timm take Hartung’s and Hoffmann’s dislocation of Heimat even farther, into the deepest and remotest jungles where the colonial imagination is free to do its work. At the same time, these works actively challenge the romantic notion of Heimat, and thus seek to radically alter the conception of one of the basic notions of German geographical belonging.

The two films for which Herzog is most well-known in the United States, Aguirre, the Wrath of God (1972) and Fitzcarraldo (1982), are both primarily concerned with the obsessive colonial pursuits, and colossal failures, of European men in their attempts to master the South American jungle. The story underlying each of the films, as I will show, is that of the inadequacy of European technology when superimposed on other landscapes and cultures. A year after the release of Fitzcarraldo, Timm started writing Der Schlangenbaum, a novel portraying the obsessive enthusiasm, frustration, and ultimate failure of a German engineer to revive a failing project to build a modern paper factory in the Argentinean jungle. Timm’s novel, while sharing many of Herzog’s concerns, observations, and fantasies, goes further than Herzog in specifically tying colonial endeavors to a German past, rather than a generalized history of European
imperialism. Because of this progression, I will first deal with Herzog and then move on to Timm’s “response” to him.

**Filming Germanness in Amazonia and Beyond: Werner Herzog’s Jungle Films**

In the last 35 years, Werner Herzog has consistently made films which deal with questions of the relationship between human civilization and the natural world in which they operate. Of particular interest to me are *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, *Fitzcarraldo*, *Cobra Verde* (1987), *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1997), *The White Diamond* (2004), and *Grizzly Man* (2005). All of these films, as I will argue, map out a certain notion of German self-understanding while dramatizing the obsessions of usually non-German “colonial heroes,” to use Lutz Koepnik’s (1993) formulation, as they are played out in exotic foreign landscapes. Of particular interest to me here is how Herzog infuses his geographically non-German films with specifically German notions of *Heimat* and *Größenwahn*, elements of Romanticism, and a critical engagement with the concept of the noble savage. Of course, there are particular risks involved in pursuing a line of inquiry that seeks to engage such mammoth concepts as national identity. First of all, I must state emphatically that I am not proposing that Herzog’s understanding of Germanness or its projection in his films is in any way representative of the dominant modes of conceptualizing Germanness, inside or outside Germany. In certain ways, Herzog’s reenactments of Germanness are at odds both with the prevailing discourse in Germany and with American (mis)perceptions of German sensibilities. However, I believe that certain current, public debates about post-war German values, including issues of the environment, commercialism, and Germany’s (and the West’s) proper role in dealing with developing countries and indigenous cultures, are informed on some level by the logic put forth in Herzog’s films. In undertaking this argument, I actively and intentionally avoid any regression into essentialism, where membership in a certain national community is understood as a guarantor of the presence, conscious or not, of idiosyncratic
“national” character traits. I am also aware of the danger of trying to read the nation into the text or film simply because it should, by essentialist logic, be there. My understanding of culture and nationality assumes that a number of competing discourses, with varying degrees of official sanction, compete, interact, and converge to create highly nuanced and individualized understandings of what it means to be part of the national community. However, this does not mean that to speak of Germanness is fruitless simply because it must encompass the wildly varying experiences of 80 million Germans. The dominance of “official” discourses (and official language) still ensures that the everyday experiences of Germans are to a large extent filtered through the narratives that are handed down in school, in the military, and in the (still largely government-financed) media, and that certain patterns of self-understanding, while neither universal nor binding, are bound to emerge. Thus, images (and words) which appear benign to an American or French audience can be charged with meaning to a German one. An example of this, which I will discuss in detail below, is Herzog’s attraction to and use of images of bears. Since divergent histories ensure that the bear occupies an unique space in the German imagination quite different from that of the American tradition (I will argue that this is a location of loss and mourning), it is therefore reasonable to understand Herzog’s manipulation of this symbol as an act with a specific relationship to Germanness, even though the symbol is bartered in relationship to characters who are not German (although often the actors playing them are). Finally, I would like to point out that looking for “das Deutsche” in Herzog’s films (as in many other post-war German cultural productions) is complicated by the fact that Germanness is often, consciously or unconsciously, hidden from direct view. German self-consciousness in giving expression to anything specifically (or proudly) German is a cultural fact of life, although this is slowly changing. The result presents a logical problem, in that sometimes the absence of
expression actually becomes a form of expression. Obviously, this type of reading, where a lack of evidence is used to prove an assertion, can easily lead to highly questionable conclusions. However, the problems associated with readings of absence can be dealt with in a comparative sense. For example, the lack of German characters in Herzog’s geographically non-German films can be contrasted to Wim Wenders’s abundant use of German characters in films such as *Until the End of the World* (1991), *Paris, Texas* (1984), *Kings of the Road* (1976), and *Alice in the Cities* (1974).

**Herzog’s Inverted Heimat of the Tropics**

South America has served in the German imagination as a “refuge and asylum for victims of political and racist persecution throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Sharman, 96). Because of its status as a refuge from the demands of modernity and its image as a prehistoric, natural utopia, one is tempted read the pure, “virgin” rain forest as a projection of the German *Heimat* landscape. Without doubt, Werner Herzog is well-aware of the potential of the Amazonian rain forest, with all its natural beauty and the simplicity of its inhabitants, to become yet another staging ground for German *Heimat* fantasies, and to a certain extent he lures the audience of his Amazonian films, along with some critics, with an initial promise of satisfaction of those desires. Thomas Elsaesser writes of *Fitzcarraldo*:

> Herzog himself seems to think of it [Fitzcarraldo] as a *Heimat* film transposed into the jungle—a film about Bavaria in other words, with a figure not unlike Mad King Ludwig who had built fantasy castles and had funded lavishly extravagant productions of Wagner’s operas.” (Sharman 106)

Yet unlike the traditional *Heimat* landscape, the harsh and unforgiving jungle serves as more than just a setting in Herzog’s films, more than just a backdrop for the playing out of naive, sentimentalist, anti-modernist fantasies of wholeness: it is a site of resistance, not only that of native peoples trying to thwart the advance of Western exploiters, but that of nature itself, which,
unlike in a traditional *Heimatfilm*, violently refuses its appropriation and political demarcation by human beings. Yet Elsaesser’s equation of the Black Forest and the Amazon on the one hand and of King Ludwig II and Herzog (posing as Fitzcarraldo) on the other, fails to take into account the fact that hiding beneath the breathtaking beauty of Herzog’s jungle is not a Romantic symbiosis between man and his environment, but the life and death struggle between them that offers no chance for man’s redemption. To read *Fitzcarraldo* (or *Aguirre* or Little Dieter) as a re-located *Heimatfilm* is either to ignore the Herzog’s intentional othering of the jungle landscape or to infuse the landscape of the traditional *Heimatfilm* with a diabolical nature that it mostly lacks.

The traditional *Heimatfilm*, as I showed in Chapter 2, is typically inundated with images of harmonious nature, where humans and animals live simple and peaceful lives in the edge of the forest or in the shadows of scenic mountain ranges. Herzog, like many critics, is aware of the risk of seduction that uncritical identification with sentimental images of nature engenders. His warning comes in the form of an inversion of *Heimat* symbolism which morphs the Germanic mythology of a sometimes sinister, yet life-giving forest into a deadly and ruthless jungle. In *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, *Fitzcarraldo*, and *Little Dieter*, Herzog presents the jungle and its undifferentiated inhabitants, both human and animal, as the absolute Other of Western civilization. In his final interview in *Burden of Dreams*, Les Blank’s simultaneously filmed documentary of the filming of *Fitzcarraldo*, Herzog makes clear that nature in its rawest form is not something he wishes to celebrate, but rather something to be avoided:

Taking a close look at what’s around us—there is some sort of a harmony: it is the harmony of overwhelming and collective murder. And we, in comparison to the articulate vileness and baseness and obscenity of all this jungle, in comparison to that enormous articulation, we only sound and look like badly pronounced and half-finished sentences out of a stupid suburban novel: a cheap novel. We have to become humble in front of this overwhelming misery and overwhelming fornication, overwhelming growth and overwhelming lack of order.
In his jungle films, Herzog puts theory to praxis, as he portrays the tropical rain forest as a place of death for the European, the native Indian, and the animal kingdom alike.

**Elements of Romanticism**

Although Herzog flatly denies that he owes any debt to the German Romantic movement, the close affinity of his landscape aesthetic with that of German Romantic painters is striking. Particularly noteworthy in this respect is the German painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), many of whose paintings bare an uncanny resemblance to Herzog’s landscapes. Friedrich’s Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer (Illustration 3) is an excellent example. In this painting, a well-dressed wanderer with a walking stick stands high on a rocky cliff, peering down upon an untouched, rocky, misty landscape, as if to admire the enormous beauty of nature or to survey his property. A nearly identical scene is depicted in *Fitzcarraldo*, as the Irish entrepreneur stands upon a makeshift platform high the canopy of the rain forest in order to map out the abstraction of the seemingly solitary nature below. To film the opening scene of *Aguirre*, in which Pizarro’s men descend a mountain to an eerie fog below, Herzog waited for days in order to capture a misty and mysterious image that Friedrich delivers in such famous works as *Der Morgen* (1820), *Morgennebel im Gebirge* (1808) *Flussufer im Morgennebel* (1820-1825). Friedrich’s *Eismeer: die gescheiterte Hoffnung* depicts a scene in the arctic, where a ship has crashed into the frozen blanket of the sea. The ship has nearly sunk, and the only visible remains are the broken mast and a tiny part of the stern, while the disrupted ice is piled upon itself like so much jagged rubble after a building collapse. This is the same beautiful and treacherous landscape that Herzog films from the air in *Grizzly Man*.

The similarities in the images produced by Herzog and Friedrich are explained in part by the remarkably similar philosophies of images that the artists share. Herzog writes:
The kinds of landscape I try to find in my films... exist only in our dreams. For me a true landscape is not just a representation of a desert or a forest. It shows an inner state of mind, literally inner landscapes, and it is the human soul that is visible through the landscapes presented in my films.

Friedrich likewise believed that the physical re-presentation of landscapes in art are subordinate to the true images, the inner images that produce them: “Schließe dein leibliches Auge, damit du mit dem geistigen Auge zuerst siehest dein Bild” (“Close your bodily eye, that you may see your picture first with the eye of the spirit”; Kuzniar 370). Nonetheless, however similar Herzog’s landscape images may be aesthetically to those of the most famous of the German Romantic painters, he differentiates himself by allowing beautiful images of wild nature to reveal themselves as masks of a sinister and deadly environment which is presented as the absolute other of Western civilization.

**Othering the Jungle and its Inhabitants**

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, “othering” is a process by which difference is recognized, established, enunciated, inscribed, or simply manufactured in the body of the individual, community, nation, or even species, resulting in the conceptualization of a self/same/one and an other. In this section I look at the many ways that Herzog marks otherness in his images in order to establish and communicate his particular world views vis-à-vis art, images, civilization, and human potential.

**The othered landscape**

By casting the jungle as a source of death rather than of life, of disorder rather than of harmony, Herzog presents this landscape as the absolute other of Western civilization. In doing so, he is following in the steps of Alexander von Humboldt, who in his writings about the Amazon described the rain forest as an “autopoetic system” which absorbed everything around it (Koepnick, 139). Koepnick points out that this leaves no room for the representation of the
native peoples, who are almost invariably equated with the jungle itself, as a manifestation of life without civilization.

Many scholars have pointed out the Herzog endows his landscapes with the qualities of an actor, and Herzog himself seems to agree with this assessment (Herzog 81). I would argue that it is precisely this particular staging of nature which allows Herzog to “other” the jungle at all. The representation of the Other, just as the representation of the “same,” relies on a notion of humanness. Thus, as mere inanimate setting, the environment has no otherness: it is simply there as backdrop and its bounties and difficulties are natural and objective, neither warmly welcoming nor intentionally hostile. In “Sylvan Politics,” Koepnick argues that Herzog’s promotion of landscape to actor results to some degree from the expressionistic heritage evident in Herzog’s mise-en-scène, “to the extent that natural imagery assumes signifying functions” (135). While I recognize that Herzog’s does indeed elevate the jungle to autonomous character and agree completely with Koepnick’s reading of Herzog’s jungle as the “absolute other of Western civilization,” my argument is much more limited in scope than his: for me, the expressionistic reading of Herzog’s natural settings as “symbolic expression, a metaphorical comment, a leitmotif, or even as a metonymical extension of the character’s inner situation” does not in itself justify the equation of environment and actor, because it diminishes the extent to which Herzog anthropomorphizes his landscapes and embeds in them an autonomous and antagonistic agency with respect to his protagonists. The capacity to actively confound and frustrate the plans of Herzog’s colonial heroes, which the jungle seems to enjoy, is absent in other symbolically important elements of Herzog’s films, such as the canons and horses in Aguirre and Fitzcarraldo’s ship, the Molly Aida. The example of the ship is extremely instructive here: despite the fact that it carries a personal name and is referred to as “she,” the Molly Aida is
nothing more than a symbol of Western technology disastrously dislocated into an environment incompatible with Western rationalism. It is a powerful symbol yet it is still a prop, in that it has no ability to act autonomously as Herzog’s jungle seems to.

Closer to my own argument is that put forth by Gundula Sharman, who has argued that underlying Herzog’s promotion of landscape from setting to “character in its own right” (99) is the violent resistance that the jungle offers to the Western imperialist agents who attempt to tame it. For Sharman, it is the autonomy and omnipotence of the “virgin” jungle which secures its role as agent and Other, in relationship to which Herzog defines his human characters. Although autonomy is clearly an indispensable component of Herzog’s treatment of the environment, it is not the critical attribute that enables this othering, because autonomy in itself lacks an organic, human connection. Herzog’s environment is more than simply autonomous, more than a mere self-governing system—like, for example, the weather—that functions without input from or regard to what the “real” actors in the films are doing. Rather, Herzog’s landscapes themselves are embedded with treacherous human characteristics which enables them to be portrayed as the active enemy of Western man: in both Aguirre and Fitzcarraldo, the jungle seduces the colonial hero with promises of satisfaction of his lust and greed, only to violently dash his hopes with a vengeance.

In the opening scene of Fitzcarraldo, in which a camera mounted in an airplane pans the canopy of the forest, Herzog superimposes the following text on the screen:

Cayahuari Yacu nennen die Waldindianer dieses Land, “das Land, in dem Gott mit der Schöpfung nicht fertig wurde.” Erst nach dem Verschwinden der Menschen, glauben sie, werde er wiederkehren, um sein Werk zu vollenden. (The forest Indians call this land Cayahuari Yacu, or, “the land in which God never finished his creation.” Only after the humans disappear, they believe, will he return to complete his work).
In a cunning move, Herzog uses “native” lore to other the jungle as not only as primordial, but unredeemed, forgotten, and neglected. The function of this othering is clearly two-fold: firstly, it sets up the jungle’s otherness as spiritual and almost existential, which in the course of the movie proves to be less surmountable than the mere physical otherness of a landscape, which could eventually be overcome with the help of technology. This spiritual othering thus has sense of permanence about it that mere physical difficulty (which can be overcome with human perseverance) does not have, since it is pre-ordained by the gods that the place will never be whole. Thus, even when engine technology does finally help Fitzcarraldo get the Molly Aida over the mountain, the gods intervene through their Indian agents to send the ship down the treacherous rapids, leaving the land that Fitzcarraldo wants to conquer in its “unfinished” natural state. Secondly, and more importantly, Herzog’s formulation, in drawing upon a (possibly invented, and certainly embellished) native lore, serves to give his argument credibility, while at the same time pointing out the natives’ own otherness vis-à-vis the jungle. This second point I will address in more detail in the next section, but it must be noted that Herzog is specifically denying native “oneness” with the jungle, which is a direct attack on the Romantic ideas of the noble savage. Likewise in Aguirre, it is not only the inhabitants of the jungle, human and animal, that are othered, but also the landscape itself. In the opening sequence, Pizarro and his crew are climbing down a mountain into the jungle below. Immediately, the Indian slaves start dying off, not at the hands of rival tribes or from their chained slavery, but from the oppressive heat of the jungle environment, to which they are unaccustomed. Later, the danger to Aguirre’s mutinous

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1 The authenticity of Herzog’s text is highly questionable. I have thus far been unable to corroborate his use of the term “Cayahuari Yacu” or its supposed meaning. However, it would not be unheard of for Herzog to simply make up a quote or attribute his own words to another (presumably more credible) author. For his film Lessons of Darkness (1992), Herzog admitted to having invented the high-brow opening quote, which he falsely attributes to Blaise Pascal in order to have the audience “step into the film at a high [intellectual] level.” See Rice News: The Faculty & Staff Newspaper of Rice University (6:1) (Oct 31, 1996). http://www.media.rice.edu/media/NewsBot.asp?MODE=VIEW&ID=5907&SnID=2
crew is not just the arrows coming from the jungle, but also the inorganic physical environment itself. As one of the rafts becomes stuck near the rocky bank, the violently stirring waters of the river become deadly. As the camera focuses on the beauty of the white water for several seconds, it becomes clear that underlying this beauty is a lethal menace. In *Little Dieter*, the protagonist goes to great lengths to show how inhospitable the jungle environment is for the German/American: the heat is nearly unbearable, the thorns cut his feet, and despite the diversity of jungle life forms he can find little to eat.

Herzog’s othering of that demonic and nightmarish character named Jungle has met with hefty criticism. Obviously, environmentalists are angered that Herzog would build a boat high in the trees of the forest for the filming of *Aguirre*, only to leave the monstrosity as a scar in the canopy when filming was completed.² And one hardly needs to be an eco-warrior to be appalled that Herzog would clear-cut a 50-foot wide swath of primeval rain forest in the interest of profit at a time when it was clear that this endangered biosphere was already disappearing at an alarming rate. Indeed, it seems that in Herzog’s logic there is nothing which is essentially or independently valuable in the “character” that appears in his films in the role of Jungle. For him, landscape only seems to have an existential worth to the extent that humans are able to be moved, affected, challenged, or perhaps even awestruck by it. Its contours are only meaningful or symbolic to the degree that this meaning is inscribed into it by the filmmaker and read by the viewer. Although Herzog has repeatedly claimed to be concerned about the destruction of the environment, he is able to justify his own limited effacement of the landscape by appeal to what he considers to be the most noble human achievement and the key to human survival: self-articulation through art, or in terms of cinema, the quest for new and adequate images:

² In his interviews with Paul Cronin in 2002, Herzog seemed proud to claim that the boat was probably still in the trees to this day, although he could not verify it.
As a race, we have become aware of certain dangers that surround us. . . . We have understood that the destruction of the environment is another enormous danger. But I truly believe that the lack of adequate imagery is a danger of the same magnitude. . . . I have said this before and will repeat it again as long as I am able to talk: if we do not develop adequate images we will die out like dinosaurs. (Herzog 66)

In a certain sense, time has vindicated Herzog’s “scarring” of the landscape, at least in the case of Fitzcarraldo. When he returned to the site where the Molly Aida had been dragged over the mountain for the filming of Mein bester Feind in 1999, the previously clear-cut path was no longer detectable as new growth has apparently merged seamlessly with old growth. In effect, Herzog’s incision into the forest created a temporary injury, but left no lasting scar—at least not on the landscape.

John Davidson has leveled the charge that Herzog’s appropriation and exploitation of Indian lands is nothing less than a form of neo-colonialism, even as the film itself seems to claim an anti-colonialist stance. Davidson’s argument is supported by the fact that even Herzog has acknowledged that it would have been much more practical to build a model ship and create the entire spectacle of the film through studio effects. Yet Herzog wanted to impress his audience with an “authentic” image so that the underlying “truth” of the story would be immediately accessible to the spectator, and thus he chose to re-enact a clearly colonialist gesture in order to give us an “adequate image.” Inasmuch as the jungle is treated as its own “autonomous” and clearly “othered” character in Herzog’s oeuvre, and to the extent that this “other” is willfully subjected to the power of Herzog’s colonialist hero, it seems fruitful to understand the landscape itself (as an entity separate from its inhabitants) as “subaltern” in the sense that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak employs the term. Spivak, in responding to the premises of Subaltern Studies, criticizes the idea that, given the opportunity, subaltern groups can find their own voice or express and define their own collective identities, partly because the idea of a subaltern itself already assumes an essentialist “saming” of the heterogeneous multiplicity within every
marginalized group, and partly because the subaltern articulations of being that are extracted from Subaltern Studies are always already filtered through the language and culture of power. In the case of Amazonian jungle, Koepnick has demonstrated that the efforts of Herzog’s colonial heroes are thwarted by their inability to view the multiplicity of the jungle outside of their Western rationalism: in other words, they attempt to impose an imperial language of Enlightenment upon an “other” that simply doesn’t act according to logic of the imposed grammar. Herzog seems to want to grant a voice to the jungle by focusing endlessly on what we might interpret as autonomous sylvan articulations of being, from the deafening rage of a furious river to the uncanny silence of a forest waiting to swallow up an explorer in an un navigable maze of thorns and quicksand. Yet we as Western viewers seem doomed to understand even these articulations through the filters of our cultures and counter-cultures. Despite Herzog’s efforts to the contrary, whether we are repulsed, like von Humboldt, by the radical otherness of the hostile landscape, awestruck by its seemingly infinite intensity, or prepared to adopt (appropriated) native notions of “belonging” to the earth rather than the other way around, we are still left in Herzog’s films with nothing more than a thoroughly Western gaze at an unknowable Other whose language we are simply unable to understand.

It is apparent that Herzog’s intentional treatment of landscape as individual actor/character rather than as mere setting serves a particular purpose in regards to the Romantic dreamer: to successfully overcome the constraints of the environment itself, a mere set of factual circumstances, requires little more than sufficient technology. But to challenge an active adversary, a living and breathing opponent with its own agenda—even if the effort fails—is to
assert the mysterious power of human desire. Yet Herzog’s effort to personify and “other” the landscape in order to create a new mythology of unlimited individual potential fails because it relies on a poetic anthropomorphism that leads to an epistemological quagmire. On the one hand, he wants us to understand the absolute otherness of the jungle through knowledge gained by witnessing and feeling its self-expression. On the other hand, the jungle’s subaltern status, established in the othering process, already dictates that we cannot really “know” the landscape at all, since we, just like Herzog’s heroes, are unable to escape our Western perspective.

Herzog’s portrayal of the victory of the jungle over the Western pioneer is not only to be understood as a rebuttal to those naive Romantic understandings of the natural world that imagine a sort of cosmic harmony in the universe which is only disturbed by the unnatural, “rational” acts of mankind. As we will see in the next section, Herzog’s jungle films radically reject the idea of universal harmony, positing in its place a theory of universal suffering. However, this is not to say that Herzog proposes a rationalist response to the New Age sentimentalism that he finds so revolting. The overly rationalist German impulse is also is criticized in Herzog’s Amazonian films. As Koepnick has shown, German forestry, far from being a celebration of untouched nature, is intimately tied to Cartesian rationalism and geometric reason, as the confusion of the forest is tamed with careful planning, circular routes are straightened out, and challenges to human domination are systematically removed. Thus, the symbiosis of the German and his forest is organized in such a way that the rational human is

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3 On his own website “The Sticking Place,” Paul Cronin, editor of Herzog on Herzog posts several quotes from his interviews with Herzog which did not appear in the book. Regarding the power of human desire, Herzog says “It wasn’t money that pulled the boat over the mountain, is was faith” (Cronin 2007).

