

“THE DOUBLE BIND” OF 1989:  
REINTERPRETING SPACE, PLACE, AND IDENTITY  
IN POSTCOMMUNIST WOMEN’S LITERATURE

BY

JESSICA LYNN WIENHOLD-BROKISH

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Doctorial Committee:

Associate Professor Lilya Kaganovsky, Chair; Director of Research  
Professor Nancy Blake  
Professor Harriet Murav  
Associate Professor Anke Pinkert

## **Abstract**

This dissertation is a comparative, cross-cultural exploration of identity construction after 1989 as it pertains to narrative setting and the creation of literary place in postcommunist women's literature. Through spatial analysis the negotiation between the unresolvable bind of a stable national and personal identity and of a flexible transnational identity are discussed. Russian, German, and Croatian writers, specifically Olga Mukhina, Nina Sadur, Monika Maron, Barbara Honigmann, Angela Krauß, Vedrana Rudan, Dubravka Ugrešić, and Slavenka Drakulić, provide the material for an examination of the proliferation of female writers and the potential for recuperative literary techniques after 1989. The project is organized thematically with chapters dedicated to apartments, cities, and foreign lands, focusing on strategies of identity reconstruction after the fall of socialism.

*To My Family,  
especially Mom, Dad, Jeffrey, and Finnegan*

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## Chapter One

### Introduction: “We are, from this perspective, all postcommunists now”<sup>1</sup>

Wolfgang Becker’s 2003 film *Good Bye Lenin!* elucidates the reorganization of and relationship to space after the fall of the Wall in Berlin. While in a coma, the protagonist’s mother, who enthusiastically supports the socialist state, misses the fall of the Berlin Wall and her beloved East Germany. Alex attempts to protect his mother from the disturbing news by transforming the family apartment back into its pre-Wende state.<sup>2</sup> He replaces the Western furniture with the now out-dated furniture of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) that had been disposed of on street corners throughout the city and imagines a new version of the story of the fall of the wall, in which the Westerners desire to leave the West and take up residence in the East. Alex’s attempts to control personal space in the reorganization of cultural and national borders reflects the post-wall primacy of space relations after 1989, as well as the conflicting fears and joys accompanying the transition.<sup>3</sup> Films like Germany’s *Good Bye Lenin!*, as well as Hungarian Ibolya Fekete’s 1996 *Bolshe Vita* and Serbian Srdjan Karanović’s 2003 *Sjaj u ocima* [*Loving Glances*], attest to the psychological and physical border shifts that accompanied the end of socialism and the exigency to produce “texts” to attest to or deal with the cultural and

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<sup>1</sup> Sakwa, Richard. *Postcommunism*. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999. (3)

<sup>2</sup> “Wende” is a German word meaning “the change or turning point” in reference to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

<sup>3</sup> I use the date 1989 and the terms *post-wall* and *post-Wende* to refer not only to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of socialism in East Germany, but also as a symbol of the changes that took place all over Eastern, Central, and Southeast Europe, as well as in Russia, following this symbolic spatial catalyst. The terms *Post-wall* and *Post-Wende* emanate from German Studies. *Post-wall* has been used in German Studies as early as 2000 in Eric Rentschler “From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus” (*Cinema and Nation*. Eds. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie. New York: Routledge, 2000). The German Studies Journal *New German Critique* highlighted the term in a “Special Issue on Postwall Cinema” (No. 87, Autumn 2002), and the term has been widely employed in post-1989 studies, including Anke Pinkert’s *Film and Memory in East Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

identificatory transition.<sup>4</sup> Postsocialist cities and nations underwent major physical changes after 1989. Examples include the reconstruction of areas such as Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, the construction and remounting of monuments such as that in Ban Jelačić Square in Zagreb, the renaming of city streets across postsocialist countries, the establishing of museums dedicated to preserving the socialist past, like Muzeum komunismu in Prague or the DDR Museum in Berlin, and cafes, like Ljubljana's Nostalgie, with décor catering to the communist past.

When we recall the end of socialism in Eastern Europe,<sup>5</sup> we remember the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the opening of borders between Eastern and Western Europe, the partitioning off of nations in Russia, and the contestation of borders in the Balkans. The collapse of socialism sparked extensive shifts in physical borders across Europe and with these changes came intensified transformations of symbolic categories, such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, and religion. My project explores “the language of place” in postcommunist texts from Russia, Germany, and Croatia. Wesley A. Kort notes, “The language of place and space is always part of narrative discourse and can be a principle locus of a narrative’s power and significance. Places in narrative have force and meaning; they are related to human values and beliefs; and they are part of a larger human world, including actions and events” (11). The language of place Kort refers to is one of many “languages” that make up a narrative, including the language of character, action,

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this project, I use the terms *socialist* and *postsocialist* when referring to the political and economic systems of former socialist countries. Karl Marx explains socialism as the dictatorship of the proletariat that restructures society, resulting in the ultimate goal—communism. *Communist* and *postcommunist* are employed when addressing the utopian ideology of the socialist state. Thus, my title refers to *postcommunist* literature pointing to the cultural and social function of literature in the socialist state’s schema as “engineers of human souls” that pushed toward the dream of communism. In this way, the terms *communist* and *postcommunist* do not directly apply to the state itself, but to the Marxist ideology.

<sup>5</sup> The geographical terminology for postcommunist countries is confused and disordered. In an attempt to discuss Russia, Germany, and Croatia, I use the terms Eastern and Central Europe, Western and Eastern Europe, Eastern and Soviet Block depending on context (both ideological and geographic). I recognize the problematic nature of including the former Yugoslavia in either of these categories, as it is located in Southeastern Europe/the Balkans and ideologically split with the USSR in the 1950s. Likewise, the unsettled position of Russia (both in Europe and Asia) and its position at the center of the Eastern Block (in contrast to the satellite nations that made up the Soviet Block) make it difficult to geographically group these nations under a single name/term.

and tone.<sup>6</sup> As Edward Said points out in *Culture and Imperialism*, narrative provides a spatial sense that can contribute to an individual's or nation's understanding of itself and its position in the world. Place in narrative does more than provide a passive setting from which characterization and plot are developed. It is a "language" that helps us understand our relationship to space and to situate ourselves historically. Kort suggests that through narratives we can see how a nation, such as England, has "appropriated its past, adjusted to its present, and anticipated its future" (13). Narrative directly contributes to the "imagining of communities"<sup>7</sup> and the individual's place within them. The places of the narratives covered in my dissertation (apartments, cities, and countries) generate and contend with understandings of space after 1989.

With post-wall geographic changes in Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans, identity markers, such as nationality, ethnicity, and religion, became intrinsically connected to questions of space. The importance of place in defining identity gained greater emphasis as postsocialist nations stressed the complexity of joining larger international political and economic groups (such as the European Union) that promoted the opening of borders and cross-national interaction. The opening of borders resulted in a perceived threat of the loss of individual identity. Thus, these postsocialist nations attempted to maintain, reestablish, or construct symbolic categories of nationality, ethnicity, and religion. The collapse of socialism and the resulting transitions caused by the end of the Cold War (with its oppositional East versus West identity construction, along with increased access to world markets and international interactions) highlights an identity struggle underscored by spatial relations. The main purpose of

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<sup>6</sup> In this context, *place* is defined as the particular in contrast to the general, *space*. Joseph A. Kestner provides the particular-general distinction between the notions place and space in his 1978 book, *The Spatiality of the Novel* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978). Kestner's description underlines the basic usage of the terms in this project where space gives meaning to the form of the text and allows the writer to engage the reader. All of these scholars build upon Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981). This early twentieth century literary theorist laid the foundation for concerns of the role of place in literature. See Chapter One: introduction, page 13-14, for a discussion of Bakhtin's work.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983).

this study is to uncover the potential contribution of postcommunist women's literature to current understandings of space relations as it pertains to identity construction across national borders.

### 1.1 The Double Bind

Postcommunist literature from Russia, Germany, and Croatia elucidates a growing trend in identity construction that can best be articulated through an investigation of place.

Postcommunism is not just a specific historical and political transition for the twenty-seven countries of Eurasia, but also a universal change in “the political and political-philosophical terrain” of countries everywhere (Sakwa 3). According to Richard Sakwa's development of the notion of postcommunism, it is both a marker of an historical shift and a “universal syndrome” that affects the formation of nationalism and subjectivity across the globe at a time when geographic borders are permeable while symbolic categories of ethnicity, religion, and national identity are increasingly closed (3). The postcommunist syndrome—an identity struggle comprised of a desire for both postnational and national identification—can be seen prominently in representations of space especially in postcommunist literature. This struggle is by no means restricted to the literature of former Soviet-Block countries. However, because of the prominence of new relationships to space in these nations after 1989, the tension is magnified.

In 1991 Jacques Derrida published a text, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, combining two articles that he had written the previous year. Derrida explores what he calls Western Europe's “double injunction” (29), which arose from “the tremor that is shaking what are called Central and Eastern Europe under the very problematic names *perestroika*, *democratization*, *reunification*, entry into the *market economy*, access to political and economic



liberalisms” (original emphasis, 19).<sup>8</sup> He continues, “This earthquake, which by definition knows no borders, is no doubt the immediate cause of the subject chosen for this debate on ‘European cultural identity’” (19). In the wake of the “earthquake,” Derrida notes that Europe’s physical and “spiritual” geography are thrown into question (19). The post-wall transitions of national and symbolic borders spur a double obligation whereby the old must be preserved and the new must be admitted. Derrida suggests that in this double bind, “it is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, *but* of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not” (original emphasis, 29). Derrida addresses Western Europe specifically; however, in many ways, this double injunction appears in numerous forms across the globe as nations attempt to protect their own physical and symbolic borders, while engaging with the transitions of increasing globalization.

In the case of postsocialist nations like Russia, Croatia, and Germany, this double injunction is even more unsettled since these nations face a restructuring of their national and international identities, as well as of their physical reality. While Western Europe may have faced an alteration of their mental world maps, the shifts taking place in Eastern Europe were much graver. The postcommunist syndrome highlights the need to maintain links to the past, which is even more difficult in postsocialist nations that oftentimes desire to ignore or efface the past and in nations that do not have a well developed “imagined community.” Likewise, these

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<sup>8</sup> In 1956 Gregory Bateson introduced the concept of the *double bind* in an essay “Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia.” Bateson proposes a communicational theory on the origin of schizophrenia, pointing to “unresolvable sequences of experiences” (206) occurring in the communication between mother and child. According to his study, a double bind victim is given an injunction, followed by a secondary injunction that conflicts with the first, thus resulting in an inescapable situation. The nation’s demand to construct a closed national identity runs up against the call to be international and have fluid national boundaries. For a victim of the double bind, who is in an impossible situation, Bateson suggests, “it is better to shift and become somebody else, or shift and insist that he is somewhere else. Then the double bind cannot work on the victim, because it isn’t he and besides he is in a different place” (210). The victim of the double bind’s geographic shifting and reorganization is explored in these post-1989 texts.

nations must remake themselves in relation to shared political and economic markets, as well as to open borders. The double injunction that Derrida speaks of concerning Western Europe is explored from the perspective of the periphery—Russia, East Germany, and Croatia.

I define the concept of the *double injunction* in more personal terms. I argue that what holds true for nations also holds true for the individual, caught in a shifting world of open borders and ethnic reconfiguration. We see this most clearly in the literature produced after 1989, in which the characters confront a personal double bind. Identity construction is conflicted in characters torn between their desires to establish stable boundaries of the self (oftentimes building upon symbolic categories like nationality, gender, and ethnicity), while maintaining more fluid and permeable boundaries that encapsulate hybridity and multiplicity. The double injunction comes to stand as a challenge to identity construction common to transnational studies. In the former socialist nations of Russia, Germany, and Croatia, this construction proves to be especially treacherous because the symbolic categories used to construct identities are unsettled and in flux (Russia and Germany) or conversely, strictly constructed and maintained (Croatia). The paradoxical desire to preserve and relinquish is certainly not unique to postsocialist nations; however, it does present an unparalleled opportunity to explore the difficulties and potentials of this universal syndrome that affects us all to varying degrees. Sakwa suggests, “We are, from this perspective, all postcommunists now” (3).

## 1.2 Reading Postcommunist Literature

Because much of the postcommunist transition involves the reorganization of space, a reimagining of both personal identity and cultural identity becomes a frequent challenge and topic of postcommunist literature. The inquiry into how postcommunist literature deals with

space relations marks a fruitful avenue into multiple topical debates. The discussion of place in postcommunist literature uncovers the importance of including this literature in dialogues concerning a post-1989 understanding of and relationship with space on a global level. In East Germany, Heiner Müller proclaimed that, “The GDR never existed” (Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies* 3) and Yugoslavia has often been dubbed “the country that never was” (Lampe 4). Although many are quick to dismiss former socialist countries and downplay the significance of the end of socialism, the texts in my project point out not only their existence, but also their relevance. Scholars such as Svetlana Boym, Charity Scribner, and Serguei Oushakine have addressed postcommunist nostalgia.<sup>9</sup> Other current scholarship interested in postcommunist literature, like Robert Murraray Davis’ *Literature of Post-Communist Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania: A Study*, explores post-wall literature as a reaction to the nations’ changing markets, while Rajendra Anand Chitnis, discusses the absence of a political agenda in postcommunist literature.<sup>10</sup> Instead of focusing on nation specific issues such as open markets, changes in publishing practices, rejection of politics, and postcommunist specific nostalgia, I endeavor to open up postcommunist literature to conversations of world literature. In a similar vein, the majority of the scholarship on the writers included in my dissertation center on reading these female writers’ works through the lens of women’s studies.<sup>11</sup> I focus on reading gender in

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<sup>9</sup> Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2001); Serguei Alex. Oushakine’s “We’re nostalgic but we’re not crazy”: Retrofitting the Past in Russia.” (*The Russian Review* 66 (July 2007): 451–82); Charity Scribner’s *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Rajendra Anand Chitnis’ *Literature in Post-Communist Russia and Eastern Europe: The Russian, Czech and Slovak Fiction of the Changes 1988-98* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Robert Murraray Davis’ *Literature of Post-Communist Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania: A Study*. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Carol Adlam’s *Women in Russian Literature after Glasnost: Female Alternatives*. (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2005.); David J. Birnbaum’s and Karin Sarsenov’s “Who is the “Cute Little Redhead”? Nina Sadur’s ‘Milen’kii, ryzhen’kii’: A Literary Conversation” (*The Slavic and East European Journal* 48.2 (Summer 2004): 203-223); Helga Druxes’ *Resisting Bodies: The Negotiation of Female Agency in Twentieth Century Women’s Fiction*. (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1996); Helena Goscilo’s “Paradigm Lost?: Contemporary Women’s Fiction” (*Women Writers in Russian Literature*. Eds. Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994. 205-228) and “Perestroika and Post-

these postcommunist women's texts as a consideration of identity, in which gender remains a pertinent component of identity construction, but not a totality. Approaching the works of female postcommunist writers, while at times responding to specific historical, political, and even gendered issues, provides insightful and productive additions to broader issues and trends in world literature.

### 1.2.1 *Physical Geographies*

The settings of apartments, cities, and countries force issues of physical and symbolic borders. Kort suggests that we consider the weight of a setting as a language of place, which functions as much more than a passive background. He prefers the term *geography* to *setting*, noting, "A narrative's 'geography' can set limits and boundaries to the narrative world,

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Soviet Prose: From Dazzle to Dispersal" (*A History of Women's Writing in Russia*. Eds. Adele Marie Barker and Jehanne M. Gheith. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 297-312); Catriona Kelly's *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Alison Lewis's "Re-Membering the Barbarian: Memory and Repression in Monika Maron's *Animal Triste*." (*The German Quarterly*. 71.1 (Winter 1998): 30-46); Harriet Murav's "Engendering the Russian Body Politic." (*Genders* 22 (1995): 32-56); Tatyana Novikov's "Angry Women's Voices: Revenge Fantasies in Nina Sadur's Stories." (*Times of Trouble: Violence in Russian Literature and Culture*. Eds. Marcus C. Levitt and Tatyana Novikov. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007. 276-286.) and "Requiems': Liudmila Petrushevskaja's World of Death" (*Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 58.1 (2004): 31-47); Nadya L. Peterson's *Subversive Imaginations: Fantastic Prose and the End of Soviet Literature, 1970s-1990s*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997); Jelena Petrović's "The Women's Writing in the 1990's—Manipulation vs. Subversion." (Slovenke u Medijskom. City of Women/Mesto Žensk Conference. Oct. 10-14, 2005. <<http://www.cityofwomen.org/2005/sl/coweb/insecurity/the-womens-writing-in-the-1990-manipulation-vs-subversion>>.); Karen Remmler's "En-gendering Bodies of Memory: Tracing the Genealogy of Identity in the Work of Esther Dischereit, Barbara Honigmann, and Irene Dische." (*Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature Since 1989*. Eds. Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler. New York: New York University Press, 1994. 184-209.); Karin Sarsenov's "Sadur and Madness: Problems of Representation" (*The Oeuvre of Nina Sadur*. Eds. Karin Sarsenov, Helena Goscilo, and David J. Birnbaum. Pittsburgh: The Ohio State University Working Papers in Slavic Studies, 2006. 74-89); Vera Shamina's "Women in Russian Theater" (*The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*. Eds. Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay. New York: Routledge, 1998. 213-217); Elizabeth Skomp's "Violence, Madness, and the Female Grotesque in Nina Sadur's *The South* and Svetlana Vasilenko's *Little Fool*." (*Times of Trouble: Violence in Russian Literature and Culture*. Eds. Marcus C. Levitt and Tatyana Novikov. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007. 287-295.); Alexandra Smith's "Carnivalising the Canon: The Grotesque and the Subversive in Contemporary Russian Women's Prose (Petrushevskaja, Sadur, Tolstaia, Narbikova)" (*Russian Literature in Transition*. Eds. Ian K. Lilly and Henrietta Mondry. Nottingham, England: Astra Press, 1999. 35-58); Melissa T. Smith's "Waiting in the Wings: Russian Women Playwrights in the Twentieth Century" (*Women Writers in Russian Literature*. Eds. Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994.189-204).

determining, for example, what occurs, what is possible, and what can and cannot be expected. In addition, the language of space can set conditions, either negatively or positively arrayed, that resist or enhance the interests or attitudes of characters or narrators” (15). With this direction in mind, the texts considered here reveal the manner in which place creates limits and boundaries, as well as how characters interact with the space. The locations move from the centralized place of the apartment to the open spaces of foreign countries. Functioning as places that provide borders and limitations to the characters in the texts, these geographies provide insight into identity construction in the post-1989 transition. From the formal construction of literary worlds, clues arise pointing to the importance of place in post-wall subjectivity.

Russian writers Olga Mukhina’s *Ю, пьеса с картинками* [*YoU, a Play with Pictures*] and Nina Sadur’s *Юг* [*The South*], German writers Monika Maron’s *Animal triste*, Barbara Honigmann’s *Eine Liebe aus nichts* [*A Love Out of Nothing*], and Angela Krauß’ *Die Überfliegerin* [*The Over Flyer*], as well as Croatian writers Vedrana Rudan’s *Uho, grlo, nož* [*Ear, Throat, Nose*], Dubravka Ugrešić’s *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* [*The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*], and Slavenka Drakulić’s *Café Europa: Life After Communism* problematize the notion of placelessness that has accompanied modern and postmodern literature. In 1971 Alvin Toffler asserted, “Never in history has distance meant less. Never have man’s relationships with place been more numerous, fragile, and temporary [...] We are witnessing a historical decline in the significance of place to human life. We are breeding a new race of nomads” (75). In 1984, Leonard Lutwack confirms that, “The disappearance of familiar places and the proliferation of a more and more limited set of uniform places have caused a peculiarly modern malaise called *placelessness*” (original emphasis, 183). However, in a postcommunist world, a discussion of placelessness suddenly has new meaning. Prior to 1989

there was a sense of placelessness within a stable framework, but now after the end of socialism there is a real experience of placelessness and fragmentation. Lutwack goes on to suggest that, “People who have the greatest need for place are those who have failed, for one reason or another, to keep pace with history or with the movement of society around them. Much of the fear of placelessness stems from resistance to the accelerated rate of change that does not allow sufficient time for some people to adapt themselves to the alteration of places” (237). Firstly, although many would agree that postsocialist nations fit into Lutwack’s schema, the conflict between place and placelessness (or Derrida’s double injunction) is not relegated solely to those who fail to keep pace, or to those who are inflexible. Instead it is a global malaise. Secondly, “keeping pace with history” is impossible, when according to communist ideology history has ended.

Placelessness is no longer a playful concept enacted in the relative stability of the Cold War standoff. Instead, placelessness is a material reality. As such, the postcommunist literature discussed here points to a counter trend that attempts to establish place. The geographies of the texts investigated in this dissertation represent the challenges and negotiations that characters encounter as they approach dueling desires and the constraints of inclusion and exclusion placed upon them. Places in literature act as agents of potential and possibility that can stretch or even avoid established and sometimes limiting physical and symbolic borders, just as they can insulate and create the safety of boundaries that the fragmented and chaotic postcommunist world cannot. Literature, especially post-1989 literature, offers a privileged territory from which to test the possibilities and pitfalls of the universal syndrome of the double injunction.

### 1.2.2 *Imaginary Geographies*

Besides the geographies (apartments, cities, and countries), literature itself arises as an imaginary place to be analyzed. Lutwack discusses the role of place in literature, suggesting that, “For literary purposes, then, place is inhabitable space ‘lived space’ or *erlebter Raum*. Even objects—an automobile, a box, an old boiler—may be considered as places as long as they are susceptible of human occupation, either actual or imagined” (original emphasis, 27). If place is defined as any space that can be inhabited either physically or imaginatively, the return to historical and literary pasts can be read as spatial constructions. In this manner, postcommunist texts elucidate the function of place both as a geography of place (setting) and as a geography of literature (structure). From fantasies to reimaginings of the past, to intertextuality and photography, the literary techniques used by the writers in my project encourage readers to imaginatively inhabit textual spaces. Literary structures address the same negotiation of border construction and destruction that are encountered in the physical geographies of the texts. Literature’s ability to textually create and remove structure pushes the boundaries of the physical world and allows writers to establish their own “laws” of space. Rooms, apartments, cities, and nations (physical geographies) can be constructed and then just as easily torn down. Imaginary geographies also provide the same spatial dimensions. Through imaginary geographies such as genre, citationality, intertextuality, plot, fantasy, and flashback, a writer can defy the laws of the physical world by marking and crossing borders.

Literature emerges as a site of spatial construction in which writers employ lesser or greater degrees of literary *reframing* and *unframing* devices. On the one hand, writers faced with national fragmentation and international interference and influence employ reframing techniques. Many of the writers turn to the historical past—World War II or communism—while others turn

to the literary past, from Chekhov to Kafka, to Goethe, to Shklovsky. These writers revisit the historical past and reframe the literary past as a method of constructing familiar borders. In a placeless present, this act of reframing provides writers and characters self-protection, agency, and control as they navigate the post-1989 double bind.

Serguei Oushakine calls this move toward the past *retrofitting* or *retroframeworks* (“We’re nostalgic” 456) in which there are “conscious efforts to restore the lost feeling of collective belonging and to reestablish cultural connections with the past that would be neither horrifying nor humiliating” (“We’re nostalgic” 452). While Oushakine develops the term retrofitting in relation to the Soviet past, the concept can be enlarged to encompass the literary past as well as the historical past in Germany and Croatia. The evocation of past forms and places is not an attempt to draw upon past content for meaning (insinuating that the present post-wall literature has no meaning). Instead, as Oushakine acknowledges, retroframeworks provide writers a structure and a form, but not meaning. While most analysis looks to “‘the content of the form’—that is, a historically specific aesthetic constellation in which the meaningful component and its representations become inseparable and mutually constitutive,” Oushakine suggests that

The old form is evoked not in order to express its old meaning. Rather it reveals the inability of existing forms to communicate a relevant content [...] It is the manipulation with “revived” frames within “new” cultural fields that provides current “manipulators” with a certain artistic agency. To frame it simply: what I want to highlight in various post-Soviet attempts to revisit the recent and remote past is a longing for the positive *structuring* effect that old shapes could produce, even when they are not supported by their primary contexts. (original emphasis, “We’re nostalgic” 453-454)

Building upon this idea, the reframing employed by writers does not supply a meaningful referent for the current text, but a form that provides a framework for postcommunist writers



facing the trauma of placelessness.<sup>12</sup> In this way, retrofitting functions much like the applications of geographies that become part of the language of place in the texts. The imitation of other literary styles or authors and the return to the historical past functions as part of the language of place that provides a familiar and known form.

On the other hand, writers create closed narrative worlds that are ultimately negated through unframing. Oftentimes fantastical elements surpass the boundaries of the text. Instead of constructing the borders missing in the physical world by recycling past literary forms or historical moments, these writers employ literature as a way to break through the limitations of the physical world and their textual world. They create plays in which characters shrink, grow, or fly offstage, write apparent “autobiography” imagining implausible visiting angels, construct entire texts around mysterious characters who in fact do not exist, and fashion protagonists who morph into dogs or monkeys or who exit the cosmos all together. Texts are stretched to their limits, whereby the absurd and bizarre bypass rules of plausibility.

These techniques of reframing and unframing challenge both spatial and temporal boundaries. In his essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin explores “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relations that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). According to Bakhtin, the chronotope of the novel gives “the meaning that shapes narrative” (250). It is in the relationship between time and space that the voices and discourses, or to use Bakhtin’s language, the heteroglossia of the text, are “tied

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Lacan’s distinction between metaphor and metonymy works well here. In a 1957 lecture, “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud,” Lacan transforms Freud’s concept of *displacement* (reassignment of repressed tensions into other forms) into *metonymy*. Reframing in postcommunist texts functions as a metonymy, an association between concepts, and not as a metaphor. Unlike the metaphor where two referents are connected by the transfer of similar quality traits, the contiguity of the referents (the connection or touching along a boundary) is what fashions metonymy. Roman Jakobson’s earlier 1956 essay “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Disturbances” points to metaphor and metonymy as two common figures of speech that are associated with aphasia. The texts here display metonymy, a contiguity disorder, in which a “word heap” (Jakobson 126) is created as syntax breaks down or becomes less important.

and untied” (250). Kort’s early twenty-first century understanding of the language of place finds its foundation in Bakhtin’s early twentieth century essays. Bakhtin argues that through spatial (and temporal) representation we can come to understand the discourses at work in these texts. These discourses arise as a struggle between Bakhtin’s notion of the monologic (unitary language with authoritarian stances) and the dialogic (multi-voiced texts in the process of “becoming”). From historical and literary representations of the past to suspended time, from borderless travel to secluded apartments, the texts under discussion in this dissertation underscore the double bind of postcommunist identity construction.

Through these modes the borders of literature and genre are laid bare and challenged. Literature is consciously reimagined as a textual geography that must be approached anew in the post-1989 environment. Similar to the physical representations of place, the literary reframings of the texts also address the manner in which literature is structured. Some writers apply intertextuality, borrowing, and citationality as a way to give form to their texts, while others literally disrupt and shatter the space of their fictive worlds, as a strategy of pushing beyond restrictive notions of space. At other times, writers employ both reframing and unframing. The construction of and transcendence of borders appears in these texts as both a geography of place (setting) and of literature (structure).

### 1.2.3 *Performatism in Post-Wall Literature*

The exploration of the language of place provides a way to discuss changing trends in world literature and to understand the importance of the reframing and unframing taking place in the works of postcommunist writers. Placing postcommunist literature into established literary movements has become of interest to scholars. Russian literary theorist Mikhail Epstein is

probably the most well known and prolific proponent of Russian postmodernism, claiming that postmodernism is a widespread movement in Russian literature and culture beginning in Soviet times. He counters critics of postcommunist literature who question the emergence of postmodernism in a nation where “modernism was grasped only in its early beginnings” (94) and where there was no capitalist society. Instead, Epstein argues that although “no modernist break with tradition” was possible in Soviet literature, socialism “coincides with the postmodern and postindividualist view of the world [...] perhaps even more radically and consistently than in the West” because of its “posthistorical habitat, where we are rid of the captivity of our own personality” (*After the Future* 95).<sup>13</sup> Indeed, if you look at Soviet art from the 1970s and 1980s (so called *second avant-garde* and *sots-art*) you can see how symbols earlier infused with meaning cease to be meaningful. They become mere sign with no referent, a signifier without a signified.<sup>14</sup> Epstein is not alone in his argument, as others across Eastern Europe and the Balkans affirm the presence of postmodernism in communist literature.<sup>15</sup>

In the post-1989 literature addressed, postmodern placelessness is countered by an attempt at framing. Going beyond the naming and categorizing of a new literary trend,

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<sup>13</sup> See Mikhail Epstein’s *After the Future: The Paradox of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*. (Trans. Anesa Miller-Pogacar. Amherst, Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995) and Mikhail Epstein, Alexander Genis, and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover’s *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture* (Trans. and Ed. Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover. New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> The artwork of Soviet dissidents Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid exemplify this practice where images/symbols are revealed as empty of meaning. They uncover the role images have in establishing and upholding systems of power and reveal how these images become reiterated and recreated such that any authentic meaning is depleted. See Valerie L. Hillings’ “Komar and Melamid’s Dialogue with (Art) History.” *Art Journal* 58.4 (Winter 1999): 49-61.

<sup>15</sup> Scholarship on postmodernism across the Eastern Block include, Timothy Beasley-Murray’s “Postmodernism of Resistance in Central Europe: Pavel Vilikovský’s “Večne je zelený...” (*The Slavonic and East European Review* 76.2 (April 1998): 266-278); Vitaly Chernetsky’s “Epigonoi or Transformations of Writing in the Texts of Valerija Narbikova and Nina Iskrenko” (*The Slavic and East European Journal* 38.4 (Winter 1994): 655-676) and *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007); Kathrin Horschelmann’s “History after the End: Post-Socialist Difference in a (Post)modern World” (*Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 27.1 (2002): 52-66); and Andrew Wachtel’s “Postmodernism as Nightmare: Milorad Pavic’s Literary Demolition of Yugoslavia” (*The Slavic and East European Journal* 41.4 (Winter 1997): 627-644).

postcommunist literature furnishes a novel approach to literature and challenges a postmodern aesthetic. It is my contention that this post-1989 literature is not an example of postmodernism or failed postmodernism, but of a different trend. Raoul Eshelman's notion of *performatism* provides a compelling link between the reframing and unframing found in these postcommunist texts and what some would call post-postmodernism.<sup>16</sup>

According to Eshelman, "Performatism may be defined most simply as an epoch in which a unified concept of sign and strategies of closure have begun to compete directly with—and displace—the split concept of sign and the strategies of boundary transgression typical of postmodernism" (1). While features of postmodernism standardly include an ironic play with styles, citations, and intertextuality (Linda Hutcheon), a skepticism of "grand narratives" of Western culture (Jean- François Lyotard), a preference for the virtual and the copy over the original (Jean Baudrillard), and a subject enmeshed in the interplay of endlessly reproducible signs inciting a state similar to schizophrenia—depthlessness followed by intense emotion (Fredric Jameson),<sup>17</sup> the salient characteristics of performatism include "strategies emphasizing unity, identification, closure, hierarchy, and theist or authorial modes of narration" (Eshelman

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<sup>16</sup> There have been numerous discussions on the topic of what comes after postmodernism. Most scholars point to a transcendence of postmodern irony, an implementation of sincerity and imagination, and an emergence of beauty and truth. In 1995 Tom Turner, landscape architect and urban planner, discussed a post-postmodern turn in architecture that tempered reason with faith (*City as Landscape: A Post Post-modern View of Design and Planning*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1995). Mikhail Epstein proposes the terms *transmodernism* or *protomodernism* as ways to think about a movement beyond postmodernism. "It is these 'proto' and 'trans' phenomena—as signs of birth and resurrection—that will mark the long epoch of *postmodernity*, which is still ahead and which comes *after* postmodernism" (*Russian Postmodernism* 467). American cultural theorist Eric Gans proposed the term *post-millennialism* to represent the epoch after postmodernism relating to ethical and socio-political terms. He draws a parallel between postmodernism and "victimary thinking" that must be overturned in post-millennialism and attributes the shift to the fall of communism (*Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993). Raoul Eshelman's book *Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism* (Aurora, Colorado: Davies Group Publishers, 2008) delves into the aesthetic of a post-postmodernism in literature, film, art, and architecture.

<sup>17</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. (New York: Routledge, 1988); Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992); Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

xii). Performatist texts are constructed to produce a unified, aesthetically mediated experience of transformation by creating closed works that force readers to identify with opaque characters or situations and to experience beauty, love, belief and transformation under artificial conditions. The key component in Eshelman's theory is that these strategies of closure, unity, and beauty are presented "as if" they could be possible, or to use Epstein's words, "in the modality of 'maybe'" (*After the Future* 338). Even as postmodernism and poststructuralist criticism have shaped our thought processes, literature of performatism asks "but what if" and creates narratives "as if" irony, multiplicity, and undecidability were no longer the fundamental building block of literary structure, subjectivity, and plot construction.

The aesthetic theory that Eshelman puts forth parallels the conundrum of the double injunction. We know that the unity and stability of a firm identity are impossible in our multicultural world, and yet we are compelled to construct one.<sup>18</sup> Performatism acknowledges impossibility, yet nevertheless attempts to create a text in which the reader is forced to identify, on an aesthetic level, with (an attitude of) belief: "The reader is 'framed' in such a way that belief trumps cognition" (13). In comparison to postmodernism, performatism is an "involuntary act of belief" versus "can't believe anything," a "*makes you decide*" versus "*keeps you from deciding*" (original emphasis, 20). To return to Bakhtin's schema, performatism can be viewed as a type of monologic ("poetic") text that does not attempt to hide its closed and unitary world, but asks the reader to enter the textual world and suspend disbelief for a time. Eshelman calls performatism a type of "monist" trend that counters the "dualist" texts of postmodernism. It is not a return to a naïve or simplistic literary mode, but an attempt to create literature "in spite of the obvious conflicts and contradictions contained within it" (6). As Eshelman is quick to point

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<sup>18</sup> Autobiographical theorist Philippe Lejeune notes, "Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as complete subject—it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing" (131-32). This is the premise of Eshelman's performatism.

out, the unified frame is always in contention with the dialogic: “All performatist works feed in some way on postmodernism; some break with it markedly, while others retain typical devices but use them with an entirely different aim” (xiv). The aesthetic discord between monist and dualist modes mirrors the double obligation found in the postcommunist syndrome.