4 For Herzog’s comments on New Age spiritualism, a typical example can be found in his interview with the San Francisco Bay Guardian, in which his claims that upon hearing the words “new age” his response is to “immediately lower my head and charge. I charge instantly” (SFBG). In Mein bester Feind, Herzog expresses his contempt for Kinski’s staged gestures toward New Age spiritualism as the latter arranged for a cameraman to follow him 50 feet into the jungle and to film him pretending to copulate with a tree.
always in control of that which is untamed only on the surface. Thus, in his Amazonian films, Herzog shows the incompatibility between this type of ordered thinking and the infinite variation offered by the rain forest: his “heroes” fail not because of the “inner rot of Western civilization” (Sharman 101) or the inadequacy of their instruments of domination (the canon, the map, the steamship), or even the nature of their typically German *Größenwahn*, but because of the infinite nature of the jungle itself.

**The othered animal**

The cosmic incompatibility between European and jungle that Herzog posits in his films is further strengthened by his negative portrayal of the wildlife that makes the jungle its home. In most respects, the animals of the Herzog’s jungles are nearly indistinguishable from their environment, inasmuch as they are the victims and agents of its lust for death. In *Burden of Dreams*, Herzog expresses his distaste for the environment and particularly for the claims made by certain people (including Kinski) that the jungle is life giving in an erotic sense:

I don’t see it so much erotic. I see it more full of obscenity. Nature here is vile and base. I wouldn’t see anything erotic here. I would see fornication and asphyxiation and choking and fighting for survival and growing and just rotting away. Of course, there is a lot of misery. But it is the same misery that is all around us. The trees here are in misery, and the birds are in misery. I don’t think they sing; I think they just screech in pain.

It is noteworthy that the shared suffering of the birds, trees, and humans does not function to unite them against the greater Other, the landscape: here, the enemy’s enemy is not necessarily one’s friend and the animal that is itself a victim can just as easily be an aggressor. As the Indians, who have offered Fitzcarraldo their assistance in getting the ship over the mountain, happily clear cut a path through their own territory in the hopes of ridding the land of the curse to which it has been subjected, they detect one of the jungle’s most dangerous snakes and immediately kill it with their spears. In doing so, they effectively shatter the Romantic European fantasy that so-called primitive peoples have a privileged relationship with nature or respect all
life forms. The realism in this scene, which for Westerners is shocking in its seeming brutality, is hardly disputable, and the killing of the snake depicted in the film was not staged, but rather a lucky break for Herzog which occurred during the filming of the destruction of the forest (DVD Commentary). Not so lucky for Herzog was the fact that during the same filming a member of the local crew who was bitten by a poisonous snake was forced to make the quick and nearly incomprehensible decision to amputate his own foot with his machete in order to save his life.

In *Grizzly Man*, Herzog takes aim at those who would romanticize the grizzly bear. And what haunts me, is that in all the faces of all the bears that Treadwell ever filmed, I discover no kinship, no understanding, no mercy. I see only the overwhelming indifference of nature. To me, there is no such thing as a secret world of the bears. And this blank stare speaks only of a half-bored interest in food.” (*Grizzly Man*)

As irrefutable proof that the bears are not only life-threatening to humans, but also savagely aggressive toward each other, Herzog shows us the footage in which Treadwell stumbles upon the perfectly clean, white skull of a juvenile bear, which has been killed by an adult male. The horror of the site, together with the knowledge that this juvenile has been almost completely cannibalized by members of its own species, serves as a guarantor of the grizzly’s otherness. In *Little Dieter*, Herzog has the protagonist, Dieter Dengler, tell the audience how he avoided a death by skirting the advances of a hungry bear. In *Wings of Hope* (1999), Herzog’s documentary about Juliane Köpcke, we learn how the 17-year-old German used her uncanny knowledge of the jungle to survive both crocodiles and stingrays after the plane she was riding in crashed into the jungle, not far from where Herzog was shooting *Aguirre*.

The monkeys that raid Aguirre’s raft at the end of the film appear to be sent from the jungle itself to pick the last vestiges of food from doomed vessel, only to return to their sylvan master with the booty they’ve collected. Aguirre’s brutal treatment of the one he manages to catch highlights the fact that, just like the two native Indians that Aguirre’s men have previously
captured and subsequently murdered, the monkeys are individually powerless, yet in their numbers are able to wreak the jungle’s collective havoc on the radically subjectivized and isolated European. In other instances, Herzog uses animals to make metaphorical comments on his actors, his audience, or Western society in general. While Aguirre’s horse epitomizes the irrevocable displacement of the Westerner in Amazonia, the champagne-drinking horse in the opening scene of *Fitzcarraldo* is clearly an indictment of the gross social injustice created by colonialism. As Fitzcarraldo lies in his jungle cabin impressing native children with his phonograph machine, he is accompanied by a pig which he has befriended. He understands the pig not only as a friend, but also as a fan, as he has already told Molly: “The children are my public—and a pig.” The children get to listen to the cracking music from the phonograph, but the pig is promised something even better: “When I build my opera house, I will see to it that you have your own box, and a velvet chair.” In this scene, Herzog uses the image of a domesticated pig not only to point out and (and make fun of) the dreamer’s naive connection to children and animals, but also to highlight the incompatibility of Western and indigenous cultures: the pig in a velvet seat at the opera house is no more out of place than is that same opera house in the middle of the Peruvian jungle.

Pigs and horses are not the only domesticated animals that Herzog employs metaphorically. His animosity toward chickens was already documented in *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970), during the filming of which Herzog captures scenes in which chickens brutally attack and cannibalize each other.⁵ Although Herzog portrays the chicken as infinitely stupid and senselessly violent and malignant, it does not become the agent of a diabolical landscape in the

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⁵ One of Herzog’s most famous quotes relates back to this incident: “Look into the eyes of a chicken and you will see real stupidity. It is a kind of bottomless stupidity, a fiendish stupidity. They are the most horrifying, cannibalistic and nightmarish creatures in this world” (Herzog 99).
way that the grizzly bear or the snake does. In the final scenes of Stroszek, as the protagonist Bruno is fleeing from the chaos of his attempted life in America, he makes a final stop in Cherokee, North Carolina. Before shooting himself on a sky ride, he drops coins into a series of arcade amusements featuring, among other things, a chicken that performs a dance for a grain of corn. Herzog’s insistence on including this scene in the film (which his film crew was against) is explained by the fact that he sees in this “ridiculous freak show” a great metaphor, although he refuses to say what it might be (Herzog 99). The answer to that inquiry likely lies in the fact that Herzog had the chicken do its barnyard shuffle for much longer than it normally would for the single grain of corn—a feat which required that the bird be intensively retrained for several weeks. As we watch this almost embarrassingly senseless spectacle go on and on, we become aware that what we are watching is not so much a reflection on the stupidity of the chicken as a comment on the artificiality and emptiness that becomes the mainstay of our daily lives. Thus, the chicken becomes not the other of Western civilization, but the catalyst in a process by which we become other to ourselves.

**The othered native**

Many scholars have passionately attacked Herzog for his treatment of native peoples, both in terms of their portrayals in his films and in the process of production. In terms of the filmic depictions, criticism has centered around Herzog’s alleged failure to fully condemn European imperialism within the narrative of the film or to recognize the portray the Indians in a way that humanizes them and marks a distinction between them and their environment. Sharman, for example, criticizes the fact that Herzog fails to present his natives as “individual characters with individual biographies” (99). This criticism is accurate to a certain point. In *Aguirre*, the Indians are either depicted as a horde of slaves to Pizarro’s expedition, invisible organs of the forest shooting arrows at the intruding Europeans, or anonymous individuals captured and
subsequently executed for disrespecting the Bible. In *Fitzcarraldo*, the natives of the jungle are likewise shown to be an extension of the landscape: as they fell huge trees into the river to prevent the retreat of the Molly Aida, it seems as though it is the forest itself which is closing in on the interlopers, moving in perfect harmony with the natives in their canoes. However, as the Indians board Fitzcarraldo’s vessel, one of their leaders appears and attempts to communicate with the crew. As he continues to speak, neither Fitzcarraldo nor the audience has any idea what is being said and the look in the eyes of the man gives no clue as to what we are to understand. Here we understand that it is the inability of the Europeans to understand the language of the natives that prevents us from understanding their story or recognizing their individuality. For us, the natives indeed remain inaccessible and totally othered, but only because of our own linguistic ignorance. Koepnick points out that it is to Herzog’s credit that he refuses to pretend to be able to portray the Indians from outside of the imperial perspective or to show images of peaceful native village life, because to do so would be to give in to the illusion that we could ever gaze at the native without being seen in return (“Colonial Forestry” 158).

Adopting an argument from Bill Niven, Sharman sees in portrayals of undeveloped South American jungle and its natives a form of “spiritual exploitation,” whereby the weary Western soul colonizes, either in his imagination or by fact of migration, a “virginal” territory still unscathed by the devastation that has been wreaked upon European landscapes and organic communities by technological advance and rampant individualism. In the act of fantasizing itself, according to this argument, the European directly appropriates spiritual themes that Sharman sees as typical of native spirituality, such as the union between the individual and “something greater than oneself” (97). Sharman’s attempt to protect native cultural capital from the parasitic Westerner is flawed, however, in that it essentializes cultures and treats them as unitary and
static individuals. Ideas do not belong to cultures: they do and should belong to humanity. If Europeans are weary of the results of rationalism, industrialism, consumerism, and modernist isolation, then they must be allowed to adopt what Sharman considers to be healthier ideas rather than be admonished to stick to the ideologies that led to the “inner rot of European civilization” in the first place. I would argue that the converse is also true: because the essentializing of native culture posits a “primitive utopia” that lives in “aesthetic harmony” with nature, it wrongly precludes the possibility that native cultures can and do benefit from ideas arriving from the outside (Rollins 193, Herzog 11). Unfortunately, Sharman’s argument is largely misplaced with regards to Herzog’s portrayals of Amazonia, for unlike in more naive, romanticized representations of the “virgin” rain forest, Herzog’s jungle is in no way suited for European spiritual convalescence from the ills of rationalism or the industrial revolution, no retreat from those malignancies that, according her Sharman, define European culture: “the thirst for power and riches, corruption in all spheres of human interaction, and visions of racial superiority” (101). If anything, Herzog’s portrayal of the jungle breaks with a long tradition of romanticizing the jungle and its inhabitants by creating and highlighting its otherness.

Criticism could, however, be leveled at Herzog’s “spiritual exploitations,” but not in the sense that Sharman describes it. Herzog’s appropriation of native spiritualism life comes in the form of simply borrowing, altering, and re-presenting native mythologies in order to further his own, thoroughly Western point of view vis-à-vis the nature of truth. One of the most obvious examples is to be seen in the soundtracks to Aguirre, Fitzcarraldo, and Cobra Verde, all of which feature the music of Popol Vuh, a German electronica band headed by Herzog’s friend Florian Flicke and named after the religious writings of the Maya Indians of Central America. Not surprisingly, the music has precious little to do with native sounds or indigenous ideas,
despite the pretense of the band’s name. And although these soundtracks are deeply moving and suggestive of the great mysteries of human emotion, the “synthesis” that produces these haunting electronic sounds is clearly a Western phenomenon. Another example can be found in *Where the Green Ants Dream* (1984), a feature film dealing with the ongoing land conflicts between aboriginal Australians and development companies that serve the interest of white Australians. For this film, Herzog appropriated a Mayan creation story from the Popol Vuh and reformulated it as a myth of the Aborigines in what appears to be an explicit attempt to show the fundamental incompatibility between Western and native approaches to land use (Herzog 206), while at the same time implicitly claiming that, at least as far as revealing an “ecstatic truth” to a Western audience is concerned, one native culture is interchangeable with the next.

I’ve already mentioned the example of the text that Herzog superimposes on the opening scene of *Fitzcarraldo*, in which a mythological account of the creation of the world, allegedly taken from the native Indians themselves, is re-told to the audience. This re-telling is clearly problematic in the sense that presenting the jungle as unfinished creation (in native eyes) indirectly de-legitimizes native attempts to improve and develop the land and casts doubt upon their claim to it as their exclusive space. Thus, if the Westerner is going to fail in his attempts to “improve” this land, it is not because his claims to it conflict with native claims (as they have none), or because their lore precludes its development (since, from a Western perspective, Indian

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6 In no way am I attempting to argue that Herzog intends to delegitimize native claims to custodianship (if not ownership in the Western sense) of the land that they inhabit. In fact, Herzog has successfully intervened in politics in Peru in order to secure the property rights of native Indians who were involved in his film projects. What I am arguing is that his appropriation of native mythology serves directly to legitimize his own attempts to “complete” creation by conquering the chaos of the jungle in order to complete the film. Thus, while Fitzcarraldo’s ultimate failure to conquer nature reaffirms the incompatibility of the Westerner and the jungle, Herzog’s own success in actually getting the ship over the mountain and in completing the film reaffirms the immunity that the auteur filmmaker enjoys vis-à-vis the rules that the rest of us, including Fitzcarraldo, must follow.
lore only applies to Indians). If he fails, it is because the landscape itself, as separate from the natives, autonomously resists appropriation.

In his attempt to other native peoples, Herzog does not shy away from reference to the less-than-noble savagery of the Indians, particularly the Jíbaro, toward fellow human beings. Thus, when Fitzcarraldo’s captain warns “I fear that we four will soon end up as shrunken heads,” he is referring to the well-known practice among the Jíbaro tribes of decapitating and subsequently shrinking the heads of their captured enemies, which are obtained during what anthropologist Bengt Danielsson refers to as the Jíbaros’ “wars of extermination” (86). For German audiences, the reference to shrunken heads is likely to be particularly unnerving, as it evokes images of the infamous “shrunken head of Buchenwald” which was to become one of the most notorious pieces of evidence of Nazi savagery introduced at the Nuremberg war crimes trials.

Just as Herzog uses the highly charged symbol of the shiny, white skull to establish the otherness of the wild animal (e.g. in Grizzly Man), he also employs human skulls to establish the otherness of natives. In Cobra Verde, the African king, a corrupt local monarch who sells black slaves to white traders, uses human skulls by the hundreds to advertise his absolute power and

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7 The connection between severed heads and native savagery is also alluded to in Little Dieter Needs to Fly, as Dieter Dengler vividly describes how angry Laotian villagers beheaded his unarmed friend Duane with a machete.

8 Herzog’s characterization of (some) native tribes as mortally dangerous is not limited to their presentation in the films themselves. In Burden of Dreams, Herzog recounts how two of his Indian workers were shot with arrows and seriously injured by Indians of another tribe further upstream, members of which had paddled downstream looking for turtle eggs. Allegedly, the Indians of Herzog’s camp convinced him to lend them firearms so that they could travel upstream and make a “show of force” in order to prevent any further incursions. From his interview, it is clear that Herzog wants to convince the audience of the constant danger of violence posed by aggressive tribes not only to Westerners, but also to the South American crew and the indigenous cast, and he is clearly uncomfortable with the fact that Western-style negotiations seem as out-of-place in the jungle as Herzog himself.

9 See Douglas Lawrence, “The Shrunken Head of Buchenwald: Icons of Atrocity at Nuremberg.” Representations 63 (Summer 1988) 39-64.
adorn his home. In this case the skulls announce the king’s arbitrary brutality, establishing his absolute otherness vis-à-vis the Westerner, whose violence is rational and calculated. Thus, although the white trader may be forgiven for failing to see a real human being beneath the black skin and barbarity of of his Other, the king is depicted as essentially evil, selling his fellow Africans into the slow smothering death of slavery and celebrating death by collecting skulls as prizes.\(^{10}\) In *Aguirre*, the mutineers raid an Indian village only to discover the dangling skeletal remains of their former comrades, as well as a shiny white skull at the bottom of a water-filled clay pot. Assuming that the skull is proof that the natives are actually cannibals, the party of conquistadors immediately retreats to the river. The reference to cannibalism here is particularly noteworthy. While it may be true that, at the time of the Spanish conquest, exo-cannibalism (i.e., eating the flesh of captured human enemies) was practiced by a limited number of Amazonian tribes such as the Wari’ (Instituto Ambiental; Conklin), it seems that Herzog may himself be over-generalizing its prevalence in an attempt to establish difference between the particular barbarity of the Europeans with an equally ghastly native barbarity. In doing so, he contributes to a long literary tradition in which “the sign of the cannibal has served as an effective trope of the signifier of the other/Other” (Sewlall 159). Although it may be argued that Herzog’s conquistadors are simply expressing the ignorance and prejudices of their time, it must be considered highly suspect that there is no indication whatsoever in the film that would cast doubt upon the accuracy of their assessment. In other words, Herzog’s failure to gesture toward the

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\(^{10}\) It is worth noting that in the DVD commentary to the film, Herzog states explicitly that one of the things he was trying to convey was the extent to which Africans themselves were implicated in the slave trade. That a well-respected German filmmaker would attempt to diminish Euro-American guilt for the institution of slavery by citing the complicity of a small number of African leaders is tantamount to blaming the victims. His reasoning is no different than that of the former CDU politician Martin Hohmann, who claimed that Jews could be considered a “Tätervolk” (perpetrating people) because of the involvement of several individual Jews in the crimes of Bolshevism and Stalinism.
inaccuracy of the accusation of cannibalism misleads uninformed viewers and perpetuates a
negative stereotype of pre-Columbian indigenous cultures.

Herzog’s preoccupation with skulls as symbols of otherness is interesting, as the skull
seems to have a special place in recent German history. The pseudo-science of “phrenology”
which sought to prove a correlation between skull shape and personality, intelligence, and
criminality, was founded by German physician Franz Joseph Gall around 1800, and became an
important component of “scientific” racism well into the twentieth century. The Nazi fascination
with skulls, and particularly with the comparison between Aryan and “inferior” skulls, is
demonstrated clearly in the case of University of Strasbourgh anatomy professor August Hirt, who
in 1943 organized the killing of 86 Jews at the nearby concentration camp Strufhof-Nazweiler in
order to make a collection of Jewish skulls for public display.11 Those familiar with German
colonial history will remember that it took Germany fifty years to return the skull of the
rebellious Sultan Mkvava of the colony of German East Africa, which had been removed,
cleaned, and sent to Germany for public display after the chieftain killed himself in lieu of falling
into colonial German hands. That Herzog pulls from this history in his films of “the exotic” is
telling, because its function in establishing and symbolizing otherness is the common thread in
all these stories. However, it is important to keep in mind that Herzog’s othering of the Jibaro, or
of the African king, or of the grizzly, through manipulation of the symbol of the skull, is
anything but a call for destruction of the native. Rather, it is a call for the retreat of the Westerner
from hostile terrain.

Herzog’s Indians, like the forest they inhabit, are presented as radical alterity,
impenetrable to the gaze of the Westerner, who sees in the eyes of this ultimate Other not his

soul, but an empty blank stare which reveals nothing of his humanity. The viewer might expect Fitzcarraldo’s captain, whose uncanny ability to pinpoint his location by the taste of the river’s water at any given point, to have some understanding of the native Indians, who we assume to have the same ability. Yet it is precisely this character who insists that even a common language (through an interpreter) cannot bridge the gap in understanding, saying “you can’t tell what they really think.” Herzog’s intentional othering of the Amazonian Indian through the symbolism of the empty stare is all the more convincing when considered together with his commentary in *Grizzly Man*, where he derides Timothy Treadwell’s belief that he can understand grizzly bears by looking thoughtfully into their eyes at their souls, which aren’t so different from his own.

Herzog, on the other hand, tells the viewer that he sees nothing but a blank stare in the grizzly’s eye, a testament to the unbridgeable gap between wild animal and the human being. In the end, Herzog allows himself to be proven correct, as the story ends with Treadwell and his girlfriend being mauled to death by a hungry bear.

Herzog’s othering of the native is not limited to attempts to portray them as incomprehensible or exceptionally violent. In *The White Diamond* (2004), Herzog’s documentary about the efforts of British aerospace engineering professor Graham Dorrington to develop an airship to study the rain forest canopy in Guyana, Herzog uses a native Rastafarian, Marc Anthony Yhap, as a local guide. On the surface, Herzog seems to respect Yhap’s knowledge of the local geography and value him as a trusted friend, even going so far as to attempt to help locate Yhap’s long lost mother in Spain. However, an intertextual reading of the film reveals a disturbing cynicism in Herzog’s portrayal. At one point, Yhap leads Herzog and the camera crew to the top of a hill in order to view the Kaieteur falls. As the camera focuses in on a single drop of water, revealing an inverted image of the entire falls within the water drop,
Herzog asks Yhap whether he sees in this one drop of water the whole universe. Yhap turns to Herzog and, after a studied pause, says “I cannot hear what you say for the thunder that you are.” Initially, this seems to be a very lofty answer, indicating the inherent wisdom of the native and its superiority to the condescending, pseudo-philosophical babble of the Westerner. Yet Herzog’s audience will likely recognize the line as an exact quote from *Cobra Verde*, uttered by Francisco Manoel da Silva (Klaus Kinski) as he writhes on the ground in front of the brutal African king, Nana Agyefi Kwame II. Thus Yhap, far from being the wise native, appears as a copycat and his wisdom is revealed as a staged farce. Furthermore, audiences familiar with Herzog’s animosity toward the devilish stupidity of the chicken will take note that Herzog focuses particular attention on Yhap’s unyielding devotion to his best friend, a rooster with “five wives.” Here, Yhap unwittingly becomes the butt of a long-running Herzogian joke.

Perhaps Herzog’s most respectful presentation of “native knowledge” takes place in *Grizzly Man*. In order to demonstrate the folly of Timothy Treadwell’s hands-on approach to the grizzly, Herzog interviews Sven Haakanson Jr., executive director of the Alutiiq Museum in Kondiak, Alaska, who claims that his people (Alaska natives) have co-existed with grizzlies for seven thousand years precisely because they always maintain a respectful distance between themselves and the dangerous bears. What is interesting here is that Haakanson is a completely Westernized native, having earned his doctorate in Anthropology from Harvard. The only hint of “authentic” natives in the museum where the interview takes place is a glossy plastic model of a male native in traditional dress. It may be argued, as Koepnick has, that Herzog spares his viewer the illusion of authenticity by refraining from depicting natives in an idealized natural environment. But inasmuch as the highly educated, Westernized native serves as an unquestioned source of legitimate knowledge, and the glaringly artificial model of the native
serves to accentuate not only the illegitimacy of our Western constructions of native bodies, but also the incompatibility of native modes of living in a modern world, Herzog’s juxtaposition of these two poles serves to legitimize Western rationalism (even if flavored by leftover tidbits of “native” knowledge) while othering the real native by casting him as a relic of the past.

One might well wonder what purpose Herzog’s othering of the jungle landscape and its human and animal inhabitants serves. Indeed, Herzog’s often hostile treatment of these topics seems at first counterintuitive, given Germany’s historically impressive engagement with ecological preservation in the form of Naturschutz and Herzog’s own oft-repeated warnings about the destruction of the environment (Herzog 66) and his efforts to prevent the “polluting” of Indian culture by segregating the Indian actors from the European and mestizo actors (and filming crew) during the filming of Fitzcarraldo (Burden of Dreams). Thus, Herzog’s is not an argument for a rationalist “taming” of the rain forest or for a “modernization” of native Indian cultures. On the contrary, it is a call for disengagement, yet another articulation of what has now become a universal slogan against neo-colonialism: “Yankee Go Home!” The fact that Herzog himself refused to go home speaks less to the impossibility of the call than to Herzog’s sense of entitlement, a self-declared artistic immunity from the rules that are binding only for the non-artists of the world. This seeming double-standard, discussed more thoroughly in a later section, is brought into relief in one of Herzog’s interviews in Burden of Dreams, in which he explains

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12 It is to his credit that Herzog, unlike many of his critics, manages to portray the complexity of issues of ethnic identity and power relations in his Amazonian films. Particularly in Fitzcarraldo, the multiplicity of identifications frustrates attempts to delineate a binary system of colonizer vs. colonized and powerful vs. powerless. Although Fitzcarraldo with his conspicuously blond hair and snow white suit epitomizes the power of the colonizer, this power becomes meaningless as the native Jíbaro board the ship and his life (and that of the crew) is put in their hands. Yet instead of exercising their power to kill Fitzcarraldo and his crew (as they have so many other invaders—White and Indian), the Jíbaro decide to use it to rid themselves of the curse that has been ravaging their land. The successful haul of the ship over the mountain is credited not to Fitzcarraldo’s genius, but to that of the mestizo cook Huerequeque. And it is not the “white God” Fitzcarraldo who wants to teach the hostile Indians along the riverbank a lesson by way of gunfire, but the Westernized Indian mechanic, Cholo (Miguel Ángel Fuentes).
how production of the film was nearly shut down by a group of German “agitators” who had come to the set location and passed out photos of mass graves from Nazi concentration camps, telling them that this would also happen to them if they cooperated with Herzog’s production. The implication, of course, is that those German agitators have no “right” to be there, while Herzog, as artist, clearly does.

The Last Amazonian Virgin

In the language of critical literature dealing with European imperialism it is common practice to employ a gendered vocabulary which explicitly equates the violence of colonization with the act of rape, where the European is cast as a masculine rapist, and the jungle and its inhabitants are staged as feminized characters to be penetrated and exploited. Within this grammar, the jungle is often semantically equated with the virgin, and references to “virgin territory” and “virgin forest” abound. This understanding is superficially furthered by stereotyped notions of the symbiosis of the continental German and his beloved German forest as well as Herzog’s own alleged promotion of landscape from setting to character. Yet Herzog undermines both the Heimat and the Enlightenment notion of a virgin forest by casting the exotic jungle instead as both femme fatale and prostitute. Aguirre and Fitzcarraldo are both drawn into the heretofore unseen parts of the seemingly virgin forest by the promise of satisfaction of their lust for riches and power, only to be struck down when the true nature of that seductress is revealed. In Aguirre, the presentation of the deadly forest stands in direct contrast to that of Aguirre’s daughter, whose youth, reticence, and compliance to her father’s will is strongly suggestive of virginity. Indeed, the uncanniness of the scenes involving the interaction of the

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13 I do not claim that anti-colonialists invented the metaphor of “virgin” forest, but rather that many unwittingly adopt a problematic vocabulary which was disseminated by Romantic narratives of the “noble savage” and incorporated into colonial fantasy.
boat between Aguirre and his daughter derives not so much from their implicit incest, but from the juxtaposition of the loyal and virginal daughter in the boat and her treacherous sylvan double at the shore.

It seems that Aguirre’s daughter is, for Herzog, the last Amazonian virgin. In Fitzcarraldo, which was released ten years after Aguirre, the figure of the virgin has transformed into that of the prostitute, albeit a sympathetic one. Here, the obvious comparison is that between the colonial prostitute, who as Fitzcarraldo’s mistress becomes the financier and the facilitator of his many failed colonial projects, and the femme fatale in the form of the jungle and its inhabitants, who lure and then deceive Fitzcarraldo by assisting him to haul his ship over the mountain, only to later send it crashing into the rocks downstream in fulfillment of their own desire to rid the land of a suspected curse. It is easy to read this curse as the yoke of colonialism itself, and the association of the colonial project with prostitution and moral decay is indicative of Herzog’s condemnation of the colonialist enterprise.\(^{14}\)

**Art Über Alles**

Although Herzog’s jungle films are often understood to be critical of colonialism, this is clearly not their main, or even their intended function. While Aguirre most directly criticized colonialism by depicting the barbarism of the Spanish conquest of the Americas, Herzog’s later films are much more ambiguous in their relationship to the results of imperialism. Fitzcarraldo, for example, is depicted as a wholly sympathetic character in spite of the fact that he is essentially trying to rob native Indians of their land and resources. More striking is Herzog’s treatment of Francisco Manoel da Silva in Cobra Verde: although the white slave trader

\(^{14}\) It is interesting to note that during the filming of Fitzcarraldo, prostitutes were brought to the remote set (under the advice of a Catholic priest!) in order to ensure that the European, Brazilian, and Peruvian actors and crew would not be tempted to initiate sexual relations with Indian women, which presumably would have had disastrous results. Thus, the intersection of native and European cultures during production yielded precisely the same social consequences which Herzog, in the film, shows to be the result of colonialism (Burden of Dreams).
epitomizes the extreme inhumanity of colonialism, his death is depicted not so much as a direct
effect of his moral bankruptcy or even as retribution for the way he has treated other human
beings, but rather from the almost regrettable fact that the world has moved forward while he has
hedged his bets on the ideologies of the past. In Little Dieter, Herzog declines to directly criticize
American imperialist warmongering in Vietnam, opting instead to focus on the heroism of the
German-American fighter pilot shot down on a bombing mission over Laos, while sidestepping
questions as to the morality of his active, even ecstatic participation in the bombing of civilians,
or the fact that he killed several guards during his escape.

Herzog’s refusal to seriously engage the moral questions of colonialism, despite the fact
that he seems well aware of its evils, is a direct result of his unfettered Romantic veneration of
the single-minded obsessiveness of the artist, the poet, the adventurer, who by virtue of his gift is
given an artistic license which seems to exempt him from the rules that everyday people are
expected to follow. Thus, while Herzog can be said to have inverted certain paradigms of the
Romantic world view, particularly its naive sentimentalism via-à-vis nature and primitive
cultures, he wholeheartedly embraces a view of the artist as prophet, as someone whose duty it is
to give the masses the “truth” they long for, even if it means crossing boundaries that should
otherwise be respected. To that end, Herzog imbues his protagonists with a particularly German
brand of idealism and an obsessive zeal for achieving impossible dreams. To use a more
archetypically German constellation, both Aguirre and Fitzcarraldo continue the age-old
Romantic quest for Heinrich von Ofterdingen’s imagined “Blue Flower” (Petzke). Whereas
Aguirre’s obsession and later dementia are clearly indicative of the darker side of the late
Romantic period, Fitzcarraldo’s nominal quests for riches in one failed capitalist venture after
another are driven at their core by his presumably more lofty dream of bringing high art (in the
form of an opera house) to the jungles of South America, a goal which Herzog portrays as noble, although misguided. Indeed, in *Burden of Dreams* Herzog claims in one interview to be articulating through the figure of Fitzcarraldo the dreams of all his viewers, which clearly is not meant to include the Indians of Peru.

It’s not only my dreams, it’s my belief that they are yours as well, and the only distinction between me and you is that I can articulate. and that is what poetry or literature or film-making is all about. it’s as simple as that. I make films because I have not learned anything else. and I know I can do it to a certain degree. and it is my duty, because this might be the inner chronicle of what we are, and we have to articulate ourselves, otherwise we would be cows in the field.

Yet Herzog’s self-imposed, almost messianic mission to bring expression to the greatest hopes and fears of Western (and German) culture is revealed in another interview to be an extension of his own melodramatic understanding of the importance of his own will to achieve his own nearly impossible dreams: “If I abandon this project, I would be a man without dreams, and I don’t want to live like that. I live my life or I end my life with this project.” The sense of entitlement which accompanies the Romantic elevation of the dreamer to the status of prophet is articulated in *Fitzcarraldo* by the protagonist’s mistress Molly: when after a 1,200 mile journey down the river the couple arrives without tickets at an opera house in Manaus (Brazil) where they hope to see a performance by Enrico Caruso, they are stopped by an usher who refuses to let them enter. Molly convinces the usher, who also would love to see the performance but is likewise barred entry, to allow the two to enter without tickets, saying “He has no ticket, but he has a right!” Thus, while Fitzcarraldo’s right to exploit the jungle for rubber is clearly problematic in the narrative of the film, his proclaimed “right” to free entry at the opera, bestowed by the Romantic logic of his boundless love for the “universal” language of opera, is never called into question.  

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15 Here the entitlement of the dreamer Fitzcarraldo bears a striking resemblance to Herzog’s own sense of entitlement, not only to be the articulator of all of our dreams, but also to seize whatever means he needs in order to make his films. In the voice commentary to the DVD release of Aguirre, Herzog relates how he stole the movie
It may seem inappropriate to read the fictional characters of Aguirre, Fitzcarraldo, or Francisco Manoel da Silva as “artists” or the “real-life” characters of Dieter Dengler, Graham Dorrington, or Timothy Treadwell as “poets,” yet Herzog unquestionably endows these these characters with a kind of madness and creative spirit that embody the Romantic ideals of intuition, imagination, and extreme feeling. In other words, these characters perform the same function in Herzog’s films as the poet plays in the Romantic tradition. Herzog likewise tries to imbue his protagonists with the kind of individuality, originality, uniqueness, and a hint of madness and flirtation with demonic forces that are the mainstays of Romantic (and still quite prevalent) conceptualizations of the artist as creative genius. Fitzcarraldo’s plan seems preposterous and impossible. Both Dengler’s and Köpcke’s unbelievable escapes from the deadly rain forest are portrayed as resulting from their unique and uncanny knowledge of the secrets of the jungle.16 Dorrington claims to have developed the first working aircraft capable of close-up observation of the forest canopy, while Treadwell claims to be the only person on Earth to have lived among grizzlies for such an extended period of time.

Herzog’s exaggerated emphasis on the uniqueness of his characters seems to invite comparison between his characters and his own person. Indeed, Brad Prager’s suggestion that Kinski in the role of Fitzcarraldo is to be understood as a stand-in for Herzog himself could be taken one step further: Herzog values in his protagonists (and in the case of Kinski, his actors) camera that he used to make that film (and several others) from a school that he attended, explaining that as an artist he had a right to the tools of his art. The monkeys of the last scene of that movie were also obtained by way of deception: after the trappers whom Herzog had only partially paid for the capture of 400 monkeys sold those monkeys to someone in the U.S. for animal experiments, Herzog showed up at the airport, and, pretending to be a veterinarian, demanded (successfully) that the animals be turned over for proper vaccination. After using them for the scene, he released them into the jungle (Herzog 86).

16 The German Romantic roots of Herzog’s re-telling of the story of Dieter Dengler has less to do with Dengler’s journey overseas in order to pursue his inexplicable dream of flying than with the circumstances which landed him in the cockpit in the first place: his own Faustian pact with the U.S. military in which his pilot’s license was obtained at the moral cost of bombing civilians in Southeast Asia.
the same characteristics that he values in himself. And while their feats are matched (and sometimes surpassed) by his own feats, their failures are contrasted to Herzog’s own cinematic success. Thus, the originality of Fitzcarraldo’s fictional endeavor to carry a ship over a mountain parallels the uniqueness of the actual movement of a ship over the mountain for the making of the film, as Herzog intentionally avoided a Hollywood-style (and presumably easier) studio effect in favor of “authentic” action. The uniqueness of Graham Dorrington’s airship in The White Diamond is overshadowed in the film by Herzog’s dubious claim that his film crew was the first ever to film the “mysterious” cave area behind the Kaieteur waterfall. Furthermore, Herzog’s successful flight in Dorrington’s airship, during which he manages to shoot some footage of the forest canopy stands in uneasy contrast to Dorrington’s unsuccessful attempt to do the same thing ten years prior, an attempt which ended in the tragic death of another German filmmaker, Dieter Plage. Thus Herzog again prevails where others have failed.

Herzog’s relationship to Timothy Treadwell is likewise one of admiration, uncanny similarity, and subtle one-upmanship. He seems to celebrate the fact that Treadwell has broken out of a life that, although full of the intrigue associated with excessive drug use, is nonetheless unremarkable, in order to fashion for himself a persona where fact and fiction blend into something unique and interesting, and ultimately, marketable. To a certain extent, Treadwell’s myth-building is comparable to Herzog’s. Both changed their last names in order to be more theatrical: Herzog preferred the noble sound of Herzog (“Duke” in German) to his legal, more Slavic-sounding surname, Stipetić, and both insist upon the uniqueness and life-or-death importance of their work. Yet Herzog consciously attempts to differentiate Treadwell’s work from his own, often in the guise of compliment. In the film voice-over, Herzog repeatedly praises what he sees as Treadwell’s ability to capture moments of unbelievable beauty. Yet he subtly
establishes his own superiority by pointing out those quiet, seemingly empty moments when, in his opinion, the film seems to take on a life of its own, although he is sure that Treadwell himself is unaware of this. Thus Herzog takes upon himself the paradoxical task of explaining the “inexplicable magic” of Treadwell’s cinematography to the audience. Yet Herzog necessarily subordinates Treadwell’s images to his own editing process, during which Herzog establishes his own authorship of *Grizzly Man* by selecting only about one hour of a total of over one hundred hours of Treadwell’s footage for inclusion in the final product.

Perhaps the most solid evidence for Herzog’s Romantic privileging of the artist is the power that his grants to himself and other artists in the form of knowledge. Although it is generally taken for granted that narrators know more than they actually pass on to their readers, viewers, and listeners, the differential between the known and the expressed normally remains concealed, as the recipient of knowledge assumes that he or she is being given all relevant information. Authorship is most overtly established and proprietary knowledge most blatantly flaunted when narrators intentionally excise certain critical information from their narratives. In most cases, their elision has the purpose of keeping the reader or listener interested in the story. In Herzog’s case, however, his appropriation of knowledge is open and adverse, presented to the listener as privileged information that he or she is not allowed, as a “mere” consumer of art, to access. Herzog’s treatment of the Kaieteur falls in *The White Diamond* serves as an example. During the shooting, one of the crew managed to film the area behind the falls, normally accessible only to the millions of swifts that nest there. Herzog is quick to claim that this has never been done, and that the area has never been seen by human eyes. However, instead of showing us the image, he decides to keep it for himself, supposedly in deference to local Indian custom, which forbids the viewing of the mysterious area. In *Grizzly Man*, Herzog
continues to tease the audience with knowledge that it cannot possess. At one point, Herzog attempts to “exposes” Treadwell’s dependence on other people (in contradiction to Treadwell’s self-propagated mythology of extreme self-reliance) by noting that, at several points in time, Treadwell had been accompanied in the wilderness by various women “who here shall remain nameless.” The climax of the story, Timothy and Amie’s violent death, which is announced at the beginning of the film and which serves to keep the voyeuristic audience tuned in, is captured on audio tape. Jewel, the owner of the tape, has supposedly never heard it. Herzog, with his back to the camera, listens to the short tape while looking toward Jewel, who is visibly upset by Herzog’s facial expressions. Herzog then takes off his headphones and, assuming a serious and fatherly tone, admonishes Jewel never to listen to the tape, suggesting instead that she destroy it. Of course, the audience is never privy to the information on the audio tape, ostensibly out of respect for the dead. Thus, the artist revels in his right to access the knowledge that an audience, seduced by his play on their morbid voyeurism to watch the film in the first place, is forbidden to view. Certainly, it could be argued that Herzog’s refusal to air the audio tape serves ultimately to shame the voyeuristic viewer, who only endures the real, ecstatic moments of Treadwell’s life in order to be able to witness his death. In the end, however, Herzog’s own aural voyeurism goes unpunished, establishing yet again the immunity of the artist.

**Herzog’s Ecstatic Truth**

Perhaps one of Herzog’s clearest departures from Enlightenment rationalism, most obviously visible in his “documentary” films, is his oft-repeated disdain for cold scientific fact, his distrust of objectivity and the grand universal “harmony” which these concepts seem to imply. Herzog’s skepticism seems to reflect a modern aversion to the dehumanization to which the cold, raw calculations of industrialism subject the individual, and reflects his well-known contempt for a physical universe that he sees as being at best utterly indifferent to, and at worst,
actively engaged in creating, human suffering. Yet it is important to keep in mind that Herzog is not critically interrogating the existence of scientific fact or challenging objectivity as an inherently ideological means of oppression. Instead, he attempts to divorce the concept of fact from that of truth, relegating the former to the knowable, mappable realm of the hostile “outside” universe (and to such lifeless and mundane human endeavors as accounting) and the latter to the mysterious realm of the human mind,\textsuperscript{17} a formulation which he formally organized in his “Minnesota Declaration” in 1999.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, rather than deny the possibility of objective fact, Herzog simply dismisses the concept as irrelevant and largely useless in the quest for the deep inner truths of human existence.

As he makes clear in his “Minnesota Declaration” (see Appendix) and in endless interviews on the subject, Herzog doesn’t question the existence of absolute truth or attempt to show it as culturally relative. For him, the deeper levels of truth, those that go beyond the “accountant’s truth” of raw facts, are “mysterious and elusive” and can only be revealed through fabrication and imagination. At the same time, these truths are supposed to be immediate and obvious to the viewer, like the truth of a great poem (\textit{Incident at Loch Ness}). In other words, there is no need, according to Herzog, for academic analysis of cinema, because the meaning—the deep, universal truth of the film—is always immediately available for the viewer, as if through direct perception. Here, Herzog seems to fashion himself as a modern day Martin Luther, who seeks to undermine the authority of cinema “professionals,” (critics who lambaste

\textsuperscript{17} “Even the…the stars up here in the…in the sky look like a mess. There is no harmony in the universe. We have to get acquainted to this idea that there is no real harmony as we have conceived it. But when I say this, I say this all full of admiration for the jungle. It is not that I hate it, I love it. I love it very much. But I love it against my better judgment” (\textit{Burden of Dreams}). In \textit{Grizzly Man}, he refers to the “overwhelming indifference of nature.”

\textsuperscript{18} In 1999, Herzog formulated his “Minnesota Declaration” in a Minneapolis hotel room and presented it the following day at the Walker Art Center. He subsequently passed out photocopies of the manifesto at the Cannes Film Festival. The full text of the declaration is shown in the Appendix.
his work and film schools that focus on technique) in order to take his message straight to the public.

The ecstatic truth that Herzog wants to reveal (or from a critical perspective, construct), which is much more intimately connected to the sublime than to the beautiful (to use the Kantian dualism), is inseparably tied to visual images, and to a lesser extent to the soundtrack or the story itself. In his DVD commentaries, Herzog is quick to point out scenes in which he claims that ecstatic truth is being revealed. Within his feature films the “moment” perhaps most consistent with his theory occurs in Even Dwarfs Stated Small (1970), when the inmates of a mental asylum on a remote volcanic island, all of whom are midgets, revolt against the administration (also represented by an insane midget). Undoubtedly, a certain Dionysian ecstasy is at work in various sequences, as the child-like inmates not only set fire to the flowerpots, trash a car which they have set loose to run itself in circles, and laugh and scream hysterically as the imposing Apollonian order all around them is turned, at least temporarily, on its head. Important here is that the viewer is not a detached spectator, looking down from some fixed angle upon the chaos below: instead, the camera pulls the audience into the midst of the pandemonium, mostly at eye level with the marauding little people, moving frenetically from one location of orgiastic reverie to the next. Yet ecstatic freedom has its costs, and Herzog seems to find it quite affordable that the price of this fantastic orgy includes the bludgeoning to death of a nursing sow, the mock crucifixion of a terrified monkey, the shocking abuse of chickens, and ultimately, the revelers’ violent turning on their own fellow inmates Azúcar and Chicklets, who happen to also be blind. That the allegorical midget revolution apparently fails to succeed, a fact which landed Herzog heavy criticism from the local German academic community still reeling from its own revolutionary
failure two years prior, is utterly irrelevant in Herzog’s logic, as the sublime images of
destruction and temporary redemption seem to be an end in themselves.

In his Amazonian feature films *Aguirre* and *Fitzcarraldo*, the element of “ecstatic truth”
of his images is indeed mysterious and elusive. When discussing Herzog’s mise-en-scène, critics
often focus on Herzog’s preference for lingering landscape shots, such his seemingly
interminable focus in *Aguirre* on the awesome and seemingly insurmountable river rapids, the
effect of which far outlasts the mere fifteen seconds he dedicates to it. In the opening scene of
*Aguirre*, the camera futilely attempts to frame a sense of awe-inspiring totality of jagged earth,
threatening sky, and a mysterious fog. In *Fitzcarraldo*, Herzog likewise opens with breathtaking
aerial shots of vast swaths of Amazonian vegetation. Yet although these shots have a certain
aesthetic quality which evoke a sense of the awesomeness of a natural world which resists
Western representation, they fail to fulfill Herzog’s poetic promise of immediate and direct,
transcendent meaning. But if indeed landscapes are to be considered as semi-autonomous actors
in Herzog’s oeuvre, then the ultimate truth of his images must lie in the interaction between these
“natural” characters and human beings. With this in mind, the search for the “ecstatic truth” in
Herzog’s Amazonian feature films leads us away from the mere landscape shots to those scenes
where the human and the natural world collide in a way that might evoke human emotion that in
its sheer voluminousness resists Herzog’s frame. One of these moments occurs when
Fitzcarraldo’s captain responds to the blank stare of the native chief aboard the Molly Aida with
the line “You can’t tell what they really think.” The narrative posits an infinite divide between
the white man and the native, a kind of stubborn unknowability that exceeds limits of the word
and the intellect, and seeks to prove it by focusing on a radically othered native who simply
stares into the camera and insisting that we cannot know him. Thus, in the same way that Herzog
in his Minneapolis hotel room annuls the truth claims of the Cinema Verité by the sheer power of his own declaration, he attempts to enforce a poetic and sublime “ecstatic truth” in the unknowability of the native by proclamation alone. If there is an “ecstatic truth” to be found in the images of *Fitzcarraldo*, it is evoked in the sequence where the conflict between the recalcitrant and rebellious forest finally gives in to the awesome power of Western technology, as the Molly Aida slowly scales the mountain under her own raw power, the meager technology of the natives having proven itself insufficient for the task. In this scene, the literal and figurative high point in the film, the audience may be as close to the sublime as at any point in Herzog’s cinema: the seeming totality of Fitzcarraldo’s (and Herzog’s) victory over what was thought to be invincible verifies Molly’s earlier contention and Herzog’s belief that Romantic dreams really are all it takes to move from the finite to the infinite, and that the cost of this ecstasy, the destruction that it necessarily unleashes, is a small price to pay.