The geographies of literature and place in postcommunist texts correspond to the incompatibility of transnational identity. The use of framing and intertextuality does not correlate with postmodern irony or playful repetition and imitation. Instead, it approaches recuperation and solicits a new type of reader. According to Eshelman,

[Performatism] demands (and in a certain sense creates) a new type of reader who is willing to enter into the closed frame of the text and, at least for the time being, to identify with its artificially rigged center before going off on his or her own. It would be going too far to say that performatist texts like this restore subjectivity in the grand style that humanist critics of postmodernism have always longed for. However, they do provide readers with a limited experience of identity-building under controlled, rather coercive conditions. (58)

Performatism is one way post-1989 literature responds to the double injunction. Despite the rather fluid and uncontrollable influences of globalization, the texts struggle to construct identity on their own terms. Eshelman explains, “On the one hand, you’re practically forced to identify with something implausible or unbelievable within the frame—to *believe* in spite of yourself—but on the other, you still *feel* the coercive force causing this identification to take place, and intellectually you remain aware of the particularity of the argument at hand” (original emphasis, 2). Much like the double injunction, the reader is aware of the multiplicity of identity and yet feels compelled to believe in the authenticity and uniqueness of a stable identity (such as nationality based upon ethnicity, language, and geography). In the aftermath of restrictive socialist regimes, amidst war, reorganization, fluctuating borders and identities, and reimaginings of historical narratives, postcommunist texts push beyond the postmodern aesthetic. There is an

insistence upon material reality because of the writers' real-life traumatic and/or life-altering experiences of ethnic cleansing, excessive nationalism, and fears of disintegrating identities. In other words, whereas postmodernism was in a sense a response to stable political, ideological, and national structures ("late capitalism" and "late communism" may produce fragmentation, but are themselves stable), the disintegration of those structures produced the desire for re-formation—the creation of stability (even if imaginary) in light of chaos.

Viewed through the lens of performatism, these texts are read as complex and fruitful, countering the criticism that the works are either too simplistic and naïve or imitative and hackneyed. Postcommunist literature is not trying to catch up to a Western postmodernist movement, but is situated squarely in the midst of current literary trends.

### 1.3 Addressing the Woman Question

Since the end of socialism there has been a distinct increase in the number of female writers in postsocialist nations. The reasons for the proliferation of women writers are multiple and complex, stemming from very material realities such as war and gender demographics, to larger theoretical suppositions of a crisis of masculinity and a general questioning of hegemonic discourse. In sociological research, scholars suggest that "the momentum of an enlarging European Union (EU) and of a broadening NATO alliance is pushing forward crucial changes of emphasis in dominant relations of power associated with issues of gender in both Eastern and Western parts of Europe—changes that generate oppressive and hegemonic forms of masculinities" (CROME 141). According to the group Critical Research on Men in Europe, the end of socialism has precipitated an overall restructuring of masculinity across Europe that has resulted in stereotypical acts of excessive masculinity—violence, criminal behavior, and

domestic violence. The study concludes that postsocialist nations, true to the double bind, have had a rebirth of nationalism along with a call to rejoin Europe. This nationalism results in “gender restoration” (CROME 150) whereby “[a]rguments that blame women’s emancipation for social problems such as falling birth rates, ‘emasculat[i]on’ of men, ‘selfishness’ of women, and sexual depravity everywhere are not unique” (CROME 149). In Russia in particular, compared to women, men have a lower life expectancy and more self-destructive practices (such as alcoholism), leading to a belief that “men are passive victims of their biological nature and structural (cultural) circumstances” caused by “either ‘those emancipated women’ of the past or ‘feminist (Western and rotten) spoils’ in the present” (CROME 155). Sarah Ashwin and Tatyana Lytkina argue that Russian men at the lower end of the labor market have been demoralized because of their positions within the household. They suggest that because men’s main role in the household is to be the primary breadwinner, when they are unable to fulfill this role, they feel marginalized and emasculated (passim Ashwin and Lytkina).<sup>19</sup>

In post-Yugoslav nations, Marko Zivkovic claims that men have experienced a two-sided struggle to uphold national images of masculinity and to contend with an international gaze. He notes that in ex-Yugoslavia, “All the papers [newspapers] emphasize how central the gender idiom is to such ethnonational imaginings” (258). Women are responsible for the growth of society through reproduction and for the preservation of the culture. As such, he notes that women are perceived as threatening, “civilizing” presences that reject the more “barbaric” men. Zivkovic maintains, “there is this (imagined) universe in which the male lineage is the backbone, and all that threatens this imagined transgenerational male bond is seen as the potentially treacherous female” (259). In this schema, men feel compelled to dominate and control women.

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<sup>19</sup> For a study of Soviet masculinity, see Lilya Kaganovsky’s *How the Soviet Man was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008.



Besides the masculine fears of the “civilizing” female, Zivkovic points out the “economic emasculation” of men, much like in the Russian situation (260). The economic and cultural emphases on gendered identity carries over into the image ex-Yugoslav males perceive the international community has of them, as uncivilized. Zivkovic argues that because ex-Yugoslav men are forced to adopt national identities that are hyper-masculine (violent, uncouth, dominant, and barbaric) that when they encounter the international community, their only option is to emasculate the Western other as part of the “civilized” feminine category, and therefore perpetuate their own stereotype.

It is difficult to believe that with attempts to reestablish specific gender roles in many of these postsocialist nations that women writers are at the forefront. As socialism collapsed across Eastern Europe and the Balkans, an ideological vacuum emerged. Slavoj Žižek discusses this ideological displacement at the beginning of his book *Tarrying With the Negative* when he describes the political changes in Eastern Europe. During the overthrow of the Romanian government, the communist symbol was cut out of the national flag, leaving a hole in its place, and representing “that intermediate phase when the former Master-Signifier, although it has already lost the hegemonical power, has not yet been replaced by the new one” (1). According to Žižek, this appearance of the hole in the flag made visible “the unique intermediate state of passage from one discourse (social link) to another, when, for a brief, passing moment, the hole in the big Other, the symbolic order, was made visible” (1). Žižek creates a gendered analogy here in which the removal of the phallic opens up a gap—a space of the feminine. One could conjecture that during this displacement of ideological projects and in the slow process to construct a new ideological position, women found a way to assert their voices in the unsettled hegemonic discourse. Yet it is precisely because of the Russian “masculinity crisis” and the

“Eastern male inferiority complex,” (CROME 155) that there appears to be a space for female writers.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of the literary market place, too, the late- and post-Soviet years opened up new outlets for women to publish both through traditional publications and through their own new venues. Carol Adlam points to the large numbers of anthologies of Russian women writers published at this time: “*Female Logic (Zhenskaia logika, 1989)*; *A Pure Life (Chisten’kaia zhizn’, 1990)*; *She Who Bears No Grudge (Ne pomniashchaia zla, 1991)*; *The New Amazons (Novye amakonki, 1991)*; and *The Abstinent (Abstinentki, 1991)*” (15). Adlam suggests that this literature did much to distinguish itself from the category of *zhenskaia literature* [women’s literature], the derogatory term associated with sentimental and autobiographical writing. Starting in the mid-1980s, the terms *zhenskaia proza* [women’s prose] and *novaia zhenskaia proza* [new women’s prose] marked the new trend in women’s literature in Russia, which because of its leanings toward experimental technique and form, was accepted as part of the “alternative” literature of the time (Adlam 17).

Likewise, in Croatia women made inroads into publishing during late-socialism; however, instead of flourishing in literature they excelled in journalism. The *Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia* reported an unusual increase in Croatia of women authorial journalists in the late seventies. Vesna Kesic claims that these women, who were literary journalist,<sup>21</sup> uncovered

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, cinema is emerging as a preferred medium to address the masculinity crisis in the post-Yugoslav nations. Ivana Kronja’s exploration of post-Yugoslav cinema points to its focus on male violence and the cycle of violence in post-Yugoslav society. She explains that since the late 90s many films approach the violence of post-Yugoslav society and attempt to move beyond it: “These films thus see society’s crisis as a crisis of masculinity, and try to find aesthetic terms to explain and/or transcend such a situation” (Kronja). If cinema is viewed as a less “civilized” and more popular medium, Zivkovic’s argument regarding the crisis of masculinity remains salient.

<sup>21</sup> As a genre, literary journalism occupies a precarious position between a narrative mode and historical report, which John Hartsock says is its paradoxical nature as “a critical site of competing claims” (11). A journalistic piece reporting on an historical event is usually verified and authorized by its use of statistics, dates, and times, while literary journalism, although also committed to facts, presents facts through narrative devices, such as showing the

aspects of the government that the government and others did not want exposed. She notes, “I am convinced that women introduced ‘I’ to the Yugoslav media. Women, with personal engagement and energy, opposed the collective male, mystic, powerful, and cowardly ‘we,’ backed by the power of the whole party” (198). When the war in Yugoslavia began, many of these women, including Kesic, Dubravka Ugrešić, and Slavenka Drakulić, sought asylum in other countries as they were targeted for their perceived anti-Croatian (“feminist”) stances.<sup>22</sup> The war itself contributed to the rise in women writers because international publishers were now interested in publishing works from former Yugoslav writers. Since the majority of Croatian men were called into military service, male writers were themselves scarce, while female writers abroad had an eager international market.

The question of the increase of women writers from the former East Germany arises as both an economic and cultural issue. New data compiled approximately twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall reveals large unemployment, stark gender demographics, and a general drop in population in areas of the former GDR (passim Kulish). Large areas of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania (northern Germany) are relatively empty due to the migration of Germans to the west and the birth rate in areas of the former GDR dropped considerably in the years following the end of socialism (passim Kulish). Andreas Kleinert’s 1999 film *Wege in die Nacht* [*Paths in the Night*] is a useful example of the masculinity crisis in East Germany. The protagonist,

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reader instead of just telling, developing characters and dialogue, working on a plot that often employs flashbacks and memories, and organizing the piece around an authorial presence (Agar 118).

<sup>22</sup> On December 11, 1992, an anonymous article, “Witches from Rio, Croatia’s Feminists Rape Croatia,” appeared in the Croatian nationalist newspaper *Globus* accusing Kesic, Ugrešić, Drakulić and two other women of being unpatriotic in their anti-war attitude by focusing on the general sufferings of women in war, instead of specifically on the sufferings of Croatian and Muslim women at the hands of Serbian men. They were discounted as “witches” and driven into self-imposed exile. For further scholarship on the “witches” of Croatia, see Vesna Kesic’s “Confessions of a ‘Yugo-Nostalgic’ Witch.” *Anna’s Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe*. (Ed. Tanya Renne. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997. 195-200), as well as her article “From Reverence to Rape: An Anthropology of Ethnic and Genderized Violence.” *Frontline Feminisms: Women, War, and Resistance*. (Eds. Marguerite R. Waller and Jennifer Rycenga. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000. 23-39).

Walter, loses his job after the East German economy collapsed. Without a job, a direction, or his former authority as manager of an East German plant, Walter spends his time with two youth, with whom he attempts to restore order in the subway at night. As Kleinert's film depicts, like in Russia and Croatia, men in the former East Germany struggle with an "economic emasculation" and inferiority complex.

As Anke Pinkert points out in *Film and Memory in East Germany*, there is a distinct connection between the crisis of masculinity appearing in post-1989 literature, film, and culture and the 1940s post-war crisis of masculinity. The unification of East and West Germany resulted in a reevaluation of post-war narratives and founding myths. Julia Hell looks at post-wall literature as a reemergence of literature and images dealing with the Holocaust and WWII. Unification resulted in a reimagining of the German relationship to the Holocaust as the two sides' post-war narratives were merged. Hell argues in her work on post-war German literature that the crimes of the fathers that took place during World War II contaminate male voices. She observes,

In many postwar texts, it is masculinity that is most irredeemably associated with the fathers' crime: their traumatic secret. Post-fascist authorship is obsessed with masculinity. It emerges in a perpetual confrontation with the image of the victims of Nazi genocide—the frozen representation of the father's incomprehensible crime, which configures the viewer as German, as part of a nation of perpetrators. ("Eyes Wide Shut" 15)

In her article "Eyes Wide Shut: German Post-Holocaust Authorship," Hell revisits literature since unification claiming that it, "rethematize[s] the predicament of post-Holocaust authorship at a time of radical change" (12). In line with post-war literature, in post-wall literature a distrust of patriarchal, masculine language arises. Hell notes, "There is no possibility of re-constructing this masculinity born of Germany's catastrophe and crimes" (25-26) and that for men "the very practice of writing has something illegitimate about it. It lacks authorial legitimacy since it still

carries the stain of transgression” (35). Returning to Kleinert’s film *Wege in die Nacht*, there is a distinct connection between the post-war rubble film and the postcommunist scenes where the ruins of socialist housing and industrial plants mirror the decay and devastation of postwar Germany. Pinkert discerns, “Not unlike German postwar rubble films, if for different historically contingent reasons, these postcommunist films constituted a substitute public discourse after 1989 where the effects of a historical break, if not trauma, were played out” (207). Germans were forced to address even more implicitly the cultural legacy of the Holocaust in their post-wall literature, once again challenging the masculine voice and the male author.<sup>23</sup>

In summary, postcommunist women writers find a place for themselves within this muddled and confused postcommunist environment throughout Eastern Europe. The late- to post-communist alterations in approaches toward women in literature and publishing aided in the proliferation of female voices. The crisis of masculinity across Europe—economic emasculation, inferiority complexes, contaminated masculine voices, and hyper-masculinity—has, on the one hand, lead to the reassertion of outdated gendered notions; while, on the other hand, the crisis has challenged the European male and opened space for women to address their postcommunist experiences.

#### 1.4 Historically Situating the Postcommunist Subject

My focus on place in literature (physical and imaginary geographies) is a fruitful way of delving into questions of postcommunist restructurings, transitions, and identity constructions. I want to demonstrate the continuities and discontinuities of structural modes, cultural responses,

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<sup>23</sup> This renegotiation of the post-war narratives is not without complexity. Pinkert suggests, “In the post-1989 public historical imagination, it is, however, the antifascist East German state that perpetually serves to establish the continuities with the Third Reich, which, in turn, enable a normative democratic lineage between the postwar West German state and the contemporary postunification Germany” (202).

and literary representations of the postcommunist subject among postsocialist nations. Historically and ontologically the postsocialist nations of Russia, Germany, and Croatia create intrinsically different cultural and political communities. They had very disparate experiences related to the end of socialism. Russia's ambivalent dissolution of a failed project, Germany's joyful unification, and Croatia's traumatic war comprise very different reactions to the end of socialism and provide a fruitful cross-cultural analysis. Despite their differences, what remains common is the struggle with identity in relation to space, as these nations navigate the trauma of placelessness.

Following the "autumn of nations" in 1989, political, national, economic (and personal) borders faced monumental restructuring. The revolutions that swept across Central and Eastern Europe, beginning in Poland and continuing into Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania, signaled the end of Soviet-style socialist states.<sup>24</sup>

#### 1.4.1 *The Collapse of the Soviet Union*

It is generally believed that Mikhail Gorbachev's 1986 reforms marked the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union, as well as the collapse of socialism in other Eastern Block countries. A policy of *glasnost* [openness] and *perestroika* [economic restructuring] was launched in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev urged other Eastern European countries to imitate Soviet reforms. While Hungary and Poland acted upon Gorbachev's advice, other Communist rulers like East Germany's Erich Honecker, Bulgaria's Todor Zhivkov, Czechoslovakia's Gustáv Husák, and Romania's Nicolae Ceaușescu ignored the calls for change. By 1989, the Soviet Union repealed the Brezhnev Doctrine, in which the internal affairs of nations in the Warsaw Pact (communist

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<sup>24</sup> Norman Friedman's book, *The Cold War: From the Descent of the Iron Curtain to the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Collapse of Communism in Europe* (London: Andre Deutsch, 2009) and Yale historian John Lewis Gaddis' *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2006) outline the Cold War from beginning to end.

nations in Eastern and Central Europe) were controlled by the USSR. In its place, the “Sinatra Doctrine”<sup>25</sup> was established allowing Warsaw Pact nations to determine their own internal affairs. In response, the communist parties of the Warsaw pact nations were voted out in popular elections (except in Romania where there was a violent uprising). Poland was the first to elect a non-communist government, followed by Hungary. By the end of 1989, revolutions had spread across Eastern and Central Europe. While Gorbachev’s reforms were aimed at more effective and efficient economic and political policies, these changes instead lead to the dismantling of socialism.

On December 3, 1989, Gorbachev and President George H.W. Bush declared an end to the Cold War. Gorbachev removed his objections to a unified Germany in July of 1990 and a year later the Warsaw Pact was officially dissolved. Meanwhile, the transformations across Eastern and Central Europe encouraged Soviet republics to push for independence. In March of 1990, Lithuania became the first republic to declare self-determination, followed by Estonia, Latvia, and Armenia. In Georgia and Azerbaijan promises of greater decentralization suspended the movement toward sovereignty. In September of 1991, the Baltic states were granted independence, followed by a Ukrainian vote for independence in December. On December 26, 1991, the Soviet Union was officially disbanded.<sup>26</sup>

The end of socialism in Russia was met with ambivalence compared to other countries in Eastern and Central Europe and the newly independent republics of the Soviet Union. Unlike

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<sup>25</sup> Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov jokingly named the Sinatra Doctrine in reference to the Frank Sinatra song “My Way.” Gerasimov explained to reporters in Helsinki that the Soviet Union had changes their approach to their neighbors: “The Brezhnev Doctrine is dead,” he said. “You know the Frank Sinatra song ‘My Way’? Hungary and Poland are doing it their way. We now have the Sinatra Doctrine.”

<sup>26</sup> For more in-depth study of the collapse of the Soviet Union, refer to Catherine Evtuhov’s, David Goldfrank’s, Lindsey Hughes’, and Richard Stites’ *A History of Russia: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004); Peter Kenez’s *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Michael Kort’s *The Soviet Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the USSR* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993); and David Marples’ *The Collapse of the Soviet Union, 1985-1991* (London: Longman, 2004).

these nations in which an active desire for reform and sovereignty resulted in the transformation of the nation, the end of socialism in Russia signaled the end of the Soviet project, the dream of communism. Instead of the uplifting agency felt by Eastern European countries (excluding the former Yugoslavia), Russia experienced a debilitating failure compounded by its enduring ethnic tensions and unclear national identity. While East Germany and Croatia turned to the West and wartime discourse respectively for post-wall identity markers, Russia was confronting definition from within. Adlam notes that Gorbachev's reforms "were characterized predominantly by issues of freedom of national and ethnic self-determination" (50). Even the new name of the Russian Federation (Rossiskaia federatsiia) "testified to the crucial and problematic issue of internal diversity: not only was the new state a federation, i.e. a political unity of relatively autonomous separate regions, but it was a state defined by multiple-ethnicity citizenship (denoted by the adjective 'Rossiiskaia' rather than 'Russkaia')" (Adlam 50). The newly postsocialist state was dealing with an undefined national identity, as well as newly roused ethnic tensions.

On a parallel path, Russian writers questioned their position in late- and post-Soviet Russia as the "engineers of human souls" as proclaimed by Stalin. According to Adlam, "alternative" or "other" literature emerged during this time. In the social and cultural transition after 1985, one of the main features of Russian literature was an ideological, thematic, and structural "crisis" of literature distinguished by hybridity, experimentation, violence, the grotesque, and transgression. Writers and critics alike questioned the "'civic' or instrumental function of literary activity" (Adlam 1). This transgressive literary trend turned away from its previous social and political function and toward thematic, structural, and linguistic experimentation. Russian writers Viktor Erofeev, Eduard Limonov, Viktor Pelevin, and Vladimir Sorokin produced strikingly violent and grotesque texts. Erofeev particularly embraced this



alternative style publishing an article “A Wake for Soviet Literature” in 1990 and supporting transgressive literature as a sign of a successful transition.<sup>27</sup> Erofeev argued that any attempt to uphold or uncover the Soviet project in literature invariably forced writers to employ a realist mode of writing. Thus, he championed transgressive literature. His collection *Russkie tsvety zla* [*Russian Flowers of Evil*] played on Charles Baudelaire’s *The Flowers of Evil*, which shocked nineteenth-century French readers with its celebration of grotesque and violent images.

Female writers like Tatiana Tolstaia, Liudmila Petrushevskaia, and Nina Sadur also created fantastical and sometimes grotesque texts. Tolstaia writes about ordinary people, yet incorporates elements of magic realism into her texts, such as the collection of short stories *Na zolotom kryl'tse sideli* [*On the Golden Porch*]. Her dystopic 2000 novel, *Kys* [*The Slynx*] treats a fantasy world in which books (reason and thought) are controlled. Linguistic experimentation is featured in works by Valeria Narbikova and in Sorokin’s texts (like *Norma* [*The Norm*]) known for their disintegration of grammar and syntax.

Adlam notes that the asocial tendency in post-1985 Russian literature,

constituted a breach of the civic tradition: such insouciant taboo-breaking implicitly, though unmistakably, challenged the deeply engrained view that literature should offer moral tutelage to the people—a view underpinning both the ‘official’ Soviet-era precept that the literary code should serve as a model of the desired social code, and the dissident Soviet-era assertion that literature should rather reveal an otherwise hidden reality to the people. (6)

This shift in literature as transgressive and asocial supports Oushakine’s findings on post-Soviet culture. Oushakine notes, “The post-Soviet threshold, the post-Soviet transitionality and in-betweenness thus has a peculiar nature—it does not provide any cues about the direction to follow, it does not channel one’s identificatory process” (“Third Europe-Asia Lecture” 995). Oushakine suggests the term “post-Soviet aphasia” as a method of understanding “a state of

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<sup>27</sup> Viktor Erofeev, “Pominki po sovetskoj literature.” *Literaturnaia gazeta* 2 April 1990: 274-283.

lacking” that followed the end of socialism and resulted in a turn toward “symbolic forms” of the past (“Third Europe-Asia Lecture” 994). Although Oushakine specifically addresses the postcommunist generation, his theory applies well to the Russian texts covered in my project. Both Nina Sadur and Olga Mukhina approach Russia’s unclear national identity and ethnic tensions by turning to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian literature. Sadur is considered transgressive in her literary themes of female violence, insanity, and sexuality and Mukhina’s plays experiment with the limits of dramatic space on stage, as well as with linguistic breakdown. While both can be considered part of the transgressive post-1985 literature in Russia, I approach Sadur’s and Mukhina’s texts as constitutive of a performatist trend toward unity and beauty. Transgressive and experimental employments of symbolic forms of the past definitely shape their work; however, through their use of place we can also uncover a move toward conversion and transformation.

#### 1.4.2 *The Fall of the GDR*

The end of socialism in East Germany came about after a process of public dissent and active outcry that began as moves toward “socialism with a human face” and evolved into German unification. East German opposition to the socialist state arose fairly late in comparison to other Eastern European countries.<sup>28</sup> Following reforms in Hungary, the border between Hungary and Austria was opened in August of 1989. Many East Germans exited the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and resettled in West Germany via the open Hungarian-Austrian border. Tens of thousands of East Germans left the GDR before travel restrictions were enforced at the end of September. Since Czechoslovakia remained the only way out of the GDR,

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<sup>28</sup> There were Polish elections in 1988, Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, the communist party split in Hungary in July of 1989.

thousands of people flooded the West German embassy in Prague hoping to gain entry to the West. By early October the GDR also closed its border with Czechoslovakia.

During the GDR's fortieth anniversary celebration, Mikhail Gorbachev pressured GDR leaders to reform. Erich Honecker refused to act and regular non-violent demonstrations in Leipzig began in August, along with small demonstrations across the country. On October 9, 70,000 people gathered in Leipzig to protest. The protests appeared on West and East German television on October 16 and 17, inducing the resignation of Honecker, the longtime leader of East Germany, on October 18, 1989. The border with Czechoslovakia was opened again, and the Czechoslovak authorities allowed East Germans to travel directly to West Germany. On November 4, a massive demonstration in Alexanderplatz in East Berlin of 500,000 demanded reform. Unable to stop the stream of people leaving East Germany, East German authorities allowed East German citizens to enter West Berlin and West Germany directly from East Germany. On November 9, 1989 the Berlin Wall "fell." In the first four days after the opening of the border, 4.3 million East Germans (a quarter of the GDR's population) crossed the checkpoints into West Berlin (Childs 88).<sup>29</sup>

Within East Germany, the struggle continued between the intellectuals and the masses, between reformed socialism and unification. For some, unification meant the bringing together of two countries artificially kept apart after World War II, for others it designated the incorporation and assimilation of East Germany into West Germany. Leaders like writer Christa Wolf and Christoph Hein called for "Socialism with a Human Face," describing unification as

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<sup>29</sup> For more on the details leading up to and following the end of the GDR, see David Childs' *The Fall of the GDR: Germany's Road to Unity* (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2001); Mary Fulbrook's *History of Germany 1918-2000: The Divided Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002); Konrad H. Jarausch's and Michael Geyer's *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003); Konrad H. Jarausch's *Die unverhoffte Einheit 1989-1990* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995) and *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Sigrid Meuschel's *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992).

“the annexation of the German Democratic republic by the Federal Republic of Germany” (Wolf, “The G.D.R. Forever” November 29, 1989).<sup>30</sup> Despite the call from intellectuals to reform, on March 18, 1990, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED)—now called the Party of Democratic Socialism—lost in the first free elections in GDR history to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). On June 13, 1990 the East German military began to officially dismantle the Berlin Wall. East Germany adopted the West German currency on July 1, 1990 and on the same day all border controls between East and West German ceased. German unification was formally concluded on October 3, 1990.

The experience of unification was decidedly different among East Germans, from celebratory reunion to traumatic takeover. The “Mauer im Kopf” [“wall in the head”] is a common phrase referring to the lasting psychological walls that remain after the physical Berlin Wall had been torn down.<sup>31</sup> For both Easterners and Westerners, the road to unification and after has been a challenge. Even in the early days after the opening of the border between East and West Germany, some West Germans had reservations. The Mayor of West Berlin reportedly admitted, “some people here in our part of the city are afraid of the rapid changes, and they fear the problems and burdens that we will have to face” (Childs 89). Not only was there a psychological gap between East and West Germans, but there was a continued economic gap as well. According to Nicholas Kulish’s profile of East Germany approximately twenty years after the fall of the wall,

Unemployment in the former East Germany remains double what it is in the west, and in some regions the number of women between the ages of 20 and 30 has dropped by more than 30 percent. In all, roughly 1.7 million people have left the former East Germany since the fall of the Berlin Wall, around 12 percent of the

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<sup>30</sup> Wolf’s “Für unser Land” was published in *Neues Deutschland* on November 29, 1989 (page 2). David Binder translated the piece as “The G.D.R. Forever.” It was printed in the *New York Times* on December 8, 1989 (page A39).

<sup>31</sup> Taken from Peter Schneider’s novel *Der Mauerspringer* [*The Wall Jumper*] (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1982).

population, a continuing process even in the few years before the economic crisis began to bite. (“In East Germany, a Decline as Stark as a Wall”).

Unification in Germany remains incomplete in terms of equality and cultural integration.<sup>32</sup>

General feelings of displacement have led to *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for cultural items from the GDR)<sup>33</sup> and some East Germans have experienced reunification as an erasure of their collective identity. Paul Cooke, in *Representing East Germany since Unification: from Colonization to Nostalgia*, explores unification as a colonizing act on East Germany by West Germany. He notes, “the language of colonization pervaded discussions of German unification and the place of east Germans within this new society in the 1990s” (2). Many writers decided to “write back,” challenging the black and white image the West had of the East and the stark stereotypes that prevailed, by presenting “an east German deliberately taking up the position assigned him or her by the western hegemony, in order to bring this position into question” (Cooke 83).<sup>34</sup> Brigitte Burmeister’s *Unter dem Namen Norma* [*By the Names Norma*], Wolfgang Hilbig’s “Ich” [“I”], and Thomas Brussig’s *Helden wie wir* [*Heroes Like Us*] speak to the need to prevent misreadings of the past and inaccurate impressions of East Germans that misrepresented life in the GDR as “part of Germany’s totalitarian past” (Cooke 61). Unlike the Russian “alternative” literature that moved away from social and political issues, writers from the former GDR proceeded to address political issues, such as GDR writers who collaborated with the Stasi,

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<sup>32</sup> *Recasting East Germany: Social Transformation after the GDR*, edited by Chris Flockton and Eva Kolinsky (Portland, Oregon: F. Cass, 1999), also provides a helpful overview on the social, economic, and political changes following 1989 in East Germany.

<sup>33</sup> Further scholarship on *Ostalgie* can be found in Jonathan Bach’s article, “*The Taste Remains*”: Consumption, (N)ostalgia, and the Production of East Germany” (*Public Culture* 14.3 (2002): 545–56); Rainer Gries’ article “‘*Hurrah, I am still alive!*’ East German Products Demonstrating East German Identities” (*Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze*, Eds. Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004. 181-199.); and Charity Scribner’s *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Besides the language of colonization, Anke Pinkert notes in her article “‘Postcolonial Legacies’: The Rhetoric of Race in the East/West German National Identity Debate of the Late 1990s” (*The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 35.2 (Autumn, 2002): 13-32) the metaphors of race that permeated the debates about Germany identity after unification in the 1990s.

post-1989 German identity, reevaluations of post-war national narratives, and unification inequalities.

In Germany, the *Literaturstreit* [Literature Debate] of 1990/1991 arose concerning the role of writers in Germany. The publication of Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* [*What Remains*], a text written in 1979 but then revised for publication in 1990, became the initial catalyst for this debate. Wolf's text covers a fictional account of her experience in the 1970s under Stasi surveillance. Some Western critics construed the delayed publication of the book as an attempt by Wolf to mark herself as a dissident writer of the GDR, instead of its supporter. Others argued that such literature (focusing on political messages) were outdated now that socialism had ended. Critic Ulrich Greiner challenged both East and West German writers (like East German Christa Wolf and West German Günter Grass) for their works engrossed in political and moral messages, instead of artistic value.<sup>35</sup> The debate only gained momentum when East German writers, like Wolf, were uncovered as unofficial collaborators of the Stasi. Even writers considered dissidents such as Heiner Müller, and key figures of the Prenzlauer Berg literary scene like Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski were discovered as having worked with the Stasi. It is no wonder that in this post-unification debate over the role of literature and the impact of the Stasi on GDR literature that writers remained dedicated to addressing political and social concerns of the historical past and the present.

The writers discussed in my project, Monika Maron, Barbara Honigmann, and Angela Krauß produce texts that deal with post-unification identity formation. These texts treat not only the individual's attempts to handle the postcommunist double injunction, but also the post-wall writer's struggle to write after the GDR. We encounter the limitations of identity formation in

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<sup>35</sup> Ulrich Greiner, "Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik. Noch einmal: Christa Wolf und der deutsche Literaturstreit. Eine Zwischenbilanz." *Die Zeit* 2 November 1990.

these texts, in which characters long to be assimilated and absorbed into the West (or any stable geographic location). They discover imposing and impenetrable borders that bar them from obtaining unity except through absurd transformations or unsatisfactory endings that usually involve the forgetting of the past. Krauß' narrator actively attempts to forget the past in order to move forward, Maron's narrator removes any evidence of her life before 1989, and Honigmann turns to a pre-1989 setting to address the past and confront it in a meaningful manner.

### 1.4.3 *The Dissolution of Yugoslavia*

Yugoslavia's dissolution marks a much more violent end to socialism. The second incarnation of Yugoslavia emerged in March of 1945 after World War II. Led by Josip Broz Tito, head of the Yugoslav resistance movement in World War II (the Yugoslav Partisans). Unlike the other Eastern Block nations, Yugoslavia split with Stalin, moving away from the ideology of the Soviet Union and economically closer to the West. Tito's Yugoslavia was initially united by a national concept of Slavic kinship, which erased, ignored, or played down ethnic differences in the nation. Later, nationalism shifted to that of a brotherhood of republics, which highlighted ethnic differences, yet maintained within the differences the sameness that held them together. For instance, literary anthologies began to include an author's ethnicity in the description of the piece, yet the piece was placed beside those of different ethnicities handling the same theme. Eventually, after Tito's death in 1980, the rivalry between the republics that he had managed to control developed into ethnic politics by the late 1980s (Wachtel 325). Since the

early eighties, there had been disturbances in Kosovo for socioeconomic and political demands, and Slovenia began pushing to form a looser confederation of an economic union only.<sup>36</sup>

The resulting war began after two of the six republics of the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia, separated from the country on June 25 and June 26, 1991 respectively. A conflict with Serbia arose first in Slovenia on June 30, 1991 and then in Croatia following the Ten Days War in Slovenia. By 1992 a further conflict had broken out in Bosnia-Herzegovina when Bosnian Muslims in the republic also declared independence from Yugoslavia. The Bosnian Serbs who lived in Bosnia wished to remain within Yugoslavia. Oftentimes funded by extremist groups, the Bosnian Serbs took part in widespread ethnic cleansing of Muslims. The Bosnian Croats, on the other hand, wished to be a part of the newly independent Croatia. Subsequently, extreme nationalism emerged in the areas fueled by the war.

Although there are currently no accurate statistics on the wars, it is generally believed that over 200,000 people were killed in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia. In Sarajevo alone, there were over 10,000 people killed and 50,000 injured during the 1,000-day siege of the city. Tens of thousands of women were raped as a systematic practice of war by the Yugoslav Army. There are still almost 30,000 missing people in Bosnia and around two million displaced persons from the areas.<sup>37</sup>

Besides the war itself, the extreme nationalism in ex-Yugoslav states like Croatia added to the nation's divided tensions between Croatian national and European Union hopeful. A new

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<sup>36</sup> Andrew Baruch Wachtel offers a detailed exploration of the shifting notions of the nation in Yugoslavia in his book *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> For further scholarship on the history of Yugoslavia and its dissolution, see Steven L. Burg's and Paul S. Shoup's *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000); John R. Lampe's *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Carole Rogel's *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and the War in Bosnia* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998); and Susan L. Woodward's *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995).



excessive nationalism enforced strict identification to ethnicity and religion as part and parcel of a national identity, while erasing and forbidding the former Yugoslav nationality and identification. The newly constructed and enforced nationalism in Croatia set strict rules of identification that applied to gender, ethnicity, nationality, and religion. Djurdja Knezevic relates, “Women are not considered as ‘only women’ but as the personification of and symbol for the nation. When this is the case, women are not human beings and individuals. Male discourse denotes women as a group imbued with (imagined) characteristics similar to those of the nation” (65).<sup>38</sup> The postsocialist moral majority, especially in Croatia, played a large role in the imagining of a newly independent Croatia in relation to gender constructions. Renata Salecl describes the moral majority as a patriarchal construction that imagines the nation in such a way as to subsume gender and religion within nationalism. Thus, objections to social issues such as abortion are not made on religious grounds, but on the claim that it is a threat to the nation. Salecl writes, “Thus emerges the hypothesis that to be a good Slovene or a good Croat means primarily being a good Christian, since the national menace can only be averted by adhering to Christian morals” (27). Women within this construction felt the brunt of an imagined community in which religion serves the nation and women are expected to serve both. On the other hand, the new nationalisms also rewrote or removed past historical narratives, monuments, heroes, and legends, as well as revising and restructuring their languages to make them as distinctly different as possible.