In Herzog’s later documentary films, the price paid for temporary entrance into the sublime is even more steep, as protagonists deeply enveloped in both Romantic and Weimar Classicist struggles seem to want to push the boundaries of the describable. In *Little Dieter*, Herzog uses various methods to try to invoke the unspeakable. As in other films, his primary mode is to insert silence in order to effect a displacement between text and feeling. The best example of this is when Dengler is sitting at the edge of the Mekong River trying to describe the bond he felt with his companion and fellow escapee from the prisoner-of-war camp, Duane. After beginning to describe how his relationship with Duane had developed into something even more important than his love for his family, Dengler breaks off into silence, barely holding back the tears. Herzog, in typical fashion, holds the frame, forcing the viewer to share in the moment when words fail to suffice. At other times, the indescribability of a moment of feeling is simply
(and, I would argue, insufficiently) invoked by declaration, as when Dengler asserts that words
cannot describe how he felt as thousands of his fellow sailors greeted him upon his return to his
aircraft carrier. In addition to his crude re-enactments of various stages of Dengler’s capture and
subsequent torture, Herzog also focuses in on several pencil sketches—presumably made by
American POW’s or perhaps Dengler himself—as Dengler narrates his harrowing escape. Not
unlike the abstract drawings of Auschwitz and other concentration camps made by inmates, the
crude sketches of the POW camp have the effect of liberating the extreme emotion of the
moment from the Medusa’s eye of a camera—actual or staged—which would only rob the
moment of its universal applicability by fixing its temporal and geographic specificity. This is
not to say that Herzog does not rely on actual images or footage of the time to “recreate” and the
moment. Indeed, he makes extensive use of archival footage of the bombing of Vietnamese
villages, Dengler’s post-rescue statements to the media, and even a U.S. Navy film about
surviving in the jungle, in order to both establish authenticity and comment on the folly of the
American effort (although Dengler himself never seems to doubt the ultimate rightness of his
mission). Yet true to his ideal that real truth is only revealed in fiction, Herzog also stages certain
aspects of the documentary in order to manufacture emotion. Having been denied access to the
Laotian jungle by local authorities, Herzog stages his reenactments of Dengler’s successive
captures, escapes in the jungles of Thailand, with hired Thai “guards” standing in for Laotian and
Vietcong captors.

As in the Amazonian films, the price paid by the jungle natives so that the German
dreamer might reach the heights is exceedingly high, a fact that Herzog mentions only briefly.
As he portends to describe to the viewer the way that Dengler viewed the firebombed landscape
below his bomber, Herzog once again draws upon the vocabulary of the dream, of the surreal.
Dengler himself claims that he never really knew how the people below were suffering until he was shot down and captured. Thus, the suffering of the colonized other is backgrounded while the heroic/tragic plight of the fighter pilot (and that of his friend Duane, who is beheaded by an angry villager) is brought to the foreground.

**Herzog’s German Vision**

Although Herzog has been associated historically with the New German Cinema, the question as to the extent to which his visions can be considered “German” visions and his films “German” films is one which has no unambiguous answer. If considered in relation to reception in Germany, one may be tempted to dismiss Herzog as unrepresentative, as his later films hardly ever have regular German distribution, and one can assume that his films don’t really speak to German mass markets. As an example, *Grizzly Man*, by far Herzog’s greatest success in many years, only appeared in German cinemas two years after its release in the US, and even then in very limited distribution. However, the relative lack of interest in Germany does not mean that Germans are loath to claim Herzog as one of their own. The USA-Correspondent for the conservative but widely distributed daily *Die Welt*, Uwe Schmitt, makes this clear in a recent article about the belated screening of *Grizzly Man* in Germany:

> Es ist sensationell und nur billig, daß Amerika seinem [sic] bayrischen Wahlbürger in Los Angeles nach 62 Lebensjahren und über 50 Spiel- und Dokumentarfilmen für seinen *Grizzly Man* feiert wie einen der ihren.20 (23)

Schmitt’s annoyance with American appropriation of German artistry is likely an articulation of a wide-spread fear of a seemingly unstoppable Americanization of German culture. Yet his ire is

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20 “It is sensational and cheap that, after 62 years of life and over 50 feature and documentary films, America celebrates its Los Angeles citizen-by-choice for his *Grizzly Man*, as if he were one of their own [my translation].”

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misplaced, for no matter how Americanized Herzog may seem to be superficially, no matter how much he admires and to some extent incorporates American ingenuity and pioneering spirit, or how long he has lived in California, Herzog remains German. In fact, it is precisely Herzog’s Germanness that seems to secure his relative popularity in the art-film circuit. Cinema-goers weary of Hollywood’s programmatic entertainment films are attracted not only to Herzog’s cinematic simplicity, but to his quirky, insistent, argumentative German personality as well. Thus, when in the making of his documentaries Herzog chooses to forgo trained voices and instead to insert his own strongly accented English voice for the narration, he is not only asserting a stronger claim of authorship of the material, but is also establishing his otherness vis-à-vis both the Hollywood establishment and his largely American public.

Some critics, most notably Davidson, have reacted critically to what they see as an intentional “false othering” of Germans within New German Cinema, whereby the slight disadvantages of Germans relative to other Europeans in various enterprises are highlighted in order to confer a “marginalized” status upon the German, while downplaying the great similarities between European cultures that would challenge the claim to German otherness (33). Certainly, Herzog’s endless tirades against the tyranny of television and Hollywood and his implicit claim to be delivering new images to an aesthetically stale world lend credence to Davidson’s argument. Herzog’s description of the “magic” of Timothy Treadwell’s footage in *Grizzly Man* serves as a fine example. As Treadwell is “unexpectedly” approached by one of his favorite foxes while filming a grizzly, he decides to film the fox’s playful antics by running backwards through a field while filming the fox as it chases him. As might be expected, the technical quality of the images is poor: since Treadwell is holding the camera and running backwards, the image is extremely unstable and the noise of the wind, Treadwell’s heavy
breathing and strained voiced calling to the fox all combine to make the scene seem extremely amateur. But Herzog, whose own rustic filming techniques have been criticized as amateurish, sees in this moment, which he describes as embodying “inexplicable magic of cinema,” a moment which the “studio directors and with their union crews could never dream of” (Grizzly Man). Since Herzog knows that his audience will identify Treadwell’s artistic “genius” with his own, his othering of Treadwell is little more than an attempt to paint himself as the absolute antithesis of the dominant industry, a heroic loner ignored by his own country. In fact, many of Herzog’s biographical documentaries serve this same othering function. Dieter Dengler is a hero whose story has been ignored by mainstream documentarians. Dorrington’s airship projects are full of promise, yet underfunded by the “establishment.” By painting himself as the maverick filmmaker who tells the untold stories of “marginalized” artists, dreamers, and heroes, Herzog paints himself as equally marginalized, a latter day prophet speaking the ecstatic truth that the powers-that-be want us to forget. That his “marginalized” protagonists are, like himself, white, Anglo-Saxon males of considerable privilege seems to escape Herzog altogether, and certainly opens him up to the type of criticism articulated by Davidson. However, I believe that Davidson’s analysis of the fetishized German other in New German Cinema is less applicable to Herzog’s films that it may be to other NGC filmmakers: for unlike many of his colleagues, Herzog is not primarily interested in the question of the German’s place in the post-war period. It must be kept in mind that the films for which Davidson reserves his harshest criticism, Aguirre and Fitzcarraldo, cannot be simply categorized at attempts to other the German Nazi or relativize German atrocities of WWII by comparison to the Spanish conquest of the Americas (Aguirre) or to assert the “otherness” of postwar German artists within the colonized space of American cultural imperialism (Fitzcarraldo). Certainly, parallels between Herzog’s non-
German characters and landscapes and their German counterparts, real and imagined, are easy to draw. Thus, although Herzog denies that he had Hitler in mind when he wrote the script for *Aguirre*, I find this not only irrelevant to my own reading but also impossible to believe: the parallels between the two leaders who murder their ways to the top only to bring themselves and everyone around them to ruin are too simply too obvious to ignore. And while Fitzcarraldo doubtlessly and intentionally is a strong proponent of certain aspects of Romantic German longing, I believe it is going to far to write him off as a mere stand-in for the “marginalized” and under-appreciated German in post-WWII Europe. And although Fitzcarraldo’s Irishness could be read as analogous to Germanness in the sense that both of these identities were to varying degrees subject to intra-European colonialism (although I, like Davidson, find the idea of “colonized” Germany problematic), the fact of the matter is that Fitzcarraldo’s Irishness is simply a matter of historical fact and cannot be cited as proof of Herzog’s intention to create “othered” Germans.  

Herzog’s well-known lack of audience in his own country is not necessarily a sign that his work doesn’t speak to a certain subset of contemporary German values or represent a particularly German world view. I would argue, on the contrary, that it is precisely Herzog’s connections to the more unsavory parts of German self-awareness that has prevented him from achieving the same kind of fame at home as he has abroad. In other words, it is Herzog’s unrefined Germanness, that many Germans find unsettling. Thus, Herzog’s depictions of grossly deformed Africans (final scene of *Cobra Verde*), German Midgets (*Even Dwarfs Started Small*), the mentally ill (*Stroszek*), enslaved and abused Indians and Africans, and aboriginal Australians

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21 I do not intend to argue that Fitzcarraldo’s Irishness cannot be read symbolically, because I believe that everything can be interpreted symbolically and that to do so is to enrich the reading. However, Davidson’s argument is based on his belief in Herzog’s intention to create othered Germans as a political statement, and thus he falls into the intentional fallacy.
jumping wildly in front of a bulldozer (*Where the Green Ants Dream*), as well as his mock-ethnographic sequences in which the camera interrogates the physiognomies of dangerous indigenous men and bare-breasted native women, are all liable to evoke uncanny revulsion in the post-WWII German mind, as remnants of a suppressed pre-war German aesthetic establishing Aryan perfection through active dis-identification with non-Aryan degeneration.

Although Dieter Dengler wears an American uniform and is portrayed as personifying an American pioneering spirit that Herzog seems to admire, his is a German story and his struggle has its roots in German literary history. In an effort to overcome the limits of daily realities, Dengler makes a Faustian bargain with the imperial Mephistopheles in order to reaches new levels of being that are otherwise unreachable. And like Goethe’s Faust, Dengler’s self-created suffering is eventually overcome as redemption is granted not by his own efforts, but through grace alone. The resulting losses may indeed be tragic, but the sequence of events is presented as somehow necessary, as if the protagonist’s actions had been divinely preordained in order to teach us a tragic lesson about the nature of man, and the crimes of the protagonists are justified by the mere intensity of his desire.

It could be claimed that in many of Herzog’s films, the Germanness that he articulates is an ever-present tension between the rationalism, organization, and industry of the Teutonic Prussian and those “hard-drinking, hard-fighting Baroque people with an exuberant fantasy life” with whom Herzog most strongly identifies—the Bavarians (SFBG Interview “Bavarian cream: Herzog blogged”). This dualism may seem anachronistic in today’s Germany, where mobility is often an economic necessity. However, a number of current debates indicate that a certain tension between the competing sensibilities of Germanness that Herzog enumerates is still playing itself out on a national stage. For example, in May of 2006 a brown bear from Italy,
nicknamed Bruno, crossed into Germany, making him the first wild bear to be seen in Germany since 1835. As one might expect, his arrival was hailed by environmentalists as well as the public, which was doubtlessly enthralled that the inspiration for both the gummi and the teddy (as well as for the common names Benno and Björn), had returned to a country from which it had been hunted into extinction. Yet this brief German fairy tale was soon to come to a tragic end: as soon as he began to kill and eat sheep and raid beehives, Bruno was promptly declared Staatsfeind and subsequently tracked down and shot dead in Herzog’s home state of Bavaria. The ensuing reaction sheds light on the centrality of the relationship between human being and uncontrollable nature which informs various modes of German self-understanding. While the Steiff company was busy preparing its commemorative Bruno-Bär for market, mourners gathered next to a six-foot stuffed replica of Bruno in Munich to stage a mock funeral. In a move ripe with still more stand-in German identity symbolism, some of the protesters carried a sign reading “We mourn Bruno! Never Again Bear-Murder in Bavaria!”

Defenders of the killing of the bear, a clear minority of the general public, tended to stress the physical danger to human beings and livestock that the bear presented and mock the naivety of those who would anthropomorphize the wild animal. Their argument, the cold, rational calculation of the Teutonic German, is pitted against an alleged Romantic identification with nature that is the hallmark of Heimat sentimentalism.

The debate about Bruno had hardly cooled down when the Berlin Zoo announced the birth of a polar bear cub named Knut, who quickly became the darling of the German public and an international media celebrity. However, the story of Bruno is not forgotten: instead, Knut has

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22 According to an n-TV poll, 69% of Germans supported capturing the bear alive and moving it to a protected area. 19% felt the bear should be left alone completely, while only 12% supported the decision to shoot the bear.
allowed the competing notions of German Tierschutz to become once again reduced to a geographical polarity, where Bavaria is characterized as populated with dumb German hillbillies with rifles, and Berliners are presented as civilized animal lovers. Parliamentarian Petra Pau, reacting to suggestions that the cub be “allowed” to die since its mother had abandoned it, remarked coldly: “Berlin ist nicht Bayern. Ergo wird es Knut besser gehen als Bruno.” (“Berlin is not Bavaria. Therefore, things will go better for Knut than [they did] for Bruno”; Clauss 2007). Obviously, these public discussions have a direct bearing on my discussion of Herzog. Although Herzog clearly proposes an alternative type of Germanness, one that challenges the stereotype of the German as overly rational, serious, industrious and cold, and offers in its place a dreamy and playful Bavarian mensch, an idealized Germanness worthy of King Ludwig and his exuberant castles. Yet in the present debates, it is Herzog’s argument about the bear that appear cold and calculated, leaving no room for an emotional bond between wild nature and mankind. In light of the public’s obsession with the playful white teddy bear named Knut, it seems that Herzog is a marginalized German after all; not in relationship to other Europeans or even to Third-World natives, but to the majority of Germans with whom his message fails to resonate.

**Writing Germanness in the Jungle: Uwe Timm’s *Der Schlangenbaum***

As I mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, *Der Schlangenbaum* is Timm’s 1986 novel about European economic intervention in South America. As a critical anti-colonialist work, it shares many of the concerns that are raised in Herzog’s jungle films: the seeming incompatibility of Western technology with Latin American cultures and landscapes, the limited possibilities and enormous challenges of intercultural communication, and the tension between mankind and the environment. At the same time, Timm’s novel goes further in tying the colossal failures of various economic policies in the so-called Third World and the murderous policies of dictatorial political systems to a specific German history and historical responsibility.
In the following sections, I will first show how Timm’s novel is in dialogue with Herzog’s jungle films and then show how the novel marks the development of a new and more mature understanding of the relationship between German culture and its Latin American counterparts.

**Native Fantasies**

When the German engineer Wagner’s company offers him the chance to spend six months in Argentina in order to turn around the faltering construction of a paper factory, he agrees immediately. What drives him to this hasty decision is neither the tedium of his wholly uninspiring marriage nor the frustrations of fatherhood. Rather, it is the potential to fulfill his boyhood dream of travelling to the South American jungle, the excitement about coming face to face with real, authentic Indians. It is a typically German fantasy, which Wagner shares with his son, who begs his daddy to bring back some Indian arrow heads when he returns. Yet Wagner’s fantasies about the Indians are quickly shattered after he is confronted with a largely Indian workforce at the project. These natives, he finds to his chagrin, continually steal supplies and equipment, leaving him unable to meet his deadlines. Furthermore, their utter disregard for fixed work schedules offends Wagner’s sense of order and duty. His relations with them sour significantly after he inadvertently runs over an Acaray snake in the road on his first day at the construction site: according to Indian tradition, anyone who kills the snake is cursed to die by drowning. Wagner’s utter inability to comprehend why anyone would take such a superstition seriously serves as the first sign of what comes to be a principle theme of Timm’s novel; namely, the incompatibility of European and Native American cultures, the same anti-romantic notion so prevalent in Herzog’s jungle films.

The attitude of Westerners toward the natives is summed up by Wagner’s incompetent and usually drunk colleague, Steinhorst. Like the captain of Fitzcarraldo’s ship, Steinhorst’s many years of experience dealing with the Indians have only taught him that they are utterly immune to
logic and therefore unpredictable (190). Yet Wagner refuses to adjust his methods to the culture in which he is literally immersed: in response to the stealing he attempts to institute a system that would require all bags to be searched upon leaving the site—one of many changes that poison the relationship between him and the Indians. Even when he is trying to help them he only causes trouble. After one of the workers sustains a life-threatening injury, Wagner insists on calling an ambulance, even though all his colleagues tell him not to meddle in the workers’ issues and the Indians themselves insist that there is nothing wrong. Wagner’s intransigence results in the arrest and deportation of some of the workers, thus deeply offending the remaining ones. Furthermore, Wagner orders that the workers build a latrine for better sanitation, unintentionally provoking bad feelings among those who do not want to perform that work or resent being forced to use these new and unfamiliar facilities. In a final faux pas, Wagner sticks his finger into a bowl of food that is being prepared by one of the Indians, who is deeply offended and throws the bowl on the ground. All of these misunderstandings lead to a worker strike, which, as required by the martial law of the dictatorship, is immediately reported and quashed by the military, thus devastating Wagner’s prospects of completing the project on time.

The only Indian with whom Wagner has any contact is his assistant and translator Juan, who as a boy was raised in an area populated by German-speaking Mennonites who employed the local Indians and eventually sent Juan to a missionary school in Europe. In addition to standard High German, Juan also speaks the northern German dialect known as Plattdeutsch (which Wagner also speaks), and therefore becomes a trusted advisor. However, since he is only a local worker and not a German, Juan is often shut out of vital conversations about serious issues because of suspicions regarding his loyalties. Thus, Juan plays a role very similar to that
of Cholo in *Fitzcarraldo*: an indispensible native who nonetheless is marked as an outsider, an other.

The otherness of the Indian workers at the construction site is marked by physical and geographical boundaries as well as social ones. The workers live in rancid barracks, with several men to each unit, and they neither eat nor socialize with the Europeans. They generally only speak through spokesmen, whom they choose to represent them in important work-related matters. Remarkably, this is a nearly identical arrangement to that which Herzog engineered between the European team filming *Fitzcarraldo* and the natives they hired to “play the part” of Indians in the film, as documented in *Burden of Dreams*. Indeed, it seems that Timm has gone overboard in his adoption of the European concerns voiced in Herzog’s narrative: when Fitzcarraldo’s captain warns him that the crew could end up as shrunken heads, at least he is referring to a custom actually practiced—however infrequently—by the natives in the area. However, when Wagner’s colleague Steinhorst says jokingly that the European crew had been worried that Wagner’s repeated offenses to the Indians might result in his becoming a shrunken head, this can only be an indication of European ignorance, as headhunting had never been practiced in Argentina or Bolivia, but only further north in Ecuador and Peru. Thus, whereas Fitzcarraldo’s early twentieth-century Captain has grown wise enough through his experience with natives to understand the limits of his ability to know them, Steinhorst’s wisdom vis-à-vis the natives is seriously called into question.

**The Native as Victim of Nature and Colonialism**

In much the same way that Herzog does, Timm goes to lengths to disrupt the romantic image of the native Indian living in harmony with nature, insisting instead on the precariousness of native existence. Timm’s Indians are threatened on two fronts: by the nature in which they live and by the effects of half a millennium of colonization and subjugation. One of the main
Spokesmen for the Indians in Der Schlangenbaum is a man known simply as the jaguar man, so named after he killed an attacking jaguar with his bare hands. The huge scar on his face, the last physical trace of the attack, becomes a focal point of an entire local folklore, in which the tale of his heroic deed is recounted even to those who don’t know him. In another apparent reference to Herzog’s experiences filming Fitzcarraldo, Timm has Wagner witness the bravery of a local man who without so much as flinching faces the excruciating pain of having his finger chopped off after having been bitten by a poisonous snake. Indeed, the nature that Timm depicts is dangerous to the point that it becomes unnatural. Instead of supporting the factory, the treacherous ground swallows it up like a piece of food. Animals take on gigantic form: there are locusts the size of a hand, rats the size of a dachshund. Nature even begins to take on the aggressive and merciless characteristics of the ruling military junta, as huge water droplets smash into the ground like grenades.

Although both Herzog and Timm are determined to show that the raw power of nature, particularly in the jungle, is harsh on Europeans and natives alike, they take different approaches to the portrayal of the effects of colonialism, which in turn reflect slightly different attitudes toward the possible role that Europeans can play in this environment. Herzog’s portrayal (and apparent condemnation) of the inhuman treatment of the Indians by the Spanish Conquistadors in Aguirre is balanced against an almost open admiration for the single-minded determination of the brutal colonial hero. In Fitzcarraldo, the portrayal of the subservience of both Indians and blacks seems to invite criticism of colonialism, but again the overwhelmingly positive portrayal of the colonial hero serves, perhaps unintentionally, to mitigate the negative aspects of European conquest and cultural imperialism.
Uwe Timm, on the other hand, is unequivocally negative in his portrayal of the effects of colonialism on native peoples. The suffering of the Indian workers at the factory, their daily humiliations as well as the physical deprivation made obvious in the descriptions of their crowded, smelly barracks are depicted without reference to anything positive. Even the fact that they earn more money here than they could anywhere else (a fact Herzog uses to justify his mass employment of Indians at pay rates the Europeans find appalling) only serves to highlight the poverty and desperation of these people. It is telling that Timm has Wagner reading Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and *Outpost of Progress*. What Wagner apparently doesn’t realize until the novel’s end is that he is part of a similar conquest as that described in *Heart of Darkness*, where the old order—guns backed by money—has been replaced with a new yet equally deadly one: money backed by guns.\(^{23}\)

The attempted industrialization of the country also has other, less obvious effects on the native people as well. As Wagner eats with his young mistress at a restaurant, he is confounded by the availability of a certain type of fish that is ordinarily foreign to the region. His waiter then explains that, since the construction of a huge dam on the Paraná river, several species of fish have inexplicably ended up in local waters. The suggestion here is clear: the damage caused by forced development is often unseen, and worse yet, unpredictable.

The difference in Herzog’s and Timm’s portrayals of the dangers of colonialism can be explained through an examination of the role of the colonial hero in their work. Most instructive for the case of Herzog is the emotional weight tied to Fitzcarraldo’s endeavor to drag his ship over the mountain. In the narrative of *Fitzcarraldo*, the protagonist’s obsession with achieving

\(^{23}\) Another indication that Timm is attempting to draw parallels between the horrors of military colonization as depicted in *Heart of Darkness* and those inherent in economic “neocolonialism” is that, just as Conrad does, Timm refuses to actually name the country in which the story takes place, although abundant references make the setting both obvious and unequivocal.
his dream at all costs is depicted positively. To quote Molly: “It is only the dreamers who move mountains!” Yet for Timm, the dream has evolved into a nightmare. When Wagner tells his colleague Hartmann that he is dreaming more frequently since his arrival in the jungle, Hartmann replies that what he is actually experiencing is the earth attempting to assert itself in the conscience as a raped, barren landscape. Thus, in Der Schlangenbaum there are no European heroes, only dislocated Europeans whose displacement is rendered either less or more uncomfortable depending on their ability to adapt, as much as possible, to the local cultural milieu. Yet even assimilation to local norms is no guarantee of moral high ground, even if it reduces difficulties. Steinhorst, for example, continually berates Wagner for his refusal to give in to local inevitabilities, such as the poor quality of the cement, the need to bribe local officials to keep things running smoothly, and the maintenance of inefficient business relationships based on cronyism. Yet Steinhorst is hardly a voice for cultural understanding; rather, he is someone who merely follows the path of least resistance, a lazy drunkard willing to put people’s safety at risk in order to avoid difficulties. Wagner on the other hand, fights to maintain high standards at the expense of alienating local workers and suppliers. His struggle is, of course, in vain, and confronted with the impossibility of continuing in his present manner, Wagner decides to cave in, accepting a load of cement even though he knows the it will eventually fail, causing the factory to sink into the tropical mud. Yet it is with regret and a deep sense of his own otherness in this place that Wagner gives up—when Steinhorst becomes too friendly in his invitation to a celebratory drink, Wagner rebuffs him with a wave of his hand and a verbal response that shows that his acceptance of the terms of engagement in Argentina is involuntary at best: “Wir duzen uns nicht” (288). Thus, Wagner’s resignation in the face of issues involving his own integrity
mark a significant internal change, a realization of his own displacement and of the fact that he can only save himself by allowing the project to fail and himself to be sent back to Europe.

The Dislocated European

As I have shown, the locations of displacement in Herzog are approached not only as places of colonial and natural brutality. More importantly, they are also places of curiosity, adventure, and unfettered imagination. In Fitzcarraldo, the institution of the opera is not so much questioned as it is magnified and glorified by its juxtaposition to native spaces. The opera house in Manaus, where Molly argues for Fitzcarraldo’s “right” to view a performance, is a place of wonder and even magic, even for the locals who would give anything to be allowed inside. This is clearly the case in other Herzog films as well: In Wings of Hope, the protagonist Juliana is celebrated as a hero as she uses her hard-won academic knowledge of the jungle to escape its deadly clutches. At the same time, her dislocatedness is accentuated by the fact that she has landed in the jungle after falling from what is one of the most striking symbols of twentieth-century Western technology: the airplane. The story of Dieter Dengler in Little Dieter becomes the necessary springboard for the action of the film. In Grizzly Man, it is Timothy Treadwell’s unsanctioned physical presence in the Grizzly maze that drives the entire story, from his heart-warming, frolicsome adventures with his animal friends to his eventual death. In all of these cases, Herzog deemphasizes issues of propriety of place and the moral implications of these protagonists’ geographical and cultural intrusions while focusing on the supposed heroic aspects of these individuals, which seemingly only manifest themselves in situations of dislocation.

For Uwe Timm, European dislocatedness is neither a wellspring of heroic daring nor an innocent adventure. Rather, it is the cause of enormous suffering while bringing the European
financial gain at the expense of intercultural understanding. Signs of dislocation become, from the very beginning of the novel, symbols of the injustice of colonialism, and to a certain extent, the impossibility of effectively dealing with its results. Even before leaving Germany for Argentina, the location of the construction site is revealed as an un-place: try as they might, neither Wagner nor his wife can find the nearest town in their atlas. Upon arriving in Buenos Aires, Wagner is shocked and disappointed that the Argentines look exactly like Europeans and not like Indians, as he had thought they would. When he arrives at the work site, the picture is quite different: the faces he sees are either those of poor Indians or of well-protected, curiously out-of-place Europeans. Thus Wagner is confronted, from the very beginning, with the perplexing multiplicities and shocking economic disparities which characterize the country.

Throughout the novel, it is the man-made structures that appear most out-of-place and which symbolize the destruction brought on by colonialism. At first, these structures appear impressive and seem to indicate the successful industrialization of the so-called Third World. In Buenos Aires, the buildings are massive and opulent, representing the best in old-world magnificence. Yet Wagner soon learns that this apparent wealth has been purchased at the price of enormous public debt, corrupt government, and low-paid labor. When he arrives at the construction site, he is shocked to find that the factory foundation has been built in the wrong spot. Thus, when the project fails at the end of the novel, when the building literally sinks into the mud, it becomes clear that “dislocated” civilization is doomed to failure. Even before this final failure, Wagner accidentally stumbles upon another failed construction site that foreshadows the fate of the paper factory. As Wagner tries to find his way back to the construction site after having his car dismantled by thieves, he lands on an enormous six-lane bridge spanning a wide canyon. As he marvels at this gigantic symbol of technological progress,
he realizes that both ends of the bridge are met with narrow dirt roads, each leading back into the jungle. Thus, like the unused yet rusty steam engine that sits on a few meters of unconnected track at the isolated jungle train station in Fitzcarraldo, the opulent bridge in Der Schlangenbaum becomes a symbol not only of the corruption, poor planning, and vanity of successive rulers, but also of the uselessness of Western technology when it is forced onto an alien culture and landscape.

While the mismatch between dislocated Western structures and the harsh jungle landscape serve to highlight the costly results of Eurocentrism and the colonialism which it both powers and legitimizes, in Timm’s text it is the dislocated European himself who provides the most powerful argument against Western intrusion. Indeed, it is Wagner’s experiences with other Europeans in Argentina, in particular other “Germans,” which most effectively illustrate Timm’s understanding of what constitutes proper Germanness in the postwar era.

The German Other

In the Argentina that Wagner comes to know, people of European descent live separately from the natives. The Otherness of these Indians, as I have pointed out, is marked physically by fences and barriers. But perhaps more interesting for the current study is the relationship that Wagner, as a continental German on a temporary assignment in an “exotic” foreign country, has with fellow Europeans in general and Germans specifically. In other words, it is the process of saming and othering within the confines of Green Hill that are most instructional. Immediately upon arrival, Wagner is invited to several high-society parties by other Germans who live on the Hill. It is at these parties where the reader is introduced to several Europeans representing various groups who have come to Argentina for any number of reasons. Among these people there are both perpetrators and victims: there is Durell, a Belgian who is rumored to have committed atrocities in the Congo. Then there is Bley, an Austrian who fled his native Vienna in
1938 only to become both rich and famous in Argentina through a chocolate business he started from scratch. Although not explicitly stated, one can assume that Bley is a Jew, particularly because of his refusal to stand near a certain Bredow, who is known to be a former S.S. officer involved with the Einsatzgruppen (killing squads) in Russia. Bredow asks Wagner if he is related to the former general of the same name, which Wagner hastily denies. Wagner’s initial disbelief and then clear uneasiness at encountering a possible Nazi fugitive—Bredow is apparently afraid that the Israelis are on his trail—is a clear result of the “temporal othering” of the Nazi in postwar German society which I discussed in the introduction.

Yet Wagner’s unease with Bredow is not the only case of temporal othering that is portrayed in Der Schlangenbaum. The Coronel, a local military leader whose cooperation is vital to smooth operation of Wagner’s project and who frequently shows up at the parties on Green Hill, is the son of German immigrants to the country. Through this character Timm ties the military abuses of the dictatorship directly to the shameful tradition of German militarism which for the most part has been transformed in Germany itself, but which is apparently free to flourish in foreign environments. At the same time, the abuses of the military are tied to the unpredictable wrath of nature itself when Hartmann explains the disappeared as suddenly being “einfach weg, wie vom Boden verschluckt” (simply gone, as if swallowed up by the ground; 215). Thus, when the Colonel claims that, in the entire country, only the military functions according to (supposedly higher) European standards, it becomes clear that when German culture is imposed in foreign lands, only tyranny, which is synonymous with nature’s arbitrary terror, can result.

One final case of temporal othering in Der Schlangenbaum deserves attention, namely, Timm’s othering of the Russian-German and Mennonite-German minorities in Argentina. Wagner is taken by surprise when he finds that his housekeeper Sophie is a member of a
German-speaking minority which has been living in largely rural colonies for over a hundred years. His estrangement from her and her community derives from her extreme religiosity: every time she speaks, she warns Wagner to beware of the whores of Babylon, and to prepare for the Day of Judgment which is soon to be at hand. In another scene, Wagner is lost and looking for a bus station to get him back to his construction site when he stumbles upon a village resembling something from the old-world Europe. A hoard of blond children run up to him asking in Low German dialect for candy, and soon he finds himself in the quaint little house of what appears to be an elder in the Russian-German community, who likewise recites Bible verses and beseeches Wagner to repent. After having a few beers, Wagner begins to be unnerved by the man’s bizarre rambling, an uncanny feeling which is intensified by his discovery that several of the members of the family have six fingers. He promptly excuses himself and hurries from the village without looking back. In his encounter with these seemingly anachronistic Germans, which Steinhorst collectively refers to as a “Kuriositätenkabinett” (curio cabinet) ” with whom “Diskussionen sind zwecklos” (discussions are pointless; 25), Wagner is confronted with a German past which he adamantly rejects as both oppressive and visibly degenerate. In this example, Timm not only contrasts the modern, rational, secular German with the pre-modern irrationality of religious fanaticism, but he also follows Herzog’s lead by turning German fantasies of Heimat on their head. Behind the familiarity of the Heimat imagery—the pre-modern, close-knit farming village of half-timbered houses and blond speakers of a supposedly more “authentic” ur-German dialect—all of which are supposed to project sameness—there lies an unsettling Otherness which cannot be overcome. Timm’s anachronistic “German” community is little more than a museum piece, a relic that for other nations would serve as proof of their historical continuity, becomes for the postwar German a temporal Other. Yet whereas the contemporary German is quick to
recognize the need to reach out to his ethnic and geographical others, the othered prior Self remains beyond any rapprochement.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to examine the ways in which two very well-known German storytellers weave their conceptions of Germanness into narratives set in exotic and dangerous places through both film and print media. The selection of these exotic settings disrupts the everyday relationships that Germans have with their “Others” in Germany (Turks, Arabs, and Russian immigrants) by posing new sets of selves and others whose relationships are negotiated in imagined spaces where identity fantasies are free to develop as the artist chooses.

Despite the fact that actual Germans play no role in the narratives of his first jungle films (Aguirre and Fitzcarraldo), Herzog draws from a deep well of German cultural and literary history and imbues his protagonists with sensibilities strongly identified with elements of German Romanticism, particularly in the privileging of the individual artist as a source of ultimate truth. Equally compelling is Herzog’s strong (late Romantic) preoccupation with notions of unknowability, mystery, the uncanny, and the darker sides of human life, complete with inner daemons that assure that the highest imaginable ecstasy, the ecstasy of truth, is paid for with an almost existential agony and suffering. Other elements of Romanticism are turned on their heads: the Heimat abroad is revealed as eternal death, as mountains, rivers, trees, and grassy plains become instruments of a malevolent universe bent on destroying the illusions of harmony and safety. The cost of Herzog’s veneration of the poet/artist/dreamer is high. As John Davidson has argued, although Herzog nominally criticizes the mechanics of colonialism and the destruction this Western institution has wreaked on the so-called Third World, both the narrative and the production of his films recreate and re-inscribe the same colonial power differentials between Western heroes and native Others that they ostensibly criticize. However, Davidson also insists
that, like other New German Cinema filmmakers, Herzog attempts to create falsely “othered” Germans by highlighting the “marginalized” or “colonized” status of Germans and/or the German film industry vis-à-vis other European powers, a move which masks the huge power differences between First- and Third-World countries. However, I would argue that Herzog neither intends, attempts, nor manages to show Germans as marginalized; rather, he attempts to paint himself as a marginalized filmmaker by pointing to his own relative lack of reception in his home country and accentuating his “heroic” opposition to monolithic Hollywood aesthetics and practices.

Uwe Timm’s *Der Schlangenbaum* serves in certain critical ways both as an answer—and an update—to Herzog’s *Fitzcarraldo* and to Davidson’s view of “othered” Germans. Whereas *Fitzcarraldo* is set in the early part of the twentieth century (i.e., beyond the memory of the vast majority of the viewing public), Timm’s novel is set during the brutal military dictatorship in an unnamed South American country in the late seventies or early eighties, only a few years before Timm began to write it. Thus *Der Schlangenbaum*, as a contemporary, highly critical portrayal of German (neo)colonialist endeavors and the German-colored political oppression which facilitates them, attempts to critically address Herzog’s sugar-coated, apologetic portrayal of European colonialist intervention in the jungle. Timm’s direct appropriation of specific motifs of Herzog’s film (which was released the year before Timm began writing his novel) indicate his intention to establish a link between the two. The author’s refusal to name the country (although other signs ensure positive identification) establishes a narrative link between his own story and that of one of the most celebrated literary portrayals of the madness of colonialism of the twentieth century, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Wagner’s own fascination with Conrad’s novel within the narrative of Timm’s novel makes this connection irrefutable.
Timm’s reference to *Heart of Darkness* is not only an attempt to show the historical connection between classical colonialism, neo-liberalism, and modern foreign aid programs, but it also relates directly to Herzog’s jungle filmmaking. Herzog’s first and perhaps most horrifying jungle film, *Aguirre*, is clearly inspired by *Heart of Darkness* and can be seen as a European precursor to Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. Yet in his second jungle film, *Fitzcarraldo*, the filmmaker seems to deemphasize the horrors of colonialism in order to highlight the obsessive zeal and dreaminess his colonial hero. Thus, whereas Aguirre’s greed and utter disregard for the welfare of the exotic landscapes or people he seeks to exploit leads to his agonizing doom, the consequences of Fitzcarraldo’s similar motives and actions are bittersweet: although his project fails, Fitzcarraldo is rewarded in the end with the captain’s chair in a local riverboat showing of Bellini’s opera *I Puritani*. Timm’s novel attempts to re-establish the primacy of the colonial problem by placing reminders of *Heart of Darkness* (and hence *Aguirre*) within a narrative which draws much of its actual content from *Fitzcarraldo*.

While Herzog uses the motifs of incomprehensibility between cultures on the one hand and treacherous nature on the other in order to argue for a separation between cultures and a general withdrawal of European influence in Latin America, as I argued earlier in this chapter, Timm is assuming a much more politically aware and critical stance. For Timm, there is no colonial hero, no artist/dreamer (like Fitzcarraldo or even Herzog himself) who is granted immunity to the rules of disengagement simply because of his drive to achieve individual ecstasy by bringing the chaos of the jungle under his own control.
CHAPTER 4
IMAGINING THE EXOTIC FROM WITHIN

Introduction

In the previous chapter I showed how two well-known producers of German Kulturgut weave messages about Germanness, both hidden and apparent, into narratives which take the jungle as their setting, but whose authors write from a German perspective which sees the landscapes and people they describe are both foreign and exotic. These depictions and imaginings of Germanness correspond to a large degree to postwar political and social imperatives—and reactions against them—which which limit the portrayal of militant nationalism while attempting to develop a “healthy” version of national belonging. In these cases, national belonging relates to notions of Heimat, the expression of which concomitantly reveals ambiguity regarding the degree to which German or European notions of “homeland” or “country” can be recreated in other spaces. I will now turn my attention to two lesser-known German-born authors who inscribe notions of national and ethnic belonging into texts while claiming an “inside” perspective with respect to South American landscapes—that is, outside the immediate sphere of influence of German social and political institutions—through their emigration to, and settlement in, Argentina. For these authors, expressions of Heimat are, perhaps surprisingly, even more tightly woven into the fabric of their narratives than is the case with either Herzog or Timm.

The first author I will discuss is Annette Schenker, whose Was für ein verrücktes Leben is currently one of the most popular examples of travel literature about Argentina.¹ Schenker, a young and fiercely independent German woman, originally travelled to Argentina as a tourist

¹ By travel literature, I am referring to both fictional and non-fictional personal narratives about travel experiences which are written in prose and have literary value. I am thus distinguishing between this type of writing and that which characterizes standard travel guides, which generally serve tourists as mere reference material for accommodations, restaurants, nightlife, and sightseeing information for short-term vacations.
more than a decade ago, but decided to settle in the country permanently after falling in love with
the natural landscape. The second writer, whose work I will examine in greater detail, is Robert
Schopflocher, a German-born Jew who, as a result of his family’s fortunate escape from Nazi
Germany in 1937, has lived the last seventy years in Argentina. Despite their enormous
differences in terms of personal biography, these two writers share striking similarities in their
ability to construct identities which challenge—with varying degrees of success—the easy
binarisms of First- and Third world, man and woman, colonizer and colonized, through crossing
borders, masquerade, and elective affinities.

German Fantasies Inside Argentina: Annette Schenker as German Gaucha

In many ways, Schenker’s Was für ein verrücktes Leben serves as a popular representation
of the tropes of Germanness that I have examined up to this point. However, I will show that her
“privileged” position as a self-proclaimed Argentinean insider facilitates a kind of cultural
hybridity which manages to selectively combine European and (perceived) Argentinean customs
and values to produce a figure that shares sameness and otherness with both cultures. This is not
to say that Schenker portrays a figure who has seamlessly combined elements from obviously
different cultures and folded them into a centered, consistent, and unified self. Rather, her
character is full of contradictions and discrepancies which, I will argue, are characteristic of
immigrant writing.²

² Although Schenker’s account is intended to be read as a factual, autobiographical document, I am
approaching it as a constructed, semi-fictional narrative which employs literary devices (such as hyperbole,
extended dialog, personification) to create a character who is independent of the author. The book’s subtitle, Eine
außergewöhnliche Frau in einem außergewöhnlichem Land (an extraordinary woman in an extraordinary country),
likewise suggests that what follows is a third-person description rather than a documentary autobiography, which
would more likely carry a first-person title such as “Mein Leben in Argentinien” (my life in Argentina). Thus, when
I refer to the “figure” in the book, I mean to differentiate between the literary construction and the person upon
whom it is based.
Romanticizing the Stone

The most prominent aspect of Schenker’s writing is its insistent use of exaggerated, romantic descriptions her adventures in Argentina, from the rugged and rocky highlands to the frozen southern tip of the country. Indeed, her Wander- and Abenteuerlust are the driving forces behind the entire narrative. Forgoing any critical approach to European appropriation of exotic foreign landscape and employing a highly melodramatic vocabulary, Schenker describes the lonely Patagonian landscape as “ein irdisches Paradies” (earthly paradise; 38). The country itself is a “Traumland,” a place whose abundance is the stuff of dreams (15) and where everything is huge: “Argentinien ist das Land der Superlative” (14). Yet whereas Herzog and Timm find the overwhelming size of the exotic landscape to be uncanny, Schenker delights in its mystery.

Like all the writers and filmmakers I’ve discussed already, Schenker identifies the land with the animals that depend on it for sustenance. It thus comes as no surprise that, through her own strong identification with the landscape itself, Schenker often feels a camaraderie with these animals in a way that calls to mind Timothy Treadwell’s devotion to the grizzly bears. Because the mountain-dwelling guanacos (relatives of the llama) prefer isolation, Schenker imagines that they must see her as a colleague (97). When the deer that she stumbles upon continue grazing undisturbed, she assumes that they see her as a “friedliches Tier” (friendly animal; 208).

Schenker’s love for the rural landscape and the wildlife of Argentina is matched only by her fascination with the rural Argentineans themselves. For her, the typical Argentine is a romantic: he plays his guitar beautifully, sings the about national heroes and legends, and sometimes even puts his own melancholy story to a beautiful tune (39). Schenker assumes this

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3 Perhaps unwittingly, Schenker seems to be drawing on a long-standing European belief in the power of the New World to generate enormity, a myth which has its origins in the descriptions of Patagonian giants which began to circulate after Magellan’s encounter with the natives in the 1520s.
storytelling role as well, recounting the legend of how José de San Martin, the hero of Argentine independence, tricked a vastly superior Spanish army into defeat by strategically placing scarecrows. Schenker’s warmest descriptions of the “natives” of Argentina, however, are reserved for the gaucho or “Argentinean cowboy,” whom she describes as the “unumstrittene König dieser grenzenlosen Weiten und unerforschten Gebiete” (undisputed king of these boundless and unstudied areas; 120). The gaucho is not only the mythological foundation of the Argentinean nation, but also the personification of the mysteriousness of the vast and sparsely populated area which make up the largest part of the country. Only the gaucho knows the secret recipe for perfect Argentine beef (13) and the best-tasting mate tea, which is considered the national drink (153). According to Schenker, the gaucho is one of the few who can manage to eke out a living in the Andean region. He is both strong and proud, a gentle giant who can be violent if provoked (76). Schenker’s gushing praise for the virtues of the Argentinean (male) and his wilderness is more than just a tourguide’s tale-spinning. Her vivid descriptions allow German readers living in a highly modernized society to experience a feeling of premodern wholeness. Furthermore, she openly welcomes the German reader to leave the monotony of civilized life to come discover a new “geheimnisvolle, unbekannte Welt” (mysterious, unknown world; 208). This world, not unlike the pre-modern Hungarian utopia depicted in Ich denke oft an Piroschka, offers not only the wide open spaces that Germany lacks, but also access to a rich mythological, heroic, and unabashedly proud national past which is denied to postwar Germans on their own territory.

**Nature’s Bad Side**

Schenker’s invitation is not to be taken as a promise of a life without hurdles. Like Herzog and Treadwell, Schenker is also eager to establish her authority by pointing out the many unforeseen dangers that the landscape poses to those outside her privileged position: because of
her excellent (self-developed) climbing skills, Schenker works on a team that rescues wayward climbers on Mount Aconcagua, the highest peak in the world outside of Asia. While describing the job, she mentions that there are many Germans buried in the cemetery closest to the peak—Germans who were unprepared or who had underestimated the difficulties of living the rough life. Other natural objects, despite their beauty, can be dangerous for the amateur as well: with due reverence she describes a river that “wartet auf seine Opfer” (is waiting for its [next] victims; 82) and a volcano, designated “inactive” by Western science, which begins to erupt and almost kills her (79). Not only the mountains, but the are dangerous, but sometimes the wildlife as well: in a passage about one of her many brushes with danger, Schenker describes the roving wild pigs on the plains as “gefährlicher als ein Jaguar, angriffslustiger und mutiger als ein Tiger” (more dangerous than a jaguar, quicker to attack and braver than a tiger; 204).

Despite the similarity of Schenker’s occasional comments on the danger of the exotic landscape to those made by the Herzog, Treadwell, and Timm, her overall message is quite different from theirs, as main focus of her observations is clearly on the beauty and mystery of the place. Unlike Herzog and Timm, Schenker does not suggest any incompatibility between Western and Latin American cultures, nor does she imply that Europeans best stay at home and refrain from inserting themselves in a hostile, uncivilized environment. Indeed, for Schenker the “natives” are European descended Argentines and the local culture is a derivation from the best of the old European pioneering spirit. Thus, Argentina is portrayed as a last frontier where Europeans can rediscover their roots, “wie einst in. . .dem wilden Westen” (like it once was in the wild west; 39). This frontier becomes for Schenker like a giant movie set, and she even describes the thrill of her many adventures as akin to the feeling one would have as a character in a great adventure film. I would argue that the frontier is indeed a giant movie set, though perhaps not in
the way that Schenker imagines. For it is on this set, far away from the realities of her original Heimat, where Schenker is best able to negotiate her own Germanness through the various roles that she plays.

**German Gaucha**

Schenker may be a dreamy romantic German, but she is anything but a traditional Hausfrau. In fact, her main identifications in Was für ein verrücktes Leben are not with female roles, but specifically with male roles. When a rural German shop owner asks Schenker to don a dirndl and try to attract customers in return for a night’s lodging, she refuses on the grounds that she has never worn either a skirt or a dress in her whole life and is not about to start now (37). Likewise, when she is pressured by friends to dance the zapateo (a dance based on a rooster’s pre-mating movements), she insists on dancing the male role and getting her (male) dance partner to put on the skirt over his pants. For a self-aware and fiercely independent German woman, this is “die einzige vernünftige Lösung” (the only reasonable solution; 57). Later, when she happens upon a team filming a Marlboro commercial in Patagonia which is in desperate need of several horses, Schenker promptly rounds up the required animals to earn some extra cash. When her friend Karl goes missing on the mountain, she sets off with a male friend to find him immediately. Schenker knows the danger, but her bravado wins the day, for “nicht jeder wagt sich so weit vor in die große Andenwelt wie wir” (not everyone dares to venture as far into the world of the Andes as we do; 83). From her own descriptions, it seems that nothing can scare her, with two conspicuous exceptions: Nazis and city folk.