The postcommunist environment in Croatia was rife with ethnic tension and ardent nationalism. As the Croatian texts explored in my dissertation note, ethnicity and ethnic loyalty

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<sup>38</sup> To explore the topic of Croatian postcommunist national rhetoric and gender in greater detail, see Chris Corrin’s *Gender and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 1999.); Tanya Renne’s *Anna’s Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997); and *Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminism in International Politics*. Eds. Joan W. Scott, Cora Kaplan, and Debra Keates (New York: Routledge, 1997.).

is policed. There is little room for deviation in a place where, as Slavenka Drakulić tells us, war criminals are “war heroes” (*They Would Never Hurt a Fly* 15). The governments of Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia reluctantly hand over perpetrators, and many figures of the war are still at large or have escaped abroad. Some, like the first elected president of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova, are venerated despite being suspected of war crimes and under investigation by the International Criminal Tribunal (ICTY) in The Hague. Drakulić writes, “The ICTY was established because the former Yugoslav states were either unable or unwilling to prosecute their own war criminals” (*They Would Never Hurt a Fly* 13). Many people in the former Yugoslavia feel that the court exists to “punish and humiliate their country” (*They Would Never Hurt a Fly* 13), and the local courts that have managed to hold trial proceedings have resulted in veteran and public outcry and even the killing of witnesses. Drakulić writes that for the veterans, “Nobody had told them that what they did—killing Serbian civilians, for example—was wrong. On the contrary, these same men had been awarded decorations, apartments, pensions, and other privileges. Ten years later the political line in Zagreb had changed; what was earlier implicitly approved now had to be investigated” (*They Would Never Hurt a Fly* 43). Yet even these investigations are often corrupt according to Drakulić.

In the states of the former Yugoslavia there is not even a consistent narrative on the war. Depending on which side’s narrative you hear, the war may be a defensive war, a war to protect, or a war against terrorists or the “Turks.”<sup>39</sup> There is not even a clear end to the war; all sides say that they have “won” the war. As Drakulić points out in her discussion of the first local sentencing of war criminals in Croatia, this trial was significant because it shows, “there is hope that Croats will be able to face their bloody past. This trial was important for another reason as well. It was the first time that the national doctrine claiming that in a defensive war Croats could

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<sup>39</sup> Turks is a derogatory term for Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, although they are not really Turkish.

not commit war crimes was finally questioned” (50). Even the handing over of Slobodan Milošević, the former president of Yugoslavia and then Serbia known as “the Butcher of the Balkans,” in April of 2001 was not a recognition of Serbian crimes. Instead, in 2000 after the new elections in Serbia, which Milošević lost, the new president vehemently opposed the idea of handing over Milošević. Only in the midst of financial crisis three months later did the new government deliver Milošević to the ICTY in exchange for 1.3 billion dollars. Of the forty people on trial in The Hague from all the regions of the former Yugoslavia, only one has acknowledged her responsibility in the war.<sup>40</sup> Although three others pleaded guilty to the crime, they refused to accept the responsibility of the crime saying that they were forced into it. Under these tenuous conditions, ethnicity and one’s actions during the war do not just construct one’s identity; they also determine very real consequences for one’s family and future.

As such, most post-1991 literature in Croatia either focuses on wartime trauma or sentimentality (Yugo-nostalgia). Testimonial literature like *The Suitcase: Refugee Voices From Bosnia and Croatia*, Goran Simić’s *Sprinting From the Graveyard*, and Rezak Hukanović’s *The Tenth Circle of Hell: A Memoir of Life in the Death Camps of Bosnia* were published in English for an international audience.<sup>41</sup> Writing about the war, however indirectly, proved to be difficult for writers like Dubravka Ugrešić, Slavenka Drakulić, and Vedrana Rudan. Critics like Renata Jambrešić Kirin, argued that Ugrešić and Drakulić propose a “mutant identity” (75) that denies the voices of refugees and victims of war and proposes an unsuitable identification. Jambrešić Kirin worries that war narratives by writers, whose experience of war is mediated, will come to

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<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, this one person is Biljana Plavić, the only woman on trial, who was second in command for the Republika Srpska (the Serbian forces in Bosnian wishing to join larger Serbia and rid its lands of the Bosnian Muslims and Croats).

<sup>41</sup> Hukanović, Rezak. *The Tenth Circle of Hell: A Memoir of Life in the Death Camps of Bosnia*. (Trans. Colleen London and Midhat Ridjanović. New York: A New Republic Book, 1996); Mertus, Julie, Jasmina Tesanovic, Habiba Metikos, and Rada Boric, Eds. *The Suitcase: Refugee Voices From Bosnia and Croatia*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Simić, Goran. *Sprinting From the Graveyard*. (Trans. David Harsent. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

stand as representative of war experience, thus effacing the immediate experiences of others.<sup>42</sup> In this manner, mediated war narratives could come to be seen as a minimizing of immediate war and trauma and an encouragement of a postmodern identification of “‘the mutant’ with hybrid cultural identity and of *no fixed* abode” (original emphasis, Jambrešić Kirin 81). A “mutant” subject position whose agency is in its instability may be acceptable for mediated narrators of wartime trauma who choose their situations, but this unstable identification is complicated by immediate narrators for whom an unstable, hybrid identity is not empowering. Jambrešić Kirin fears that what she believes mediated war narrators propose with their narratives is a “homogenous community of immigrants and individuals in Diaspora”(82) that bypasses the experiences of those whose positions are not chosen.

The works of writers like Ugrešić, Drakulić, and Rudan, because of their mediated experiences of war, controversial positions (perceived feminists), and imagined postmodern subjectivity (Western sell-outs) often were not received well in Croatia. Ugrešić and Drakulić went into self-imposed asylum in other countries. Rudan’s text, with its black humor and clearly fictional narrator, fared better in 2004, than Ugrešić and Drakulić writing in the late nineties about what appeared to be semi-autobiographical material. Ugrešić maintained when discussing the war and the “right” to tell the story,

Some have found an identity, others have lost one. To speak about identity at a time when many people are losing their lives, the roof over their heads and those closest to them seems inappropriate. Or else the only thing possible; everything began with that question, with that question like an unfortunate noose everything ends. (*Culture of Lies* 45)

Literature remains a treacherous business for writers (especially women) in Croatia. Ugrešić, Drakulić, and Rudan attempt to juggle a personal identity freed from strict wartime discourse

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<sup>42</sup> Jambrešić Kirin asserts that Croatian ethnographers who study personal war narratives “insist on the distance between mediated and immediate lived war experiences (of being expelled, bombarded, tortured or drafted)” (75).

(including female stereotypes and patriarchal rhetoric), embracing a multiethnic, multicultural and international identity that still clings to its Balkan identification. The stakes of identity in texts from Croatian writers are extremely costly. The only space available for these writers is within a flexible, fluid form and from a shifting identity structure.

### 1.5 From Agoraphobic to Peripatetic Subjects

To examine the conflicts of the postcommunist syndrome in post-wall literature, I explore spatial representations (both physical and imaginary settings), uncovering textual instances of identificatory breakdown and maintenance. Post-1989 texts show the struggle between open geographic borders and closed symbolic borders through literary setting and textual reframing and unframing. The texts included in my dissertation were chosen because of the manner in which place emerges as framing devices. The preponderance of female writers in postcommunist nations was intriguing, thus prompting me to explore their investigation of post-1989 identity, not just as texts dealing with gender, but also as a trend in literature after socialism. By comparing three different nations—Russia, Germany, and Croatia—I am able to span very disparate experiences of postcommunism and enter into a fruitful cross-cultural analysis. I use a range of critical theory—postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis, Russian formalism, literary theory, studies in personal narrative, and diaspora and exile studies — in order to interrogate the multiple intersections that postcommunist literature has with world literature and critical theory.

My project is organized by theme (apartments, cities, and countries), fittingly mixing national literatures in a transnational analysis. Moving from the contained framework of the apartment to the open borders of travel, the comparison of national literatures reveals not only a

similar struggle among the nations with the challenge of the double injunction, but also nation-specific differences. Among the literatures from the same nations, a pattern arises pertaining to the manner in which writers approach the double injunction. Russian texts struggle to construct a protective border framing them from a threatening outside, while German texts desperately attempt to fold themselves into a Western (or other) framework. Croatian texts, in the spirit of “negative capability,”<sup>43</sup> refuse to give up contesting frameworks. These protagonists develop a contesting identity that forces stability and yet refuses to relinquish multiplicity.

The dissertation begins with the most enclosed and framed location—the apartment. Chapter Two, “Authorial Narratives: The Place of the Apartment in Postcommunist Literature” addresses characters struggling to adapt to the changes after 1989. German writer Monika Maron’s *Animal triste* proves to be a rich contrast to *Uho, grlo, nož* [*Ear, Throat, Nose*] by Croatian writer Vedrana Rudan. The narrators of both texts physically and textually sequester themselves and their readers in the confines of their apartments. Circular narratives pull readers ever back into the texts, while the plotlines encircle male characters. The female body functions as the ultimate unifying frame. Each text works to provide a protective frame of narrative and identity only to be ultimately breached through bodily metamorphosis.

Chapter Three, “Reconciliatory Plots: The Place of the City in Postcommunist Literature,” places questions of the double injunction within the larger context of the city. The work of framing identity and narrative becomes increasingly more difficult for the characters of Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić’s *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* [*The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*], German writer Barbara Honigmann’s *Eine Liebe aus nichts* [*A Love Out of Nothing*], and Russian writer Olga Mukhina’s *Ю, пьеса с картинками* [*YoU, a Play with Pictures*]. The

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<sup>43</sup> Here I am using John Keats’ notion of *negative capability*. In a letter written to his brothers George and Thomas on the December 21, 1817, Keats suggests that negative capability “is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”

city emerges as a site of interaction with the “other” where characters willingly or forcedly encounter the multi-cultural, multi-national locations of permeable boundaries. From those that embrace the challenge to those that resist it, the outcome is much the same—an impossible negotiation between encroaching outside and safe inside or the exciting potential of multiplicity up against the persistent call of a unified identity. The strategies used by writers mirror the multiplicity of the city and its awkward contestation with reframing and unframing. A common thread of reconciling with the double bind unites these texts.

Chapter Four branches out further to include the place of the foreign as locations of both identity loss and identity building. “Transformative Perspectives: The Place of the Foreign in Postcommunist Literature” looks at Russian writer Nina Sadur’s *Юг* [*The South*], German Angela Krauß’ *Die Überfliegerin* [*The Over Flyer*], and Croatian Slavenka Drakulić’s *Café Europa: Life After Communism*. Instead of facing the “other” at home, these protagonists go abroad. The typical travel narrative in which the traveler gains knowledge of him or herself after returning from abroad is challenged in these texts. For Sadur’s Russian protagonist visiting the south, the lines between home and abroad are blurred, just as they are in Drakulić’s text where the boundaries between tourist and native are clouded. Krauß’ narrator chooses to transcend the restrictions of earth itself. From Krauß’ absurd transformation, to Sadur’s religious conversion, to Drakulić’s subject inversion, these texts propose (albeit naïve, irrational, and incomplete) methods of framing the unbounded abroad.

This study is an attempt to explore what happens to literature after communism and how that literature pertains to fundamental issues of world literature. In my conclusion, I turn to transnational studies as a way to think about postcommunist literature as a foray into transnational subjectivity and the manner in which literature struggles with transnationalism.

## Chapter Two

### Authorial Narratives: The Place of the Apartment in Postcommunist Women's Literature

The double injunction (or postcommunist syndrome<sup>1</sup>), a tension between open geographic and economic borders and closed symbolic categories, emerges in the texts of Croatian writer Vedrana Rudan's *Uho, grlo, nož* [*Ear, Throat, Nose*]<sup>2</sup> and German, Monika Maron's *Animal triste*<sup>3</sup> as a psychological malady of place. In the wake of war in Croatia and unification in Germany, the texts' characters develop agoraphobia, preferring to sequester themselves in their apartments. The dissolution of physical borders and the rebuilding of Berlin generate Maron's narrator's agoraphobia, while the policing of ethnic identities in Croatia prompts Rudan's narrator to retreat into the closed interior of her apartment. The negotiation of post-1989 placelessness in the texts of Rudan and Maron engages the apartment as a framing device that encloses the characters and their narratives.

The geography<sup>4</sup> of the apartments protects the narrators from the disorienting outside world. Leonard Lutwack, in his exploration of the role of places in literature, notes, "The body is the smallest shelter of individual identity, and the house is an intermediate refuge, enclosing the body and the things that nourish it" (104). Similarly, the apartment is a haven for the narrators, who attempt to create a safe place for themselves within the confines of their bedrooms. Both narrators engage in extra-marital affairs and limit their movements to the bed. The bed, as the

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter One: Introduction, pages 4-6, for a detailed discussion of the *double bind*.

<sup>2</sup> Although the English title of Rudan's text is *Night*, I prefer to keep the literal translation of the Croatian title that emphasizes the corporeal nature of the text.

<sup>3</sup> The English translation of Maron's text retains the same Latin title of the German found in the text's epigraph from Gaius Petronius' *Satyricon*.

<sup>4</sup> I use the term *geography* instead of *setting* because as Wesley A. Kort suggests the term *setting* indicates a passive background, while *geography* refers to a multitude of interacting elements that can be "active, meaningful, and primary" (15).



ultimate place of refuge, pulls the reader and the narrators' lovers into the private walls of the apartment, while the narrators' bodies act as secondary "containers" or places.<sup>5</sup>

The agoraphobic narrators are not victims of fragmentation, war, and disorientation, but subjects attempting to gain agency. The apartment provides the much-needed safety from which the narrators become their own frames, their own containers, through body and narrative. Their identities have been put into question as postcommunist subjects (one might even say as postmodern subjects "pulled apart and misled" (Eshelman 8)) dealing with a double obligation. However, the narrators use the unifying, enclosed apartment to escape the situation, demonstrating forms of performatism<sup>6</sup> that highlight monist, authorial modes of narration, closed circular narratives, enclosed settings, and ultimately personal transformations. The apartment marks the place from which the narrators, as abject subjects without borders or structure, evade the double bind through sexual union (*Uho, grlo, nož*) or physical metamorphosis (*Animal triste*).

## 2.1 Reading the Apartment

To situate the place of the apartment in Rudan's and Maron's texts, a brief exploration of the site of the apartment is in order. Lutwack notes in his study of places in literature, "[T]he use of place as a formal element presents no single line of development over the course of literary history" (18). Apartments are not representative of one thing, but flexible geographies that, as Mikhail Bakhtin points out, are a combination of time and place that create "the meaning that shapes narrative" (250). According to Sharon Marcus, the apartment in nineteenth-century English and French urban literature demonstrated the microcosm of society, where writers

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<sup>5</sup> I am using the idea of place as outlined by Leonard Lutwack in his book *The Role of Place in Literature* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1984). Lutwack defines place as any "inhabitable space [...] either actual or imagined" (27). See Chapter One, page 8-10.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter One: Introduction, pages 14-19, for a review of Raoul Eshelman's notion of *performatism*.

explored the mixing of private and public spaces. Conversely, the apartment and other confining locations (prisons, bathrooms, bars, and houses) in modern European literature developed into a metaphor for “the sense of confinement that has been forced upon the modern hero by society or by his own tragic predicament” (Lutwack 241-242). Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Зануки из подполья* [*Notes from Underground*], Franz Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung* [*The Metamorphosis*], Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” and Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg* [*Magic Mountain*] are all examples of spatial restraint. In the two texts explored in this chapter, the apartment also functions as a place of confinement, but as a welcome one. The apartment acts as a barrier between the narrators and the loss of place after 1989.

Lutwack suggests that place can be employed as “allegorical reflections of the mind” (19). In the works presented here, the apartment becomes a symbolic representation of personal self-protection in the current geopolitical break down in Croatia and Germany. From this location the narrators are able to frame, and thus control and protect, themselves from the chaos outside. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the reunification of Germany force new representations of the apartment. In Rudan’s and Maron’s apartment texts, there is the distinct desire to interiorize everything, from the female body, to the reader, to their lovers. Agoraphobia is literally fear of the *agora*, the Greek place of assembly or marketplace.<sup>7</sup> Felicity Callard argues in “‘The Sensation of Infinite Vastness’; or, the Emergence of Agoraphobia in the Late 19th Century” that “agoraphobia was not only a particular kind of psychological experience, but characterized by a particular kind of dissolution of the individual’s usual spatial relations” (875). The terrifying “sensation of infinite vastness” is common to the agoraphobic (Callard 876). In these texts, the infinite vastness is countered by an orienting placement—the enclosed apartment. Lutwack defines settings of centrality as “the deployment of persons, things, and places around a center,

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<sup>7</sup> The German physician Carl Westphal coined the term agoraphobia in 1871.

and this center thus acquires paramount importance over all around it” (Lutwack 42). The centrality of the apartment in these texts creates a unity of place out of which the narrators create their own transformations.

The place of the apartment is typified by alterations in social space. From the urbanization of the nineteenth century, to the collective concerns of communist nations, to late-socialist fears, the apartment highlights the need to imagine places and their functions differently as society changes. The post-1989 reunification, war, and reevaluation of borders prompt another reconsideration of the apartment. For Rudan and Maron, the retreat into the most private of all spaces—their apartments—speaks to a fear of the enlarging outside world, tempered by nationalism, and a desire to tame that fear of placelessness by encapsulating all within their private domain.

## 2.2 Apartments in Yugoslav Literature

In Yugoslav literature, writers had a two-fold approach toward the location of the apartment. On the one hand, early-Yugoslav novels, like Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža’s 1932 *Povratak Filipa Latinovića* [*The Return of Philip Latinovicz*], engage the place of the apartment along the same lines as a pub or store. Characters from Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Austria, from all social classes mix in Krleža’s microcosm. There is little to no differentiation between Philip’s apartment and the public streets and shops. The microcosm displays the official approach to post-war Yugoslav identity, in which all republics were united by a national concept of Slavic kinship, which erased, ignored, or played down ethnic differences in the nation. Philip’s last name, Latinovicz, a mix of both Latin and Slavic, mirrors the same open blending of peoples, as well as of public and private spaces. Writers like Krleža depict the apartment as a public space,

where peoples from various ethnicities and nations mingle. Krleža's protagonist returns from Paris (signifying his fidelity to his homeland) and enters the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic spaces where private and public fail to distinguish themselves.

On the other hand, later communist literature promoted apartments as problematic sites of seclusion and isolation threatening the nation. In Serbian author Grozdana Olujić's 1967 *Divlje seme* [*Wild Seed*], the protagonist is an orphan discovered alone after the war without any memory of her parents. She does not know her ethnicity and spends the novel placing advertisements in newspapers hoping to connect with her parents. Her basement apartment, whose windows are at street level, is symbolic of her inability to fully enter society, seeing only the feet of people walking by. In the end, Lika realizes that she can find her identity only once she embraces the outer world: "Овај тренутак, ова улица, небо изнад града, усечено електричним водовима, лица која пролазе и носе нешто твога на себи, ти која носиш нешто њиховога, тај тренутак враћаће се! Тако више никада нећеш бити сама" (156) [This moment, this street, the sky above the city cut by wires, the faces that go by and carry something of you in them, you who carry something of theirs, this moment will return and you will never be alone again (117)]. It is in the streets of the city that identity materializes. The apartment emerges as a dangerous place where ethnic identity and individualism may sprout, while the image of the city is all embracing.

After the Yugoslav break with Stalin in 1956, multinational narratives that highlighted "Brotherhood and Unity" appeared toting the familiar theme of many ethnicities, yet one country.<sup>8</sup> *Divlje seme* shows that one character's isolation in her apartment can only be solved by

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<sup>8</sup> See Andrew Baruch Wachtel's book *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998) for an insightful exploration of the Yugoslav national narrative and its shifting incarnations.

her integration into the community. The apartment stands in the way of her connecting with the official national narrative. Olujić's text supports the Yugoslav narrative that regardless of ethnicity, all are united. The isolated apartment becomes a threatening place of dangerous separatism in late-Yugoslav literature, while in post-Yugoslav literature Rudan envisions the apartment in direct opposition. The seclusion of the apartment allows her narrator, Tonka, the space to approach identity construction during the confusion of war, the policing of strict official national narratives, and the loss of past identifications.

### 2.3 The Unified Body: Transformation in Vedrana Rudan's *Uho, grlo, nož*

Vedrana Rudan (1949-) arrived on the Croatian literary scene in 2002 to great acclaim with her first novel *Uho, grlo, nož* [*Ear, Throat, Nose*]. Not only has her text received widespread praise and admiration in Croatia, but it has also been translated into numerous languages and reworked as a one-woman stage production in Belgrade, Warsaw, and Zagreb. Rudan entered the literary scene at the age of fifty-three after being fired from her job as a radio journalist for satirizing then Croatian president Franz Tudjman in the early nineties. Rudan continues to be a controversial figure in Croatia sparking numerous reactions, both positive and negative, towards her contentious stereotyping of race, religion, ethnicity, and gender.<sup>9</sup>

The narrator of *Uho, grlo, nož*, Tonka, has decided at the age of fifty to leave her husband, Kiki, for a younger man, Miki. Set after the Yugoslav war, the stream-of-consciousness narrative takes place during the course of one night in which Tonka sits in bed watching television with the sound turned off and talking to an anonymous reader—"you." Tonka

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<sup>9</sup> *Crnci u Firenci* [*Negroes in Florence*] is the title of Rudan's latest book published in 2006. Here, as in *Uho, grlo, nož*, it is clear that Rudan builds upon stereotypes. Equally provocative are the pictures of her dressed in a bridal gown with a prominent black eye posted on her web site and her satirical performance (similar to that of Sasha Baron Cohen) as a nun on a Croatian television program.

divulges that in the morning her new lover, Miki, will arrive to take her from her old life, in which her husband earns a living smuggling goods across the Austrian border and she is terrorized because of her half-Croatian, half-Serbian ethnicity. However, at the end of the text, Miki is ringing the bell of the apartment and Tonka decides to “Neka čeka” (103) [let him wait (211)].<sup>10</sup> Suddenly, Tonka asserts that her tale most likely was a farce. The reader is left to decide to accept Tonka’s fantastical tale of seduction, representing the “unrealized dream” Tonka is so fond of discussing, or to dismiss the entire text as a fabricated lie.

During the course of the night, Tonka’s monologue covers a plethora of societal problems including a critique of the war in Yugoslavia, a World Trade Center conspiracy theory, a support of abortion and extra-marital affairs, a scathing objection to corrupt politics, irrational advertisements, women who are happy in marriage, women who are unhappy in marriage, men obsessed with their masculinity, and commercialization in general (despite her IKEA clock and American television shows). Due to the argumentative, vulgar nature of Rudan’s text and her nondiscriminatory ability to offend, Rudan has often been likened to the French author Louis-Ferdinand Céline (1894-1961).<sup>11</sup> Brendan Driscoll notes, “Such nihilism lends itself to easy comparison with Céline’s *Journey to the End of Night*; though Rudan prefers sex to excrement, both gleefully tap profanity’s unique power in addressing profound horror” (637). Mirela Roncevic dubs Tonka the “antifeminist feminist” (102) and Andrew Ervin imaginatively

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<sup>10</sup> All page numbers refer to Vedrana Rudan’s *Uho, grlo, nož* (Zagreb: AGM, 2002). All English quotations and page numbers are from Celia Hawkesworth’s translation in the English edition *Night* published by Dalkey Archive Press in 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s *Journey to the End of Night* [*Voyage au bout de la nuit*] was published in 1932. Céline has become infamous less for his experimental literature, and more for his anti-Semitic stance. He wrote anti-Semitic pamphlets, sided with Hitler, and fled to Germany in 1944. Rudan’s text does not propagate Céline’s anti-Semitism; however, she does criticize Catholicism, race, and ethnicity. In an interview with Ana Lucic, Rudan playfully answered the question regarding her connection to Céline saying, “Literary influences? I was an influence to Céline, not he to me [sic]. He started first? You Americans don’t have imagination!” For further scholarship on Céline, see James Flynn’s *Understanding Céline* (Seattle, Washington: Genitron Press, 1984), as well as Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

describes Tonka saying, “Picture Molly Bloom fresh off a seven-day Jameson bender attempting to write a guest editorial for *Bitch* magazine” (21). Roncevic suggests that the text’s dueling structure between tragedy and comedy is its redemptive quality: “It not only reaffirms a fiercely provocative literary voice but might also announce the arrival (or revival) of an inspiring genre where language makes all the rules while tragedy and comedy linger indistinguishable” (102).

Although critics like Driscoll may off-handedly relegate Rudan to the category of nihilist and Ervin and Roncevic to postmodernist, a more nuanced reading of Rudan’s work does not uncover a senseless disregard for existence or a denial of moral truths. Instead, Rudan’s narrator attempts to relate the impossible condition of existence due to the incompatibility of heightened wartime nationalism and rhetoric compared with the borderless influx of media, peoples, and goods. Within this atmosphere of open mass markets, policed ethnicity, and war rhetoric, spatial orientation becomes the primary concern of Tonka (and later Maron’s narrator) who experience in Julia Kristeva’s words, “the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders” (4). The former geographic and symbolic borders of Tonka’s identity are shattered, and she finds her national identity unsettled, her husband’s “job” nullified, her safety questioned, and her very body to be a site of contesting borders where Serb and Croat mix. Instead of approaching Rudan’s text as a postmodern “infinite regress of discourse” (Eshelman 86) with dueling sides reducible to neither, I read Rudan’s work as an example of performatism. In the chaotic and contradictory environment of post-Yugoslav Croatia, Tonka employs her apartment, her body, and her narrative as border creating strategies, which eventually enable her to avoid the double obligation through the illusory tale of love and an “unrealized dream.”

### 2.3.1 *Framing the Impossible*

To begin with, Rudan employs the geography of the apartment to frame her narrator, Tonka. The apartment functions as a location of safety from which Tonka weaves her narrative and traps her reader. The English title of the book, *Night*, emphasizes the manner in which the apartment stands as a frame outside of which nothing but darkness exists. Tonka turns off the sound on her television, limiting the narrative voice to her own. The first-person, omniscient narrative forces her point of view upon the reader. Even though the story Tonka tells about her lover Miki who is coming in the morning to take her from her old life turns out to be untrue, it is the only story, the only substance in the text. We can either join in Tonka's fabrication or literally have nothing. Rudan's text asks/forces us to believe in the narrative or disregard the text altogether. Raoul Eshelman notes that in some performative texts, "The act of narrating itself becomes a circular, enclosed act of belief that cannot be made the object of a metaphysical critique or deconstruction without destroying the substance of the work itself" (19). Thus, Rudan's text (and Maron's text) needs a reader willing to engage the text on its own terms. Along with the text's physical geography, Rudan employs a structural framing.

Tonka forces the reader to enter the apartment and then keeps him or her there by continually focusing her wandering secondary narratives back to the primary story about Miki and her affair. This circular pattern, not only literally pulls the narrative back to the physical setting of the apartment, but it also draws the reader's curiosity and forces the reader to remain to hear the entirety of the narrative. In this way, Tonka's narrative strategy builds a frame around the reader tantalizing him or her with the tale of forbidden love, while clandestinely using the tangential space to complain about the ills of society and to address the horrors of the double injunction, which she encounters, from capitalism to war.



Firstly, Tonka's dueling narrative strategy acts as a framing device. The text's narrative tone fluctuates from intimacy to hatred, from comic relief to pitiful tragedy. Tonka shocks the reader after her initial invitation to listen to her story turns to abuse by page four. She taunts, vilifies, and berates the reader. In the first pages of the text, Tonka asserts, "Zašto vi mene ne volite? Zašto ste tako nadrkani i puni mržnje? Ne zanima vas moja priča. Zašto su dobre priče samo krvave priče? Što hoćete vi od mene?" (10) [Why don't you like me? Why are you such cynical jerks? You're not interested in my story. Why are unhappy stories the only good stories? What do you want from me? (5)]. She accuses readers of being "lažljivice jebene" (12) [fucking liars (9)] for not admitting that they desire to strangle their mothers when they call on the telephone and provokes the readers to admit their unhappiness with life: "Koje lažljive, lažljive, lažljive, kurve! Koje kurve! Lažljive! Kome ja govorim? S kim ja navigam? Dobro. OK. Zašto lažete? Mislite da će vaša koma biti manja? Ako ste prevarile sebe, prevarile ste cijeli svijet?" (12) [You're lying, lying, lying bitches! What lying bitches! Who am I talking to? Who are you? All right. OK. Why are you lying? Do you think you'll be in any less of a coma if you lie? If you're fooled yourself, you've fooled the whole world? (9)]. Through her excessive, relentless profanity and her constant mistreatment and challenging of the reader, Tonka presses the boundaries of acceptability, but also *hails* her reader, recruiting a tacit agreement to maintain the narrative she has created.<sup>12</sup>

The reader is cajoled and bullied into engaging with the text as Tonka directly addresses the reader, asks the reader questions, and makes assumptions about the reader forcing agreement or disagreement. Eshelman describes similar performative framing in which the reader "has the feeling of being entrapped and manipulated" (86). However, just as Tonka forces a combative

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<sup>12</sup> Here I am referring to Louis Althusser's notion of *hailing* in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (*Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1971. 121-176).

relationship with the reader, she also equally seduces the reader with the promise to relate the explicit sexual exploits of her friends and of her own affair with Miki. She describes what she wore the first time she met Miki, “Crno rublje, svilen, ali čvrst bodi, crne čarape” (33) [Black undies, a silk, tight teddy, black panty hose (55)]. She lures the reader by offering bits and pieces of her and Miki’s first sexual encounter interrupted by tangential stories and tirades. However, just as quickly, she shifts the focus from an erotic nature to tell the reader that her panty hose were “ne debele, ali dovoljno debele da se ne vide kapilare” (33) [not thick, but thick enough so that my spider veins didn’t show (55)]. When the reader asks why she wants to have any affair with Miki, she answers, “Želja za komadom mladog, žilavog, mršavog, tvrdog, novog mesa. Ništa od toga” (33) [The desire for a piece of young, sinewy, thin, hard, new flesh. Nothing like that (56)]. Flawed bodies, age, and lack of desire interrupt her erotic tales. Her statements are always overturned and her tone erratically shifts in a game of enticement and rejection. In this manner, Tonka manages to entrap the reader within her narrative and her apartment.

Besides the erotic tales of sexy underwear and inappropriate affairs, Tonka also plays on the reader’s sympathy. At one point, she announces, “Jednom sam popila čitavu kutiju. Htjela sam se ubiti. Da. To je bila frka” (35) [Once I took a whole bottle. I wanted to kill myself. Yes. That was a real mess (59)]. From a suicide attempt, to a difficult childhood, to a lonely marriage, to life during the war, Tonka plays on the reader’s sympathies and on the spectacle of her narrative. This tension between invitation and expulsion appears in the mixture of commands, profanity, accusations, questions, and challenges pitted against comedy, eroticism, and pity. Eshelman illustrates the reader’s relationship to such a performative text, perceiving, “we more or less involuntarily assume a position of terrified awe vis-à-vis the text” (78). This narrative strategy keeps readers engaged (whether by sheer force or amazed curiosity).

Secondarily, Rudan's text creates a structural frame by imposing silence. Rudan's narrator in *Uho, grlo, nož* attempts to silence the multiple discourses infiltrating the unity of her apartment. Not only does she turn her television volume off, but she also narrates over the images that are playing on the television. The text has two sections "Počinjemo" [Let's get going] and "Opustite se" [Relax], which exchange narrative arrangements. The first section of the book juxtaposes Tonka's barrage of social criticism, her biographical information, and her illicit affair with the background image of a television documentary focusing on war victims who are telling their stories. The image of "starci brišu mokre oči" (16) [old men wiping tears from their eyes (18)] on television meets the rough and vulgar language of Tonka's stories of "Taj moj otac, to srpsko smeće koje me uštralo pedeset i neke" (23) [that father of mine, that Serbian piece of garbage who squirted me out in '50 something (33)]. Her biographical information and current affair with Miki interrupt and even become the voiceover of the television image. The second section in the text shifts its juxtaposition by positioning Tonka's more tragic stories of wartime Yugoslavia against television game shows, advertisements, and pornography. Tonka refuses to let her narrative be exchanged for any other narrative. Official war documentary, traumatic war stories from other people, and mundane or exotic entertainment are pushed aside for her own monologic narrative.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3.2 *Fabricating the Unrealized Dream*

With an ironic gesture, Tonka spends most of her diatribe uncovering other people's illusory narratives. Despite her own creation of a monologic, closed narrative centered on a

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<sup>13</sup> The term *monologic* comes from Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of literature as either monologic or dialogic. Performatism, and thus Rudan's text, can be viewed as a type of monologic ("poetic") text that does not attempt to hide its closed and unitary world, but asks the reader to enter the textual world and suspend disbelief for a time. See Chapter One, pages 14-19.

potentially fabricated affair, Tonka feels compelled to expose the fantastical narratives that other people build their lives around. Over and over Tonka asserts that, “deset godina gledam ljude s maskama” (12) [For ten years I’ve been looking at people in masks (10)]. She describes people as being in their own films, where they experience the world from their own point of view through their own cinematic narratives. Tonka warns, “Filmovi znaju zajebati čoveka” (49) [Films can screw up a person (92)]. For Tonka, the postcommunist world is built upon a stark contrast between fantasy and reality. Life is the performance of a narrative, where one is motivated by an “neostvarenim snom” (adjusted 63) [unrealized dream (124)], created by a narrative, in which one is reduced to experiencing life through narratives and images that are not one’s own.