**The Nazi Other**

Given Argentina’s notoriety as a safe haven for escaped Nazis after WWII, it is hardly surprising that Schenker (like Timm’s Wagner) is preoccupied with the possibility of coming face to face with what for contemporary Germans is the ultimate Other. Indeed, her encounter
with Germans who she suspects of being Nazis is one of the first episodes that she describes: after the German shopkeeper hands her the dirndl and her initial annoyance wears off, Schenker begins to suspect that these Germans have something to hide and she decides to investigate. With her travel companion, she makes her way to the shopkeeper’s yogurt factory, which is supposedly the family’s main source of income, only to find it locked behind a rusty gate. The situation doesn’t make sense and Schenker begins to suspect that these are in fact escaped Nazis. As Schenker explains to her readers, “Bei diesem Gedanken kann es einem fast unheimlich werden” (this thought can cause it to become nearly uncanny for a person; 35). Her word choice is significant, as das Unheimliche, as explained by Freud, can be induced when one perceives something to be alive which is supposed to be dead, or when one runs into ones doppelganger. In Schenker’s case, both of these situations converge.

The appearance of the Nazi induces das Unheimliche, which is, semantically and etymologically, the opposite of Heimat. Interestingly, it is not the distance separating Schenker from her native country that causes the wholesomeness of Heimat to disappear; rather, it is precisely the presence of the othered self in a place where (or better yet, in a time when) it is not supposed to be. Schenker’s immediate effort to distance herself from the Nazi thus constitutes her own enactment of temporal othering. The phrase she utters right before running off –“Nichts wie weg!”—is likewise interesting from a linguistic point of view, as it is the semantic opposite of the quintessential Heimat phrase in English: “There’s no place like home!”

City-Country Dichotomies

Given Schenker’s overwhelmingly positive and exciting descriptions of the Argentinean countryside, it is not surprising that she constructs the city (and its inhabitants) as Other. Her advice to anyone travelling to Argentina is to get out of Buenos Aires immediately. For her, the capital city (which is home to 30% of the country’s population), although very European in style
and architecture, is filthy and dangerous. The air is polluted, making a mockery of the name Buenos Aires (“good air”). Those who inhabit the dirty city are likewise not to be trusted. Upon arriving in the country, Schenker is robbed of everything she has by a taxicab driver. Later, her quick wit helps her escape being gang-raped in a hotel by three men who, she can only assume, want her because of her blond hair and blue eyes. The city is huge by comparison to any German city, but Schenker treats it as a monolithic entity to be avoided at all costs. For her, the city and the country are separate, incompatible spaces that cannot even be compared to one another (18).

To some extent, Schenker’s city-country dichotomy reflects traditionally German Heimat-oriented attitudes that privilege the imagined harmony of local community over the equally imaginary chaos of the national metropolis. In the next section, I will show how another German-born writer in Argentina attempts to break down the city-country dichotomy in favor of a more balanced and multifaceted approach to writing Germanness within both rural and urban environments.

**German and Jewish in Argentina: Robert Schopflocher’s Elective Affinities**

In this section, I will examine depictions of German, Jewish, and other “national” identities from a perspective of another kind of German in Argentina: a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany. Although Robert Schopflocher’s biography is very different from Schenker’s, their writing shares a preoccupation with issues of space and the relationship of space to identity. Thus, in this section I will focus more intensely on the interactive relationship between space and spatiality on the one hand and personal, communal, and national identity on the other. In doing so, I follow the lead of Anthony Purdy in accepting the by now axiomatic truth “that place plays a central role in migrant writing” (17).
The Centrality of Space

The increasing academic focus on space as a primary interpretive mode, frequently referred to as the “spatial turn” in cultural studies, represents to a certain degree another attempt to view cultural production through a new critical lens, and as such is not unlike a host of other periodical “turns” that the humanities have taken. Yet the spatial turn differentiates itself from its morphological cousins in its relative success in transforming our critical grammar to its goals—even when our referents have little to do with the issues of migration, exile, and transnationalism that have contributed so significantly to its development: we locate our arguments within certain critical traditions and moments, we situate ourselves and our objects of inquiry in relation to social production, we align ourselves with certain groups in society’s margins, we frame and re-frame questions and histories, and we recognize that language is a site of power. Much of the development of this increasing spatial awareness can be attributed to the pioneering efforts of geographers Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja, among others, to introduce new methods of spatial thinking to a critical tradition that has largely prioritized historical and social analysis. In my own study, I will build mainly on the ideas of Edward Soja and some of the other theorists and literary figures to which he refers.

In Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places, Soja challenges what he sees as the hegemony of a dyadic historico-social criticism which subsumes spatial analysis into its own methods and assumptions. Following the lead of Lefebvre, Soja articulates an ontological “trialectics of being,” which applies “at all levels of knowledge formation, from ontology to epistemology, theory building, empirical analysis, and social

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4 I am referring here to the psychological (Jacquette), psychoanalytical (Long), linguistic (Rudolph), postmodern (Hassan), the translation (Bassett) and cultural (Don Mitchell) turns. Within German studies specifically, there have been other “turns” as well, such as the “Turkish turn” in German literature (Adelson).
practice” (71). Borrowing more or less directly from Lefebvre’s concepts of perceived (real), conceived (imagined), and lived (social) spaces, Soja posits his own second-level trialectics of spatiality, made up of the component fields of First-, Second-, and Thirdspace. For Soja, Firstspace perspectives involve a privileging of the raw materiality of space and of the attendant human attempts to process the spatial information gleaned through sensory perception by mapping and measuring (10). This perspective, which Soja sees as the traditional geographical understanding of space, has traditionally been set in binary opposition to Secondspace perspectives emphasizing ideas about and re-presentations of space. Thirdspace is proposed as an-”Other” alternative, not merely as a synthesis of the real and imagined in which elements of the “opposing” theses are selectively combined, but rather as a new way of conceptualizing space which liberates our thinking, theoretically, from the age-old dualisms, conveniently represented in the First- and Secondspace perspectives, between materialism and idealism, objectivity and subjectivity, and, to take it one step further, between the center and the margins, self and Other.5

Soja thus conceives Thirdspace as tentative and flexible (2), real-and-imagined (6), and radically open to new constellations and contestations (13). It is a position which is not so much geographical as it is attitudinal, not so much assigned as it is chosen. It involves a critical awareness of spatial concerns without becoming a dogmatic “evangelical spatialism” (“Keeping Space Open” 350). Given his meandering and esoteric descriptions, it should surprise no one that Soja has attracted considerable criticism, particularly—and most vehemently—from his fellow geographers. Patricia Price, for example, is disturbed by Soja’s steadfast refusal to

5 Indeed, Soja’s very description of the process of positing alternative viewpoints, thirding-as-othering, lexically challenges the privileged status of the term Other (as the binary opposition to Self/Same) by rendering all alternatives or “third” ways, landscapes, and identities as equally “othered.”
unambiguously define his concept of Thirdspace ("Longing for Less of the Same"). Rob Shields points out Soja’s failure to effectively demonstrate the originality of his “trialectics of space” ("Harmony in Thirds – Chora for Lefebve”), while Andrew Merrifield faults what he sees as Soja’s wholesale lack of understanding and flippant dismissal of the tenets of dialectical Marxism ("The Extraordinary Voyages of Ed Soja"). Furthermore, Price criticizes Soja for relying too heavily upon white male authority in the form of Lefebvre, Foucault, and Baudrillard while emphasizing “chosen” marginalities at the expense of those imposed by force upon subaltern groups in Western society (343).

Considering the seriousness of these charges originating from scholars in his own field, it may seem surprising that I would choose Soja’s concept of Thirdspace as a starting point from which to approach the spatial narratives in the literary work of German-Jewish-Argentinean author Robert Schopflocher. Yet the applicability of Thirdspace to Schopflocher’s texts derives to some extent precisely from the aspects of this approach which tend to draw the heaviest criticism. For example, the “radical openness” of the concept and its fluid definition make it possible to meaningfully read Schopflocher’s textual landscapes as Thirdspace articulations, even though the spatial configurations Schopflocher portrays are, as all literary constructs, essentially imagined, and thus superficially similar to what Soja calls Secondspace. Furthermore, the fact that Soja’s concept of Thirdspace does not privilege economic dispossession over other gauges of marginality, a circumstance which draws the vitriol of more strongly committed Marxists like Merrifield, renders his particular framing of otherness more suited to my reading of Schopflocher’s texts, in which issues of class are often subordinated to other markers of identity. Finally, particular attention must be paid to Price’s provocative suggestion that, as an economically advantaged “straight white male,” Soja’s own selective interfacings with alterity in
Thirdspace are little more than whimsical excursions into marginality, a “longing for the marginalized speaking position” (343). Although one could argue that Price’s own status as a tenured, white faculty member at an American university significantly impacts her credibility in denouncing the perceived privilege enjoyed by “scholars like Soja” and renders her own alliance with marginalized positions suspicious according to her own formulation, her suggestion that heterosexual men of European descent can only experience alterity vicariously reflects precisely the kind of simplifying, exclusionary, binary thinking that both Soja and Schopflocher are attempting to challenge. Although he freely acknowledges the deadly seriousness and urgency of confronting “imposed” marginalities created by gender and racial oppression, Soja suggests, following the lead of bell hooks, that to “choose” the margin is to create a different kind of liminal existence, in which solidarity is created through the “subversive crossing of borders” (“Keeping Spaces Open” 351). In my reading of Schopflocher, it is through these subversive border crossings—made by both the author himself and his protagonists—and through assumption and performance that alternative identities and marginalized outsiders are constructed and portrayed. Indeed, it is Schopflocher’s obsession with borders and transgressions that makes Thirdspace, a concept principally invoked within the opening borders of field of geography, a useful frame through which to read these narratives.

Furthermore, the application of Thirdspace principles to the rural spaces that Schopflocher portrays entails a certain spatial incongruity with respect to Soja’s Thirdspace adventures, which are based on the privileging in modern and postmodern geography of urban space; long associated with social and technological progress on the one hand, and migration, marginalization, and exploitation on the other. The city has been celebrated by some as the “ultimate creation of man’s intellect and the fulfillment of his aesthetic needs” (White 240) and
derided by many as the ultimate achievement of capitalism. It is thus not surprising that urban spaces become a focal point in the work of both Lefebvre, who recognizes the city as the “setting of struggle” (Production of Space 386), and Soja, whose idea of Thirdspace as infinite possibility is indebted to an understanding of the metropolis as a kind of Aleph, a place that contains all other places simultaneously—a metaphor he borrows explicitly from the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, who in turn adopted the concept from Jewish mysticism. As the traditional destination of dispossessed immigrants arriving in the developed nations—and the home of most of the critics who attempt to speak for them—the city also becomes a focal point in postcolonial and transnational studies.

In Argentina, however, the pattern of immigration, and hence the locations of cross-cultural contact so crucial in Schopflocher’s writing, has at times varied significantly from patterns established in Europe and North America. From the late nineteenth century, official government policy sought to develop the Argentine economy through the establishment of agricultural colonies (colonias) of European farmers in the country’s rural yet fertile areas. It was this policy that permitted the establishment not only of the rural colonies of the Russian-Germans or Wolgadeutsche who had come to the Americas in large numbers after the expiration of concessions which had been granted to them in Russia by Catherine the Great in 1863, but also of de Hirsch’s Jewish colonies where Schopflocher worked and which served as the setting of many of his stories. Thus it comes as no surprise that within the author’s spatial imagination the rural town, the village, and the isolated colony, as spaces of cultural and social intersection, take on the Thirdspace qualities that are normally associated with cosmopolitan existence.

German and Jewish in Germany

Robert Schopflocher was born in 1923 to a largely secular, middle-class Jewish family in the Bavarian town of Fürth, whose sizable Jewish population had earned it the nickname
“Frankish Jerusalem.” In his later autobiographical reflections on his childhood in Germany, he claims to have been the product of what is often considered the stereotype of pre-war German-Jewish culture. His father is described as a Freidenker (“free thinker”), a generally agnostic lover of the Enlightenment humanist tradition who is affiliated with both the Masonic lodge and the main liberal synagogue, which he attends mainly on the High Holy Days (Spiegel der Welt, 340). His mother’s secular credentials are rendered anecdotal: when a Protestant dress maker knowledgeable of halachic prescriptions on fabric content asks her whether she has anything against the dress being made of Mischstoff (“mixed materials”), Frau Schopflocher, the assimilated Jew from the Palatinate, stares back at her puzzled and embarrassed, not knowing the how to respond (339).

Schopflocher’s early childhood in Fürth is (re)constructed as standard fare. Like most other boys his age, he attends public schools, sits through boring classes in religion paid for by Kirchensteuern, reads Karl May in his spare time, and maintains collections of stamps and Zigarettenbilder. As a child, he enjoys a budding Jewish identity that in no way conflicts with or diminishes his sense of being a full-fledged Fürther. But the fluidity of identities and the easy crossing of identity borders begins to change in the early 1930s as anti-Semitism begins to manifest at school, and by 1933 Schopflocher’s spaces are separated by force after the installment of the Nazi dictatorship. As is well known, the Nazi objective of disentangling German and Jewish identities was accomplished through the strategy of separating and

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6 In 1933 Fürth had a Jewish population of around 3,300 (4.2% of total population). It is the birthplace of several other prominent German Jews, including Henry Kissinger.

7 This is not meant to suggest that anti-Semitism in Fürth was minimal in the mid to late 1920’s. Indeed, Julius Streicher’s rabidly anti-Semitic publication, Der Stürmer, was first published in nearby Nuremberg in commemoration of Adolf Hitler’s birthday (20 April) in 1923, and Streicher himself owned property at Pleikershof in the administrative district of Fürth. Schopflocher’s early immunity to this rising anti-Semitic tide can be attributed to his age, his schoolteachers’ insistence on maintaining tolerant, humanistic classrooms, and his father’s continued belief in the eventual victory of reason over irrationality.
segregating spaces. Within a few short years, government offices, schools, parks, pools, and libraries became non-Jewish spaces, thereby eliminating any possibility that intertwined German and Jewish identities could be lived through negotiations of overlapping spaces. In *Spiegel der Welt* Schopflocher describes how in late 1933, as a direct result of the “Aryan Paragraph” he is forced to leave the *Volksschule* and move to the closed space of a local Jewish school, an experience which he finds highly degrading (348). Dissatisfied with these developments, his parents elect to send him to the Jewish boarding school at Herrlingen (near Ulm), at which Martin Buber occasionally lectures. For six difficult years this rural school attempts to pursue its own goal of reviving Jewish identity by bringing city children “closer to nature” while simultaneously fulfilling its obligations to the new Nazi government by performing the threefold task of familiarizing the children with German and Jewish culture, linguistically preparing them for emigration, and preparing them for technical, horticultural, and domestic training in accordance with the goal of “vocational re-stratification of the Jews.”¹⁸ The increasing isolation of Jews in Germany is such that by 1937, Schopflocher’s father determines, with the help of “Aryan” business acquaintances, to get an exit visa for Argentina. After several months of delays at the insistence of the Fürth Chamber of Commerce—which urges the denial of their exit applications—visas are also given to the rest of the family.

¹⁸ From an article in the “Bayrische Israelitische Gemeindezeitung” appearing on 1 November 1933; full text available at http://www.alemannia-judaica.de/herrlingen_synagoge.htm. “Seine Aufgaben lassen sich in drei Punkte zusammenfassen: Heimischmachung der Kinder im deutschen und jüdischen Kulturkreise, ihre sprachliche Vorbereitung auf die Auswanderung, Vorbereitung auf handwerkliche, gärtnerische und hauswirtschaftliche Ausbildung im Rahmen der beruflichen Umschichtung der Juden.”
German and Jewish in Argentina

After settling with his family in Buenos Aires, Schopflocher continues his high school studies at the liberal, German-language Pestalozzi-Schule. He then goes on to study agriculture at university, after which he works as an administer of the rural Jewish *colonias* funded by the German-Jewish philanthropist Baron Moritz von Hirsch (“Maurice de Hirsch”). In doing so, he is not only bowing to pressure from his father, who believes that the future of Argentina is tied to agriculture, but is also realizing the Herrlingen school’s stated goal of revitalizing Jewish living by re-connecting the Jew to the countryside. Yet, like so many of the Jewish settlers that he chronicles in his later writings, Schopflocher abandons the confines of the village and returns to the metropolis to make a better life for himself. After his return to the city, he begins his writing career in the Spanish language. His first books on Argentine agricultural history and bee keeping are followed by novels and short fiction depicting the difficulties and rewards of life in the colonies, for which he was awarded the literary prize of the city of Buenos Aires.

It is not until Schopflocher is 75 years old that he makes a “turn” to his native language. His first German text, *Eine Kindheit* (1998), is an autobiographical sketch published concurrently with his first collection of short stories, *Wie Reb Froike die Welt Rettete*. These are followed by two more short story collections, *Fernes Beben* in 2003 and *Spiegel der Welt* in 2006). Although some of the stories are essentially re-workings of previously published work in Spanish,

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9 The liberal-humanist Pestalozzi-Schule in Buenos Aires, founded by the Swiss publisher of the *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, was one of only two German language schools in Argentina which were never brought into conformity with Nazi ideology or gleichgeschaltet.

10 This focus on agriculture and rural life must be seen as a product of the growing Zionist movement (and later Kibbutz/Moshav movements), one of the main tenets of which is that Jews not only needed to return to the land, but also need to learn how to work it (Telushkin 288, Peretz 16).

11 In this dissertation, I only deal with Schopflocher’s German-language texts for reasons of space. In future work, however, I will be looking at how Schopflocher’s identities are shaped through his negotiation of his native and second languages.
Schopflocher claims in *Wie Reb Froike* that all of his stories have a German *Urtext* which is laid open or *freigelegt* through his return to the German language (180). Yet the move back to German does more than open up stories to more “authentic” expression, it also enacts a linguistic claim, a re-territorialization of the language, and hence the German identity with which it is bound, which was taken from him by National Socialism.

And yet even now, after living more than sixty years in what he calls *die Sprachfremde* or linguistic exile, Schopflocher’s works show a remarkably German sensibility. He goes to great lengths to emphasize his own continued membership in German *Bildungsbürgertum*, as both he and his German-Jewish characters perform their worldviews by quoting Friedrich Schiller, Goethe (“*Edel sei der Mensch, hilfreich und gut*” / “Nobel be mankind, helpful and good!”), Eduard Mörike, Joseph von Eichendorff, and Klaus Mann (“*Die Muttersprache ist der unverlierbare Besitz, die Heimat der Heimatlosen*” / “The mother tongue is one’s inalienable property, the homeland of the homeless”), just as his own admittedly selective memory is explained through extensive reference to Sigmund Freud.12 Perhaps even more significant in this context is Schopflocher’s strong regional attachment to his Franconian *Heimat* and, in particular, the local Fürth dialect that is so intimately tied to his childhood memories: “*Sobald seine Laute an mein Ohr dringen, wird’s mir warm ums Herz*” (“As soon as its sounds reach my ear, my heart begins to warm” (*Spiegel der Welt* 333). Yet for all its seeming sentimentalism, Schopflocher’s adoption of the trope of *Heimat* in both his “non-fiction” sketches as well as his short stories is marked by a critical interrogation of the term. Thus, although Schopflocher claims

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12 Schopflocher’s insistence on explaining his own trauma by quoting Freud serves not only to highlight an intellectual, linguistic, and social bond he shares with a fellow German-speaking Jewish exile, it also serves to locate Schopflocher solidly within both intellectual and popular culture in Argentina. As Mariano Plotkin has shown, the language of psychoanalysis, as it is routinely invoked to make sense of the collective trauma of the Dirty War waged by the former military regime, has become perhaps more entrenched in Argentina than in any other country in the Western Hemisphere.
to have left Germany searching for a new Heimat, he uses the term with full consciousness of the emotional and historical baggage it carries. Heimat, although still strongly associated with local rather than national geographies, is neither organic and unifying, nor homogeneous in Schopflocher’s writings. It is not necessarily a place of safety and security, but a place of physical and economic hardship. In other words, Schopflocher’s depictions of Heimat, from the isolated mountain enclave to the rural Jewish colony, begin to take on the qualities of what Robert Blickle calls “anti-Heimat” (142-45), expressed through his characters’ problematic, almost antagonistic relationship to their physical environment and the natural landscapes that are the hallmark of Heimat representation (142-145). In “Seltsam vertraut” the young Jankl is sent to the city after a plague of locusts destroys the year’s harvest and his beloved magical rosebush. Yet even before this calamity, he had watched his grandfather be attacked and killed by a swarm of bees, had nearly drown in quicksand, and barely escaped being bitten by a deadly snake. Yet unlike many anti-Heimat representations, rural life is not portrayed as depraved, nor is the rural family structure demonized as dysfunctional. Rather, Schopflocher shows the geographical complexity of rural spaces and the multiplicity of identities that these make possible. In other words, he depicts the village as nothing less than a Spiegel der Welt (mirror of the world), a “setting of struggle” just as compelling and representative as the geographer’s city.

Other Spaces, Thirdspaces

As an exile writer, it is hardly surprising that Schopflocher primarily chooses metaphors which are distinctly spatial in form. The title of the second collection of short stories, Fernes Beben (Distant Tremors) suggests spatial instability through the trope of unruly geography. In moments of great emotion or personal change, where the ecstatic and the horrible intersect, the earth underfoot begins to shift. For example, in “Fernes Beben,” when Juancho, a newly assigned “manager” of a remote mountain railway station begins to recognize the totality of his
new isolation, a light shaking of the earth marks the moment of his understanding. Later, as he is
forced through blackmail to allow a railroad inspector to have intercourse with his wife, the earth
beneath his feet begins to shake violently, threatening to swallow him alive. And whenever
Jankl—who now returns to the *colonia* as the urbanized and successful “Jack”—begins to
contemplate alternate realities that might have been had he not chosen to spend his life chasing
money, he gets the feeling that the floor beneath him is swinging. And it is not only the ground
beneath the feet that fails to support in these stories, but often the feet as well. Juancho accepts
the “job” in the remote Andes to escape persecution in the city due to his clubbed foot and
resulting limp. Kathi, a German-Jewish refugee who attempts to disembark in Buenos Aires to be
united with her unknown fiancé in “Wie Reb Froike die Welt Rettete” is nearly sent back to
certain death in Nazi-occupied Europe when the fiancé discovers that she walks with a limp. In
both of these cases, the inability to master and negotiate one’s space leads to extreme
marginalization.

In Schopflocher’s spatial narratives, borders and intersections take on vital importance: the
car and its road, the train and its tracks, and the ship and its course, do not connect separated
spaces so much as they overlay inextricably connected spaces. Belonging simultaneously and
entirely to all the spaces they traverse, these symbols and spaces of transportation become the
staging ground for the violent upheavals that mark spatial convergences. In “Die große Keilerei”
(The Big Brawl), a road cutting through a small village becomes the site of a bloodbath after a
seemingly innocuous fender bender develops into a full-scale riot between urban dwellers and
local villagers. In “Späte Rache” (Belated Revenge) the city-dwelling Manfredo realizes that
someone is plotting his murder as he barely avoids being shoved onto the tracks of a subway
system that spans both the fashionable districts of Buenos Aires as well as its slums. After
narrowly escaping a homicidal city bus, he ends up being murdered by a stranger he foolishly allows through the front door of his home. It is also in these “other spaces” that the impossible becomes possible and both benevolent and demonic powers flourish. In the customs house at the welcoming pier in Buenos Aires, Reb Froike exercises mind control on the government official to persuade him to let Kathi disembark, even though her fiancé has refused to accept her. Likewise, while driving his car through the colony of his childhood, Jack holds a conversation with his dead father and catches fleeting, yet ultimately fatal glimpses of himself, both as a young boy riding with a friend on a horse and as an old man in a horse-drawn carriage.

Michel Foucault refers to many of these symbols and spaces of transportation as “heterotopias,” named for their function in containing, representing, and/or contesting all the other sites within a given culture, yet always maintaining their absolute difference from all those other sites. These places, whose status as “outside of all places” is often marked by physical enclosure—a fence, door, or wall—are nonetheless “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (“Of Other Spaces” 25). Interestingly, Foucault credits the genesis of his concept of heterotopia to a story by Borges in which the author describes “a certain Chinese encyclopedia” supposedly translated by German sinologist Dr. Franz Kuhn in which

    animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies. (The Order of Things XV)

This juxtaposition of seemingly random elements—which have no connection at all in Western culture save the nicely ordered letters which serve as their organizing principle—evokes a decidedly eerie, haunting feeling in the reader which is rooted in the implied collapse of those organizing devices—both neurological and linguistic—that serve the fundamental purpose of
distinguishing the Same and the Other (XV). Although the genesis of Foucault’s concept of heterotopia is derived from a formulation which can exist only in the “no place” of language, the term nonetheless refers, unlike its utopian counterpart, to real, locatable, lived spaces in which the infinite “profusion of existing things” appears in constellations which rupture the established cultural syntax. These spaces include not only the symbols and spaces of transportation—the car, train, bus, or ship—but also such wildly divergent places as the cemetery, the jail, the boarding school, the retirement home, the museum, the library, the colony, and the garden, among many other possibilities. Such is the diversity of Foucault’s heterotopias, connected only by their own extreme interconnectedness with every other space in a given society, that collection of heterotopias is itself heterotopic.\(^{13}\)

Not surprisingly, Edward Soja claims Foucault’s “heterogeneous and relational space of heterotopia” as an articulation of Thirdspace, as a repudiation of both Firstspace focus on physical forms and Secondspace emphasis on abstraction. For Soja, heterotopia “is neither a substanceless void to be filled by cognitive intuition nor a repository of physical forms to be phenomenologically described in all its resplendent variability” (*Postmodern Geographies* 17). Although Soja does not mention it, there is another reason to accept the comparison. The idea that heterotopias bear a relationship to all the other sites of a culture while always maintaining their “absolute difference” suggests that Foucault’s heterotopias enjoy the same privileged status in relation to the sites that they represent that Thirdspace does toward the First and Secondspaces that it both contains and exceeds.

\(^{13}\) In both “Of Other Spaces” and in the preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault describes with a studied ambiguity many types of heterotopia, many of which are of little concern here. Of more interest, however, are the heterotopias he sees in Borges’s spaces, inasmuch as they explode meaning, order, and language, and therefore the concept of difference itself. Heterotopic sites such as the library and museum, on the other hand, although they likewise attempt to “contain” and “represent” all the other sites in their respective culture, do not generally serve the disruptive function. On the contrary, if Benedict Anderson is to be believed, their function has been, at least historically, to document and conservatively reproduce the imaginary community of the nation.
Yet as much as I (and Soja himself) might like to incorporate heterotopic spaces under the rubric of Thirddspace, any reading of spatial convergences in Schopflocher’s texts as heterotopias must be undertaken with an awareness of the limitations that this type of reading engenders. In particular, Foucault’s assertion that heterotopias bear a relation to every other place in a given society or community seems to assume a certain homogeneity of the population and a stable definition of society. In some cases the line is drawn rather easily: the jail bears a relationship to every other place within a given community inasmuch as the entire space of the community—even “private” and secret space—is “covered” by the jurisdiction of the court which owns the jail. Yet as the diversity of a community or society increases, the ability of any single place to relate to all other spaces or “contain” them diminishes. The example of the cemetery is quite instructive here. For Foucault, the town or village cemetery relates to every other space within the town it serves in that every family has relatives buried in that space. The cemetery, he seems to suggest, becomes the great equalizer, a site where everyone is entitled to “her or his own little box for her or his own little personal decay” (“Of Other Spaces” 25).

But Schopflocher’s colonias are far from Foucault’s homogeneous ideal, for even in these remote locations, religious restrictions provide for separate eternal housing for the Jewish and Christian dead, although this separation is not all-encompassing and opportunities for transgression and hybrid identities abound. The rural Jewish cemetery that Jack visits is a “closed” space only in appearance, as the gate regulating entrance is merely propped up against the posts that are supposed to secure it. The euphemistically named “good place” itself is tended by the non-Jewish caretaker, Eleuterio González. As Jack prepares to leave the cemetery, it is the non-Jew who politely reminds him of the ritual washing of the hands, a custom which the
assimilated Jew has forgotten. But Jack is no longer Jankl, and he refuses to indulge: he simply leaves the cemetery as abruptly and unceremoniously as he entered it. Furthermore, even the rural cemetery is not a place of equality. Everyone is indeed entitled to an individual box and an individual decay, but not an equal one. The grave sites of religious Jews in the back are covered with simple headstones in the traditional shape, while the graves of less observant Jews in the better plots up front sport square headstones with embossed pictures of the deceased, a conceit that is in keeping with (Christian) Argentine custom but ritually forbidden to the orthodox. After Jankl unexpectedly dies during his visit to the colonia of his childhood, his funeral is celebrated as a “gesellschaftliches Ereignis ersten Ranges” (“first-rate societal event” 67). Yet Schopflocher spares his unknowing German reader the knowledge that all Argentines take for granted; namely, that despite the fortunes he might have amassed, the gates to La Recoleta, the most famous cemetery in Buenos Aires, the gates which enclose the most expensive and sought-after space in the capital, do not open for Jews. Yet despite—or perhaps because of—this radical inaccessibility, not just for Jews, but for all but the tiniest percentage of Argentineans, the space is nothing if not heterotopic. For there is no single space in the entire country, enclosed or otherwise, that enchants and occupies the consciousness of the populous even as it represents—even celebrating—the most blatant inequality.

14 This scene retells Schopflocher’s story of friendly German-Jewish coexistence in pre-Nazi Germany, in which his mother has to be reminded by a non-Jewish dressmaker about the halachic restrictions on garment materials. Yet the difference in the two situations is telling: whereas Schopflocher’s mother is portrayed as a fine example of integrated German Jewry and her ignorance of Jewish law comes across as a mildly embarrassing yet completely forgivable mistake, Jankl’s open hostility toward the tradition of hand washing is indicative of an outright rejection of his Jewish identity. It is precisely this inability live equally within his two identities that leads to his spiritual demise.

15 In this scene, Schopflocher inverts and retells Kafka’s “Vor dem Gesetz.” In both stories, a keeper watches over a gate which leads to the seemingly closed space of the law, but which can easily be penetrated if the aspirant so chooses. But whereas Kafka’s humble hero comes from the country to request entrance and misses his opportunity by never daring to challenge the system, Jankl returns to the country as a successful urban businessman and simply barges in, only to find that, once rejected, the law loses not only its power to coerce, but also its power to save.
What is most valuable about the heterotopias that Foucault names, at least as far as the current study is concerned, is not so much their at times dubious relationship to “every other space” in a given society, but the fact that these are precisely the locations in Schopflocher’s texts where identities are negotiated and performed, where the struggles for life and death take place, where the experience of the quotidian is most intense. For Manfredo, desperately fighting unknown forces that demand his death, the subway is an uncanny, terrifying place: lips move with no attendant voices, faces twitch in unnatural ways, fellow passengers hide behind newspapers. In “Geschichtsunterricht” (history lesson), the perfect microcosmic garden behind the retired professor Sarmiento’s apartment is as meticulously arranged as it is inaccessible. Yet its worth lies not so much in its heterotopic value as realized utopian perfectibility as in its Thirddspace value as a site of resistance against the encroaching concrete jungle. And it is during a visit to the senile professor in a retirement home that Fortunato Martini—a former student who now manufactures garden gnomes—realizes in horror that his belatedness in keeping his half-hearted promise to maintain contact with the lonely old man has forever shattered any chance of communication.

Foucault ponders whether the colonies might not also be considered “heterotopias of compensation,” inasmuch as their original role was to “create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is mess, ill-constructed, and jumbled” (27). In this context, Foucault specifically refers to those “extraordinary” seventeenth-century Jesuit colonies in South America as “marvelous, absolutely regulated colonies in which human perfection was effectively achieved” (‘Of Other Spaces’ 27). Obviously, this “heterotopia” could only exist as an extremely problematic Eurocentric male fantasy of absolute domination and submission, and as such it is not so far removed from the “heterotopia” of the concentration
camp. What is of interests here is that the spaces that Foucault calls heterotopic are precisely the locations that appear in Schopflocher’s stories as sites of convergence and conflict, as Thirdspaces of multiplicity. The *colonia* that Schopflocher portrays is just such a space. It is neither an easy series of accumulating othernesses in permanent opposing relation to the heterogeneous, multicultural, limitless metropolis, nor does it represent a romantic reenactment of a spiritually fulfilling, connected, organic shtetl life that never existed as such. It is neither pure nature nor pure suffering. It exists in a dynamic, complex relationship not just to the city, but to the suburbs, towns, villages, and other colonies.

**Reclaiming and Rewriting the Remote**

In his portrayal of life in the *colonias* and other rural areas Schopflocher attempts to rescue these spaces from totalizing or simplifying tendencies by showing their heterogeneity, thereby highlighting the unexpected similarities that these sites share with the metropolis. Juancho, for example, is marginalized within the concrete confines of the oppressive city because of his slow wit and a disability that hinders his mastery of space. Yet the oppression of the city he escapes is more than matched by the utter humiliation he must suffer, year after year, at the hands of the inspector. At the same time, the massive materiality of the city is mirrored by that of the bare and lifeless sierra, an enormous heap of pure minerality that is “oppressive in its magnificence” (11). Rather than constituting the open space often associated with *Heimat* (Sclafani 4), mountains are experienced as closed space, as a place of exile, every bit as threatening as the city he left behind.

The heterogeneity of rural space corresponds to the remarkable diversity of its inhabitants. The majority of Jews in the colonies have roots in Russia and Poland, but the arrival and subsequent integration of German Jewish expellees initiate a change and conflict. The “Germans” are orderly, materialistic, and religiously unorthodox. They set up their own religious
spaces, quote German poets and refuse to give up their language despite the fact that it is the language of the Nazis, leading at least one long-time resident to suspect that there might even be Nazis among them. The meticulous Germans look down upon the backward, unenlightened, superstitious Ostjuden. Yet even these Ostjuden are not religiously uniform. Reb Froike represents Orthodox Judaism, while Reb Avraham dabbles in Kabbalah and mysticism, an interest which leads to his family being shunned by the Torah literalists. A good number of non-Jewish Argentines work in the colonies as well, which over time has led to mixed cultural practices. Besides the adoption of Argentine burial customs noted earlier, the colonists also buy healing herbs from Don Soilo the local curandero (medicine man), take afternoon siestas and communally sip mate tea through a shared silver straw, as is the Argentinean custom.\footnote{The custom of drinking mate was originally developed among the Guarani natives of northern Argentina and Paraguay. Thus, its status as the national drink reflects the hybrid nature of Argentine culture. Furthermore, immigrants returning to the Middle East from Argentina took the practice back with them, such that Syria is now the top importer of Argentine mate.} Thus, through the portrayal of geographical and social heterogeneity, as well as cultural mixing that occurs in rural spaces, Schopflocher attempts to draw parallels between urban and rural spatial practice.

Despite his attempt to compare village and city life, in his eagerness to portray the complexity of rural spaces Schopflocher occasionally gives in to the temptation to cast the city as a monolithic generator of capitalist exploitation and sexual mischief. The rich and those who pretend to be, all of whom are tied to the city, are proud of their achievements, unwilling to accept responsibility for their actions, and often utterly corrupt. Jack’s accumulated wealth is attributed to his willingness to pay bribes, lay off workers, and cheat on his taxes, while his myriad justifications ring hollow. The nameless, sole survivor of the street riot in “Die große Keilerei” refuses to accept any blame for the death and destruction unleashed by the crash he
caused, and his biggest worry is that his family will discover the he was driving in the company of his mistress. When masquerading as a “little guy” fails to convince a police detective to let him go, he resorts to bribes and threats. Likewise, the railroad inspector in “Fernes Beben” goes to great lengths to show off his wealth through his suit and tie, expensive watch and diamond ring. Yet even the most despicable figures in these stories are not always as one-dimensional as they at first appear. The blackmailing railroad inspector who torments Juancho has been unhappily married, childless, and sexually estranged from his wife for several years, yet because of the power of the Catholic Church in Argentina, he is legally prohibited from getting a divorce. Furthermore, his identity as a middle-class citizen—which is what he seems to value most—is shown to be mere performance, as the oversized stone in his conspicuous ring is revealed to be a fake.

**Other Othernesses in Thirdspace**

The complex heterogeneity of the rural areas that Schopflocher depicts serves not only to rescue this space from the reductions and simplifications that urban orientated spatial practices encourage; it also provides a background to understanding the many ways that people are “othered” or marginalized within all communities. In this context it is particularly interesting that Schopflocher engages in othering practices which differ from those of other writers that I discuss in other chapters. For example, Schopflocher engages in what Thomas Diez refers to as “temporal othering” not by depicting previous incarnations of the self as “othered” identities to be kept at a distance, as is the case in the work of Timm and Schenker, but instead does the opposite. By portraying the few remaining inhabitants of the Jewish colonias as heroic and casting those who have returned to the cities and positioned themselves within the capitalist system as unhappy and unfulfilled, Schopflocher effectively “others” the assimilated urban Jew of the present with respect to the increasingly anachronistic rural Jews. Thus it would seem that
Schopflocher, the current state of affairs in which Jews have abandoned the “back to the land” philosophy that brought them to the colonias of Argentina is unacceptable. Yet there is a strong sense of realism and quiet resignation in Schopflocher’s descriptions of the move to the cities, such that those who abandon the colonias are not completely vilified. Jankl is haunted not so much by his move to the city as he is by the things he has been “forced” to do to accumulate power and wealth.

Schopflocher’s othering practices within the colonia deserve some attention as well. In Wie Reb Froike die Welt Rettete, for example, the portrayal of the German Jews is particularly interesting. In the stories which deal with the arrival of “the Germans” in the colonies, the narrator is always someone from the Eastern European families who recounts in detail the difficulties that the arriving Germans face, but without actually identifying with them. The Germans are pure outsiders in the colony, and in certain respects are at the mercy of their Russian and Polish coreligionists, a situation best demonstrated as Reb Froike has to be called in to rescue the crippled German Kathi from certain death as she is about to be sent back to Europe. It is significant that Schopflocher does not tell the story of the arriving Germans from their own point of view, even though this experience is likely the one with which the author himself is most personally familiar. However, it would be entirely incorrect to conclude that Schopflocher is attempting through his literary expression to distance himself from his own Germanness. As I demonstrated above, Schopflocher goes out of his way in his autobiographical sketches to position himself squarely within the tradition of German Bildungsbürgertum. His German characters are likewise proud of their civilized and rational Germanness, which makes their forced separation from Germany (and from non-Jewish Germans) appear all the more tragic.
Thus, rather than mark a separation from Germanness, I would argue that Schopflocher’s assumption of points of view which diverge from his own history are indications of his eagerness to explore all the facets of his various concurrent identities and the places where these identities are formed and performed: it is an attempt to embrace the multiplicity and dynamics of individual existence.

**Generic Hybridity**

Schopflocher’s experimental mixing and matching of personalities that I have referred to above is accomplished through a narrative strategy which likewise draws on multiple genres and which I refer to as generic hybridity. One example of this strategy can see be seen in the narrative of “Fernes Beben.” Although the protagonist, Juancho’s identity as an Argentinean male is the only thing that connects him to his creator, the story is not a reworking of an Argentinean (or even German) stock character, but of an East European Jewish one; namely, the schlemiel, that well-meaning and morally upright, yet hopelessly weak, cowardly, sexually dysfunctional, feminized and bumbling fool that long served in both the Jewish and non-Jewish imaginary as one of the archetypes of male Jewishness (Gonshak 9).17 Important for my analysis of Juancho is that the schlemiel is also “a simpleton, he is unlucky, he’s clumsy and gauche, he’s a social misfit, he’s naïve and gullible, and he makes foolish bargains” (Berger 93). This description fits Juancho perfectly. “Mein Juancho ist unter einem Unglücksstern geboren,” laments his poor old mother (“My Juancho was born under an unlucky star”; 7). His defective foot gives him a clumsy limp, which leads to his being socially awkward. Having been socially shunned his whole life, Juancho does not even know how to court a woman, and he predictably

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17 Besides the schlemiel, there are several other Yiddish words which describe foolish people, such as the colorful schlimazel, whose designation derives linguistically from both Yiddish (“shlim” or “bad”) and Hebrew (“mazl” or “luck”). My concern here is not to delineate the subtle differences in these types, as many of their traits overlap. The schlemiel is the best known of these stock characters and the only one with a direct relationship to German literature through Chamisso’s *Peter Schlemihl*. 

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ends up marrying the first girl whom, after some embarrassing coaching by the young lady in question, he manages to kiss. Finally, it is his exaggerated naïveté which leads him to accept his cousin’s “job offer” at that remote, nameless train station, despite glaring evidence that the job is not legitimate.

The European schlemiel, that generic character that serves as a model for Juancho, has been rendered extinct, his native space, the shtetl, having been violently erased from the map. Subsequent attempts to breathe life back into this character type have run up against strong resistance. For, as Ruth Wisse argues, many Jews now consider the schlemiel’s slow wit and physical weakness an uncomfortable embarrassment in the post-Holocaust world, a reminder of the perceived inability of European Jews to effectively prevent their annihilation. The moral superiority of the schlemiel, the optimism that endeared him to Jewish readers was suddenly seen in the light of the historic failure of faith to redeem the world on its own. Thus, in more contemporary configurations, particularly in American literature, this image of the frail, unmanly Jew, once identified as one of the main Jewish archetypes, now competes with what Paul Breines has called “Rambowitz” characters, tough, “heroic” Jews who give life to novels like Leon Uris’s *Exodus* (5). Yet even if the schlemiel as hero has lost a good deal of his appeal to a Jewish audience, there is no reason why a gentile version of him cannot still be compelling to a German reading public, which has long been familiar with the figure since the publication of Adelbert von Chamisso’s novel *Peter Schlemihl*, a story in which a fool sells his shadow. Although Chamisso’s character is not Jewish—even though his name is a Yiddish word derived from Hebrew—his foolish bargain with the devil results in his having to spend his life alone,

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18 It should be pointed out that Breines is concerned with competing images of Jewish masculinity, which explains his identification of Woody Allen as an American “neoschlemiel” (63). Thus, the American Schlemiel, while boasting an abundance of passivity, neurosis, and sexual dysfunction that passes as typically Jewish, has lost the intellectual simplicity, the abject naïveté that made him the object of pity. Juancho, on the other hand, retains this quality.
roaming from place to place like the proverbial wandering Jew (Fuchs 177). Thus, the German reader is able to understand Juancho, cut off from civilization and doomed to spend the last years of his life in the vast loneliness of nature, as an Argentinean incarnation of a German character with a strangely Jewish fate.

Another example of apparent generic hybridity evidenced in Schopflocher’s stories also deserves mention, namely, his occasional depiction of seemingly magical events. The inclusion of such elements might lead German readers to assume that he is employing the techniques of magical realism, which is best known as a Latin American genre characterized by the insertion of apparently magical elements within otherwise apparently “realist” narratives. But magical realism, particularly in its most important Latin American incarnations, involves more than a mere inclusion of magic within otherwise realist frames: crucially, it involves depicting the fantastical as completely ordinary and unexceptional, thereby calling into question the Western division of experience into discreet (and implicitly hierarchical) realms of real and magical. Gabriel García Márquez, the Colombian author whose *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is heralded as the prototypical Latin American magical realist novel, explains his intent this way: “My most pressing problem was to destroy the line of demarcation that separates that which seems real from that which seems fantastic, because in the world I was trying to evoke this barrier didn’t exist” (my translation, cited in Bradley vii). Therefore, it would appear to be a mistake to read Schopflocher’s depiction of magic as an appropriation of the Latin American magical realist tradition. This conclusion is compounded, however, by the fact that the already difficult task of defining and delimiting a genre is complicated in the present case by the fact that most scholars recognize at least two divergent strains of magical realism. Cuban writer and critic Alejo Carpentier, who is credited with inspiring the magical realist writer Gabriel García
Márquez, differentiates between a truly Latin American “real maravilloso” (marvelous real) and European influenced magical realism, which he links to an artificiality associated with surrealism. This rather sweeping understanding of a marvelous real that completely yet latently saturates Latin American culture is of course problematic in that it essentializes both the genre itself and the Latin American culture it is supposed to have completely penetrated. Applied to Schopflocher, Carpentier’s formulation suggests that either Schopflocher’s writing is Latin American (and therefore automatically infused with the marvelous real) or he is simply a European residing in Argentina. Without doubt, Schopflocher’s claim to a Latin American identity is slightly more tenuous than Carpentier’s, for although both writers were born in Europe to European parents, Carpentier at least had the benefit of growing up in Cuba, even if his Spanish was spiced throughout his life with a French accent (Brennan 9), as Schopflocher’s is with a German one.

Yet, given that Schopflocher’s first novels were written in Spanish and that it was this Spanish work that earned him the literary prize of the city of Buenos Aires, I see no reason to question his credentials as a truly Latin American writer. On the other hand, Schopflocher’s use of magical elements clearly does not correspond to what has come to be expected within magical realist texts, namely, that the supernatural appear as a normal part of everyday life. When Reb Froike uses mind control on the immigration agent to save the life of Kathi, for example, the feat is celebrated as something special and otherworldly, a special God-given power that is anything but commonplace. And when Marcos, the grandson of Avraham the Kabbalist in “Vom Baum

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19 In “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real” Carpentier claims the “marvelous real” as authentic Latin American cultural property: “The marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American” (104).

20 Carpentier claimed his entire life to have been born in Cuba, but Roberto González Echevarría, Sterling Professor of Hispanic and Comparative Literatures at Yale University, has shown that Carpentier was actually born in Lausanne (Switzerland) and moved to Havana as an infant.
der Erkenntnis,” discovers the magical circumstances of his birth—namely that he is the reincarnation of Avraham’s first son—this knowledge is imparted through Gematria, a system of numerology which derives meanings and relationships between words based on the numerical “value” of the words in the Hebrew numbering system. Important here is that the secrets of Kabbalah and access to the magical knowledge that it imparts are extremely limited within the Kabbalistic tradition: specifically to men over the age of forty who are deemed worthy of sharing the secret. In other words, when magical events occur in Schopflocher’s texts, they appear either as gateways to other worlds of infinite and magical dimensions or as revealing the magical truths and relationships that, while secretly functioning within everyday life, are invisible and inaccessible to ordinary people.