At one point Tonka tells the reader, “Sto puta ste bili u tom filmu” (62) [You’ve been in that film hundreds of times (120)]. Romantic films like *Gone with the Wind*, in which war and love are unrealistically portrayed, follow the course of monologic narratives in that they both create a fantasy for people to believe. A memorable moment in Tonka’s tirade is when she describes sitting in a bar watching the war scenes in *Gone with the Wind* while Opatija (the Croatian city she lives in) is under a general alert during the war in Yugoslavia. There is an incongruity with the situation as Tonka claims, “Čovjek nekako može razumjeti da će ti gradovi nestati u dimu i velikom plamenu” (69) [You can somehow understand that these towns are going to disappear in smoke or great flames. War is war (136)]. However, “Ne može uživati. Dok ekranom piči ‘opća opasnost u Gradu’” (69) [You can’t enjoy it. Not while ‘General alert in the city’ keeps flashing across the screen (136)]. The emphasis in her description is that even in the most dangerous of wartime situations, there is an incompatibility between the fantasy of war and the reality of it. The problem is not that the film interrupts the war, but that the war interrupts

the idealized, distanced image. For Tonka, the world is built around unrealized dreams created by closed narratives in film, in national and international rhetoric, and in advertisements.

From the opening pages of *Uho, grlo, nož*, Tonka begins breaking down any illusory ideas that the reader may have about the text. She deliberates,

Zašto ste toliko opsjednuti porukama? Ja vama nešto želim poručiti?! Ja vas želim zbuniti?! Jeste li ikada razmišljali? Da li vam je ikad palo na pamet da vam nitko ništa ne želi poručiti? Ni poručivati. Ni govoriti vam istinu. Taj netko vas želi zajebati. Manipulirati vama. Iskoristiti vas. Ne poručivati. (11)

Why are you so obsessed with messages? I'm trying to tell you something? I want to confuse you? Do you ever think at all? Has it ever occurred to you that no one wants to send you any kind of message? Or tell you anything? Or tell you the truth? That someone wants to fuck you up? Manipulate you. Exploit you. Not communicate. (7)

In a self-ironic turn, Tonka warns the reader of her unreliability. The question marks in the passage, along with the fragmented sentences emphasize Tonka's reluctance and resistance to simply provide for the reader a "truthful" rendition of her narrative. Instead, her statements ("I'm trying to tell you something," "I want to confuse you," etc.) become marked as questions. She questions her own narrative meaning, but conversely creates a unified narrative with the fantastical unrealized dream that she so detests.

Although Tonka takes pleasure in uncovering everyone else's unrealized dreams, she frames her own unifying narrative and traps her readers within its borders. While Tonka uncovers the illusory narratives others create their stories out of, she subtly warns us of the twist that her own narrative will take. For Tonka there is little distinction between the narrative lies made up in support of a nation or a war and the delusional narratives of romance and love that lovers tell each other. Tonka intertwines two tales in the text, one the story of a slain child and the other of a budding romance. Tonka relates watching a funeral covered on the local news, during the war, of a newborn baby who was killed: "Na ekranu smo vidjele gdje je beba bila

zaklana ili bačena u bunar. Sjećam se vrta i bunara, ali ne detalja” (53) [On the screen we saw where the baby had had its throat cut or had been thrown into a well. I remember the garden and the well, but not the details (100)]. Following the story, she transitions into the tale of her friend Ela who has an affair with a man she met at the local carnival while they were dressed in costumes with masks covering their faces. The two seemingly disjointed stories come together when Tonka unveils them both to be based upon fabrications. Tonka discloses that the story of the dead baby was a hoax produced by a local television network to magnify the war and Ela and Boris’ love story emerges as an equally fake account. The lovers projected their unrealized dreams onto the other and realize afterwards that neither of them were what the other desired.

Although Tonka exposes the mirage of the closed narrative, she does recognize its power and even advises her girlfriend Ela to partake in her unrealized dream with Boris. Tonka claims that everyone “koja se sa voljenom osobom u gimnaziji ili nekoj drugoj srednjoj školi nije izjebala” [who didn’t get to screw their beloved in high school or some other school] is searching for the unrealized dream, created by the fantasy, in comparison to “zanemariva manjina koja ga je stavila ili primila” (63-64) [the insignificant minority that either put it in or received it (124)]. Tonka perceives the affair as a way to penetrate the fantasy, to take hold of it and enjoy it for the short time that the dream can be realized. For Tonka, her unrealized dream is to engage in a union that results in a momentary collapse of self and other, in which there is a brief eclipse of a need for a narrative to uphold one’s identity, whether that be one’s ethnicity or one’s role as wife or parent.

At the end of Tonka’s narrative, Miki has not yet come to pick her up. Instead, Tonka betrays that Kiki (whom she claimed was on business in Slovenia) has been sleeping in the bed beside her during the entire night: “A Miki?! Što ‘a Miki’?! Što je sa Amikijem? Izislila sam

Mikija?! Gdje je Miki? Nisam ga izmislila! Jeste li gluhi?! Čujete kako zvoni?! Zvoni! Miki zvoni! Miki je na vratima i zvoni! Neka zvoni” (103) [What about Miki? What about him? What’s with Miki? I invented Miki?! Where is Miki? I didn’t invent him! Are you going deaf? Can’t you hear him ringing the bell?! Ringing! Miki’s ringing the bell! Miki’s at the door, ringing the bell! Let him ring (210)]. The moment when Tonka “[ću] uhvatiti Mikija za jaja” (12) [will take Miki by the balls (9)] is revealed as a fabrication. Eshelman notes, that performatist texts like Rudan’s end with a clear decision between actuality and artifice. “Where postmodernism offers competing, equally plausible worlds, [performatism] gives us a choice between what is false and what is most likely true” (Eshelman 54). Although the reader may feel duped or even angered by the conclusion of Rudan’s text, the choice to believe in Tonka’s preposterous tale as a mode of transforming her chaotic life bestows a certain assurance that however transient, there are means to assume a position of agency.

### 2.3.3 *Schizophrenic Subjects, Transformative Bodies*

In the attempt to hold together a world and an identity that is falling apart, Tonka retreats to her apartment. She divulges, “Da sam nekad bila drugačija. A onda je došao rat, pa sam popizdila” (11) [I used to be different. And then the war came and I went nuts (7)]. She wonders why “se svi Hrvati, svi građani Republike Hrvatske ne poubijaju?!” (35) [all Croats, all citizens of the Republic of Croatia, don’t kill themselves (61)]. The sudden shift between a multi-ethnic nation and a strictly one-ethnicity nation disrupts any sense of continuity and meaning for Tonka. Likewise, the inundation of international goods and media results in a condition not unlike Fredric Jameson’s notion of the schizophrenic subject, buffeted between depressed suicidal

thoughts and intense anger and ire.<sup>14</sup> Tonka's narrative clearly expresses this sway between intense emotion and intense depthlessness. Eshelman explains that, "All performatist works feed in some way on postmodernism; some break with it markedly, while others retain typical devices but use them with an entirely different aim" (xiv). In this case, Tonka maintains the schizophrenic subjectivity of postmodernism; however, she ultimately escapes (even if it is only momentarily) the multiple and shifting identity position. She sets up the union of sex, a brief fleeting moment, as the transformative act.

The shifting schizophrenic discourse in this text operates as a marker of the disintegration between borders. Although the alteration of tone functions as a hailing mechanism that keeps the reader within the text, the text also codes its narrator's postcommunist syndrome in these terms. Rudan intermingles notions of bodily borders and spatial borders with the melding of ethnic identities, with a dueling textual structure, and with the female body. In response, Tonka imposes her own rigid narrative frame (in both setting and narrative structure) in an attempt to combat the borderless features of her world. Tonka embodies what Kristeva calls the abject subject, a subject without borders. For Tonka, her world and her own identity have become abject as known borders and structures of identity and nationality break down. As Kristeva notes, a subject becomes abject "when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*" (original emphasis, 5). Tonka's body is the site of the conflict, since she is half Croat and half Serb. Tonka's mother, who is Croat, had an affair with a Serbian man, Zivko, while working for the socialist party. Tonka claims, "Ja sam njoj bila poklon od Partije" (23) [I was a gift from the Party (33-34)]. Although Tonka often insists that it does not bother her that her unknown father was a Serb and that the war's premise of "us" versus "them" is irrational, in the next breath she hides her mixed

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<sup>14</sup> Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992).



ethnicity, denies her identity, and berates the Serbs. The wartime confusion of borders, ethnicities, and fears are written on Tonka's body. Tonka actualizes the impossibilities of subjectivity in wartime Croatia, where identity is based upon notions of organic unity, common national character, and distinct language.

Despite the fact that Tonka claims to ignore the potential hazards involved with being of mixed ethnicity, she often hides in her apartment for fear of who is at the door and makes sure to inform people that she is Tonka Babić from Croatia—"iz Korčule" (15) [from Korčula (15)]—even though she has never been there before. In the Croatian context, Tonka displays the breakdown in meaning caused by a loss of distinction between self and other. Besides Tonka's abject mixture of ethnicity, her position as a middle-aged woman is also "radically excluded" (Kristeva 2) from the official, ideological "laws" of the newly formed Croatian state. The meaning/structure of excessive nationalism in Croatia collapses and is exposed by Tonka's body, which is both Croat and Serb, both sexual and unproductive. Tonka is "klimakterična ludara u pedestetoj" (11) [a menopausal idiot in her fifties (7)]. She is a female beyond the age of reproduction, who has sex without reproducing and refuses categories of femininity by spurning motherhood, having abortions, rejecting marriage, engaging in an affair, and ignoring religious and national "rules" of womanhood. The image of woman in Croatia's extreme nationalism was as a representative and protector of the nation.<sup>15</sup> Djurdja Knezevic explains, "Women are not considered as 'only women' but as the personification of and symbol for the nation. When this is the case, women are not human beings and individuals. Male discourse denotes women as a

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<sup>15</sup> To explore the topic of Croatian postcommunist national rhetoric and gender in greater detail, refer to Chapter One: Introduction pages 35-41, and see Chris Corrin's *Gender and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 1999); Tanya Renne's *Anna's Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); Renata Salecl's *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism After the Fall of Socialism* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and *Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminism in International Politics* edited by Joan W. Scott, Cora Kaplan, and Debra Keates (New York: Routledge, 1997).

group imbued with (imagined) characteristics similar to those of the nation” (65). Within this symbolic structure, Tonka is an aberration, an abject subject that shatters Croatian official narrative in her impossible, borderless position as a woman whose sexuality is in no way linked to nationality, religion, or reproduction.

Just as Tonka’s apartment and her narrative creates a unified, closed frame, the female body functions as a mode of brief unification. For Tonka, sex is the ultimate act that can move one outside of oneself, leaving behind identity, and allowing one to “da postane životinja” (34) [become an animal (57)]. The tensions inherent in the postcommunist double bind disappear in the moment of sexual union and Tonka sees this transformation as being akin to an animal-like state. In her description of sex with Miki, Tonka describes this erasure of personal identity and subsequent euphoria of unity and control: “Sav je drugačiji, ja uvijek, kad me muškarac tako gleda mislim da je on, u tim svilenim, mutnim trenucima, moj” (33) [It’s like, he’s looking at you, but he doesn’t see you. He’s quite different, I think, when he looks at me like that, in those silky, misty moments, he’s mine (57)]. Tonka imagines the body as a locus of release and singularity. It is through the body that one can rise above the burdens of identification and fragmentation. From the beginning of *Uho, grlo, nož*, the desire to place the body at the center of the text is apparent. Not only does Tonka desperately and forcefully dwell on sex, but also as the title suggests, she uses the body as a metaphor to redefine bodily fragmentation. The ear, throat, and nose are all distinct parts (much like the aspects of Tonka’s identity) and yet they are all connected by the same network and to the same body. Additionally, they are the openings of the body to the outside world. For the agoraphobic narrator, the infinite vastness of the universe is only heightened by her body’s lack of boundaries. Just as her body is unable to officially and

clearly demarcate her ethnicity, her body's openings also open her up to a hostile world that expects clear-cut boundaries.

In an attempt to avoid this impossible situation Tonka's refuse to settle with one ethnicity. She also rejects the impossible separation between "us" and "them" touted by the official wartime rhetoric and the international community. The only voice Tonka wants to allow is her own closed narrative and interpretation of her own life. When the reader supposedly forces her to assume a position as either Serbian or Croatian, Tonka bursts, "'Naše'!? Eto vidite do čega ste me doveli?! Ja sam postala mi! Ja sam postala mi. Naše pitanje?! Koje jebeno naše pitanje?! Ja sam ja! Ja! Ja sam ja! Na vratima našeg stana pisali su sprejem: 'Van iz Hrvatske'! Meni?! Koja ne znam geografiju i koja nikad nisam živjela 'van'?!'" (25) ['Ours'! There, you see what you've done to me! I've become *us*! I've become *us*! *Our* problem! Why the fuck is it *our* problem? I'm me! Me! I'm me! Someone wrote with spray paint on the door of our apartment, 'Get out of Croatia!' Me? Who doesn't know geography and has never lived 'outside'! (37)]. It is obvious that the policing of ethnic identity is a daily encounter for Tonka, yet she insists on being "me." She rejects the international theory that the Yugoslav war began because of ethnic conflict, stating, "Pa ipak mi je nepodnošljivo kad dođu ovi iz Evrope i počnu mi srati kako se sve ovo oko nas dešava samo zato jer sam ja Živkova kćerka" (46) [I still can't stand it when these guys from Europe come and start giving me shit about how all of this around us is happening just because I'm Zivko's daughter (85)]. Tonka refuses to accept ethnic differences as a valid rationale for the war and resists having to decide which side she would place herself. In an interesting twist, Tonka employs a form of *negative capability*. She is able to hold two competing claims simultaneously accepting both of them—she is both Serb and Croat. The solution for Tonka's abject state is not a Derridian dualism with two sides irreducible to the

other. Instead, John Keats' notion of *negative capability* provides a constructive perspective from which to view Tonka's position, as there is no "irritable reaching after the fact and reason." For Tonka, a state of being outside of a system in which one is compelled to resolve contradiction is tantamount to eluding the double injunction. One approaches this "animal" state in a number of ways in Tonka's narrative—through her controlled narrative and her affair.

Just as Tonka strives to reach that singular moment of union with Miki, she also seeks that same moment of union, or identification, with her reader. Tonka's narrative begins in the Prologue after an anonymous voice tells her, "Tonka, ti moraš nekome tko gleda sa strane objasniti tko si ti, a tko su Oni" (7) [Tonka, you have to explain to someone outside of it all who *you* are and who *they* are (original emphasis, 1)]. The request sparks the narrative that follows in which Tonka discloses, "Oni su oko mene. [...] Samnom u sobi. U zraku sobe, u mojim očima, pod mojim kapcima, u mom nosu, u mom uhu, u kartonskoj kutiji na ormaru gdje držim kupaće kostime i ljetne bluže i Kikijeve bermude, u ikeinoj noćnoj lampici, u svemiru" (7) [They're all around me. [...] In the room with me. In the air of the room, in my eyes, under my eyelids, in my nose, in my ear, in the cardboard box on the shelf in the closet where I keep my swimming suits and summer tops and Kiki's Bermuda shorts, in the IKEA bedside lamp, in the universe (1)]. Tonka relates that for her the reader ("they") and herself ("you") are intermingled and indistinguishable. The two mingle in her body, in her and her family's clothing, in the decorations of the apartment and the air she breathes. The infinite vastness of the world is suffocating her and Tonka's response is to control and give boundaries to the narrative. Through a tightly controlled authorial narrative, Tonka eliminates the two-pronged reader and narrator divide and creates a single, monologic mindset. Tonka's authorial aim, to enclose her reader within a frame so singular that the reader has no other choice but to identify with her (despite

their potential dislike of her or even repulsion of her), parallels the short-lived sexual union the narrator has with Miki. For Tonka, escaping the double injunction is temporary, coerced, artificial, and dependent upon negative capability.

In Monika Maron's text, a slightly different issue of restructured borders materializes. While the same splintered, abject subject appears, its foundation is that of reunification instead of dissolution. Rudan juggles fantasy and reality, along with the incompatible in an attempt to live with competing claims and paradoxical worldviews. She is unwilling to abandon contradiction, while Maron endeavors to guarantee conformity and erase paradox.

#### 2.4 Apartments in East German Literature

In East German literature, the apartment maintains the same theme of solitude and isolation found in late-Yugoslav literature, but the connotations of dissenting writers determine the apartment's private sphere as a place freed from the overreaching eyes of the state. Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* [*What Remains*], although not published until 1990, was written in the late seventies. The text documents the narrator's supervision by the Ministry for State Security. The apartment becomes a place of retreat where the narrator is able to write, removed from government surveillance. In a reverse gaze, Wolf's narrator hides behind the curtains of her apartment window spying upon the state agents parked in front of her apartment. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) apartment operates as a site of retreat from the state's influence, yet also a site of alienation.<sup>16</sup>

In Christoph Hein's 1982 *Der Fremde Freund* [*The Distant Lover*], as well as in his 1989 *Der Tangospieler* [*The Tango Player*], the apartment functions as a private place where his protagonists attempt to lead independent lives. For Claudia, the protagonist of *Der Fremde*

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<sup>16</sup> Hereafter referred to as the GDR.

*Freund*, the apartment stands as a physical and psychological protection from her own complicity in the restrictive 1950 GDR government. She claims that, “Verdrängungen sind das Ergebnis einer Abwehr, das Sichwehren gegen eine Gefahr. Sie sollen dem Organismus helfen zu existieren. Ein Lebewesen versucht zu überstehen, indem es verschiedene Dinge, die es umbringen könnten, nicht wahrnimmt” (85) [Repression is self-defense, defense against danger. Designed to help the organism exist. A living being tries to survive by not perceiving various things that could destroy it (98)] mirrors the place of the apartment in Hein’s text, where Claudia finds safety from the state at the expense of her psychological health. For Dallow, the protagonist in Hein’s *Der Tangospieler*, the apartment is a place away from the fear of the state after imprisonment. Likewise, in Ulrich Plenzdorf’s novel *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* [*The Legend of Paul and Paula*], a couple finds the apartment in an old dilapidated building to be a space of hope and private happiness amidst the harsh world. Maron’s post-wall narrator does not retreat into the apartment to avoid government observation, but to escape the uncomfortable changes of unification and protect her fragile identity.

## 2.5 Return to the Wild: Metamorphosis in Monika Maron’s *Animal triste*

Published in 1996, *Animal triste* by Monika Maron (1941-) revisits the theme of female containment found in her earlier work *Die Überläuferin* [*The Defector*] published in 1986.<sup>17</sup> The narrator of *Die Überläuferin*, Rosalind Polkowski, wanders through her memories and her imagination as she is isolated and confined to her room because of paralysis. Her complete interiorization of the self becomes the only means through which the narrator can escape the

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<sup>17</sup> Maron began publishing works of fiction in the 1980s; however, they were only published in the Federal Republic of Germany. In 1988 she obtained a visa to leave East Berlin and lived and published in the West until unification. Unlike authors like Christa Wolf, who opposed reunification, Maron endorsed the move in her 1990 essay “Die Schriftsteller und das Volk” [“The Writers and the People”].

official narratives and social conventions of the GDR. Helga Druxes notes that in Maron's work "restrictions and wounds the self suffers in the straightjacket of social control and supervision are always inscribed and rendered visible on the *female* body" (original emphasis, 175). This same bodily inscription is present in *Animal triste*. However, while Rosalind's pre-1989 interiorization results in her personal, psychological freedom, the agoraphobia of Maron's post-wall narrator concludes in bodily metamorphosis.<sup>18</sup> *Animal triste*'s narrator remains nameless as a sign of her loss of identity. Instead of trying to throw off restrictions, this narrator endeavors to embrace a new post-1989 identity. Unlike Rosalind, whose paralysis is imposed upon her (representing the bodily restriction and paralyzing force of the communist state), the narrator of *Animal triste* confines herself.

An elderly East German woman looking back on her life from some forty to sixty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall narrates the text. She was a paleontologist at the Natural History Museum in Berlin. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, she meets a West German man, Franz, divorces her husband, and begins an affair. We discover that Franz is now dead, presumably due to the narrator's actions, and that following his death the narrator "[hat sich] aus der Welt zurückgezogen" (10) [withdrew from the world (2)] to her apartment.<sup>19</sup> She has little contact with the outside world and no longer even knows how old she is, estimating around eighty or ninety. From the perspective of what the narrator guesses is forty to sixty years past, she is able to relate the story of her affair in a repeating framework that circles around the location of the

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<sup>18</sup> See Martin Kane's article "Culpabilities of the Imagination: The Novels of Monika Maron," *Literature on the Threshold: The German Novel in the 1980s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990. 221-234), for a discussion of the liberating nature of the interior in Maron's *Die Überläuferin*, as well as Thomas Beckermann's "'Die Diktatur repräsentiert das Abwesende nicht': Essay on Monika Maron, Wolfgang Hilbig, and Gert Neumann" (97-116) and Ricarda Schmidt's "The Concept of Identity in Recent East and West German Women's Writing" (429-448) in *German Literature at a Time of Change 1989-1990: German Unity and German Identity in Literary Perspective* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1991).

<sup>19</sup> All page numbers refer to Monika Maron's *Animal Triste* (7<sup>th</sup> ed. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2007). The translations and page numbers of the German text will be that of Brigitte Goldstein's *Animal Triste* published by The University of Nebraska Press (Lincoln, Nebraska) in 2000.

bed. As the text progresses, the narrator breaks free of the circular pattern of her narrative, and she is able to finally confront Franz's death, suggesting that she pushed (maybe accidentally) Franz in front of an oncoming bus, killing him.

The metaphor of a romantic relationship was a common depiction of East and West Germany in the post-Wende period. As Alison Lewis points out in "Unity Begins Together: Analyzing the Trauma of German Unification," German Unification was often pictured as a marriage union: "The notion of German union as a shotgun wedding between an overbearing, masculinized West Germany and a vulnerable, feminized East Germany captured the imagination" (135). While Maron upholds the stereotype of the dominant, masculine West Germany and the weak, feminine East Germany, she recasts the metaphor of union as that of an affair instead of a marriage. The partnership of the newly reunited Germanies emerges as fleeting and uncommitted, leaving no place for the East German narrator to reestablish the boundaries of a new identity.<sup>20</sup> Instead, she commences to erase her past and create a new post-wall identity based entirely upon the West.

Maron's narrator has divorced her husband and left her child and embarks upon a new romantic relationship wholeheartedly, while her lover Franz remains committed to his wife and his former life. The affair for Franz is not a new commitment but a temporary amusement. While nothing changes for Franz, everything changes for the narrator. She relates,

Eigentlich weiß ich bis heute nicht, warum in Franz' Leben alles bleiben konnte, wie es war, während mein Leben weggespült wurde wie ein unverputztes Lehmhaus vom Wolkenbruch. [...] Es muß auch an dem Wandel der Zeit gelegen haben, der nur mich betraf und nicht Franz, der ja aus Ulm kam. (79)

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Cooke in his book *Representing East Germany since Unification: from Colonization to Nostalgia*. (New York: Berg Publishers, 2005) has a chapter titled "Postcolonial Studies, Colonization and East Germany" in which he explores unification as a colonizing act on East Germany by West Germany. Maron's text supports a colonized reading as the narrator attempts to relinquish any former identity she might have had and acquire a new West German identity.



[Actually I really don't know to this day why Franz was allowed to go on with his life as before while my life was washed away like a mud hut in a torrential downpour. [...] It must have something to do with the great transformation of the time, which affected me but didn't affect Franz, since he was from Ulm. (41)]

Maron depicts the postcommunist relationship between East and West Germany as an unequal union characterized by one's position on a map. The narrator must give up her very life style and identity, while Franz retains his previous life with additional romantic and professional possibilities. The "Mauer im Kopf" [wall in one's mind]<sup>21</sup> for Maron's text resides within the unbending, unchanging West German Franz (who sees no reason to change) and the self-sacrificing, self-depreciating East German narrator (who relinquishes everything). Unlike Rudan's text in which Tonka fights to keep her conflicting and uncomfortable identity, Maron's narrator desperately tries to erase her own identity and adopt that of West Germany, represented in the character of Franz. The narrative of unification is discovered to be not a uniting of two sides, but an adoption of one side's narratives over the other's.

Maron scholar Alison Lewis reads Maron's text as an example of the abject in "Remembering the Barbarian: Memory and Repression in Monika Maron's *Animal Triste*" and others, like Helga Druxes, have noted the importance of place in Maron's previous works. I contemplate a conversation between these two positions through the lens of performatism. My analysis of *Animal triste* explores the manner in which Maron negotiates physical geographies, as well as structural and bodily borders as a mode of escaping the double injunction.

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<sup>21</sup> "Mauer im Kopf" is a phrase taken from Peter Schneider's novel *Der Mauerspringer* [*The Wall Jumper*] (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1982) referring to the lasting psychological walls that remains after the physical Berlin Wall has been torn down.

### 2.5.1 *Framing the Apartment*

Maron's narrator depicts her struggle to adjust to the new lack of borders between East and West Germany in her representation of place. The narrator's reactionary behavior after the fall of the Wall and her subsequent asylum in her apartment begins when the city of Berlin changes around her. The narrator remembers driving to work in Berlin:

[W]as ich anders als mit »Sinn« nicht zu benennen weiß, denn alles, was ich sah, die Straßen, Imbißbuden, die ineinanderfließenden Menschenströme, erschien mir so sinnentleert, daß ich nach einem auch nur vagen Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit vergeblich in mir suchte, als könnte ich ohne die Vermittlung von Franz zu nichts und niemandem mehr gehören. (13)

[Everything else I saw, the streets, the fast-food booths, the streams of people flowing into each other, it all seemed devoid of "meaning." In vain I tried to discover in me a sense of belonging, as if I couldn't belong to anything or anybody unless it was filtered through Franz. (70)]

In this passage, the long sentence performs the wandering, chaotic experience of attempting to follow or find meaning. The narrator feels lost as the city takes on a new shape, and she physically gets lost while driving around town, encountering numerous detours that prevent her from getting to work. Even the Natural History Museum where she works, whose history seemingly embeds it in unchanging meaning, no longer retains its meaning for her. The museum is taken over by the West German government and she decides to quit her job at the museum.

Since Berlin has lost its meaning and has been "aufgerissen" (208) "torn open" (115) and destroyed, the narrator turns to New York, a city she has dreamed of visiting. However, her trip to New York (the extreme example of her new transnational environment) is replete with obstacles. In New York, the narrator is so frightened that she only ventures out into the city once. On that outing, she gets locked in an apartment building's staircase. Later, she imagines that someone is holding the door of her New York apartment closed, only to discover that it is she who has pulled the chain across the door locking her inside. The narrator leaves New York early

without visiting any of the places she came to visit. The city, both Berlin and New York, emphasizes the narrator's fears of open, borderless place in the post-Wende world. When the narrator finds herself unable to navigate her new postcommunist environment, she reacts to these fears, attempting to frame the borderless world by retreating into her apartment and enclosing Franz (the representative of the West) within its walls.

The narrator attempts to enclose Franz in her apartment in order to create the physical and narrative frame to combat her fragmented world. She attempts to extract meaning from Franz as a representative of a West Germany whose identity was not shattered, compared to its East German counterpart. While the narrator's one-room apartment has no identifying characteristics and is always portrayed as being in semi-darkness, the walls and furnishings of Franz's apartment are detailed. On Franz's kitchen table the narrator sees "einen Teller Bouillon [...], in dem zwei oder drei Maultaschen schwimmen" (112) [a plate of bouillon with two or three dumplings floating in it (60)], as well as "Karin Lüderitz ihre Biedermeiermöbel und das sorgsam zusammengetragene Zwiebelmuster-geschirr" (112) [Karin Lüderitz's Biedermeier furniture and carefully collected dishes with the onion pattern (60)]. The narrator depicts Franz's study as a "sonnendurchfluteten Raum" [sun-bathed room (112)] with an "Empirekommode mit den Intarsien" (202) [inlaid empire chest (112)] and "Vitrine" (202) [glass cabinet (112)] where "[Sie] tranken Tee aus englischem Porzellan mit Jagdmotiven" (202) [[They] drank tea out of English porcelain cups with a hunting pattern (112)]. Franz's "Bürgerpracht" (202) [bourgeois affluence (112)] serves as a foil to the narrator's bleak and nondescript apartment. His apartment represents the goods of capitalism, where cultures mingle. Franz's apartment has a cultural, culinary, and multi-cultural history that the narrator desires to incorporate into her own apartment.

The narrator describes her own apartment as a framing of Franz. The narrator relates, “Ich weiß, wie er aussah, wenn er meine Wohnung betrat” (11) [I know what he looked like when he entered my apartment (2)]. If we read Franz as a representative of West Germany, we can see how the narrator attempts to confine a part of the whole in order to come to terms with and to control the uncontrollable outside world. The limiting apartment makes Franz (the West) visible to the narrator; thus, making the chaotic exterior knowable and seen. When Franz leaves the apartment, the stable worldview and identity that the narrator constructs with his arrival disintegrates: “durch die [Tür] er verschwand, wenn er nachts um eins nach Hause fuhr” (77) [The door behind which he disappeared when he drove home at one o’clock at night (40)]. This sentence is not a complete sentence at all, but a telling fragment commenting upon the fragmentation and incompleteness that takes place once Franz departs. Franz disappears when he leaves. For the troubled narrator, Franz becomes the touchstone that, if contained, will help make sense of the fragmentation of her city and her identity.

On four different occasions (page 15, 18, 50, and 55 [4, 6, 24, and 27]) the narrator describes Franz sitting before the window in her apartment with the light coming in from behind the curtain: “Er sieht mich nicht an, sondern starrt durch die Dunkelheit auf die Fenster hinter den geschlossenen Vorhängen” (15) [He doesn’t look at me, he simply stares into the darkness at the windows behind the drawn curtains (4)]. In these repeating passages, Franz seems intent only on looking outside. The curtain obscures the window that Franz directs his gaze toward. The narrator symbolically prevents Franz’s escape from the interior of the apartment, with a curtain, in an attempt at interiorizing the other. Eshelman describes this textual framing, “Ideal selfness, [...] consists in appropriating otherness (understood as someone else’s whole frame) for your own ends” (95). Similar to Rudan’s text, where the apartment becomes a physical construct

barring the reader from exiting the text, Maron's narrator prevents Franz from leaving her apartment. Since the narrator's understanding of and relationship to place has been disrupted, all aspects of her identity have faltered. Franz's definable, West German sense of place marks an identity and a place the narrator would like to inhabit. Thus, while Franz is alive she physically attempts to encircle him within her apartment, and when he is dead she attempts to keep him within her fictional frame through her contrived narrative.

This attempt to appropriate Franz becomes evident in the narrator's naming of him. In *Animal Triste* the narrator has forgotten Franz's name and therefore makes up a name for him choosing "Franz" because of its beautiful pronunciation: "Dann ist Franz ein schönes dunkles Wort wie Grab oder Sarg" (18) [Then Franz becomes a beautiful, dark word like tomb or coffin (6)]. Her description of him, like that of the apartment, is as a container, a feminine image. The narrator tries to contain Franz by forcing his identity to be that which she has given him. The narrator's move to house Franz in her apartment and in her repeating memory exposes this intense desire to enclose everything.

Near the end of the affair when it appears possible that Franz will leave his wife and move in with the narrator, the most expansive description of her apartment is given. The narrator recalls, "Später haben wir ein Zimmer ausgeräumt. Franz hatte gefragt, wo er seinen Schreibtisch aufstellen dürfe. [...] Ich erinnere mich, daß Franz und ich mitten in der Nacht die Möbel des hinteren Zimmers auf die übrige Wohnung verteilten" (236) [Later on we straightened up the room together. Franz had asked where he could set up his desk. [...] I remember how Franz and I, in the middle of the night, divided up the furniture in the back room over the rest of the apartment (131)]. For the first time, the narrator's apartment begins to take shape. It has more than one room and furniture as well. The previously absent "back room" is being pulled into the

rest of the apartment as a joint effort of union. Now, instead of the unnatural barrier of the curtain obstructing the exterior, the natural barrier of the night encloses the couple. It appears that the narrator may have finally “captured” Franz for herself. However, as she walks Franz to the bus stop, where he says he will return the next day to move in with her, she panics, “Er wird nicht wiederkommen. Ich werde das Zimmer wieder einräumen müssen” (237) [He won’t come back. I’ll have to rearrange the room again (132)]. It is intimated that the narrator then, in her fear that she will have to face the entire reorganizing of place all over again, pushes Franz in front of the bus or perhaps in her attempt to entice him not to leave, he accidentally falls off balance into the path of the bus.

### 2.5.2 *Reframing the Fantasy*

Once the narrator and Franz’s relationship ends (because of his death), the narrator must find a new way to hold Franz safely within the walls of her apartment. This process becomes two-fold, as the narrator creates a fantasy world for herself in the seclusion of her apartment and a circular, repeating narrative for her reader. While the narrator can no longer confine Franz to the apartment, she can retain an altered memory of the affair and force the reader to experience it with her over and over again. The narrator retreats to her apartment with her memories and refuses to acknowledge that Franz is dead, only recounting the truth on the last two pages of the book after obsessively repeating her repressed memories to the reader. Unlike Tonka who acknowledges the constant tension between fantasy and reality and acts in spite of the strain, Maron’s narrator turns her reality into a fantasy world, trying to ignore the tension.

After Franz’s death, the place of the apartment, especially the location of the bed, becomes the center out of which the narrator’s stories emerge and then converge. The narrator

declares, “als ich beschloß, den Episoden meines Lebens keine mehr hinzuzufügen, habe ich sie alle zerschlagen” (10) [I made up my mind not to add any more episodes to my life, I smashed them all to pieces (1)]. By living in seclusion, the narrator creates a suspension of time and place, both for her and for the reader. Not only does the narrator retreat from the world at this point, she also admittedly alters the memories that she does have. She purposely forgets the specifics of her relationship with Franz, including his name and why they ended the relationship. The narrator admits, “Ich sitze hier schon zu lange und erfinde Geschichten” (12) [I have been sitting here much too long making up stories (2)] and that, “Im Laufe der Jahre habe ich gelernt, mich an das, was ich vergessen will, nicht zu erinnern” (16) [Over the years I have learned not to remember what I would rather forget (5)]. The narrator’s reliability is called into question, as well as her sanity. Like Tonka, Maron’s narrator finds solace in the fantasy and works to coax the reader into her illusion. Similar to Tonka’s performative framing, Maron’s narrator also works to enclose her reader (whom she also directly addresses) in a monologic (monist) narration.

Problematically, however, the narrator’s fabricated narrative is constantly challenged and interrupted by the actuality of the unsatisfactory affair. She insists upon Franz’s prominence in her life, but he has little actual presence in the text. His name is forgotten, he rarely speaks to her, and she admits, “Ich werde nie erfahren, was Franz denkt” (18) [I will never know what Franz is thinking (6)]. There is unease in *Animal triste* as the narrator attempts to contain Franz, and yet undoes her own fantasy as she unfolds her story. In the narrator’s own retelling of the affair, Franz refuses to answer her questions or engage in dialogue. However, entire sections of the text are dedicated to the narrator’s former husband. This split between what the narrator attempts to prove as a reality clashes with the gaps in her own recreation of events. Despite her

insistence that her life is all about Franz, he is actually not a real presence but a “blass[e] und geisterhaft[e]” (19) [ghostly pale (6)] absence marked by a dried semen stain on her bedcover. The actuality of her post-affair and postcommunist situation is that she has no relationship to Franz, to the West, except for the one that she imagines.

While Franz and her apartment are nondescript, the object of focalization is clearly demarcated. Within the text, the narrator’s narrative returns to the image of the bed no less than nine times (14, 50, 55, 99, 110, 150, 183, 207, 238 [3; 24; 27, 52; 59; 82; 101; 115; 133]).

Der Bezug ist mit großen, in kräftigem Rot, Grün und Lila gehaltenen Blumen bedruckt, die mich an die Blüten fleischfressender Pflanzen erinnern. Das Laken ist schwarz, so daß das Sperma meines Geliebten noch immer deutlich und schön zu erkennen ist, ein nicht sehr großer Fleck in der Form eines sitzenden Pudels und dicht daneben ein zweiter, größerer, ein weniger scharf umrissenes Gebilde, das, sooft ich es betrachte, neue Möglichkeiten seiner Deutung offenbart. (14)

[The flowery print of intense red, green, and lilac on the cover reminds me of the flowers of carnivorous plants. The sheet is black, and my lover’s semen is still quite clearly, and beautifully, recognizable—a-not-too-large stain in the shape of a seated poodle and, next to it another, larger, less sharply drawn image that presents new possibilities of interpretation every time. (3-4)]

As each foray into a new memory about Franz wanders into tangential directions, the narrator returns the narrative to the location of the bed, the most intimate and tangible evidence of her affair and containment of Franz. The carnivorous plants resemble the narrator’s own desire to consume and contain Franz, if only through his bodily remains. Yet, like the fantasies she tells of Franz, the semen stain defies consistent interpretation. The narrator takes what is an inconsequential stain and elevates it to a symbol. She gives meaning to the meaningless. The narrator returns over and over to the site of the semen-stained bedcover in an attempt to transform Franz and her chaotic, fragmented life into a quantifiable, understandable sign.

The act of suspension carries over into the reading experience of the text. The place of the apartment emerges as a claustrophobic space for the reader, who is confined to the narrator’s



memories that circle around and around the location of the bed. Because of the narrator's circular narrative pattern and her secluded life, the space and time of the text are suspended in an attempt at a unified, closed narrative. The reader has little to no marker of time, as the narrator herself cannot accurately relate how much time has passed since she withdrew to her apartment. The narrator relates, "Ich kümmere mich nicht mehr um die Welt und weiß darum nicht, in welcher Zeit sie gerade steckt" (9) [I no longer pay attention to what goes on in the world, and I don't know what time period we are living in right now (1)]. The lack of temporality in the text is emphasized by the narrator's description of pre-Wende time as "die seltsame Zeit" (40) [the peculiar time (18)], while in the post-wall time she claims, "Für mich ist die Zeit mit Franz eine zeitlose, durch kein Zählwerk geordnete Zeit geblieben, in der ich mich seitdem befinde wie im luftigen Innern einer Kugel" (126) [The time I spent with Franz is for me a timeless time, a time that cannot be regimented by some counting mechanism, a time in which I have lived ever since, as in the airy interior of a crystal sphere (68)]. Just as the narrator traps Franz in her apartment, she also creates a crystal ball to hold her readers, telling them fantastical tales. In essence, Maron's narrator plays God by creating Franz and then deciding what we get to know about the world that she has created. Eshelman notes that performative texts often have what he calls a "theist narrative" in which "a narrator equipped with powers similar to those of an all-powerful, omniscient author forces his or her own authoritative point of view upon us in what is usually a circular or tautological way" (19). The narrator not only controls space in the text, she also directs time.

In his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin explores "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relations that are artistically expressed in literature" (84). According to Bakhtin, the chronotope of the novel gives "the meaning that

shapes narrative” (250). It is in the relationship between time and space in the novel that the voices and discourses, or to use Bakhtin’s language, the heteroglossia of the text is “tied and untied” (250). The narrator of *Animal triste* resists placement within a chronotope by arresting her movement within time and space. Once the “timeless time” with Franz is uncovered as a flawed affair, the narrator attempts to retreat into this fantasy. This stasis that the narrator creates in the text is particularly disturbing because it transgresses the boundaries of traditional narratives where space and time fix a text in a particular context. Maron’s narrator refuses to establish a context, instead retaining past, present, and even future within her apartment. She refuses to let the reader establish his or her coordinates beyond the timeless time of post-1989. Like Rudan’s text, which encloses the narrator in the blackness of night, Maron’s narrator is enclosed in an unknown temporality, removing contextual markers.

These examples of suspended time and an unraveling fantasy point to the complicated duality and paradox of Maron’s text. While Rudan’s narrator recognizes the fleeting nature of fantasy and gives in to the dueling tensions in the text, Maron’s narrator has a twofold response. On the one hand, the narrator has stopped time and place to maintain the climatic time with Franz and her love affair indefinitely. On the other hand, the text’s stories betray the affair’s denouement and her fantastical imagination. The text’s title also challenges the reader to separate the narrator’s desires with the narrative itself. “Animal triste” comes from the Latin expression, “post coitum omne animal triste est” [After sex all animals are sad]. The title suggests that all “union” is fleeting and that after merging with an other a denouement must occur once again separating self and other. Rudan’s narrator finds solace and transformation in this moment of union, but Maron’s narrator discerns nothing redeeming about the transitory nature of sex.

However the narrator does have a transformation. She releases herself from the circular pattern of her narrative by no longer suppressing the truth about Franz's death. Near the end of the text, she ventures beyond the narrative that she usually tells herself: "Ich habe meistens an dieser Stelle unterbrochen und lieber wieder an den Anfang gedacht" (185) [At this point I usually break off and prefer to start from the beginning (102)]. She relates that she avoids the ending so as not to close the narrative: "Das Ende ist eindeutig und entscheidet alles, das Ende ist nicht korrigierbar. Darum habe ich es vergessen" (232) [The end is unambiguous and decides everything, the end cannot be revised. That's why I forgot it (129)]. She admits, "Mein Gedächtnis weicht aus wie Augen einem ekelhaften Anblick, einer vereiterten Wunde oder einer Lache von Erbrochenem. [...] Heute werde ich aufhören, auf Franz zu warten" (198) [My memory evades me like eyes evading a horrifying sight, a pus-filled wound, or a pool of vomit. [...] Today I shall end my wait for Franz (109)]. On the last two pages, the narrator finally consciously acknowledges the fantasy she has been creating, relates the end of the narrative, and symbolically closes the narrative she had kept suspended for so long.

### 2.5.3 *Bodily Metamorphosis*

The closure of the narrator's story marks the end of her attempt to deny her abject subjectivity and ignore the double injunction, leading to her ultimate transformation. Unlike Tonka who rejects merging the incompatible elements of her shattered state, Maron's narrator does all she can to create real and imaginary boundaries. Lewis, in her article "Die Sehnsucht nach einer Tat," observes,

In allen Romanen von *Flugasche* bis zu *Animal triste* äußert sich die Problematik des weiblichen Handelns über ein Wechselspiel zwischen Innen und Außen— zwischen Innen- und Außenwelt, zwischen privaten und öffentlichen Räumen,

zwischen Innenräumen des Körpers und äußeren Schauplätzen,—zwischen Sein und Dasein. (76)

[In all the novels from *Flugasche* to *Animal triste* the problem of female action is expressed through an interplay between inside and outside—between interior world and exterior world, between private and public spheres, between interiors of the body and external locations—between being and existence.]<sup>22</sup>

Maron's narrator is troubled by the double bind, the need to juggle dueling frameworks. As Druxes' analysis of Maron's earlier texts argues, the historical context of Maron's work "acts on bodies just as it rearranges space" (173) and the narrator of *Animal triste* is no exception. She undergoes self-mutilation and reshaping in order to force her body to imitate Franz's West German position. The pre-1989 text by Maron in which a character could "think her way through the wall" and toward a discovery of the self, is not mirrored in her post-1989 text (Druxes 183). Here the body is altered in an attempt to become the West German, whom she imagines to be outside of the double bind she feels herself to be in.

The narrator uses her body as a place that can be inhabited by others and literally rearranges it to conform to the other. She notes, "Ich habe in meiner Wohnung keine Spiegel" (10) [My apartment has no mirrors (1)], and "[Ich ruiniere] meine Sehschärfe absichtsvoll" (10) [[I] deliberately ruined my eyesight (2)]. She attempts to etch Franz, literally unto her body, by forcing herself to see the world through Franz's eyes. She ruins her eyesight by wearing a pair of Franz's eyeglasses after he leaves "als einer letzten Möglichkeit, ihm nahe zu sein" (11) [in a last desperate attempt to be close to him (2)]. By destroying the avenues (the mirror and her own eyesight) through which she would be able to evaluate herself and her world, the narrator tries to force her body into the mold that can become the other. Both Tonka and the narrator display (as Kristeva notes) the impossibility that constitutes their very being. For Tonka this is because of her mixed ethnicity and for the narrator it is due to her desire to become the other. While

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<sup>22</sup> All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

Rudan's Tonka revels in the excesses and impossibility of her position through a paradoxical and unsettling narrative, Maron's narrator struggles to reject her location in the abject and literally disappears into the other. She tries to forget; she attempts to rearrange or remember differently.

The fear of borderless, unstructured bodies does not cease with the narrator's own post-Wende dismay that her body, like the city of Berlin, no longer has stable borders for identification. In fact, women in general in *Animal triste* constitute a threat of blurred boundaries and slipping identities. In the narrator's stories about her mother and Franz's wife, the narrator continues to distance herself from their bodies, as well as from her own. The narrator discloses, "Ich ekelte mich vor Weiberfleisch, auch vor meinem eigenen" (74) [Female flesh disgusted me, my own included (38)]. The narrator's repulsion to female flesh is a rejection of the borderless subjects that women become when they appear as interchangeable parts without individual identities. In essence, the women in the text are doubles of each other.

After the war when the narrator's father returns home she reports, "Vor allem aber wäre uns die unbegreifliche Verwandlung unserer Mütter erspart geblieben" (69) [Most of all, we would have all been spared having to witness the bewildering transformation of our mothers (35)]. Her self-sufficient mother transforms with her father's reappearance into a helpless, self-sacrificing figure saying, "[M]an müsse den Männern wieder zu Selbstvertrauen verhelfen" (70) [[I]t was necessary to give the men a boost, so they could regain their self-confidence (36)]. The mother gives up her self-sufficient position during the war to return to a diminished role in relation to her husband and the defeated nation. The narrator's father occupies a dominant role in the house, spreading his papers over the dining room table and insisting upon certain foods and behaviors. The narrator's childhood memories of her mother and her shifting identity from breadwinner to domestic homebody reshape the space of the child narrator's world.

Likewise, Franz's wife is an object of abjection for the narrator because she represents the narrator's own doubled body. Franz's wife is the body that literally contains Franz, just as her own does, during intercourse. Thus, she is both an object to be desired and hated. In the narrator's imagined encounters with Franz's wife, she relates, "Immer wieder zwang ich sie, die Kleider abzulegen, um mich wieder und wieder von dem Ekel erregen zu lassen, der mich beim Anblick ihres nackten Körpers überkam. [...] [I]ch [wartete] auf den letzten Verrat: daß er es mit ihr genau so tun würde wie mit mir" (153-154) [Again and again I forced her to undress, to arouse in me again and again the sense of disgust that overcame me when I saw her body. [...] I waited for the last betrayal: that he would do it with her exactly as with me (84)]. In this passage, the narrator finds both arousal and disgust in Franz's wife. Franz's wife is the narrator and yet not her. The boundaries of "me" and "you" recede as they occupy the same position in relation to Franz. Both are without identity, as their lack of names suggest, except that of their gender and their relationship to Franz as wife and mistress.

Although in previous works Maron's female characters found peace in an inward retreat to reclaim the self, in *Animal triste* the female body (whether that of the self or another) provides only a fractured identity in need of a man to reframe them. Druxes argues that in Maron's other novels: "Maron locates [introspection and interiorization] in *Heimlichkeit* (secrecy; literally, the essence of home), and before it can make itself heard in public, it has to establish a felt sense of being as home in the self." (*Resisting Bodies* 34). This moment of being at home in the self takes an unexpected turn in *Animal triste*, however. In the fragmented environment of reunification, the self has been obliterated for Maron's narrator. As the narrator nears the point of confessing to Franz's death and emerging from her fantasy world, her body struggles to hold in the knowledge:

Mein Körper ist mir einzige Plage. Er kneift und beißt mich, er zerrt an mir, meine Füße sterben ab, und mein Rücken schmerzt, als zöge mir jemand bei

lebendigem Leibe die Nervenstränge durch die Wirbel. Wenn es mir gelungen sein wird, mich bis ans Ende zu erinnern, werde ich mich zwischen die fleischfressenden Pflanzen legen und sehr lange schlafen. (232)

[My body is one big pain to me. It pinches and bites me, it pulls on me, my feet are going numb, my back hurts as if someone were pulling the living nerve strands through my vertebrae. When I have succeeded in remembering to the very end, I'll stretch out between the carnivorous plants and go to sleep for a long, long time. (129)]

The truth is literally being pulled from her body and her nervous system is shutting down. When the narrator does come to the moment of truth, she does not find a way to her self, but instead to a metamorphosis.

Maron's text ends with an unexpected bodily transformation, from the body as place to contain the other to that of an animal: "Ich bin eins von ihnen, eine braunhaarige Äffin mit einer stumpfen Nase und langen Armen, die ich um meinen Tierleib schlinge. So bleibe ich liegen." (239) [I am one of them, a brown-haired ape with a stubby nose and long arms that I wrap around my animal body. That's how I remain lying here (133)]. Through her shape shifting, the narrator is released from her abject subjectivity. Her body, her identity, and her narrative escape the imposed self-delusional boundaries the narrator has placed upon them. This unusual transformation from human to animal can be read in multiple ways. On the one hand, the narrator's transformation may be read as her death, since she claims, "Mich hält nichts mehr wach" (238) [Nothing keeps me awake any longer (133)]. The metamorphosis can be seen as a hallucinatory or dreamlike state before her death, in which one evades the double bind of the narrative through death. On the other hand, much like Tonka's transformation into an animal-like state during sex, Maron's narrator transforms into an animal outside of the prescripts of the human world. Instead of maintaining the walls of her apartment, the narrator exits her physical and narrative prison. She notes, "Die paar Schritte auf meinen Platz zwischen den

fleischfressenden Pflanzen schaffe ich noch. Ein fremder Wind streift mein Gesicht und spielt mit den Blättern der Pflanzen” (238) [I can still manage the few steps from where I am sitting to get to the carnivorous plants. A strange wind grazes my face and plays with the leaves of the plants (133)] She “enters” the jungle on her bedspread and remarks, “Ich liege in ihrer Mitte und fürchte sie nicht” (239) [I am stretched out in their [the animals’] midst, and I am not afraid (133)]. The transformation (although absurd) represents a natural environment without the fears that accompany the narrator’s postcommunist life. Stuart Tabener argues that the narrator’s transformation is “an act of biological and anthropological self-recognition” (45).<sup>23</sup>

Maron’s text poses a striking comparison to Franz Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis.” Not only does the narrator name her lover Franz, but also, like Gregor Samsa, the narrator’s transformation takes place on the bed. Unlike Kafka’s narrative, where the transformation makes visible the fragmented subject that Gregor already is, Maron’s narrator surpasses the abject state. She moves from self-denial to self-recognition, while Gregor slowly loses his human qualities. The narrator’s story ends with the transformation; Gregor’s begins with it. The narrator’s Franz could be imagined as a doubled Kafka. She names him and thereby deems him the “author” and creator of her failed narrative. She desires to be transformed by Franz into the proper postcommunist subject; however, only ends up killing her creator for his failings. Instead of degenerating and dying, she reemerges in a transformed state. In this manner, Maron uses Kafka as a retrofit that recycles a known literary frame and structure that her narrator attempts to fit

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<sup>23</sup> Tabener criticizes Alison Lewis’ argument that the narrator becomes the barbarian in the bedspread as the ultimate form of abjection and the only place she has left to retreat to after relinquishing her connection to Franz. By accepting her position as a “beast,” Tabener argues that the narrator’s personality and the historical context should not be mingled. In this case, I agree with Lewis that the narrator was an abject subject; however, I argue her metamorphosis was liberation from that position. Thus, I position myself between the two scholars taking into consideration the abject subjectivity of the narrator, as well as her historical context, while recognizing the transformation as a move beyond a borderless state.



around her own narrative.<sup>24</sup> Serguei Oushakine notes that, “Functioning as visual templates, retroframeworks offer a recognizable outline without suggesting an obvious ideological strategy of its interpretation” (“We’re nostalgic” 456). Just as Maron’s narrator fails to adopt someone else’s framework, Maron’s reframing of Kafka only points to the fact that Kafka’s frame no longer provides adequate content for the postcommunist subject.

## 2.6 Reading the Postcommunist Apartment

In both Rudan’s and Maron’s texts we encounter the place of the apartment as a geography that provides the borders necessary for the narrators to create their own narrative frames in a postcommunist world challenged by a double injunction. Eshelman reminds us that in performative texts, “We are now leaving the postmodern era with its essentially dualist notions of textuality, virtuality, belatedness, endless irony, and metaphysical skepticism and entering an era in which specifically monist virtues are again coming to the fore” (Eshelman xi). Tonka and Maron’s narrators implement the safety of the apartment setting as a way to create their own self-controlled, closed narratives. Performatist techniques of closed, controlled narratives and of the ultimate triumph over the text’s struggle (in these case the post-1989 double bind) characterize these texts. Maron’s narrator attempts a reframing of her lover Franz, of the reader, and of Kafka only to find that her attempts to cancel out the fears of placelessness fall flat. The absurd transformation of the body released from its identifications proves to be the ultimate evasion of the post-unification double bind. Similarly, the body stands as Tonka’s site of transformation. Through intercourse, Tonka also discovers a moment of liberty, in which she is freed from her ethnic, gendered, national, and postnational obligations.

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter One: Introduction, pages 11-14 for further discussion of retrofitting in the scholarship of Serguei Oushakine.

Both texts are enmeshed in the social and cultural debates of their postsocialist nations. In the Croatian context, Tonka's escape hinges on negative capability, while Maron's German text addresses the post-Wende desire of complete unification. Scholar Paul Cooke suggests that texts like Maron's present "an east German deliberately taking up the position assigned him or her by the western hegemony, in order to bring this position into question" (83). Maron displays the impossibility of ignoring one part of the double injunction. One can read the narrator's transformation as an absurd commentary on the impossible situation forced upon East Germans and the Western representation of them. It is important to remember that the full Latin quotation from Maron's title is "Triste est omne animal post coitum, praeter mulierem gallumque" [After sex all animals are sad, except the woman and the cock]. Once freed from the union and transformed into something else or into some other state, Maron's title hints at happiness.

In the Croatian context, embrace of the dual nature characterizes the approach to the double bind where identity has been limited to excessive nationalism, and in the German context, by the acceptance of the open, postnational identity at the cost of the national. This tendency obviously relates to the end of socialism in each nation, in which a traumatic war and forced nationalism attempted to erase and ignore the multi-ethnic Yugoslav past, in contrast to an act of unification that resulted in the adoption of a West German mindset.

Like Rudan, Maron does not provide an answer or direction for her protagonist. She does not overtly attempt to criticize or celebrate German unification. Instead, both texts simply, yet powerfully, address the fears of a borderless, fragmented world and the position of narrators determined to exceed the double injunction through whatever means possible. The transitory and preposterous nature of their transformations accentuates the absurdity and hopelessness of the characters' post-wall positions. However, the beauty of these texts is an affirmation of the power

of the subject to take charge of their situations, at least aesthetically, within the boundaries of their texts. The apartment in Rudan's and Maron's works exposes the potential of writing in the universal postcommunist syndrome as a place of agency that "*demonstrates with aesthetic means the possibility of transcending the conditions of a given frame*" (original emphasis, Eshelman 12).

## Chapter Three

### Reconciliatory Plots: The Place of the City in Postcommunist Literature

In the previous chapter, postcommunist writers employed first-person narratives and the geography of the apartment as framing devices that ultimately allowed characters to elude their post-1989 double bind if only momentarily and unsatisfactorily. In this chapter, writers address the geography of the city. Instead of the enclosed frames of the apartment, characters directly interact with a personal and collective tension between a desire to accept new open geographic and economic borders and yet to protect symbolic categories.<sup>1</sup> Writers implement performatist plots that engage reconciliatory acts whereby characters discover union with other characters, themselves, or their families.<sup>2</sup> A harmony emerges in these texts in the partial comfort found in continuity, heredity, female solidarity, literary reframing, and writing. Writers Dubravka Ugrešić, Barbara Honigmann, and Olga Mukhina produce city geographies with reconciliatory plots that hinge on reframing strategies.

Reframing, the application of previous historical and literary pasts in order to provide a narrative framework,<sup>3</sup> materializes in representations of the city in postcommunist texts from the three countries outlined in the introduction—Croatia, Germany, and Russia. Following the collapse of socialism and subsequent emergence of a double bind, three texts emerging from post-wall literature engage the loosening and fragmentation of borders. Ugrešić's *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* [*The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*], Honigmann's *Eine Liebe aus nichts* [*A Love Out of Nothing*], and Mukhina's *Ю, пьеса с картинками* [*YoU, a Play with*

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter One: Introduction, pages 4-6, for a detailed discussion of the *double bind*.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter One: Introduction, pages 14-19, for a review of Raoul Eshelman's notion of *performatism*.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter One: Introduction, pages 11-14, for further discussion of retrofitting in the scholarship of Serguei Oushakine.

*Pictures*], display city texts that engage with identity formation in the wake of shifting geographic borders. Each writer employs some form of reframing, from the citing of other writers, to the recycling of nineteenth-century photos, to the revisiting of Viktor Shklovsky, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Anton Chekhov, to the reevaluation of World War II.

The depiction of cities in these texts reveals problems of inclusion and exclusion, as well as of maintenance and disintegration of borders. The dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the resulting war, the reunification of Germany, and the collapse of the Soviet Union all produced city geographies of homelessness in an ever-expanding globe. The place of the city creates varying responses to open borders and restructured space. While the memorial qualities of Ugrešić's city teem with potential, Honigmann's cities remain inhospitable, and Mukhina's restrictive. Despite differing views on the city, it is the site of the city, as the embodiment of the double bind, with its conflicting invitations and expulsions that characters in these texts are forced to confront the dueling tensions. Characters reconcile their relationship to their cities and to the double bind, and writers establish recycled structures through narrative reframing. In these three representations of the city, I examine how each writer navigates the postcommunist syndrome focusing on their particular national situation—city as pretense, city as museum, and city as myth.

### 3.1 Reading the City

The city has been an important geography, if not main character, in Western literature for centuries depicting cultural imaginings of the nation and modernity. Cities often function as the space in which a nation's narrative and identity are formed and challenged. It is the place where rules of engagement, cultural models, and precepts of inclusion are constructed, as well as the site of constant influence and intrusion from the outside world. Richard Lehan notes in his book

*The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*, “The city has determined our cultural fate for the last three hundred years—has become inseparable from our personal and national destiny. As the product of the Enlightenment, urbanism is at the very heart of Western culture, the source both of political order and of social chaos” (3). In the postcommunist world, the increasingly permeable borders of nations, and thus cities, heighten the tension between closed national borders and monist narratives and the multicultural, international, polyphony of narratives streaming in from outside.

From Marxist to semiotic readings, to geography, anthropology, and memory studies, the site of the city speaks to the symbolic boundaries of identity. Whether cities are interpreted through their economic evolution from mercantilism, industrialization, to globalization (Henri Lefebvre and Carlo Rotella), as a loss of an original, natural home (William Chapman Sharpe), as a feminist site for identity formation and agency (Helga Druxes), as collective dream-logic that must be approached through Freudian dream interpretation (Roland Barthes), as reflections of Western literary movements (Steven Marcus, Hana Wirth-Nesher, and Richard Lehan), or as a natural juxtaposition between city and country (Raymond Williams), the immense scholarship on city texts and cities in general agree upon the shifting nature of the city and its borders.<sup>4</sup> William Chapman Sharpe asserts, “The city is like a text, a site whose existence signals both loss and

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<sup>4</sup> For further scholarship on city texts and various approaches to them, see Roland Barthes’ “Semiology and the Urban.” *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics* (Eds. M. Gottdiener and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 87-98); Helga Druxes’ *Resisting Bodies: The Negotiation of Female Agency in Twentieth Century Women’s Fiction* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1996); Henri Lefebvre’s *The Urban Revolution* (Trans. Robert Bononno. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Richard Lehan’s *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998); Steven Marcus’ “Reading the Illegible: Some Modern Representations of Urban Experience” *Visions of a Modern City: Essays in History, Art, and Literature* (Eds. William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock. New York: Heyman Center for the Humanities, 1983. 229-243); Carlo Rotella’s *October Cities: The Redevelopment of Urban Literature* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998); William Chapman Sharpe’s *Unreal Cities: Urban Figuration in Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Whitman, Eliot, and Williams* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1990); Raymond Williams’ *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Hana Wirth-Nesher’s *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

promise, and whose ambiguity requires interpretation” (2). Hana Wirth-Nesher agrees with the dual nature of the city as both a place of inclusion and exclusion: “Modern urban life, then, is a landscape of partial visibilities and manifold possibilities that excludes in the very act of inviting. But the effect of inaccessibility differs with each city dweller, according to the nature of his or her ‘outsiderness’” (9). As these passages suggest, the city participates in the unsettling attempt to situate the two opposing forces of inclusion and exclusion, paralleling the postcommunist double bind.

This chapter explores the manner in which postcommunist texts struggle with the geographies of cities where physical, national, and cultural boundaries are not clear. In so doing, Ugrešić imagines a city that reconceptualizes the geographic and symbolic borders between Western Europe and the Balkans, Honigmann discloses an incompatibility between national identity and ethnic identity, and Mukhina confronts traditional Russian cultural images and myths. Unlike the geography of the enclosed apartment characterized by monist modes of narration and circular narratives, the city geography is open to the foreign outside and the site of the double injunction. Reframing functions as a performatist device that asserts an authorial move past the fragmentation of the present post-1989 situation, just as the texts’ characters discover ways (although often unsatisfactory) to reconcile their conflicting situations.

### 3.2 City Geographies in Yugoslav Literature

To understand postcommunist city geographies, it is important to review the city prior to 1989 in its particular context. David A. Norris investigates the function of the city in Balkan literature, in his book *In the Wake of the Balkan Myth*. Unlike Western Europe, which framed modernity based upon a national description and understanding of space, the Balkans maintained

a much different approach towards the city. The lands that are now Croatia have switched hands numerous times over the centuries. After a battle in 1526, the Ottoman Empire took over Croatia. The following year the country agreed to be ruled by the Hapsburg Empire in return for safety from the Ottoman Empire. In the nineteenth century Hungary imposed Magyarization on Croatia. When the dual Austro-Hungarian monarchy was established in 1867, Croatia proper and Slavonia (central region of present-day Croatia) were included in the kingdom of Hungary, while Dalmatia and Istria (western areas of Croatia) entered the Austrian empire. During World War II, Croatia was ruled by both Italy and Germany. Not until the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991 had Croatia ever been its own autonomous nation. Because of the shifting rulers and occupiers of Croatia, the city in Balkan literature symbolizes occupation and outsider status, instead of national inclusion. As Norris notes, “The city represents a cultural role model imposed from the outside, but which gradually assimilated the local population” (91). City texts in Croatian literature are not representative of the nation, as they are in Western Europe, but oppressive sites of indoctrination and forced assimilation.

Many Balkan writers took up this historical mixing of nations and empires, imagining the area as the meeting place of East and West. This bridge metaphor between East and West appeared in texts such as Ivo Andrić’s 1945 *Na Drini Ćuprija* [*Bridge on the River Drina*] and Miroslav Krleža’s 1932 *Povratak Filipa Latinovića* [*The Return of Philip Latinovicz*]. However, in these texts, this “meeting” does not result in a fruitful hybridity, but a dangerous gap that cannot be bridged. During socialism, city texts were generally absent as authorities prescribed literature that would “represent the Partisan victory in terms which would justify the Communists’ monopoly on political power” (Norris 121). Only in the 1960s and 1970s did cities return as a hallmark of Yugoslav literature. Norris explains that in these city texts, “The life of



the city is the collective endeavor of all inhabitants, which is a sum far stronger than the sum of its individual parts. Life is public, anonymous, unfolding on the street” (122). A good example of the late-communist literature of the city is Serbian writer Grozdana Olujić’s 1967 *Divlje Seme* [*Wild Seed*], in which Lika, the narrator, finds she must relinquish her personal identity in order to embrace the city—eraser of all individual identity—for a collective identity. Borislav Pekić’s 1970 *Hodočašće Arsenija Njegovana* [*The Pilgrimage of Arsenije Njegovan*] also depicts the forced loss of personal memory in return for a collective one. The long-sick protagonist finally emerges from his house only to find the city transformed and his once numerous landholdings claimed by the socialist government. Collective identity is paramount.

The return to the geography of the city in Dubravka Ugrešić’s post-Yugoslav *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* recasts the Balkan bridge metaphor and the imagined hybridity of the region in a complex mingling of the uncanny. Ugrešić’s exilic city recycles the familiar multi-cultural, oppressive image of the city common to Yugoslav literature; however, her post-Yugoslav text emerges as a productive site of familiarity in unfamiliar wartime displacement.

### 3.3 City as Museum Exhibit: Borrowed Frames in Dubravka Ugrešić’s *Musej bezuvjetne predaje*

Ugrešić wrote *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* [*The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*] while in self-imposed exile in Berlin during the war in Yugoslavia.<sup>5</sup> The text that resulted from her loss

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<sup>5</sup> *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* was first published in Dutch in 1997. The following year it was published in English. Although the book was originally written in Croatian, it was not published in the original until 2002 due to the author’s strained relationship with the Croatian government. The war rhetoric and extreme nationalism in Croatia at the height of the war in Yugoslavia was nothing short of automated and habitual propaganda. On December 11, 1992, an anonymous article, “*Witches from Rio, Croatia’s Feminists Rape Croatia*,” in the Croatian nationalist newspaper *Globus* accused Ugrešić and four other women (one of whom was Slavenka Drakulić whose text is addressed in Chapter Four) of being unpatriotic in their anti-war attitude by focusing on the general sufferings of women in war, instead of specifically on the sufferings of Croatian and Muslim women at the hands of Serbian men. Ugrešić was discounted as a “witch” and driven into self-imposed exile. She left her position

of home, family, and friends defies both genre and plot. The disjointed narrative mirrors the fragmented experiences of a displaced person attempting to memorialize that which has been lost. The work's narrator is in exile in Berlin compiling a collection of short vignettes, quotations, diary entries, short stories, essays, and observations on myriad topics ranging from Berlin, to art installations that she frequents while in the city, to her Yugoslav childhood. The resulting collection of narratives (observations, short vignettes, and references to other writers) creates a postcommunist museum that commemorates and recalls through a disjointed and borrowed framework the displacement of people, identities, and objects after 1989.

The fragmented pastiche that fashions the text consists of seven sections. Four of them recount the narrator's present impressions in Germany and have German titles: "Ich bin müde" [I'm tired], "Guten Tag" [Good day], "Was ist Kunst" [What is art], and "Wo bin ich?" [Where am I?]. These "German" sections are numbered segments that introduce direct quotations from various exiled writers, haphazard remarks from people in Berlin (ranging from her neighbors to the mailman), and the narrator's own sparse observations. Inserted between the German ones and in contrast to them, the remaining three parts of the text focus on the past, have Croatian titles, and contain longer vignettes. Bits of stories, diary entries, and soup recipes comprise the vignette "Family Museum," while "Archive: Six stories with the discreet motif of a departing angel" tells about friends and acquaintances, and "Group Photograph" relies on tarot card readings to reveal the characteristics of the narrator's Croatian girlfriends. As reviewer Jasmina Lukić notes, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* is nothing short of "a series of discontinuities" (391). The

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in comparative literature, specializing in Russian literature, at the University of Zagreb. For further scholarship on the "witches" of Croatia, see Vesna Kesic's "Confessions of a 'Yugo-Nostalgic' Witch." *Anna's Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe* (Ed. Tanya Renne. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997. 195-200), as well as her article "From Reverence to Rape: An Anthropology of Ethnic and Genderized Violence." *Frontline Feminisms: Women, War, and Resistance* (Eds. Marguerite R. Waller and Jennifer Rycenga. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000. 23-39).

narrator's montage mirrors her exilic position by creating a disorganized series of sketches and observations tenuously held together by leitmotifs, recurrent images, and interlocking cross-references. Although Ugrešić does not implement a first-person narrative voice that controls the text's plot, she does organize the text as a museum exhibition with an authorial/curator-regulated framework. Her reconciliatory acts do not appear through traditional plots, but in the borrowing and doubling of others' words and stories.