**Schopflocher and Borges**

To point out the incongruity between Schopflocher’s texts and the expectations of Latin American magical realism is not to claim that these works are not in dialog with Latin American fiction—quite the contrary. For even if his fiction does not fit well within the admittedly permeable generic boundaries of the “marvelous real,” Schopflocher’s depictions of the supernatural are very much in tune with those of his compatriot and contemporary, Jorge Luis Borges. One of the most celebrated Latin American authors of all time, Borges is known for having sown the early seeds of what grew to be the marvelous real. Yet many scholars have pointed out that his work bears a much stronger affinity to what Wendy Faris—apparently accepting Carpentier’s distinctions—calls the “northerly spare” (i.e., European) variety of the genre than to the exuberant “tropical lush” variation more commonly associated with Latin American fiction (165). 21

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21 Faris notes that distinctions between European and Latin American varieties of magical realism have been theorized by many scholars. Jean Weissberger, for example, distinguishes between a “scholarly” variety in
Schopflocher and Borges, however unequal their literary fame, share remarkable similarities in terms of their biographies, subject matter, and philosophical outlook. Borges was born in 1899 to a bilingual Spanish-English home in Buenos Aires. The English side derives from his paternal grandmother, a Protestant hailing from Staffordshire, England, who lived with Borges’s family and spoke English with little “Georgie.” His father, having inherited the English language as well as a healthy intellectual appetite, was an agnostic, free-thinking lover of philosophy (Aizenberg 4). Borges’s mother, on the other hand, was part of an old Creole family known for its strong nationalism and strict Catholicism. Edna Aizenberg has argued that Borges’s bilingual upbringing led him to a kind “extraterritoriality,” even before his father’s failing eyesight led him to move the family to Switzerland when Borges was only fifteen (The Aleph Weaver 9). Thus, like Schopflocher, Borges’s formative high school years were spent trying to adapt to a new culture. In Geneva, Borges learned French and Latin in school, and he taught himself German in order to access the works of the great philosophers. When his attempted reading of Kant’s impossibly dense prose failed, he became engaged instead in the study of Heine’s poetry, Buber’s prose, and the novels of Gustav Meyrink, whose Der Golem was the first German-language book Borges managed to read in its entirety (15). His later work included Spanish translations of both Hermann Hesse and, more importantly, Franz Kafka, who is often cited as having exerted the greatest influence on Borges’s depiction of the supernatural (Flores 111-13).

Borges’s attraction to the German language and his extensive reading of German literature lead him to a much larger overlap in cultural knowledge with Schopflocher than their shared

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Europe which “loses itself in art and conjecture” and a “mythic or folkloric” type in Latin America. Roberto González Echevarría sees European varieties as epistemological or “stemming from vision” while the Latin American variety is more ontological, in that the geographical milieu is, in itself, marvelous (Faris 165). While all these distinctions are necessarily qualitative and cannot be accepted as rigid, the depictions of the supernatural in Borges’s work that I will consider all show an affinity toward the more European.
experience within Argentinean culture would, on its own, permit—not least because the older
Borges belonged to the generation of Schopflocher’s father. Perhaps more importantly for the
present study, the German language led Borges to what he refers to as “lo hebreo” (“things
Hebrew”; Aizenberg 14). Of primary importance in Borges’s interest in Judaism is not so much
his dabbling in Kabbalah, which I will deal with in the next section, but rather his particular
spatial interpretation of the Jewish condition. As Aizenberg has pointed out, Borges’s interest in
Jewishness stems from his recognition of what is perhaps the central problematic of Latin
American identity vis-à-vis the so-called “Western” world: it is part of that world yet still
marked with a sense of otherness. The identification with European cultural traditions is
particularly strong in Argentina, which sees itself as the “whitest”—and therefore the most
European—country in Latin America.22 Thus, the sense of “otherness” in relationship to the
more dominant Western cultures is likely to be felt more keenly and exclusion from the power
structure is likely to be felt more personally and painfully, not unlike the exclusion of the Jew
from the European culture with which he so strongly identified. Thus, for Borges, “Judaism
became a paradigm for being Latin American” (Aizenberg vii). Yet Borges, like Schopflocher, is
aware of at least one strategic benefit of being located at the “margins” of Western European
culture, namely, that he not only has the right to everything Latin American, but also to
everything worthwhile in the Western cultural tradition, including all its topoi, symbols, and
archetypes (50). This assertion amounts to a “territorial claim” to all cultural spaces to which the
author has any access at all. It is a radical challenge to cultural hegemony of the West as well as
a challenge to the concept of Western civilization as a discreet, bordered entity, and as such

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22 Andres Malamud (University of Buenos Aires/European University Institute) claims that Argentina,
because of its white physiognomy, high education levels, and “Western cultural patterns” has always looked to
London and Paris as reference points rather than to Rio de Janeiro or Mexico City (3).
serves as a validation of Leslie Adelson’s rejection of the designation of the condition of cultural marginality as a state of being “between two worlds” (116). Furthermore, this territorial claim exhibits a Thirdspace quality, particularly in its rejection of “either/or” alternatives in favor of a “both/and” option. It highlights the unique Thirdspace ability to be completely within two cultural spaces simultaneously. For both Schopflocher and Borges, this geographical simultaneity is materialized, magically, in the form of the Aleph.

The Aleph

The Aleph that Borges describes in his short story of the same name—a place which contains all other places—serves Soja as a symbol for the limitless possibilities of Thirdspace. Of particular interest to Soja, as noted above, is the way that the Aleph, as Thirdspace, is realized in the metropolis which within its geography contains all the intersecting geographies of all the people and cultures that are packed within its borders. Yet the Aleph might just as easily be understood as a symbol of heterotopia, and as such is in dialog with Foucault at least as much as it is with Soja. It is therefore interesting that Schopflocher also invokes the mysteries of the Aleph, yet in a slightly different way. It is through the comparison of these invocations and their implications that not only the possibilities but also the limits of the concepts of Thirdspace, heterotopia, and the Aleph as critical tools through which we express the budding awareness of space that is referred to as the spatial turn, are revealed.

In Borges’s story “The Aleph,” Carlos, the first cousin of the narrator’s deceased girlfriend Beatriz, invites the narrator (presumably one of Borges’s myriad alter egos) to his city apartment to see an Aleph, which he explains as one of the points in space that contains all other points. Borges agrees and hurries over to have a look. Because of what he describes as the limited, serial nature of language, Borges claims that he can only with great difficulty and necessary distortion describe what he has witnessed in Carlos’s cellar. In a sphere no more than an inch across, he is
able to view every detail of every conceivable earthly space from every possible angle, simultaneously, without overlap or confusion. He lists just a few of the infinite number of wondrous things he’s seen: all the ants on earth, all the grains of sand in a desert, a random woman in Invernes, a sunset in Querétaro painted in the color of a rose in Bengal—objects as unrelated as the types of animals registered in the Chinese encyclopedia. But his wonder turns to horror as he realizes that he can also see such intimate and hidden things as his own bowels, the cancer in the breast of the Invernes woman, his dead lover’s dusty and decaying bones, and the heretofore unknown obscene letters she has written to Carlos and hidden in a desk drawer.

Having once seen the monstrosity of infinite knowledge, he tries to convince Carlos not to fight the planned demolition of the apartment building and to leave the “pernicious metropolis” once and for all (26-28).

Schopflocher’s Aleph appears in “Seltsam Vertraut” as the rosebush that Jankl loved as a child. Standing next to the plant, the aging Jack is transported to one of the infinite number of alternate universes in which his life has not been lived in vain. Within a few minutes, Jack lives an entire lifetime as Jankl, a boy who is never sent to the city and who grows up anchored in the colonia, marries Chawah, his childhood love, has children and grandchildren who love him, and who dies at peace with himself. Yet the alternate universe is not a utopian dream and even this life is not without its difficulties: successful harvests are followed by failed crops, cattle prices rise and fall, ants must be battled, droughts and floods afflict the land. Most of his children leave the colonia for the city, and his beloved Chawah dies after a short illness. After returning to the “present” universe in which Jankl is simply a man whose choices have left him lonely and his life meaningless, he dies of an apparent heart attack.
Both Borges and Schopflocher portray their respective Alephs (named after א, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet) as earthly manifestations of the infinite universe. In Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), the aleph is endowed with magical powers because of its numerical value of 1, which denotes both the oneness of God and the unity of all creation. However, there are differences in the authors’ portrayal of the Aleph. Borges’s Aleph is a small sphere through which infinite physical spaces can be viewed from all angles. It is a microcosm of the known universe in which, miraculously, no detail is diminished and every space is rendered “without overlapping or transparency” (26). Yet this Aleph does not actually contain all other spaces—the description in the text makes it clear that this tiny sphere merely mirrors or re-presents them, serving as little more than a convenient screen upon which images from the farthest reaches are projected. It is an inverted Foucauldian panopticon in which the unified eye of the observer, with infinitely multiplied lenses, looks inward from every direction upon a multiplicity of space reduced to a single, central point; it is a fly’s eyeball turned inside out. In order words, the Aleph that Soja finds so important as a symbol of Thirdspace represents not so much the density or complexity of the metropolis as it does the fantasy of a scholar’s crystal ball.

Schopflocher’s rosebush, on the other hand, is the point where the “upper path,” the unknown path of infinite possibilities, meets the lower path of earthly history. What is contained in this Aleph is the infinite number of alternate universes which has, paradoxically, increased in number with every choice Jack has made, every turn that he has taken. Thus, unlike Borges’s (and Soja’s) Aleph, Schopflocher’s Aleph shows its beholder not the simultaneity of spaces that are, but that of the spaces that might have been. It is not so much the master of space as it is the master of time.
Soja encourages us to “choose” Thirdspace as a position in, or alliance with, marginalized space. At the same time, the radical openness of his concept encourages us to complicate our understanding of margins and their relationship to centers, borders, and intersections.

Schopflocher’s texts respond to this opportunity by helping us imagine other othernesses. They also demonstrate how personal spaces are claimed and identities are constructed, assumed and performed in all of our lived spaces—not just in the metropolis represented by the Borgesian Aleph. Importantly, Schopflocher’s texts let us view the Aleph itself from a different angle, one which, in keeping with the spirit of Thirdspace, highlights the revolutionary value of every choice, including the “choice” of marginality.
CHAPTER 5
TOWARD A CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF GERMANNESSE

In this dissertation I have attempted to trace the development of literary and filmic expressions of Germanness in the postwar period as they relate to spaces outside of Germany proper, from Eastern Europe to the jungles and mountains of South America. Taking Anderson’s conception of the nation as “imagined community” as a starting point, I have chosen to look at fictional encounters between Germans (or Europeans imbued with specifically German characteristics) and those “natives” inhabiting the exotic space in order to see if and how those interactions reflect wider issues within the German national discourse at home. These issues include the proper role of Germany and Germans in the wider world, the relationship between German civilization and the environment, and the ways of dealing with Germany’s past.

Germany in the World

As I demonstrated in the second chapter, the first postwar attempts to show German Heimat abroad reflected a strong sense of politicized nostalgia, a longing for a time when Germans in outside of Germany could be imagined as playing a leading role in the cultural development of those areas. In Ich denke oft an Piroschka, Hofmann depicts a “pre-capitalist” rural community with which postwar Germans could strongly identify. It is a community living in wholeness, where Germans and Hungarians live in happy cooperation—before the establishment of National Socialism, the devastation of WWII, the “fall” of Eastern Europe to communism or the division of the German nation between East and West.

Later generations of Germans have tended to take a more critical approach to German intervention in the affairs of the outside world. Those such as Werner Herzog and Annette Schenker, who identify more strongly with German Romantic traditions, tend to portray exotic lands as difficult and dangerous places where only the most determined—the elect few—are able
to prevail. These narratives tend to exalt the adventurer while stressing the inaccessibility of the exotic to the average Westerner. Other writers such as Uwe Timm take a staunchly critical approach to all efforts by Germans to interfere in foreign countries, including efforts to help “modernize” or Westernize non-European countries and cultures. This argument rests in part on the assumption that the West has very little to offer to non-European cultures that is not likely to lead to social inequality, crime, and corruption. Not surprisingly, all the writers and filmmakers I have examined are critical of traditional mass tourism. Herzog even goes so far as to call tourism “sin,” whereas travelling on foot is virtue (see appendix).

The German and the Environment

As Susanne Zantop has shown, South America has served in the German imagination as a symbol for wild, untamed nature for hundreds of years. Although the ways in which writers and filmmakers approach this mythology vary significantly, the variation depends upon the artist’s own relationship with environment. On one extreme is Herzog, whose antipathy toward the random, arbitrary, even sinister hostility of nature is reflected in all his jungle films. For him, there is no harmony with the dark forces of nature, only an obsessive drive to overcome them. A similar attitude is evident in Timm’s Der Schlangenbaum: although the environment is not imbued with malevolent intentions, the novel nonetheless makes a strong case for the incompatibility of the jungle environment with Western technology. Schenker, on the other hand, paints a much more amicable picture of the natural world: although the environment can be dangerous if one chooses the most extreme of adventures (as she often does), on the whole humans are portrayed as living in harmony with wild (and domesticated) animals, which often do not even bother to run away when humans approach.

The wide gap between Herzog’s apparent anthropocentrism and Schenker’s “ecocentrism” reflects a dichotomy which had already established itself between early and late Romantic motifs
in German literary history. Whereas early Romanticism laid emphasis on natural harmony, the later period tended to focus on the mysterious, demonic, and uncanny realms of human existence. As I have shown in the second chapter, the issues of man versus nature are still some of the most important points of discussion in Germany today. The examples of the bears Bruno Knut are quite instructive: Knut, the polar bear cub born in the Berlin Zoo, has been used by German environmentalists to emphasize the danger that global warming poses to the natural environment of the polar bear—far outside of Germany’s borders. Thus, issues of German environmental action at home (reducing greenhouse gases) and abroad (saving polar bears) have opened a new avenue for German action outside Germany without raising the same red flags that Germany’s participation in the bombing of Serbia did. The case of Bruno, the brown bear who was shot dead by hired hunters in Bavaria, raised issues about the willingness of Germans to once again allow potentially dangerous animals to share a forest which has been brought under human control and “rationalized.” It also brought to the forefront regional differences and resentments between what Herzog describes as the rational, Teutonic North and the dreamy, rowdy South. By and large, the German public is enthusiastic about the reintroduction into the native forest not only of bears, but also of the wolves and lynxes which had likewise been hunted into extinction.

The German Past

Even when main characters in German depictions of the exotic are not German themselves, the narratives that unfold in the stories that I have examined are driven, to different extents, by the haunting specter of the German past. In order to distance themselves from this past, the characters may assume alternate identities and thereby deemphasize their own Germanness. In *Piroschka* I have shown how the romantic portrayal of the mythological Hungarian past serves as a substitute for a mythological Germanic past which was made untouchable by its adoption by
and subsequent popular association with National Socialism. This same phenomenon can be seen in *Was für ein verrücktes Leben*: Schenker does her best to paint a heart-warming picture of melancholy Argentinean men singing the tales of the national heroes to the tune of a single guitar. The German reader, with no access of his or her own to a timeless history wrapped in mythology and heroic legend, is able to enjoy the feeling of oneness with this history vicariously.

Another way in which these characters deal with the German past is through the othering of the anachronistic German figure that is deemed incompatible with contemporary ideals of Germanness. In *Der Schlangenbaum*, for example, Timm portrays the small, German-speaking religious communities in Argentina as not only fanatically religious, but also physically degenerate. The former S.S. man who shows up at the parties on Green Hill is likewise ignored by the majority of the guests. Schenker also has a strong tendency to temporally other the figure of the escaped Nazi, who has become a stock character in German tales of Argentina.

**The Germanness of the Future: Multicultural Identities?**

It is by now axiomatic that Germany is becoming increasingly multicultural, despite efforts on the political right to curb the influence of non-European sub-cultures in Germany by enforcing cultural standards on would-be immigrants. Yet it seems that constructions of Germanness set outside the safe borders of the Fatherland are slow in catching up. Instead of encouraging multiculturalism, these portrayals seem to encourage a retreat from external contact with alien cultures. The ostensible reason is the fear that native cultures can only be contaminated by Western influences and a belief that their survival as a culture depends on their continued isolation. Yet even this attitude is ultimately Eurocentric—for it assumes both that the European knows what is best for the native and that European culture, wrapped as it is in industrial production and consumerism, will ultimately overrun any other culture that it touches.
Of all the authors I have examined in this dissertation, it is those who live and work outside a German cultural framework that show the strongest tendency to portray characters who adopt multicultural identities. Most obvious is Schenker herself. Despite trying to portray herself as a true female gaucho (in a culture where the gaucho is always male), Schenker retains her German identity, both physically and culturally. She is always conscious and seemingly proud of her conspicuously blond hair and blue eyes. Indeed, she does not hesitate to use these to her advantage whenever she needs to. In other words, her persona is neither strictly European nor Argentinean, but a selective mixture of both. It is perhaps not surprising that the literary work of Robert Schopflocher, who has lived as a German-Jewish-Argentinean for the past seventy years, shows the greatest multicultural potential. Although his main characters are never German, the author himself identifies very strongly with his German roots in Fürth. Whereas Schenker tends to understate her Germanness, Schopflocher goes out of his way, as a writer, to highlight his. His protagonists struggle to find their identities through their negotiations of space: Jewish, Argentinean, and even German spaces that must be traversed and challenged. His concentration on the individual struggles of his protagonists, who may live their entire lives in one small space, drives a wedge in the effort to delineate the various identities that they (and the author himself) assume.

As the European Union expands into Eastern Europe and even beyond the traditional borders of Europe, it seems less and less likely that the dissolving of national allegiances within member countries—which seemed an almost utopian possibility just a few years ago—will ever come to pass. Thus the dream of many of the Germans from the 68er generation, that Germany would finally be defined by its seamless and egalitarian integration with its neighbors rather than by its shameful history, seems to be a fading possibility. In light of this stubborn persistence of
nationalist sentiment, it becomes increasingly important that literary and filmic expressions of
sameness and otherness resist the temptation to ignore the specificity of individual nations (and
human beings) in an effort to preempt the danger of nationalism. Instead of attempting to show
how we’re really all the same, we need to find ways to accept the sameness and otherness in both
those with whom we identify with those against whom we define ourselves. This would entail an
ethical process of othering similar to what Mary Canales has called “inclusionary othering,”
where recognition of difference prompts a reevaluation of self through empathy. Perhaps Uwe
Timm himself wrote it best:

Allein die Neugier auf das Fremde reicht nicht aus. Die Gier Neues zu sehen und zu hören,
garantiert noch keineswegs eine Sichtweise, die Verstehen ermöglicht. Das setzt etwas
Anderes, Grundsätzlichere voraus: das Staunen. Ein Staunen darüber, wie die Menschen,
wie die Dinge. . . anders sein können als man selbst ist. Die Wahrnehmung dieser Differenz
erst lässt eine Reflexion der eigenen Wahrnehmung zu und damit die Möglichkeit der
eigenen emanzipatorischen Veränderung im Verstehen. Ein Verstehen, das sich bemüht,
die eigene Wahrnehmung als vorläufig und geschichtlich bedingt anzunehmen, also auch
sich selbst als fremd und abhängig zu erfahren, um so den anderen, Fremden in seiner
Würde wahrzunehmen.¹ (“Das Nahe, das Ferne,” 9)

Timm’s formulation not only makes a strong case for an ethical “inclusionary othering,” it
also asserts the othering of the self as not only useful, but a necessary step in the approach to
human understanding. Timm’s own message of retreat in Der Schlangenbaum, then, is perhaps
too comprehensive and hurried, as this self-othering reflection that Timm rightly prescribes
requires contact with Others—not just those inside Germany, but also those in Eastern Europe,
the Argentinean frontier, and the remotest Amazonian village.

¹“Curiosity for the Other is insufficient in itself. The lust to see and hear new things in no way guarantees a point of
view that makes understanding possible. This requires something else, something more fundamental: amazement.
An amazement about the ways that people and things can be different from oneself. The perception of this difference
permits reflection on one’s own perception and with it the possibility of an emancipatory transformation of
understanding. An understanding that endeavors to accept one’s own perception as provisional and historically
determined, and therefore also to experience itself as Other and dependent, such that the Other can be perceived in
his worthiness” [my translation].
APPENDIX
THE MINNESOTA DECLARATION (HERZOG 1999)

“LESSONS OF DARKNESS”

1. By dint of declaration the so-called Cinema Verité is devoid of verité. It reaches a merely superficial truth, the truth of accountants.

2. One well-known representative of Cinema Verité declared publicly that truth can be easily found by taking a camera and trying to be honest. He resembles the night watchman at the Supreme Court who resents the amount of written law and legal procedures. “For me,” he says, “there should be only one single law: the bad guys should go to jail.” Unfortunately, he is part right, for most of the many, much of the time.

3. Cinema Verité confounds fact and truth, and thus plows only stones. And yet, facts sometimes have a strange and bizarre power that makes their inherent truth seem unbelievable.

4. Fact creates norms, and truth illumination.

5. There are deeper strata of truth in cinema, and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization.


7. Tourism is sin, and travel on foot virtue.

8. Each year at springtime scores of people on snowmobiles crash through the melting ice on the lakes of Minnesota and drown. Pressure is mounting on the new governor to pass a protective law. He, the former wrestler and bodyguard, has the only sage answer to this: “You can´t legislate stupidity.”

9. The gauntlet is hereby thrown down.

10. The moon is dull. Mother Nature doesn´t call, doesn´t speak to you, although a glacier eventually farts. And don´t you listen to the Song of Life.

11. We ought to be grateful that the Universe out there knows no smile.

12. Life in the oceans must be sheer hell. A vast, merciless hell of permanent and immediate danger. So much of a hell that during evolution some species—including man—crawled, fled onto some small continents of solid land, where the Lessons of Darkness continue.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Will Lehman was born in 1968 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He spent the first ten years of his life in Loveland, Ohio, before moving with his family to Naples, Florida. Upon graduating from Barron Collier High School, Will attended the University of Florida in Gainesville until 1992, when he completed the Bachelor of Science in business administration with a focus on marketing. After a year in the work force, Will returned to UF in 1993 to pursue a Master of Arts in German, which he completed in 1997 after spending a year in Mannheim, Germany.

After completing the master’s, Will left the academic world to work for six years at Bloomingdale’s in West Palm Beach and New York, where he served as manager, corporate trainer, and database analyst. In 2003, after teaching an intensive German course as an adjunct at Hunter College in New York, Will decided to return to UF to complete his PhD in German Studies and pursue an academic career.

While earning his PhD, Will had the opportunity to teach in a variety of disciplines at UF, including German, Spanish, and freshman English composition. At the same time, Will taught both classroom-based and online courses as an Adjunct Instructor of German at the University of South Florida in Tampa. His first appointment as Assistant Professor of German is at Western Carolina University.