Ugrešić's fragmented structure has often been deemed postmodern and unconcerned with the victims of the war. Some critics dismiss the historical and political context of Ugrešić's text. Ellen Handler Spitz, for instance, reads the text as a mirror of the human experience of loss (Spitz *passim*). She diminishes the nuances and complexity of the text by reducing it to a commonplace experience. Similarly, those critics who consider Ugrešić's work a postmodern play with identity miss the political wartime constraints under which she, as a female writer, functioned. For instance, Renata Jambrešić Kirin argues that Ugrešić proposes a "mutant identity" (75) that denies the voices of refugees and victims of war and proposes an unsuitable identification.<sup>6</sup>

As Monica Popescu perceptively argues, "Ugrešić casts her novel into a fragmented form not to celebrate postmodern disenchantment with truth but to counter nationalist reification of

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<sup>6</sup> The "right" to tell the story becomes a contentious post-Yugoslav positioning. Jambrešić Kirin worries that war narratives by writers like Ugrešić, whose experience of war is mediated, will come to stand as representative of war experience, thus effacing the immediate experiences of others. In this manner, mediated war narratives could come to be seen as a minimizing of immediate war and trauma. She suggests that the hybrid subject position of Croatian mediated wartime narratives like Ugrešić's—both "insider" and "outsider"—encourages a postmodern identification of "'the mutant' with hybrid cultural identity and of *no fixed abode*" (original emphasis 81). A "mutant" subject position whose agency is in its instability may be acceptable for mediated narrators of wartime trauma who choose their situations, but this unstable identification is complicated by immediate narrators for whom an unstable, hybrid identity is not empowering. Jambrešić Kirin fears that what she believes Ugrešić and other mediated war narrators propose with their narratives is a "homogenous community of immigrants and individuals in Diaspora" (82) that bypasses the experiences of those whose positions are not chosen. Although Ugrešić's text definitely addresses the war in Yugoslavia, she is not interested in representing anyone or in writing a war documentary. The semi-autobiographical mode heightens the tension with scholars like Jambrešić Kirin. My project suggests that Ugrešić's text does not put forth a hybrid identity, but an unresolved subjectivity characterized by *negative capability*.

memory” (354). Ugrešić is concerned with formulating a method of writing from within the political context of the early nineties in Croatia. She is interested neither in postmodern identity nor in documenting wartime trauma, but in modes of reclaiming and reframing. In fact, *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* is not only about recovering memory, but also about finding a literary form and voice in a highly political, nationalized, and fractured context. I approach Ugrešić’s text as a memorial project concerned with collection, stability, and preservation, while cognizant of the impossibility of creating such a closed system. Raoul Eshelman notes, “performatism in literature has worked tacitly, by taking crucial devices of postmodern aesthetics and retooling them in a way that is no longer compatible with prevailing postmodern norms” (39). Of all the texts handled in this project, Ugrešić’s text verges on the postmodern; however, she complicates postmodern norms in her attempt to create an autobiography (a subject) and to construct a closed system (a museum) in a fragmented world.

Ugrešić’s narrator is unable to fully embrace her postnational exilic position in Berlin. Despite the wartime environment and heightened nationalism in Croatia, she still feels connected to her Balkan homeland. The double injunction emerges in Ugrešić’s text as a personal negotiation of national and postnational, complicated by a rigid, anti-feminist wartime nationalism in Croatia. Ugrešić struggles to create an identity and a writing style that manages to address the double bind without condoning or being subsumed by the wartime rhetoric.<sup>7</sup> In order to do this, the narrator takes up a contradictory agenda (both preservation in the form of the museum and unconditional surrender in the form of the fragmented text) and produces an unlikely text that resists both assertions of ideological truth and narrative closure. She unsettles her text in an attempt to create and inhabit an aesthetic space that not only resists official

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the war in Croatia, and the rise of Croatian nationalism, see Chapter One: Introduction, pages 35-41.

narratives and war rhetoric, but also enables her to address the traumatic loss of her homeland. In the chaos of wartime Croatia and the trauma of exile, Ugrešić attempts to create a museum text that begins “to stress unity, beauty, and closure rather than the endless ironies” (Eshelman xii), by focusing on what remains—friends, family, and creativity. The narrator is trapped between her national affiliations and her exilic, nomadic life.<sup>8</sup> Memorializing becomes a form of performatism that recognizes the fragmentation and impossibility of sustained narratives, yet attempts to create a text that provides a way for us to understand Ugrešić’s point of pain (“točka boli”) and for her to approach subjectivity.

### 3.3.1 *Berlin, the Uncanny Museum*

The epigraph Ugrešić chose for her volume provides insight into its major concerns: it states that when analyzing the contents of the stomach of a dead walrus in the Berlin zoo, we should keep in mind that he died in 1961 on the day when construction began on the Berlin Wall. Context, in short, is critical even when the pieces of the text appear to be disjointed and unassociated. It is the date and historical context that endow the contents of the walrus’ stomach with “sobom uspostavili tananije veze” (11) [some subtler, secret connections (1)], just as 1989 orients the segments of Ugrešić’s text.<sup>9</sup>

The context of Ugrešić’s text—Berlin, late 1990s—is equally important for the analysis of her text. One of the main motifs, one could even say main character, in the text is the city of Berlin. When interviewed by M.A. Orthofer about *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* and her latest book (2004) *Ministarstvo boli* [*The Ministry of Pain*], Ugrešić rebuffed questions about

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<sup>8</sup> I define postnational or nomadic subjectivity as “free floating signifiers without psychic and material investment in one or more given particular geopolitical spaces” (Lionnet 8).

<sup>9</sup> All quotations are taken from Dubravka Ugrešić’s *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* (Zagreb: Konzor & Samizdat B92, 2002) with English quotations from Celia Hawkesworth’s translation of the Croatian text, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (London: Phoenix House, 1999).

autobiographical authenticity as unimportant, saying “Okay, but there is something else which is important, and this is the opposition between the two towns which serve as metaphors in the novels, and the opposition between two completely different narrative procedures.” As Ugrešić points out, the geography of Berlin and the structure of the text become particularly vital in understanding the discussion of space.

Many scholars have noted the multicultural, transnational representations of Berlin in literature over the past two centuries. It is often described as lacking stability, with an unsettled memory or past, artificial without connection to the land, and unrepresentative of Germany (Haxthausen xii-xiii). The imprint and repercussions of World War II and the Berlin Wall have resulted in a curious problem of a city haunted both by war and division. Charles W. Haxthausen and Heidrun Suhr remark, “The idiosyncratic character of this city might seem to be merely the most enduring, most palpable consequence of a war that ended nearly half a century ago, leaving a ‘gaping crevice’ between past and present” (xii). Ugrešić’s image of the city (unlike the location of East Berlin symbolizing official national narratives in Honigmann’s text) builds upon the multicultural and multi-layered literary themes about Berlin. The “museum” in *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* frames the fragmented and disjointed pieces the narrator has collected, just as the physical city of Berlin incorporates a plethora of displaced people. Unlike the other texts discussed in this chapter, which have well-defined and outlined plots, Ugrešić’s text lacks such a transparent structure. Instead, Berlin materializes as the reference point that accommodates the disordered peoples, objects, and events after 1989, functioning as Ugrešić’s museum.

The geography of Berlin is part of the postcommunist museum, where the artifacts and afterlife of socialism mingle. The city arises as a fragmented site teeming with refugees and immigrants, flea markets, and remnants of the historical past, where temporality, spatiality, and

identity are all in flux. Ugrešić creates an image of Berlin that is an uncanny double of everywhere and nowhere. The narrator is both at home and away in Berlin. She writes,

Berlin je grad-mutant. Berlin ima svoje zapadno i svoje istočno lice: ponekad se zapadno objavljuje u istočnom a istočno u zapadnom. Na licu Berlina presijavaju se hologramski odbljesci nekih drugih gradova. Ako krenem u Kreuzberg, stići ću u neki kutak Istanbula, ako se S-Bahnom odvezem na rubove Berlina, stići ću na periferiju Moskve. (135)

[Berlin is a mutant-city. Berlin has its Western and its Eastern face; sometimes the Western one appears in East Berlin, and the Eastern one in West Berlin. The face of Berlin is criss-crossed by the hologram reflections of some other cities. If I go to Kreuzberg I shall arrive in a corner of Istanbul, if I travel by S-Bahn to the edges of Berlin, I can be sure I shall reach the outskirts of Moscow. (110)]

The narrator finds both Eastern and Western Europe in Berlin. It emerges as a city that provides for the exilic narrator a sense of home and foreign at the same time. The familiar that the narrator finds in Berlin becomes a way for the narrator to create connections to her family, friends, and former country. In this way, the physical disconnect with Croatia is re-imagined as a new approach to home. Sigmund Freud points out the uncanny qualities of “the unintentional return” (*The Uncanny* 144), where, when lost, we find ourselves returning to the same point or place over and over again despite ourselves. Ugrešić’s Berlin is this exilic, lost location from which the narrator always unintentionally finds a connection to home.

Besides the spatial elements of the uncanny, Berlin also represents a temporal or historical uncanny. Ugrešić asserts,

Stvari u Berlinu stupaju u najrazličitije međusobne veze. Berlin je poput morskog slona koji je progutao previše neprobavljivih stvari. Zato po berlinskim ulicama treba koračati oprezno. I ne misleći o tome šetač gazi po nečijem krovu, po nečijem grobu. Asfalt je samo tanka skrama koja prekriva ljudske kosti. Žute zvijezde, crne svastike, crveni srpovi i čekići pucketaju pod nogama osjetljivijeg šetača kao hruštevi. (210)

[Things in Berlin acquire the most various interconnections. Berlin is Teufelsberg, a walrus which has swallowed too many indigestible items. That is why one has to tread carefully in Berlin streets; without thinking the walker could step on

someone's roof. The asphalt is only a thin crust covering human bones. Yellow stars, black swastikas, red hammers and sickles crunch like cockroaches under the walker's feet. (169)]

The past and present are layered upon each other. In an uncanny twist, the geography of the city reveals unintentional returns to the historical crises of the city. Teufelsberg, literally "Devil's Mountain" is an artificial hill in Berlin built by the Allies after World War II from the debris of the city of Berlin. The site of the hill was originally a Nazi military technical college. During the Cold War listening stations were built on the hill to listen to Soviet and East German military traffic. Sites like Teufelsberg become part of the narrator's postcommunist museum where the placelessness of 1989 translates into a memorial site. The narrator asserts, "s vremenom nešto nije u redu" (137) [There's something wrong with time here (112)] and "odnedavno je sve pobrkano, ne znam više što je bilo prije, a što poslije, što se dogodilo tamo, a što ovdje, a što negdje drugdje" (138) [for some time I've been mixing everything up, I no longer know what came first and what was next, whether something happened here or there or somewhere else (113)]. Postcommunist placelessness is impressed upon the city and its inhabitants as a displacement of peoples and borders, but also as an obliteration of historical time and space. Berlin and postcommunism opens a space whereby the past must be acknowledged.

The text's last chapter, "Wo bin ich?" [Where am I?] epitomizes the question of place and identity in the text. Spatially the narrator, like the objects in the museums and flea markets, is out of her context. Her original context is lost and she is afloat in a city that has lost its boundaries of time and space. The narrator recounts, "Na berlinskim buvljacima izmiruju se vremena i ideologije, kukasti križevi i crvene zvijezde, sve se može kupiti po cijeni od nekoliko maraka" (292) [In Berlin flea-markets times and ideologies are reconciled, swastikas mix with red stars, everything can be bought for a few marks (239)]. The text's parting image embodies



the inherent tension of the postcommunist syndrome in Ugrešić's text and her ability to reconcile the situation through an uncanny familiarity. The narrator is exercising in a fitness center on a step machine. The window looks "na Europa Centar I Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, koju Berlinčani zovu *silosom za duše*. Na vrhu Europa Centra polako se okreće troroga, metalna Mercedesova zvijezda" (301) [on to the Europa-Center and the Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche, which the Berliners call a 'soul silo.' On the top of the Europa-Center the three pronged, metal Mercedes star slowly revolves (247)], below her sits a Gypsy who "nespretno prebire po dječjem sintisajzeru" (302) [awkwardly tinkling on a child's synthesizer (248)], while she "savladav[a] stepenicu koja ne vodi nikamo" (301) [climb[s] stairs which lead nowhere (247)]. Firmly located, yet in motion, the narrator is positioned right in the midst of the struggle between past and present, native and foreign. With the refugee woman below and the symbols of capitalism above, the narrator has a view of two Europes: the postcommunist future in the Europa-Center (a united Europe) and the current fragmentation (the reorganization of borders) in the gypsy woman who is homeless, an outsider wherever she goes. The signs of postcommunist transition uncannily appear before her. She remains between the two, conscious of both, yet unable to do anything but march in place.

Significantly the Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche, the bombed ruins of a church left after World War II as a remembrance of the war, also completes the picture insisting upon the memories of the past. Despite the future-oriented structures of globalization and capitalism in the Mercedes star, the past and its "soul silo" remain a permanent fixture. The location of exile (Berlin) is not a place away from home, but an unexpected turn toward familiar memories and crises. The ending of the text does not imply a triumph of liminality. The narrator's bird's-eye view does not suggest that she has found her way or navigated between the two positions of

exile—home and away, past and present. There is no orienting vision—only a repetition of home. The same historical moments of World War II, refugees, and postcommunism confront the narrator in Berlin. Berlin becomes an exilic location that is not away from home, but home itself. The location of exile and the city text is only the location of similarity, an uncanny return.

Ugrešić's *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* sustains the Croatian legacy of the city as representative of the meeting of Eastern and Western Europe; however, her depiction is of disenfranchised peoples like immigrants, refugees, and the disillusioned. It retains the international mix of characters in Croatian city literature; however, in Ugrešić's text all people are displaced. In exile in Berlin, the narrator creates an uncanny text where past and present mingle, where nations and histories mix, and where boundaries of time and space are ambiguous. This confusion of place, time, and borders produces a city geography that questions the validity of physical and psychological divisions between Eastern and Western Europe. Ugrešić challenges Western European images of the Balkans and reframes the pre-1989 image of the city.<sup>10</sup> The postcommunist city emerges as confusing and fragmented, yet full of potential and reaching toward new understandings and organizations of the historical past.

### 3.3.2 *Reframing Literature*

This uncanny turn has implications both for the text's structure and its readers. The orienting location of Berlin serves to be the only guide we have for reading the text. Ugrešić's uncanny doubling appears as textual repetitions of themes, motives, and references. The uncanny repetition is a combination of the familiar and strange, comfortable and dangerous, intimate and obscure, known and inaccessible to knowledge. The repetition of coincidental circumstances,

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<sup>10</sup> For a comprehensive study of the cultural image of the Balkans in Europe, especially in travel literature, see Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

themes, characters, or events that have no apparent causal reason are familiar in their frequent appearance and yet unfamiliar because of the absence of causation. Ugrešić's narrator creates a framing device in her repetition and reframing. Like the central location of Berlin (although multiple and fractured), the narrator's strategy of repetition functions as a mysterious structuring device. Karey Perkins maintains,

The uncanny appeals to us since, in its lack of no known cause or reason for the juxtaposition of two uncanny events, it implies that there IS a cause or reason beyond our understanding. Hence, the mystery of this randomly ordered event suggests that the world is ordered, without our knowledge, and all is safe, stable, secure, and comfortable. No surprises. Ironically, it is the hiddenness and secretiveness of the cause of uncanniness that reassures us that the world is known and stable.

The reframed, repeated literary references create an imaginary geography for the narrator and the structure needed for her displaced, exilic position.

The narrator illuminates her approach when she associates the fragmented structure of the text with that of the structure of dreams:

Egzilantu se čini da stanje egzila ima strukturu sna. Najednom se, kao u snu, pojavljuju neka lica koja je bio zaboravio, koja možda nikada nije sreo, neki prostori koje pouzdano prvi put vidi, ali mu se čini da ih odnekud zna. San je magnetsko polje koje privlači slike iz prošlosti, sadašnjosti i budućnosti. [...] [E]gzilant počinje odgonetati smušene znakove, križiće i čvoriće i najednom mu se čini da u svemu čita tajni sklad. (24, 299-300)

[A]n exile feels that the state of exile has the structure of a dream. All at once, as in a dream, faces appear that he had forgotten, or perhaps had never met, places that he is undoubtedly seeing for the first time, but he feels that he knows them from somewhere. The dream is a magnetic field that attracts images from the past, present, and future. [...] [T]he exile begins to decipher signs, crosses and knots, and all at once it seems as though he were beginning to read in it all a secret harmony. (12, 246; translation adjusted)

By connecting dream and exile, the passage positions the narrator and the reader in a space of uncertainty, where everyday life must be interpreted and translated, just as in the dream world.

The underlying dream structure, thus also of Ugrešić's text, lacks a master narrative to support

its inner logic. What holds the dream together is a personal universe with a secret unity and repeating images. Therefore, interpretation plays a prominent role in translating the dreamlike textual fragments (such as leitmotifs, repeated images, and cross references) into a unified text that submits to a neat hermeneutical reading. The reader attempts to translate the dreamlike structure, yet always falls short because of the endless references and possibilities. However, since the recurring motifs and images are strewn throughout the text, the reader feels compelled to interpret them—a task encouraged by the narrator, who advises the reader to “pokuša[ti] uspostaviti neke značenjske koordinate” (11) [tr[y] to establish semantic coordinates (1)] “Try” is the key word here, as the incoherent form of the text hinders any exhaustive effort to interpret the narrator’s dream world.

This implementation of a performatist aesthetic, whereby the reader is asked to be the fundamental actor in the creation of the text (either accepting the text’s premise and enacting its rules or rejecting the text outright), allows Ugrešić to relate her narrative. She sets up the parameters, the limits and content of the text, but the reader must accept the call to interpret and interact with the museum pieces (repeating images and themes) that she provides. Unlike the national narratives and war rhetoric that desperately strove to fill the postcommunist vacuum, Ugrešić’s text not only distances itself from such narratives, but also eludes completion. Although part of her museum endeavor longs for a strong, unifying narrative to organize and construct her newly found postcommunist position, Ugrešić also realizes the danger of a museum project that would erase or rewrite her memories of Yugoslavia with such a newly created postcommunist “story.” On the one hand, she refuses to join in the excision of communist memory promoted by the new Croatian state. On the other, she resists the simplified, official narratives of wartime Croatia. She neither allows complete access to her feelings of loss nor does

she reconstruct them. Simply by glancing at the title readers confront the competing, paradoxical claims of the text, which mix order and collection with submission and surrender. The narrator's contradictory agenda produces an unlikely text that resists both assertions of ideological truth and narrative closure. In the context of the war in Yugoslavia and the newly found nationalisms in the areas of the former federation, the narrator resists simplified or official narratives that explain the war, create it as a spectacle, or take a particular political stance.

A character in the text claims, "Ja pišem svoje pjesme uvijek o nečem drugom de ne bih morala o onom prvom" (218) [I always write my poems about something else, so as not to write about the first thing (175)], and the narrator surmises, "Čini se da bol, kao i psovku, s lakoćom možemo izreći samo na jeziku koji nije naš" (50) [It seems that we can only easily express pain, and curses, in a language that is not our own (35)]. In one of the text's brief stories, the narrator recounts trying to comfort a schoolmate at the university who attempted to commit suicide after her affair with a married man ended. The woman was able to speak about the affair only in English. The narrator notes, "Ona je ispričala bol na stranom jeziku [...] i istodobno bol sačuvala ne uništivši njezinu jezgru" (50) [She told her pain in a foreign language and at the same time preserved it by not destroying its nucleus (35)]. Like the narrator of Ugrešić's text, the young woman surrenders her story, yet preserves its "nucleus."

That recollection functions as a key to Ugrešić's dominant device in the work, though whereas the woman speaks on the point of pain in another language, Ugrešić via her narrator substitutes other topics and other people's stories for her own point of pain. Thus *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* sidesteps the point of pain, the loss of country, and the war through surrogacy. Unable to explain the position of exile and the pain at the core of the text without erasing it or creating another master narrative, Ugrešić solves the dilemma with a replacement, a

reframing—by writing about something and someone else. Her weaving of voices and literary adaptation simultaneously negotiates between the contrary modes of preservation and surrender, absence and presence, enabling her to address her postcommunist experiences indirectly.

The invitation to interpret the text as a dream and to protect the traumatic point of loss again hints at a Freudian reading. Freud argues that in dreams displacement is one of the ways to express what has been repressed.<sup>11</sup> For Ugrešić's narrator, this means that her emotions are transferred elsewhere. Though Ugrešić's postcommunist museum ironically avoids most references to war, physical displacement, and emotional collapse, the fragments of the text all point back to the war and pre-war times. Freud notes, "What was the essence of the dream-thoughts finds only passing and indistinct representation in the dream" (*New Introductory Lectures* 25). This strategy, whereby war gains only "indistinct representation," can be viewed as a means to commemorate what the Croatian postcommunist war narrative overshadows. In this case, Ugrešić uses dream displacement as a literary technique. The method is not a sign of repression, but a strategy of resistance and agency. Ugrešić refuses to allow her narrative to be subsumed by official narratives.

The citations within the text function as dream displacement, whereby the narrator "speaks" through the words of others. The narrator either directly or indirectly references the following: Walter Benjamin's notions of angels, snow, and archeology; Milan Kundera's angels, ice, and oblivion; Christa Wolf's *Christa T*; Miroslav Krežla's, Viktor Shklovsky's, and Vladimir Nabokov's *Berlin*; Marguerite Duras' semi-autobiographical fiction; Irena Vrkljan's numbered vignettes; Daniil Kharms' absurdism; Nikolai Gogol's humor; and Isaak Babel's gestures toward magic realism. All of these writers at some point in their careers have had difficulties with their respective state governments and many of these contentious relationships

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<sup>11</sup> Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Trans. A. A. Brill. New York: Modern Library, 1994).

ended in exile for the writer. Ugrešić uses the words and figures from these writers' works as a museum project that points to her own wartime experiences of attempting to write under perilous political conditions. The category of writers with whom Ugrešić feels camaraderie occupies the same in-between position that she does as a displaced writer creating a space to write when her connection to home has been lost.

On the one hand, these direct and indirect references create a literary home for Ugrešić, and on the other, they allow her to tell her story of loss without destroying its epicenter. She keeps the memory of her loss fresh by refusing to discuss it outright and at the same time reveals her disaccord with the Croatian government and its attempts to rewrite or erase the past. In this way, she aesthetically resists the official narratives of the new Croatian state and keeps alive the pain and loss that these narratives attempt to ignore or efface, while reiterating the physical location of Berlin as an uncanny geography where in-between literary figures converge.

What appears to be an absence of personal narrative and voice in the proliferation of mimicry and imitation actually facilitates a space for the voice of Ugrešić's narrator and an uncanny aesthetic. The imitation and direct reproduction of other writers' works functions as a metonymy whereby the connection between Ugrešić's silence about the war and the substituted story or quotation is an association between concepts.<sup>12</sup> It is in the play between and the interpretation of the two that meaning is formed. Unlike the metaphor where two referents are connected by the transfer of similar quality traits, the contiguity of the referents is what fashions metonymy. Consequently, Ugrešić does not present herself as a replica of the writers she emulates, but as a unique voice that arises in the interplay between the "point of pain" in the text and the substitute reference.

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<sup>12</sup> See Jacques Lacan's 1957 lecture, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud," in which he transforms Freud's concept of *displacement* into *metonymy*. Instead of metaphor, where the signified occupies the place of the signifier, metonymy is a perpetual deferral.

For instance, the textual associations encompassing angels is multiple. Angel references appear in the description of Berlin, with its Victory Column, a monument to wartime victory atop of which stands an angel. Besides the physical landmark, angels appear as textual reproduction, including a quote from Kundera's novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and a dialogue from Wenders' film *Wings of Desire* (1987)—in the original German, *Der Himmel über Berlin* [*The Sky over Berlin*], with two angels who roam the city in an attempt to capture its reality. The angel leitmotif continues when characters in the text are described as angel-like or as having wings, when an angel materializes in one of the stories, and when Benjamin's angel of death and Kundera's angel of oblivion become developed ideas. The impressions of war, forgetting, and memorializing pull all of these associations together, just as the references to Nabokov, Shklovsky, and Krežla evoke exile, Berlin, and war (in the last two cases). Even the city of Berlin, which functions as a main character in the text, displaces the city of Zagreb and calls to mind division, war, and refugees. Ugrešić hints at her literary techniques by providing quotations from writers and then strewing leitmotifs throughout the text that remind readers of their works: Babel's magical realism in "The Sin of Jesus" appears in the form of a visiting angel from heaven (also associated with the angels in *Wings of Desire*); the absurd and humorous elements of Kharmis and Gogol arise in the text's black humor; the structure of works by Benjamin and Vrkljan, who used numbered vignettes (and are both in-between writers of exile themselves), or Kharmis, known for his brief vignettes, sometimes only a few paragraphs long, in which the realities of deprivation alternate with dreamlike occurrences. Duras' "autobiographical" works, where autobiography and fiction meet and mingle, are layered upon Ugrešić's own literary attempts. Autobiographical issues emerge again as the East German character Christa in Ugrešić's text appears to duplicate Wolf's Christa T. The search for a



narrator, for a self, pulls these references together. A detached narrator displaces what could be perceived as an autobiographical text.<sup>13</sup>

The key to Ugrešić's literary metonymy is that it is only as good as her reader's literary knowledge. Because the reader creates it, it emerges anew each time it is read, depending upon the reader's historical, political, and literary knowledge or lack thereof. It is in this play between text and reader; dream and interpretation, that Ugrešić's agency arises. This technique provides her with an aesthetic space of survival and resistance in an embattled environment where war rhetoric had become totalizing and habitual.

### 3.3.3 *Reconciling Subjectivity in Berlin*

Berlin's uncanny position allows the narrator a place from which to establish a tentative subjectivity. Eshelman suggests that performatist subjectivity is distinguished by characters constructed in such a way that other characters in the text (or the reader) identifies with them (8-9). This identificatory process is an uncanny doubling in Ugrešić's text. Freud writes,

a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other's self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged. Finally there is the constant reoccurrence of the same thing, the repetition of the same facial features, the same characters, the same destinies, the same misdeeds, even the same names through successive generations. (*The Uncanny* 142)

Ugrešić's narrator reveals identity construction to be a form of uncannily shared physical traits, displacements, and similar destinies. The majority of stories told in the text are about women, who are identified not as intrinsically linked to their national identity, but to shared experiences of displacement. The female characters in the short vignettes include the narrator's childhood

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<sup>13</sup> Christa Wolf's concept of *subjective authenticity* applies well here as a method of maintaining realism yet including the subjective experience of the author as an important perspective from which to tell the story. Wolf's text *Kindheitsmuster* applies her concept of *subjective authenticity* by detailing an autobiographical journey from a detached third-person perspective. Both Wolf and Ugrešić defer the question of autobiography and truth.

seamstress, who sews bits and pieces of scraps together to create modern clothes for her customers, much as Ugrešić sews together her text; her mother, who left her war-torn homeland of Bulgaria after World War II and learned to speak a new language and live in a new country; her ever-knitting Bulgarian grandmother, to whom the narrator feels a connection despite having met her only a few times and having no common language to communicate in; her lesbian friend Vida, who after moving to the United States tried to fill her life with memorabilia; the over-emotional Polish-American Lucy, who searches for a way to understand her half-American, half-Polish existence; the aloof Indian student Uma, the narrator's roommate; the East German wanderer Christa, who after leaving East Germany is unable to find a satisfactory "home" and thus keeps wandering across Europe; and so forth. While eschewing self-representation as a spectacle of war, which many readers expect from her, the wartime narrator maintains her sense of sadness and loss for her former country. At the same time, the narrator's sense of self emerges from the similarities found in the other women. Her subjectivity becomes a form of mimetic art that reconciles itself to finding associations in continuity, doubling, solidarity, and hereditary.

Like intertextuality and citationality, the stories of others in Ugrešić's text function as a metonymy for her own autobiography. Quoting and emulating writers is a type of mimetic art, as is the text's incorporation of photography and autobiography. While the latter two are snapshots of an event or someone's life, the quotations are a snapshot of a writer. The standard expectation of a mimetic art is that it shows "the truth," report "reality." As part of the postcommunist museum, these modes of replicating a happening, a person, or a text become memorial acts that preserve something of importance.<sup>14</sup> The narrator writes, "Jedino na što oba žanra mogu računati

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<sup>14</sup> Current scholarship has put to rest any former belief that any of these genres or strategies of representation could be created without authorial intervention of some kind. Philippe Lejeune notes, "Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as complete subject—it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing" (131-32). The desire to achieve the impossible is a potent force. In a similar

[...] jest slijepa slučajnost da će napipati točku boli” (46) [There is something that both genres [photography and autobiography] can count on [...] and that is the blind chance that they will hit upon the point of pain (31)]. The superimposition of others’ voices and images on Ugrešić’s absent voice and image sustains the memorial act that she strives for, while acknowledging the impossibility of capturing the “truth” in its entirety.

Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* observes that mimetic art, like photography, is double-sided: “A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence” (16). Likewise, Ugrešić’s narrator reminds us, “Ona se bavi onim što je jednom bilo, a to što je jednom bilo ispisuje netko koji *sada* jest” (46) [These genres] are concerned with what once was, and the trouble is that what once was, is being recorded by someone who is now” (31)]. The passage of time works against immediacy, which cannot be re/captured, and Ugrešić fully understands this weakness in her choice of genre. At the same time, she recognizes its potential to access a different form of knowledge—what Sontag calls *understanding*.<sup>15</sup> Sontag defines understanding as the realization that mimetic art cannot be accepted as a true record, but that narrative enables us to access some elements of the object or happening. What kind of narrative does Ugrešić present? A mix of autobiography, citationality, and photography remote from the sort of streamlined narrative that potentially could unify these modes.<sup>16</sup> Her palimpsest of multiple

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vein, intertextuality as a meaningful replication has also lost much of its weight as homage to a particular writer and fallen into a postmodern act of endless signification. Lastly, Susan Sontag’s discussion of photography is also quick to point out the desire to simply report through photographs cannot truly be achieved, noting, “the camera’s rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses” (23).

<sup>15</sup> This “understanding” does not mean that the reader or viewer has reached the “truth” of the mimetic art, but that, as Ugrešić suggests, they access the point of pain.

<sup>16</sup> Akin to Walter Benjamin’s arcades project focusing on Paris in the late nineteenth century, Ugrešić’s series of observations, notes, commentaries, analyses, quotations from books, excerpts, random aphorisms, and references can be arranged and rearranged in any number of different constellations. In his file on methodology, Benjamin states, “Method of this project: literary montage. I needn’t say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them” (460). Ugrešić mirrors Benjamin’s methodology in which fragments and leitmotifs begin to make sense in their relationship to each other. Like Benjamin, she furnishes no narrative connections for the reader.

genres results in a partial rendering of her point of pain and is rife with gaps that leave unusually generous room for readers' interpretation.

Nowhere is reader explication more necessary than in the narrator's layering of biography (the story of the other) and autobiography (the story of the self). The story of Lucy, a woman who interviews the narrator, richly conveys this contested and shared space between narrator and character. Lucy feels bonded to the narrator (a feeling unreciprocated by the latter) and credits her with the ability to write what she herself feels but is unable to express: "Zato joj se, uostalom, toliko svidjela moja knjiga. Kao da ju je sama napisala. Kao da sam skinula njezine misli" (148) [That is why she had so liked my book. As though she had written it herself. As though I had taken down her thoughts (120)]. Ugrešić herself resorts to the same substitution of other for self when she borrows quotations from other writers' works. She even appears to co-opt Wolf's character Christa T. as a woman whom her narrator meets. In all of these examples, the reader must parcel through the blurred lines between self and other.

Implementing this strategy of assorted viewpoints and voices, Ugrešić leaves room for her readers' subjectivity even while presenting perspective as shifting and multiple. In the last section of the text, the narrator describes her friends using tarot cards. She maintains, "Tarot je bio alternativna književnost, gdje je snaga teksta ovisila o moći interpretator i imaginaciji čitatelja" (232) [Tarot was nothing other than a kind of alternate literature in which the strength of the text depended on the power of the interpreter and the imagination of the reader (187)]. It remains for the reader to build the associations between the stories and provide the neat narrative that Ugrešić refuses to supply.

The use of photography in the text likewise becomes an act of translation and interpretation when what should be stable boundaries constituted in photographs emerge as fluid,

shared, and doubled. Looking at some photographs, the narrator believes that she recognizes a snapshot of herself:

Je bila jedna moja, snimljena na plaži. Mogla sam imati trinaestak godina. Na poledini fotografije otrila sam tekst na bugarskom jeziku ispisan nevještom rukom moje daleke sestrične: *To sam ja, snimljena na plaži, u svom novom kupaćem kostimu*. Ispod teksta bio je njezin jednako nevješt potpis. (original emphasis, 41)

[[O]ne of me, taken on the beach. I could have been about thirteen. On the back of the picture I discovered a text in Bulgarian written in my distant cousin's unskilled hand: "This is me, taken on a beach, in my new swimsuit." Under the text was her equally clumsy signature. (26-27)]

In this scene, which dramatizes competing claims, the narratives of self and other combine, and the physical body itself becomes contested (or shared) through its indistinguishability. This fusion and confusion raises the question of individual identity and one's self-image as well as implying a kinship through gendered experiences.

In a parallel scene, gazing at a photograph leads to the narrator's realization of a similarity between her mother's face and her own. She detects the same "dvije male bore oko ustiju. Spuštale su se nadolje, stvarajući sa svake strane lica posve mali, jedva primjetni mješčić" (51) [two lines around my mouth. They pointed downward, making on either side of my mouth a small, barely noticeable pouch (35)]. Earlier in the text, the narrator describes a picture of her mother in identical words. The narrator discloses, "Ponekad lovim u svome glasu njezin napukli glas, ponekad ispod moga glasa probija njezin, govorim u dvoglasu" (83) [Sometimes I catch in my voice something of her cracked voice, sometimes her voice breaks in under mine, I speak in duet (61-62)] and "Poznajem tek njezine geste, pokrete, izraze lica, boju glasa. Prepoznajem ih u sebi" (82) [I know all her gestures, movements, expressions, the tone of her voice. I recognize them in myself (61)]. Apart from inscribing generational continuity, such passages show that for the narrator, women's bodies and their stories may be understood only in connection to one

another. In fact, the narrator cannot tell her story without telling the story of other women. And in that sense she may be said to represent a gendered perspective that transcends her own. Later, when recounting her monthly baking exploits, the narrator remarks, “useljava duh moje bake [...] i primorava me da jednom mjesečno ponovim njezin slučaj” (169) [[T]he spirit of my grandmother [...] is settling in me and obliging me once a month to follow her pattern (136)]. Thus, whatever the fragmentation of her text, Ugrešić posits links with other women as the basis for understanding the self and reconciling the post-1989 double bind. The narrator notes, “smo svi mi živi muzejski eksponati” (291) [we are all museum exhibits (239)]. Such connections form the basis of a museum, where objects acquire additional meaning through “cohabitation” with other objects, just as the narrator and, presumably, Ugrešić find their identity shaped by gendered ties and parallels over time.

The narrator carries with her two photographs; one shows three unknown women bathing in the Pakra River in northern Croatia at the beginning of the century; the other is an overexposed “škart fotografija” (225) [reject photograph (181)]. The all-white “reject” is of the narrator’s last dinner with a group of girlfriends in Croatia, which subsequently disbanded owing to rifts caused by the war and its ethnic politics. While time has transformed the first photo of the women in the river into a museum piece, a part of history, the war in Yugoslavia has done the same to the second photo. The narrator situates this blank photograph of herself and her friends alongside the anonymous photo of the women bathers,<sup>17</sup> with the explanation, “Požutjela fotografija s početka stoljeća je poput upaljene svijetiljke na mrklu prozoru, udobrovoljavajuća tajna gesta s kojom izvlačim slike iz ravnodušne bjeline” (225) [The yellowed photograph from the beginning of the century is like a lamp lit in a murky window, a heartening secret gesture

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<sup>17</sup> This snapshot appears on the cover of most English-language editions of *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*.

with which I draw pictures out of the indifferent whiteness (181)]. Though the English translation uses the verb “to draw,” a more accurate equivalent for “izvući” is “to pull out,” “to extract,” or “to save,” reflecting the nuance of the original. Throughout *Musej bezuvjetne predaje*, layering and superimposing others stories and styles fleetingly enable access to the point of pain through a mediated form of association, which simultaneously denies access to the heart of loss. That which is lost—in this case, the group picture and subsequently the narrator’s former Yugoslavia—can be saved and extracted in an unsettling act of translation and appropriation from one image to another. While the photo of the bathers has no accompanying narrative to explain the tableau, the second photo has only narrative to attest to the “captured” occasion, for the photo is ruined. These photos therefore epitomize Ugrešić’s project of preservation and surrender.

The memorial arts employed in Ugrešić’s textual museum convey a sense of both presence and absence. Mimetic arts (citationality, autobiography, and photography) provide Ugrešić a method of recording and honoring her past while evading wartime discourse. The loss of Yugoslavia, the narrator’s sense of self, as well as her friends and memories, may have become a gaping hole due to the war; however, through a mediated extraction of superimposed photographs, of others’ words and stories, she is able to accomplish a dreamlike translation and reconciliation with women at its very heart. Writing becomes the aesthetic space in which Ugrešić attempts to resist the extremely polarized war rhetoric and negotiate the traumatic loss of her homeland. Through a type of *negative capability*, Ugrešić sidesteps war discourse and approaches a manner of reconciling her desire to preserve her national identity and occupy a new postnational position. Berlin serves as the substitute center out of which Ugrešić’s narrator is able to construct an uncanny, in-between subjectivity.

### 3.4 City Geographies in Post-War German Literature

David A. Norris argues that Western Europe framed modernity based upon a national description and understanding of space. German literary representations of the city developed in a traditional Western European fashion in which the city is representative of the nation. The capital city of Berlin became great fodder for writers constructing and challenging national narratives.<sup>18</sup> Dorothy Rosenberg notes that post-war images of Berlin reflected, for the most part, their specific national narratives—the German Democratic Republic (GDR) or the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)—often ignoring the other side’s existence and their competing narratives. She comments that in West German representations of Berlin, “[T]he cultural development of the city tends to follow a relatively straight line of development and then suddenly shifts to a cultural history of its western half,” while the East likewise portrays “a coherent whole with an unbroken history” (206). City geographies about Berlin mirror the post-war narratives of the two nations, creating closed narratives about each country’s involvement in the war.<sup>19</sup>

Within the GDR, an anti-fascist narrative emerged as a humanist project rejecting Nazi involvement. In order to imagine a new community amidst the devastation and guilt of World War II, political atonement of German citizens in the GDR was conceived through the building of an anti-fascist state. The anti-fascist narrative in the GDR positioned itself against both

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<sup>18</sup> Many scholars have explored the connection between the city of Berlin and the German nation. See Marilyn Sibley Fries’ examination of representations of Berlin by German authors in *The Changing Consciousness of Reality: The Image of Berlin in Selected German Novels from Raabe to Döblin* (Bonn, Germany: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1980). The collection *Berlin: Literary Images of a City, Eine Großstadt im Spiegel der Literatur* edited by Derek Glass, Dietmar Rösler, and John J. White (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1989) explores Berlin in literature. Although few have taken up the challenge to investigate the role of Berlin in communist or postcommunist literature, the anthology *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis* edited by Charles W. Haxthausen and Heidrun Suhr (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) does include a few articles on these time periods.

<sup>19</sup> Prior to World War II, there are numerous other texts that center on Berlin, most notably Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* published in 1929. Due to the focus of the project, I will discuss only those after World War II.



capitalism and Nazi Germany, enticing many people with its utopian socialist project and its history of resistance within fascist Germany. The victims of the Holocaust were titled the persecuted of fascism, thus, effacing the victims and re-imagining East German citizens as victims of fascism as well.<sup>20</sup>

Texts from GDR authors generally upheld this anti-fascist, socialist model. As Rosenberg observes, writers, like Ulrich Plenzdorf's *Legende vom Glück ohne Ende* [*The Legend of Happiness without End*], Klaus Schlesinger's *Alte Film* [*Old Film*], and Günter de Bruyn's "Freiheitsberaubung" ["Deprivation of Liberty"], typically set their works in working-class districts of the city like Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, and Friedrichshain, emphasizing living conditions. Other writers supporting the anti-fascist myth, such as Christa Wolf and Irmtraud Morgner, view the city as a stage, while others, as found in the works of Heinz Knobloch, imagine the city as a main protagonist upon which the anti-fascist narrative is played out (Rosenberg 206-217). Contrarily, in dissident playwright Heiner Müller's avant-garde plays, like *Germania Tod in Berlin* [*Germania Death in Berlin*], the streets of Berlin emerge as sites of protest. The Prenzlauer Berg poets also emphasize the streets of Berlin as dissident space.

Like Wolf and Morgner, Barbara Honigmann explores the geography of the city as a theatrical performance of the national narrative. However, Honigmann reveals the performance as a façade covering post-war tensions, allowing her narrator to confront the German-Jewish divide in her identity and make peace with herself. Writing, through reframing, permits the

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<sup>20</sup> For further scholarship on the anti-fascist myth and GDR literature, see Julia Hell's psychoanalytic reading of East German literature in *Post-Fascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis, History, and the Literature of East Germany* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997); Gareth Pritchard's *The Making of the GDR, 1945-53: From Antifascism to Stalinism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000); the special edition of the *New German Critique*, No. 67, *Legacies of Antifascism* (Winter 1996), especially Dan Diner and Christian Gundermann's "On the Ideology of Antifascism" (123-132); Wolfgang Emmerich's chapter "Mythos Antifaschismus und befohlener Sozialismus: die DDR als 'Gründung'" in *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1981).

narrator to create what Eshelman calls a “positive transfer of power” (16) from father to daughter and a gradual coming to terms with the double bind.

### 3.5 City as Pretense: Exploring the In-Between in Barbara Honigmann’s *Eine Liebe aus nichts*

Although published in 1991 after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the novella *Eine Liebe aus nichts* [*A Love Out of Nothing*], by Barbara Honigmann (1949-) is set in pre-1989 Berlin.<sup>21</sup> The text’s narrator looks back at the pre-Wende era as a navigation of impossible identification similar to the post-war challenges that her Jewish parents endured as they decided whether to remain in exile or join the GDR. Like Ugrešić’s text, where home and away, local and global, mirror each other, Honigmann’s text also performs an uncanny return. For Honigmann’s narrator, late-socialism reinvigorates the same post-war questions that her Jewish father had to consider concerning his ethnic and national identity. The daughter faces a familiar unknown in the days preceding the end of socialism. In Honigmann’s text the similarity is in the narrator’s inability to merge together disputing sides—German and Jew. Honigmann’s city is not a site of potential, but a theater without a role for the divided hero. Honigmann’s setting of the story prior to 1989 highlights the unaddressed anti-fascist narrative of the GDR as a hindrance to German reunification.

In *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, an unnamed protagonist relates (with a backward glance) her decision to leave the GDR and move to Paris to realize “der Wunsch nach einem wurzellosen

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<sup>21</sup> German Jewish writer Barbara Honigmann has been publishing since the late seventies. After her parents’ exile in England during World War II, she was born in 1949 in East Berlin. She studied theater at the Humboldt University later working as a dramatic advisor and theater director. In 1984, she left the GDR moving to Strasbourg, France. Her biography is often enmeshed in the themes of her texts, such as this one, which focuses on exile, second-generation Holocaust survivors, and the theater. *Eine Liebe aus nichts* delves into all of these topics.

Leben” (31) [the wish for a rootless life (22)].<sup>22</sup> The novella begins with the return of the unnamed protagonist to Berlin to attend her father’s funeral. Through a circular, first-person narrative, she relates the uprooted lives of her Jewish parents (a Bulgarian mother and German father) who fled Hitler and met while in exile in England. Her parents have since divorced and her mother now lives in Bulgaria, while her father lives in Germany with his fourth wife. The protagonist worked in a theater in Berlin deciding to leave her dead-end job and constraining life to move to Paris (a city her parents both lived in before the war).

Many critics have noted Honigmann’s attempt to negotiate the discrepancy between her Jewish and her German identity.<sup>23</sup> This mixed identity has become a point of contention often analyzed through the lens of postcolonial theory and resulting in claims of fruitful hybridity. For instance, Christina Guenther notes, Honigmann “critiques the notion of genealogical and geographical origin by translating identity into a hybrid genre” (215) and Anat Feinberg suggests that the figure of the wandering Jew can provide a fruitful way of addressing Honigmann’s texts as escaping national boundaries (161-181).<sup>24</sup> However, claims to hybridity ignore the narrator’s inability to bring the German and Jewish sides of her identity together. It would be more fitting to conclude with Petra Fachinger that Honigmann’s work is “in the borderlands” unable to avoid

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<sup>22</sup> All page numbers refer to Barbara Honigmann’s *Eine Liebe aus nichts* (Berlin: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1991). All English quotations and page numbers are from *A Love Made Out of Nothing and Zohara’s Journey* translated by John Barrett and published by David R. Godine, Publisher (Boston, Massachusetts) in 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Scholars have also explored Honigmann’s texts through a feminist lens situating her works as particularly important to the work of women and memory. See Karen Remmler’s “En-gendering Bodies of Memory: Tracing the Genealogy of Identity in the Work of Esther Dischereit, Barbara Honigmann, and Irene Dische.” *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature Since 1989* (Eds. Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler. New York: New York University Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Other texts that argue for the potential of hybridity in Honigmann’s work include, Leslie Adelson’s “There’s No Place Like Home: Jeannette Lander and Ronnith Neumann’s Utopian Quests for Jewish Identity in the Contemporary West German Context” (*New German Critique* 50 (Spring/Summer1990): 113-134); Ursula Marz’s “Exil im Souterrain” (*Tageszeitung* 19 July 1991: 6); and Guy Stern’s “Barbara Honigmann: A Preliminary Assessment.” *Insiders and Outsiders: Jewish and Gentile Culture in Germany and Austria* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1994. 329-346).

“contradictions and ambiguities” (69).<sup>25</sup> For Honigmann’s narrator, there is no way to pull the two sides of her identity together, neither is there a way to escape her position between them. The narrator relates, “Ellis Island ist meine Heimat” (57) [Ellis Island is my home (40)]. She remains in transition, without a geographical identity marker and without the linguistic marker of a name within the text.

When she goes to a shop in Paris to have her father’s Russian-made watch fixed, the watchmaker asks the narrator if she is from Russia and the following dialogue takes place. She replies, “nein, nein, aber woher denn, daher käme ich nicht” (10) [no, no, why would you think that, I’m not from there (7)]. As this conversation suggests, the narrator cannot say where she is from and yet she has a distinct sense of where she is not from. She is an in-between figure without the hope of transitioning into a new country or hybrid identity. The narrator desperately desires to find a place for herself, whether that is as a German or as a nomadic, postnational citizen. However, she finds that national German identification does not combine with her Jewish ancestry and yet a nomadic lifestyle does not coalesce well with her very real national identification to Germany.

The protagonist’s connection to Germany is literary as well as geographical and linguistic. Honigmann’s text includes a variety of intertextual references to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Hölderin, and Rainer Maria Rilke. Guy Stern describes Honigmann’s work in which a “variety of narrative devices interlink” to “accommodate the authorial intention of shuffling between the time frames and of creating continuity out of fragmentation” (329). However, while Stern argues that Honigmann’s mixture of narrative devices results in a symbolic and structural exile that “extends into homecoming” (330), I maintain that

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<sup>25</sup> It is important to add here that I do not completely agree with Fachinger’s approach to Honigmann’s work as a borderland text since she ultimately argues that the novella “becomes a site of subversion” and “hybridization” (57).

Honigmann's cultural allusions and structural techniques do not conclude in homecoming, but in the continued divide between German and Jewish identity markers. The inclusion of canonical German writers in Honigmann's work does not fuse her work with theirs, but highlights the inability to do so in either geographic or literary identification. Goethe's poem "Ginkgo Biloba" is Honigmann's epigraph. The poem questions the structure of the ginkgo leaf, "Is it *one* living being/That divides itself within? /Or are there *two* who choose/To be considered *one*?" (original emphasis, 3).<sup>26</sup> This question haunts Honigmann's text in all of the relationships her narrator has, including her own personal identity, her relationship with her father, and her relationship with Germany, Alfried, and German literature.

Instead of reading Honigmann's work as a rich performance of hybridity, I agree with Todd Herzog's reading of Honigmann in which "Hybridity, both cultural and biological, turns out to be a hopelessly intractable negation" (10). While some, like Jutta Csoels-Lorensen, have looked at the way Honigmann uses speech to emphasize this divide,<sup>27</sup> and others, like Herzog, have explored plot and theme, I will focus on the geography of the city in her novella. My aim is to add a spatial reading of the text to show that place, specifically the city, in Honigmann's novella emerges as a space where German and Jewish elements remain as mixed, unsettled, and divided as the protagonist's own identity.

### 3.5.1 *City as Stage*

The cities in *Eine Liebe aus nichts* include Berlin, Weimar, and Paris. Each city represents a different attempt to gain a fused identity and each remains equally unfulfilling for

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<sup>26</sup> The German language edition of the book (*Eine Liebe aus nichts*. Berlin: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1991) does not have an epigraph.

<sup>27</sup> See Jutta Csoels-Lorensen's "'Un drame interdit d'accès': Remembrance and the Prohibited Past in Barbara Honigmann's Generational Texts" (*The German Quarterly* 80.3 (Summer 2007): 369-390).

the narrator in her attempt to find a geographic location that suits her identity. In Honigmann's text, the German cities (replete with Holocaust images and neglected post-war German-Jew relations) compel the narrator to confront the double bind and reconcile herself with her in-between position. Berlin is the city the narrator lives in before she leaves for Paris. The narrator describes the city from her apartment window:

[V]or dem Fenster erstreckte sich der Straßenbahnhof, die ersten Bahnen krochen gerade aus den Schuppen, dahinter lag der Zentralviehhof, von dem immer ein beißender, ekelerregender Gestank vom Tod der Tiere herüberwehte, neben dem S-Bahnhof Leninallee kündigte die Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle irgendeinen Parteitag an, dahinter zogen sich bis zum Horizont Fabrikhallen und Schloten und dazwischen ragte ein kleiner, blaßblauer Kirchturm. [...] die Straßenbahnen und Schuppen und das angekarrte quiekende Schlachtvieh in seinen Gittern und die Schloten und die ausgeschüttete Morgensonne darüber. (40-41)

[The main streetcar terminal extended back from below my window, the first trolleys were just creeping out of the sheds; behind lay the central slaughterhouse, from which the acrid, nauseating stench of animals constantly drifted over. Next to the commuter station on Lenin Avenue, the Werner Seelenbinder Hall was announcing yet another party anniversary, and behind it, the factory buildings and chimneys stretched off toward the horizon and in between rose a small, pale blue church tower. [...] the streetcars and sheds and the animals trucked in for slaughter squealing behind bars and the chimneys, with the morning sun flooding over it all. (29)]

This passage highlights two important features of the city—its anti-fascist, humanist underpinnings, along with traces of the Holocaust. Just behind the party building stand the chimneys and factories reminiscent of the Jewish communities that worked in camps and were killed during World War II. As illustrated at the beginning of this section, the GDR established a post-war narrative that “atoned” for the wrongs of the war and aligned themselves with the Jews as victims of fascism and as anti-Nazi supporters. The symbols of this narrative, depicted in the street named after Lenin and in the party building, are revealed as superfluous compared to the images and language associated with the Holocaust. The anniversary party, the church tower, and the morning sun clash with the violent images of slaughter and prisons punctuated by putrid

smells and horrific sounds. The anti-fascist narrative of the GDR is revealed as little more than a façade attempting to cover the atrocities of the Holocaust.

The GDR narrative emerges as a failed narrative both for the narrator and for her parents. The narrator explains, “Und schließlich waren sie nach Berlin gekommen, um ein neues Deutschland aufzubauen, es sollte ja ganz anders werden als das alte, deshalb wollte man von den Juden besser gar nicht mehr sprechen” (34) [And in the end, they’d [her parents] come to Berlin to build a new Germany, one which was to be entirely different from the old one, and, for that reason, it would be better not to talk about the Jews at all anymore. But somehow things didn’t work out (24)]. The narrative that her parents and the other citizens of the GDR wanted to believe in and create materializes as a pretense hiding the truth of the situation—a continued divide between German and Jew. Like the theater which the narrator visits as a child and in which she later works, the city becomes a performance during which the narrator stands “von der Seite” (25) [in the wings (18)] “denn hier war die Illusion nicht so beherrschend, das Theater fand nur in einem Raum des großen Hauses statt, dessen andere Räume für uns sichtbar blieben” (26) [because the illusion was not so overpowering there; the play was going on in one room of that big building, the other rooms of which were still visible to us (18)]. East Berlin and its GDR narrative function as a play providing just enough illusion for most, but not enough for those who stand in the wings and are able to see the apparatus of artifice. Since the narrator is unable and unwilling to find a place for herself in Berlin, representative of current German-Jew relations, she turns to another city.

The narrator’s treatment of the city of Weimar connotes an equally failed attempt to find a place of identity. Just as the narrator is unable to merge the two sides of her identity in the context of current-day Berlin, she finds no reprieve in past imaginings of Germany in the

Classical Period of Weimar from the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Weimar holds a particularly important position in German history as the home to numerous canonical authors, such as Goethe (whom Honigmann refers to frequently within the text), Friedrich Schiller, and Johann Gottfried von Herder. In the novella, the narrator's father lives in Belvedere Palace, a *Lustschloss* (pleasure-house), built between 1724 and 1732 for Ernst August, Duke of Saxe-Weimar. Ernst August's eldest son, Karl August, and Goethe reportedly had a strong friendship and on the grounds of the palace can be found the gingko trees which Goethe famously wrote about and which is used as an epigraph to the English edition of her novella.

Belvedere Palace is scheduled to become a museum; however, the process has never been completed. The narrator's father and wife act as curators for a museum that has yet to be completely installed in the palace. For years, "So ist das Schloß immer leer geblieben, in einem halb verfallenen und halb restaurierten Zustand" (91-92) [the palace had always remained empty, half dilapidated and half restored (66)]. The narrator finds in Weimar only a partial link with the past; it has not been fully erected. Like the narrator's attempt to reframe Goethe in her epigraph, the geographical connection to Goethe fails just as the literary one does. Despite the efforts of her father and step-mother, the museum remains an unestablished shell without content, whose position still does not shield them from the Holocaust since "man hat dort einen freien Blick über die ganze Gegend, sogar bis hinüber nach Buchenwald" [from there [Belvedere Palace] you have a clear view of the entire region, even over to Buchenwald (25)]. Not only can the link to the past not be made in the completion of the museum, but it also cannot protect the palace from modern German history and the nearby remains of a concentration camp.



Since the German present and the past provide no place for the narrator to shelter, she turns to her parents' pre-war lives and a postnational identity. The narrator reminisces that "Weggehen könnte auch so etwas wie ein Verwandeln sein" (48) [leaving could even be something like a metamorphosis (34)] and "vielleicht habe ich sogar so etwas wie eine Verwandlung erhofft" (12) [maybe I'd even hoped for some sort of transformation (9)]. However, Paris, the city in which the narrator chooses to emigrate, does not provide the transformation that the narrator is looking for. When the narrator arrives at the Paris train station, she finds all of her paths into the city blocked:

Aber schon, als ich aus dem Bahnhof in die Stadt hinaus wollte, war kein Weg da und keine Straße, nur eine lose Absperrung, eine Baustelle, Bagger, Kräne, lärmende Maschinen und eine riesige Baugrube. [...] ich bin noch durch hundert Eingänge und Ausgänge wieder herein- und wieder herausgehetzt, es war, als ob wirklich kein Zugang in dieses Stadt hinein zu finden wäre. (12-13)

[But as soon as I wanted to get out of the station and into the city, there was no sidewalk, no street there, only a rickety barrier, a construction site with bulldozers, cranes, noisy machines, and a gigantic excavation. [...] I frantically ran in and out of hundreds of entrances and exits again and it really seemed as if there were no access to the city. (9)]

The city that the narrator hopes will provide her with a stable identity has no place for her but a basement apartment in which she can watch people's feet moving past. Instead of the progressive city of revolution, the location of the flaneur, and the pre-war bliss her parents enjoyed there, Paris becomes for the narrator a stifling location: "Wie im Gefängnis, dachte ich da, und nicht wie in der neuen Welt" (12) [Just like in prison I thought then, not like a new world (9)]. The narrator is unable to rediscover the post-war world of innocence and happiness that her parents experienced in Paris. She exclaims, "mein Auswandern vielleicht nur der Traum von einer wirklichen Trennung, der Wunsch nach einem wurzellosen Leben war. Mehr als von allem anderen bin ich vielleicht von meinen Eltern weggelaufen und lief ihnen doch hinterher" (31)

[My emigration was perhaps just a dream of a real separation, the wish of a rootless life. Perhaps more than anything else, I've been running away from my parents and yet still go on trotting along behind them (22)]. Even the dream of a life not based on a geographic location leaves the narrator empty. She cannot leave behind the legacy of the Holocaust or her Jewish roots, nor is she able to denounce her German nationality. Unlike Ugrešić's narrator, Honigmann's finds no solace in the return to the familiar within the unfamiliar. She laments, "Damals waren wir unglücklich, weil wir eine große Sehnsucht nach etwas ganz Unbestimmtem hatten, und nun saß ich hier und hatte immer noch Sehnsucht nach etwas ganz Unbestimmtem" (20) [back then we were unhappy because we felt an intense longing for something completely undefined; and now I was sitting here, still longing for something completely undefined (14)]. Regardless of where the narrator looks for an identity based upon geographical standing, the location always falls short. The double bind, a desire for a postnational identification and the call for a national identification, forces the narrator to discover other ways to reconcile her divided position.

### 3.5.2 *Coming to Terms with the Double Bind*

Although Paris does not provide Honigmann's narrator an instant transformation and stable identity, it does give her the distance necessary to make small changes in her life. These alterations center on her relationships with men, both of whom embody a particular identification. In *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, the narrator's in-between position carries over into the juncture between love and identity. The search to resolve competing identity claims has far more significance than settling on a geographic location to call home. The ability and inability to find love come hand-in-hand with the ability and inability to establish a fixed identity. During the course of the text, the protagonist has two lovers—one a German in Berlin and the other an

American Jew in Paris. Each lover represents a side of her identity that imposes upon her the loss of the other side.

The Jewish narrator and German Alfried, a director at the theater where she works, have a clandestine relationship hidden from all of their fellow co-workers. Although years in the making, the relationship is never made public. They meet secretly in the narrator's apartment or take night walks together on "Rubble Mountain" (the man-made hill created from the debris of the city after the war). The narrator relates, "[W]ir [verbargen] uns voreinander. Wir sagen nie, ich liebe dich, und nie, ich liebe dich auch. Wir gestikulierten nur, und die Gesten konnte man immer auch anders verstehen. Vor allem eben: kein Wort. Eine schwerverständliche Pantomime" (44) [We concealed ourselves from each other. We never said, "I love you," and never "I love you, too." We just gestured and gestures can be interpreted any way you want them to be. But above all, not a word. An unintelligible pantomime (31)]. Like Berlin's unresolved relationship between German and Jew, German Alfried and the Jewish narrator cannot bring themselves to common ground. Just under their feet, literally in the form of "Rubble Mountain," are the remains of a history that has not been dealt with. The narrator laments, "[I]ch [wollte] keinen Germanen lieben, denn ich konnte, wollte und durfte den Germanen nicht verzeihen, was sie den Juden angetan hatten" (46) [I didn't want to love a German, because I couldn't and wouldn't forgive the Germans for what they had done to the Jews (33)], while Alfried "wollte diese Wirklichkeit meines Lebens nicht sehen, die ich nicht gewählt hatte, aber die doch schwer wog und deren innere Wahrheit offensichtlich und verborgen zugleich war, auch für mich selbst" (46-47) [didn't want to see the reality of that life of mine—which I hadn't chosen, but which still weighed heavily on me (33)]. According to the narrator, their romance cannot continue because of this unresolved conflict at the heart of their identities. She calls their love, "eine Liebe aus

nichts, in der nichts passiert und die sich endlos im Nichts verliert" (78) [a love made out of nothing, in which nothing happens, and which endlessly fades away into nothingness (56)]. Eventually, when the protagonist moves to Paris, she symbolically breaks off her relationship with Alfried (who left East Germany years previously). When they meet in Paris and Alfried offers to find the narrator a job in Munich, she refuses him preferring to remain in France.

In her own small ways, the narrator (although not merging her in-between identity) manages to gain agency by recognizing her unhealthy relationships. Although she acknowledges that her and Alfried's relationship, emblematic of her relationship with Germany, is a "love out of nothing," a love that has no foundation and that cannot be explained, she remains emotionally connected to both Alfried and Germany. She remarks, "Denn wie gegen meinen Willen liebte ich ihn ja, und diese Liebe ist mir oft wie ein Zusammenhang oder gar Zusammenhalt vorgekommen, aus dem wir nicht heraus könnten" (46) [Because I did love him, almost against my will, and that love often seemed like a connection or even an adhesion that we couldn't pull away from (33)]. The narrator admits to the problems inherent in her relationship with Alfried, and therefore Germany, yet they also are immutably connected. She hangs up a picture of Alfried on her apartment wall in Paris next to a map of the city. The juxtaposed pictures expose the pull of the double bind between her national connection and her postnational desires. Significantly however, the picture of Alfried is a sketch that she has drawn. This minor detail reveals her shifting relationship to the double bind, whereby she reframes (albeit minimally) the direction of the relationship with her own personal sketch instead of an already produced image.

On the other hand, the narrator's postnational inclinations materialize in her relationship with a Jewish American in Paris. The two relate to each other through what the narrator calls "Mythen unserer Kindheit und unseres Lebens überhaupt" (55) [myths of our childhood days and

of our lives in general (39)]. They relate the stories of their families' post-war emigrations and experiences in foreign countries. The narrator finds a kindred spirit in Jean-Marc, who is able to be the nomadic, postnational subject, whose identity shifts as his location shifts. In America he is Marc, but in Paris he renames himself Jean-Marc. When Jean-Marc offers to take the narrator back to America with him, she refuses. She is unable to release her connection to Germany and he is unable to understand it. Jean-Marc avoids studying the German language and refuses to go to Germany, pronouncing "ein Bann" (56) [a ban (40)] on the nation. Yet, the narrator tries to explain to him that it is her "Muttersprache" (56) [native language (40)]. She notes, "Sosehr, wie sich Alfried damals von mir zurückgezogen hatte, so sehr versuchte jetzt Jean-Marc, mich ganz auf seine Seite zu ziehen" (56-57) [Just as much as Alfried had withdrawn himself from me back then, Jean-Marc was now trying to pull me entirely over to his side (40)]. She cannot understand his deep resistance to visiting her family in Germany and he cannot understand her ability to live in a country of perpetrators.

### 3.5.3 *Literary and Familial Lineage*

The dueling sides of Honigmann's text do not resolve themselves. As Jutta Csoels-Lorensen argues, "Honigmann's texts [are] as acutely attuned to the challenges of envisioning and writing a possible relation between an *Other* as a precarious performance in language; more specifically, as a colloquy always haunted by the prospect of failure" (original emphasis, 370). The narrator's exploration of the city and her romantic affairs do not result in an evasion of the double bind. Instead, the narrator's triumphs are small moves that reframe her relationship to Germany and to her father. The text does not conclude with resoluteness, but with uncertainty. The narrator reports as she waits to leave Berlin returning to Paris,

Plötzlich, wie ich da vor den Häusern stand, ist mir aller Sinn abhanden gekommen von Weggehen und Wiederkommen und Freundschaft und den verschiedenen Orten der Welt, als ob sie sich alle auflösten oder in die Luft aufstiegen, wenn man sich ihnen nähert, und eigentlich kann man nicht wissen, ob sie sich verflüchtigen oder ob man selber flieht. (105)

[Suddenly, as I was standing there in front of those buildings, the leaving and returning and the friendships and the different places in the world seemed robbed of any sense, as if they all dissolved or flew off into the air whenever you tried to approach them and you never actually knew whether they'd just evaporated or whether you, yourself were running away. (76)]

The narrator does not know if her failure to reconcile her identity is inherently futile or self-destructive behavior, and the reader must conclude that the double obligation is not resolved in the text. However, the narrator does manage a “positive transfer of power” (Eshelman 16) that asserts her resiliency and ability to change.

Besides Alfried and Jean-Marc, the narrator has a strained relationship with her father, who always appeared more interested in chasing women than building a relationship with his daughter. The narrator notes, “er klagte mich mangelnder Liebe zu ihm, ja, der Kälte und Gleichgültigkeit an: Unsere Gespräche seien immer zu kurz, nicht ausführlich genug, ich konzentriere mich nicht richtig auf ihn, sei abwesend” (23) [He accused me of not loving him enough, even of coldness and indifference, our conversations were always too short, not extensive enough, I wasn't paying proper attention to him, was distracted (17)]. Even though the narrator attempts to please her father, she admits, “eine Liebe von weit her geblieben” (24) [our love remained a love at a distance (17)]. The father's death alone signifies a transfer of power from parent to child, as does the narrator's termination of a family cycle of dysfunction. Instead of continuing their tendency to look for stability in lovers and in political causes, the narrator stops putting her agency in someone else's hands, whether that be lovers, a nation, or a family. An uneasy reconciliation takes place in the text, when the narrator's father admits that he does

not know where he belongs and suggests, “Vielleicht war alles immer nur wie mit Martha” (35) [Perhaps everything was really just Martha the whole time (25)]. In other words, perhaps everything was a grand idea that never came to fruition.

“Martha” is a play the narrator’s father dreamed of writing. While Ugrešić’s narrator finds potential in literature as a way to coalesce fragments in order to create a new voice for herself, Honigmann’s characters fail to write pieces that bridge their identity or generate a place of unlimited potential. Instead, literature partakes in the slow transformation of generations. Both the narrator and her father write plays within the course of the text. On the one hand, the father relates that as a child he gathered his friends and family together to witness a play he had written, only to realize when they arrived that he had forgotten to write the play. “«Martha» war nur mein Traum von einem Theaterstück gewesen, der Traum von einem großen Abend, der nur mein Abend, mein Erfolg und Ruhm gewesen wäre, aber das Stück existierte gar nicht, ich hatte ganz vergessen es zu schreiben” (37) [*Martha* had only been my dream of a play, the dream of a grand evening that was to be mine alone, my success and my fame, but the play did not exist at all; I had completely forgotten to write it (26)]. The attempt to write a play that would be his (unlike the anti-fascist post-war narrative of the GDR) never materializes. The Jewish wartime generation is unable to write their own narrative. On the other hand, the narrator’s attempt to write a play of her own, although successfully written, fails to thrive. Her unnamed play opens in West Germany to an empty house. She laments, “In der Zeitung könne man übrigens auch lesen, wie mißlungen alles sei” (60) [all you had to do was read the newspapers to know what a flop it was (43)]. On a positive note, the post-war generation is able to write a narrative; however, the narrative is not heard, not named, not identified. Like the narrator’s move to Paris, her attempts at writing prove to be small affirmations of success.

The narrator reframes her father's life with her own—a repeating framework of emigration, failed loves, and literary attempts. The reoccurring father-daughter pattern is altered only slightly by the narrator, but out of this reframing emerges a bittersweet father-daughter connection and an affirmation of potential, however slow in coming. There is partial comfort found in continuity, heredity, and writing. The first person-narrative structure that the novella begins with is altered at the end as the narrator takes up her father's date book. The last pages of *Eine Liebe aus nichts* consist of diary-like entries that the narrator has continued in her father's date book from after the war. The narrator comments, "ich [schrieb] selber darin weiter und datierte die Wochentage noch einmal um auf das jetzige Jahr. [...] ich [habe] angefangen, die leeren Seiten vollzuschreiben, so daß unsere Aufzeichnungen ineinander verliefen in dem englischen Kalender, der sowieso schon längst abgelaufen war" (100) [I write my continuation in it and transposed the weekdays to the current year once more. [...] I started to fill up the empty pages, so that our notes ran into each other in the English pocket calendar that was long out of date as well (72)]. Even if only after death, the narrator gains a limited connection to her father as their lives blend into one in the date book. She also achieves a burgeoning sense of agency, despite the impossible double bind, as she connects with her father on her own terms.

In Honigmann's *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, the German city, whether Berlin or Weimar, questions the anti-fascist GDR narrative stating that German and Jewish identities have been successfully incorporated and included into the post-war national narrative. Instead, the German Jewish protagonist of Honigmann's text reveals a mixed identity that cannot be combined whether she lives in Germany or in France. The late-socialist cities in Honigmann's text mirror the post-war cities that the narrator's post-war Jewish parents encountered. Honigmann's text emphasizes the gaps in post-war identity and national narratives as part and parcel of the lack of



foundation and identity emerging after socialism. Despite the seeming answers to the war and the incorporation of Jews into the GDR, Honigmann testifies to the need to readdress narratives of World War II and the false façade that cities of both Eastern and Western Europe have employed to cover the divide between nationalism and Jewish identity. A poet-wall national and individual identity hinges on an interpretation of World War II that allows a transfer of power to succeeding generations.

For Honigmann, the city fails as a boundless location of subjectivity. Instead, the protagonist remains, as Csoels-Lorensen claims, “suspended” between various geographies, identities, and literatures that she lays claim to (369). Like Ugrešić, Honigmann discovers the difficulty of identity formation not only in spatial terms, but also in temporal ones. The present identity quest is not simply a postcommunist challenge, but also a remnant of World War II and the post-war’s ensuing national narratives. Karen Remmler argues that Honigmann’s texts have “Orte des Eingedenkens” [places of remembrance] (43), which force readers to engage with both the past and the present. Csoels-Lorensen’s assertion about language in Honigmann’s text supports Remmler’s position. She notes, “Honigmann’s prose is spare, ‘einfach’ or ‘naiv,’ as has been said, but its impact lies in its ability to evoke the moment of dialogue as an intersection of many possible, as well as impossible (because taboo) utterances, hailing from multiple locations and times, in short the *deep situation* of its emplaced materialization” (original emphasis, 372). Honigmann’s plain and simple language, along with the text’s locations, are not marks of its lack of complexity, nor of its fruitful hybridity, but of the impossibility of the protagonist’s double bind. Honigmann’s performatism is not a fantastical or optimistic transformation, but an uneasy affirmation of the tenaciousness of family ties and the power of narrative.

### 3.6 City Geographies in Russian and Soviet Literature

In Russian city texts the geography of the city in literature has always been divergent and contentious, especially because of its connection to the nation and its narratives. The city holds great significance in Russian literature dedicated to understanding Russia's position in the world. St. Petersburg was a source for many writers, including Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Alexander Blok, Osip Mandelshtam, and Andrey Bely, seeking to understand the site of Peter the Great's "window to the west" and its relationship to Europe. Likewise, Moscow maintains particular consequence for Russian literature, from Leo Tolstoy's *Анна Каренина* [*Anna Karenina*] (1875-77), to Andrei Platonov's "Счастливая Москва" ["Happy Moscow"] (1932), to Boris Pasternak's *Доктор Живаго* [*Doctor Zhivago*] (1957), to Mihail Bulgakov's *Мастер и Маргарита* [*The Master and Margarita*] (1967), to Venedikt Erofeev's *Москва-Петушки* [*Moscow to the End of the Line*] (1969). In all of these works, the city plays a part in creating an image of Russia that emerges in art, politics, and national identity.

The most well known discussion of Moscow texts actually appears in an exploration of Petersburg texts. Vladimir Toporov's *Миф. Ритуал. Символ. Образ: Исследования в области мифологического* considers the place of St. Petersburg in Russian literature.<sup>28</sup> He identifies Petersburg as "мифологизированная антимодель Москвы" (272) (mythologized anti-model of Moscow).<sup>29</sup> Thus, the most thorough study of Moscow in literature is as a counter model to St. Petersburg. One must address the juxtaposition in order to understand the myth that Moscow embodies. According to Toporov,

По одной из них бездушный, казенный, казарменный, официальный, неестественно-регулярный, абстрактный, неуютный, выморочный,

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<sup>28</sup> For more information on representations of Moscow in Russian and world literature, see Н.Д. Блудилуна и С.А. Небольсин. *Москва в русской и мировой литературе* (Москва: Наследие, 2000.), a collection of articles focusing on Moscow texts from the nineteenth century.

<sup>29</sup> Translation my own unless otherwise noted.

нерусский Петербург противопоставлялся душевной, семейственно-интимной, патриархальной, уютной, «почвенно-реальной», естественной, русской Москве. По другой схеме Петербург как цивилизованный, культурный, планомерно организованный, логично-правильный, гармоничный, европейский город противопоставлялся Москве как хаотичной, беспорядочной, противоречащей логике, полуазиатской деревне. (268)

[On the one hand, callous, bureaucratic, utilitarian, official, unnaturally regular, abstract, uncomfortable, poisonous un-Russian Petersburg was contrasted with sincere, home loving, intimate, patriarchal, cozy, “down to earth,” natural, Russian Moscow. According to the other scheme Petersburg as the civilized, cultural, systematically organized, logically correct, harmonious, European city was opposed with Moscow as the chaotic, disorderly, logic defying, half-Asian village.]

From Toporov’s counter model, scholars have explored the dichotomous relationship between the two cities and how that relationship appears to reinforce each city’s position in the Russian imaginary. Sara Dickinson speculates that early seventeenth century representations of Moscow stress its rural, authentic spirituality untainted by European urban society. She marks Leo Tolstoy’s *Анна Каренина* [*Anna Karenina*] as an exemplary novel in which, “Tolstoy demonstrates a clear preference for Moscow, the presumed home of traditional virtues, religious faith and family life” (7). In a similar vein Ian K. Lilly draws three common characteristics of Moscow texts, including “literary elaborations of Moscow’s female essence,” “conviviality, community and inclusiveness,” as well as “religious and ideological in character” (33).<sup>30</sup> As these examples emphasize the “Russian-ness” of Moscow, its authentic, natural, and spiritual qualities, in contrast to the Westward-looking St. Petersburg associated with outsider, non-Russian characteristics.

In Russian socialist realism, cities appear as symbols of socialist progress. As film scholars Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascasoli point out, in Soviet times “the city and the factory

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<sup>30</sup> See also Ian K. Lilly’s “Conviviality in the Prerevolutionary ‘Moscow Text’ of Russian Culture” (*The Russian Review* 63 (July 2004): 427–48) for more on the beginnings of and associations with the Moscow text.

were loci of conformity, as individuals had to adjust to their rhythms” (139). Here again, as in the case of Yugoslav and East German socialist realism, the city stands as an all-encompassing marker for identity construction.

Olga Mukhina takes up the Moscow geography after 1989 as a location desperate to keep its sense of “Russian-ness.” Mukhina’s multi-generational cast struggles to incorporate and ignore the international presence in the city. While Ugrešić’s and Honigmann’s texts focus on personal struggles with the double bind, Mukhina reveals how the double obligation affects generations of Russians, by reframing the myth associated with the city.

### 3.7 City as Myth: Confronting Isolation in Olga Mukhina’s *Ю, пьеса с картинками*

Russian playwright Olga Mukhina (1970-) wrote her first play (*Alexander August*) in 1991 at the age of twenty-one.<sup>31</sup> She is part of the proliferation of post-Soviet playwrights, which John Freedman calls the “poetic wave” (“Beautiful Sounds” 13). Vera Shamina designates the postcommunist period “the era of women” in Russian theater (216). The rise of well-known playwrights, like Ludmila Petrushevskaya in the late 1970s, lead to an increase in female dramaturgy.<sup>32</sup> Shamina maintains, “The 1980s and 1990s have been marked by an energetic outburst of feminist or, rather, women’s theatre in Russia” (215). The absence of traditional approaches and themes of sentimentality result in “very tough, uncompromising, sometimes shocking” pieces, where women “can be ugly, tough, tragic, but never pathetic” (Shamina 216). Mukhina’s play *Ю, пьеса с картинками* [*YoU, a Play with Pictures*] is no exception as its

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<sup>31</sup> *Alexander August* is Mukhina’s first play after gaining entrance to the Gorky Literature Institute with her play *The Sorrowful Dances of Ksaveria Kalutsky*. While *Alexander August* remains an unfinished piece, Mukhina attracted attention with her second play *Tanya-Tanya* (1992), which was published in 1994 by Современная драматургия. Since 1993, she has worked as a scriptwriter for a popular music television program.

<sup>32</sup> For further scholarship about women playwrights in Russia, see Melissa T. Smith’s article “Waiting in the Wings: Russian Women Playwrights in the Twentieth Century” *Women Writers in Russian Literature* (Eds. Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994. (189-204)).

female characters remain practical and detached from the sappy, moonstruck men who fall in love at the drop of a hat with woman and city alike. Despite Mukhina's affinity to Shamina's position on women playwrights in postcommunist Russia, I highlight her intervention in questions of relationships to place in the postcommunist wake of the double bind.

Mukhina's play *Ю, пьеса с картинками*, published in 1997, follows a group of characters representing three generations. Stepan Ivanovich and Yelizaveta Sergeyevna (in their sixties) are married with two daughters, twenty-year old Anya (single) and thirty-five year old Sister (married to Seva). The play takes place in the streets of Moscow and in this family's home, where a cast of characters move in and out, including youthful Dmitry newly returned from war, middle-aged Andrei disillusioned with Moscow life, immature Pirogova smitten with a war pilot who flies over Moscow, retired Barsukov aged fifty and his trouble-maker son Nikolai. An odd pair of elderly women, who poke their noses around corners only to exclaim ridiculous and nonsensical observations, visits the characters. The drama has no particular plot trajectory, instead focusing on Chekhov-like cross-talk, the characters' relationships to Moscow, and a series of mismanaged and intertwining romantic relationships. An unknown war is taking place outside of the city's borders, as evidenced by Dmitry's return from the war, the pilot who flies over the city, and the radio reports.

The medium of the play underlines the importance of post-1989 place. Mukhina's play emphasizes the very issue of borders and boundaries created by space in her attempt to write a drama that incorporates the entire city of Moscow. Initially interested in writing screenplays for cinema, Mukhina's focus shifted after repeated rejection from the Moscow film institute. Her cinematic leanings have bled into her theater works with plays deemed "untheatrical" and

unstagable (Freedman, “Introduction” xiv).<sup>33</sup> Not only does Mukhina include photographs and personal drawings alongside her dialogues, her structure is often episodic (like a cinematic production) suddenly jumping from location to location and including fantastical action, such as characters suddenly shrinking or growing on stage or in the case of *Ю, пьеса с картинками* near the end of the play two characters “уносит ветер” (100) [are carried off by the wind (100)]. These cinematic hallmarks of Mukhina’s plays along with grammatical errors of inappropriate or missing punctuation and unconventional authorial directions make her plays difficult to stage. Mukhina also provides photographs of her characters within the play, seemingly giving suggestions or soliciting a sense of what the characters should elicit. In *Ю, пьеса с картинками*, the character of Anya for instance, although a young woman in the play, is pictured as a little girl. Other characters appear in nineteenth-century garb, some have obscured faces, and others evoke the Soviet “man of steel” image. The pictures suggest that the characters represent varying periods of time in Russian history, as their actions within the play seem to support. Similar to the characters in Anton Chekhov’s plays, Mukhina’s maintain established worldviews, which she asserts in both character and picture alike.

Freedman, the English translator of many of Mukhina’s plays and prolific critic of her work, characterizes her work as that of “dreamlike states; poetic structures; honest, unabashed lyricism snipped at the corners by trenchant irony” (“Beautiful Sounds” 12). He notes,

The lines separating directions, dialogue, and monologues are often blurred. Scenes are ‘impossible’ in the theater as well as in real life [...] are offered to us as blithely as people sipping tea. People frequently step outside themselves and comment on the action in which they are currently participating. Even the

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<sup>33</sup> Despite this designation, Mukhina’s plays *have* been staged in Russia and translated into Bulgarian, Czech, French, German, and English. She has gained widespread attention and has been produced at well-known theaters such as the Studio Theater in Washington, D.C. during their 2004-2005 Season, the Russian Academy of Theater Arts, the Chekhov Moscow Art Theater, and the Zhelezyaka Theatrical Association of St. Petersburg, to name just a few.

punctuation and other basic laws of writing break down or disappear in the course of the play. (“Beautiful Sounds” 13)

It is evident that Mukhina’s plays experiment with traditional form and structure pushing the reader, director, and audience to their very limits.

In this manner, drama highlights the postcommunist syndrome in which open borders conflict with closed symbolic borders. The limitations of the stage and its props conflict with the spatial enormity of Mukhina’s play, not to mention its fantastical elements (almost impossible to recreate on stage) and its inclusion of photographs (reaching beyond the limits of the dramatic genre). Both thematically and structurally, the limiting of Mukhina’s narrative to a stage exposes the paradoxes and tensions inherent in the post-Soviet reimagining of space. Mukhina recasts the Moscow myth in a post-1989 mode, which protects characters from the intrusive and violent foreign (non-Russian) outside. The author-controlled, Chekhov-like narrative encircling the city of Moscow becomes oppressive to some and comforting to others. Coming to terms with the double bind in *Ю, пьеса с картинками* is of plodding and limited success—some are able to evade, others reconcile, and still others ignore it.

### 3.7.1 *Moscow Geography and Chekhov Revisited*

Mazierska and Rascasoli note in *From Moscow to Madrid: Postmodern Cities, European Cinema* that in Soviet Russia Moscow represented the universal, collective body: “In the case of Russian cities and Moscow in particular, the conviction that the city is more important than the individuals who live in it was not far from reality. In communist times Moscow was filled with tall monuments, many of them inaccessible to the public, who were limited to admiring them from a distance” (139). Moscow is representative of all of Russia. Yana Meerzon goes so far as to suggest, “Moscow embodies the dream planet and the unavoidable final destination. It also

becomes the birthmark of its inhabitants even though they try to run from it” (641). The city emerges in Mukhina’s play as the primary force holding its characters together. Despite their disparate views on Moscow from Yelizaveta Sergeyevna’s nostalgic views of the past, to Andrei’s one-sided love affair with the city, to Dmitry’s homesick return through rose-colored glasses, and Anya’s city that refuses familiarity, Moscow is the point that pulls them all together. As Meerzon notes in “Every Home Is Its Own Private Moscow: Between Geopathology and Nostalgia in Olga Mukhina’s *Ю/YoU*,” “Moscow the Third Rome predicts and determines the life narratives of its past and present dwellers” (655). The idea that Moscow is the Third Rome characterizes the city, as all roads (whether one likes it or not) do in fact lead to Moscow in the play.<sup>34</sup>

Many of the features often attributed to Moscow texts—site of Russian authenticity, city as female, community as body of people, representation of a closed, local world, and irresistible draw—appear in Mukhina’s play. Mukhina evokes the Moscow myth, opening the play with the following stage directions:

Мимо Маяковского, Пушкина и Гоголя мчатся белые «роллс-ройсы», троллейбусы и гужевые повозки. Утренние самолеты пролетают над прудами, лошади, велосипедисты и пешеходы сталкиваются с поющими мексиканцами. Цветет сирень, пахнет дождем, хлебом и солью. Над всем городом светит большое солнце. Сева и Андрей идут в сторону Кремля. (5)

[White Rolls-Royces, trolleys and flat-bed trucks race by Mayakovsky, Pushkin and Gogol. Morning airplanes fly above the ponds. Horses, bicyclists and pedestrians jostle with singing Mexicans. Lilacs bloom, it smells of rain, bread and salt. A huge sun shines over the entire city. Seva and Andrei walk in the direction of the Kremlin. (67)]<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See also Синицына, Н.В., *Третий Рим: История и эволюция русской средневековой концепции (XV-XVI вв.)* (Москва: Индик, 1998.) for further discussion on the historic and religious beginnings of Moscow as the Third Rome.

<sup>35</sup> All page numbers refer to Olga Mukhina’s *Ю, пьеса с картинками* (*Драматург*. 8 (1997): 3-40). All English quotations and page numbers are from *Two Plays by Olga Mukhina: Tanya-Tanya and YoU* translated by John Freedman and published by Routledge (New York, New York) in 2004.



The Moscow myth that Toporov describes appears in the play as a tension that runs up against its own limitations. The idealized, authentic, natural Moscow as the closed, inward-looking village that refuses to let the outside in is challenged in the unusual stage directions in which traditionally Russian cultural icons and “authentic” natural images (Mayakovsky, Pushkin, Gogol, lilacs, bread, salt) mix with English automobiles and singing Mexicans, along with trolleys, planes, and flat-bed trucks. The play’s initial direction pits immigrants, movement, importation, and the foreign against the Moscow myth of Russian purity. The transitory space of the street meets the established traditions of Russia and the introduction of the first two characters on stage unveils them headed toward the Kremlin oblivious to the others on the street.

Although the city incorporates both Russian and non-Russian elements, Mukhina’s play stages a controlled narrative, which places her characters in a pre-established literary framework. She “traps” her characters in a post-Soviet Chekhov play. The play format alone exemplifies the impossibility of ignoring or resisting the limitations of the stage. Character asides, indirect action, and un-representable staging push the boundaries of the stage and remind the audience of the outside of the production. Yet, unlike many contemporary dramas that “break the fourth wall,” exposing the lack of boundary between the fiction and the audience, Mukhina’s play and her characters interact in a city that desperately attempts to rebuild the fourth wall. The text centers on a nostalgic mode that reaches for familiar notions of Russian-ness. Mukhina’s play appears to be set within Anton Chekhov’s late-nineteenth-century plays. She recasts his form and style with characters cemented in their own worldview, who talk across each other instead of with each other. She plays with images and themes Chekhov is famous for, including his infamous gunshot in every play, his reoccurring references to cucumbers, his off-stage action, and everyday, nonsensical interruptions (such as Lopakhin’s “moo’s” in Chekhov’s *Вишнёвый*

сад [*The Cherry Orchard*] paralleling the old women's interruptions in *Ю, няца с картинками*). As in Chekhov's *Три сестры* [*Three Sisters*], Mukhina's characters are obsessed with the city of Moscow. Although they already inhabit that city, the play centers on their images of the city.

Chekhov's themes often focus on a transitory time in Russian history, the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the resulting decline of the Russian landed aristocracy. Mukhina revisits Chekhov at another transitory moment in Russian history. The post-Soviet timeframe of the play suggests a similar displacement. As in *The Cherry Orchard*, Mukhina treats a multi-generational reorganization of space and identity. The older generation finds the transition incomprehensible preferring instead to ignore the immanent threat, while the younger generations must reconcile themselves with the new environment. Chekhov's indirect action and Mukhina's recasting of this style features the struggle with place in the play. Leonard Lutwack notes in his study of place in literature, "Shakespeare thus plays off of the staged place against the unseen place, the wild island of the New World against the over-civilized Italy and its warring principalities. The same is done in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in which the normal course of dialogue provides us with a picture of the orchard as it was in the old days, as it is now, and as it will be when it is subdivided" (13). Mukhina's play likewise establishes all of the action offstage. Moscow emerges much like the cherry orchard, an image of the characters as it was, as it is now, and as it will be.

As Serguei Oushakine notes in reference to retroframing, the reframing of the past provides a familiar structure for the writer; however, it does not enable a restructuring.<sup>36</sup> While Chekhov's dramas provide the audience and Mukhina a known framework, it does not supply

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<sup>36</sup> See Chapter One: Introduction, pages 11-14, for further discussion of retrofitting in the scholarship of Serguei Oushakine.

new meaning for the post-Soviet situation. Instead, the characters in the play and the play's structure proceed as if a return to the literary and historical past were possible even as the outside world encroaches upon the text. A performatist trend emerges in the play's rigid framework, which implements a Chekhov worldview upon the characters. Some of the characters accept and uphold this closed narrative, while others subtly change it from within or escape the play altogether. Chekhov famously said that his nostalgic, dramatic plays were comedies, and Mukhina treats her use of Chekhov in a similar manner, uncovering the absurdity of such a nostalgic, dramatic worldview. She presents the varying post-Soviet worldviews without commentary in a third-person objective mode, using a dramatic form that highlights the personal "frames" (worldviews) that each character holds. The juxtaposition between nostalgia and nonsense in her plot echoes the play's relationship to Chekhov and Moscow—both comfortingly nostalgic and irritatingly confining.

### 3.7.2 *Romance and the City*

Like Honigmann's narrator, the characters in Mukhina's play map their relationship to the city onto their romantic relationships. If we view romantic relationships as an acknowledgement of and negotiation with an other, an outsider, then we come to understand the connection between the characters' relationships to Moscow and to each other. The individual and his or her relationship to an other, highlights the same tension between the city of Moscow as a closed system and the outside world as a penetrating force. Moscow represents the closed, organic, and idealized Russia that the characters find themselves struggling against, working with, or oblivious to. The world outside of Moscow, in the form of airplanes, war, letters, foreigners in the streets, and seemingly English words (the title), threatens to break into the

traditional image of Moscow in Russian literature. By banishing these forces to indirect action outside of the play, by converting the English “you” into the Russian “Ю,” and by ignoring the outsiders, the play and its characters attempt to expel the foreign from Moscow and create a unified and closed frame that recasts post-Soviet Moscow into its former literary, mythical image. This negotiation of Russia and the outside results in a mixture of escapism and translation work, whereby the characters either disregard the present and hide in the past or attempt to understand their current situation by putting it into familiar frameworks in a struggle for understanding on their own terms.

The romantic relationships in the play mirror the characters’ relationships to Moscow within this mythological framework. Yelizaveta Sergeevna’s reunion with her former lover Barsukov and her ensuing nostalgic, backward-looking image of Moscow only sees how it was “как до войны” (7) [before the war (70)] when she was young and could dance all night. Yelizaveta Sergeevna’s husband Stepan Ivanovich is oblivious to the current state of affairs in the world and in his marriage. His wife is secretly attracted to another man and manipulates his knowledge of the outside world. She proclaims the radio off limits restricting his exposure to the wartime news. Thus, his relationship to the city is also backward looking and naïve. His relationship to the city is an innocent, child-like view that comes out in his repetition of nursery rhymes.

While the older characters attach themselves to the city through nostalgic images of the Moscow myth, the younger ones have different approaches. The younger characters do not discern the same idealized image of the city. Anya’s desire for Dmitry, who is already having an affair with Sister, is mirrored in the city in which “Москва старая!” (7) and “ни одного знакомого лица” (14, 18) [Moscow is old (70)] and [has not one familiar face (79, 83)]. Her

disappointment and disillusionment with love is displayed in the inadequate avenues that Anya has to access the city. For Anya, the city is old-fashioned and without familiarity. Unlike the others, Pirogova has little connection to the city because she focuses on her pilot boyfriend who flies above the city. Despite her seemingly romantic ideas about love, when the relationship ends she quickly picks up the pieces, relating, “Главное—любить не только душой, но и головой” (14) [The main thing is to love with your head, too. Not just with your heart (79)]. The pilot, “Надо всей Москвой” (5) [Way over Moscow! (68)], then is not an idealized love, but representative of an outsider, who never materializes in the play despite Pirogova’s desire to make him appear within the closed framework of the play. Andrei lacks a lover and subsequently abhors the city remarking, “Всю мою жизнь она только холодно наблюдает за мной, смеется, ни разу она не протянула мне руки, как бы я ни скулил, как бы ни выпрашивал хотя бы чуть-чуть. Я чужой ей. Я ей никто” (5) [My whole life this city has observed me as coldly as a cold woman. A woman who laughs at me. Who never once offered me a hand, no matter how I whimpered or begged her to even just a little. I’m strange to her. I’m no one to her (67).] In Andrei’s dialogue, the connection between woman and city is clear. It is evident that he is the one character not originally from Moscow, since his family sends him letters from his hometown outside of Moscow. Andrei desires to be a part of the city; yet, he is unable to see the city mythologized as the older characters can. Instead, he and the other younger characters represent the actual struggle to embrace the changing city.

Besides the generational divide among the characters of *Ю*, there is also a distinct separation of gender. While the female characters remain leery and reserved, the men jump headfirst into love. Dmitry recounts, “Я люблю этих людей, которые идут мне навстречу, представляете? Я их как-то физически люблю!” (6) “I love all of those people who are

walking past me, you know? It's like I physically love them! (68)]. Similarly when he attempts to seduce Sister he entices her with romantic strolls while holding hands. She laughs at his overdramatic language and emotions when he exclaims, “Или идемте кричать вслед чайкам и бросать им хлеб горстями! Там я вырву из груди свое сердце и утоплю его в серых московских водах” (11) [Or we can go shrieking at the seagulls and throw handfuls of bread to them! Then I'll rip my heart out of my chest and drown it in the gray Moscow waters (75)]. The men revel in romance, flowery language, and poetry. Barsukov parallels Stepan Ivanovich's repetition of nursery rhymes with his connection to Moscow through folk tales, myth, and poetry. While speaking of his former affair with Yelizaveta Sergeyevna, he links the river they visited in their youth with the current river in which “Водоросли и травы также видно очень подробно. [...] Коньков-горбунков, головастика и других личинок” (12) [You can see the underwater plants and grasses very clearly, too. [...] Mythical little hunchback horses, tadpoles and other little maggots like that (76)]. He indirectly references both Konstantin Balmont's poem “Подводные растения” (“Underwater Plants”) and the classic folk tale “The Little Hunchback Horse.” The echoes of the Symbolists' view of women as the Eternal Feminine, along with the legends, build a mythologized and idealized vision of woman and city alike. Even Andrei's lack of love is based upon an unrealized dream of the city. In Mukhina's *Ю*, the men are desperate to rebuild the mythical image of city and woman alike. They come across as childlike and ignorant because of their self-delusional attitudes and their ability to be easily manipulated.

Gender becomes entangled with questions of postcommunist identity in Mukhina's play. There does appear to be a masculinity crisis in Mukhina's play that can only be placated when the image of woman and Moscow remain static and mythologized.<sup>37</sup> The legacy of Russian

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<sup>37</sup> For more information on the double bind and the masculinity crisis, see Chapter One: Introduction pages 19-25.

literature arises as an answer to the gender divide. As Barsukov's repetition of myth and literature insinuate, the men struggle to see the city and the women clearly. It is easier for them to view the present through a familiar, unified, and mythic lens, thus altering its appearance and avoiding the double bind. Unlike Ugrešić's text where literary references open a space of possibility for the narrator to assert her voice, literature functions in the play much like it does in Honigmann's novella where intertextuality becomes a lure. Honigmann's narrator is enticed by German literature and the stability it provides her identity, while her own literary endeavors remain divorced from German audiences. Yet, she finds writing to be one way to create comforting and lasting connections between family and identity. Mukhina's characters (especially the older ones) are seduced by the call of a narrative that provides structure at a time when that structure is missing. It is easier for the female characters to remove themselves from this mythical vision because as women they recognize the split between themselves and these literary images. They in essence become representative of the threatening, foreign outsider. As shall be shown, some characters, like Yelizaveta Sergeevna, prefer the romanticized visions of themselves, while others, like Anya and Pirogova, search for a different perspective.

### 3.7.3 *Addressing the Myth*

Despite the mythical power of Moscow and the attempts of some of the characters to remain within the myth, the Chekhov-like structure of the play and the characters own attempts to reconcile with the frame produce gaps in the text. The inability of the myth to completely appease all aspects of the double bind appears in various forms. The younger female characters search for different perspectives and the world outside of Moscow creeps into their lives. The tears often emitted by the male characters signal an unconscious recognition of the loss of the

myth. While the men are often depicted as weeping, the women appear to know something that the men do not. The following is a good example of this discrepancy between the closed narrative experiences of the male characters and the glimpses of the outside that the female characters encounter. After hearing shots ring (off stage) outside of the apartment (as they do at least six times within the course of the play), the following conversation takes place:

Сестра. А эти люди ничего не знают, сидят на работе в галстуках, ходят под платанами, прогуливаются по улицам в шляпах. И ничего не знают. Будто ничего не случилось.

Аня. Ну не плакать же им всем.

Сева. А уже успело что-нибудь произойти? (17)

[SISTER: These people don't know anything. They sit at work in their ties, walk around under the trees and stroll down the streets in their hats. They don't know anything. It's as if nothing had happened.

ANYA: Not everybody can cry.

SEVA: You mean something has happened already? (81)]

Compared to the men's description of Moscow filled with romantic images of women, Sister's description of the city is much more pessimistic. She and Anya are able to recognize that something has happened, something has changed, and that the majority of people are oblivious to it. We could assume that this happening is the collapse of the Soviet Union, although nowhere is the historical timeframe mentioned. While Sister seems to grieve this change, Anya (the younger of the two) does not feel badly about it. Seva, on the other hand, has not observed a change. We see three levels of loss here. Seva does not mourn the "happening" because he is not conscious of it. Sister understands that something has changed and feels saddened by it, while Anya does not seem to have lost anything.

While Sister and Anya are candid about the "happening," they still seem unable to understand the extent of it. Some characters, like Yelizaveta Sergeyevna, work to keep the other characters ignorant of the change. She rules that there will be no radio and no calendars



exclaiming, “Ничего не хочу слышать!” (26) [I don’t want to hear about it! (93)] and diverts the other characters’ attention from the gunfire or the radio or any other interruption with invitations to coffee, tea, or vodka. When Kolya is brought into the house with a gunshot wound she ignores his wounded state and the violence that has just taken place, asking him, “Коля, вы не знаете, куда у нас пропали чашки?” (16) [You don’t know what happened to our cups do you, Kolya? (80)]. She tries to keep the others indoors away from the city streets by ignoring the violence and manipulating the other characters’ actions. Other characters, like the uncanny old women, who appear to live in the hallway and interrupt conversation with nonsensical interjections, seem to arrest the myth. Instead of diverting attention, they interject the outside that Yelizaveta Sergeyevna tries so hard to keep out. They often speak in German, “О, майн либер” (32) [Oh, Liebe meine (100)] or produce strange exclamations, “О-хо-х-хо-хо” (36) [O-ho-ho-ho (105)]. The non-Russian interjection printed in Cyrillic marks a fundamental challenge of the text to make sense of the outside world in Russian terms. The play’s title, *Ю*, also problematizes the English word “you” by phonetically distinguishing it as the Russian letter “Ю.” The title emphasizes the attempt to understand the outside world in Russian terms, to interpret the English “you” through the Russian alphabet. There is also a play on the notion of “you” as other and the attempt to understand that outsider. The female writer who titled the play and her female characters are able to observe the changes taking place as former national borders realign and collapse both linguistically and geopolitically. The play shows their endeavors to understand; yet, they have no answers for the men or for themselves.

The interruptions from the outside continue in lesser and greater forms that break into the idealized mythical Moscow—the ominous and anonymous war, the letters that Andrei receives from his mother and sister who live outside the city, the gunfire, and the violence. The play is set

up such that it slowly deteriorates any romanticized notions about love or about Moscow. The idealized notions of women are interrupted at the end of the play by Seva and Kolya's visit to a prostitute signifying an other outside the social norm, but she also “варит арабский кофе, а на пальцах ее горят бриллианты!” (33) [makes Arabian coffee and diamonds sparkle on her fingers! (101)], highlighting her foreign qualities. The romanticized images of women appear to be disintegrating. Likewise the social harmony of the setting also crumbles. Part One, Scene One has only slight indications that something is amiss, with Andrei's complaints about the city and Pirogova's pilot boyfriend hinting at war. However, Part One, Scene Two introduces the war, the numerous loves gone wrong, Kolya's arrest, and the intervening old women. These interruptions only become larger and more frequent as Pirogova's pilot boyfriend stands outside shooting throughout the play.

Following the shots, a period of awakening ensues only to be numbed with a bout of drinking:

Степан Иванович. Что ты, это еще только начало.  
Елизавета Сергеевна. Боже мой, Боже мой.  
Дмитрий. Сейчас даже в Африке—и то война.  
Аня. А вдруг фронт до Москвы дойдет?  
Степан Иванович. Фронт? Только если атмосферный.  
Николай. Это по радио сказали?  
Елизавета Сергеевна. Может быть—лучше чай будем пить? (20)

[STEPAN IVANOVICH: Are you kidding? This is just the beginning.  
YELIZAVETA SERGEYEVNA: My lord. My Lord.  
DMITRY: These days there's even war in Africa.  
ANYA: What if the front reaches Moscow?  
STEPAN IVANOVICH: The front? Only if it's a cold front.  
NIKOLAI: Is that what they say on the radio?  
YELIZAVETA SERGEYEVNA: Maybe we ought to have some tea? (86)]

Although it appears as if the characters reach moments of understanding where they contemplate places beyond Moscow and fearful dangers that may be moving closer to the protected city, in

the next breath they willingly slide back into their oblivious positions by drinking. These dialogues of acknowledgement and then oblivion repeat over and over again in the text. From Kolya's arrest and then his shooting, to Andrei's suicide attempt, to Seva's shooting in a "duel" with Dmitry, the violence in the play increases.

At the apex of the violence Anya exclaims, "Там, где кончаются московские бульвары—нас с вами ждет счастье!" (32) [Happiness is waiting for us where Moscow's boulevards come to an end! (99)] and she and Andrei "уносит ветер, больше ничего не видно" (32) [are carried off by the wind and we don't see them anymore (100)]. Moscow becomes a claustrophobic space for some of the characters, where the only escape available to them is absurd. While they literally vacate the city, other characters struggle unconsciously with the closed frame. Even Yelizaveta Sergeyevna (the character that continually attempts to uphold the ruse) transforms into one of the interrupting old women mimicking their exclamations, "О, майн Gott!" (34) [Oh, mein Gott! (102)]. Her foreign language betrays even her inability to maintain the myth.

Other characters come to terms with the myth from within. The classic literary theme of the love triangle and the duel is recast without a heroic, tragic, or romantic ending. Sister's husband Seva and her lover Dmitry confront each other and propose a duel. Uncharacteristically, the action takes place on stage in a direct confrontation with the other, diverting from Chekhov's model. Before the duel begins, Dmitry laments, "[Т]ы и я [...] забыв о правилах" (34) [We've forgotten the rules (102)]. Seva reveals to Sister that he too has been having an "affair" with the local prostitute. Sister intervenes in the men's argument grabbing the pistol and an unorganized fiasco ensues. The female becomes part of the battle, instead of a passive bystander. Mukhina instructs, "Бегают по комнате, сшибают мебель. ТЫ ТЫ ТЫ ТЫ ТЫ ТЫ ТЫ ТЫ ТЫ ТЫ-ДЫ-



previous scenes. While the whole of the play takes place in the summer, the last two scenes resume on New Year's Eve as the snow falls outside. Everything is as it was before with Stepan Ivanovich repeating nursery rhymes and Yelizaveta Sergeyevna reminiscing about the past and passing out drinks. Outside on the street Dmitry and Kolya discuss going off to war together both armed with pistols. Just as it seems once again the outside may be creeping into the text, the two men are diverted by some passing girls in the street shouting after them, "ИДИТЕ К НАМ, ДЕВУШКИ! МЫ ВАС СЕЙЧАС БУДЕМ ЦЕЛОВАТЬ!" (40) [HEY GIRLS! OVER HERE! HERE WE COME! WE'RE COMING TO KISS YOU! (109)]. The play ends with an ambiguous dialogue between the old women:

Первая. Они похожи на героев.  
Вторая. Не знаю.  
Первая. Все так говорят. (40)

[FIRST OLD WOMAN: They look like heroes.  
SECOND OLD WOMAN: I don't know.  
FIRST OLD WOMAN: That's what everybody says. (109)]

Mukhina's noncommittal ending suggests not an eventual revelation and transformation of her characters, but a continual battle of acknowledgement and denial that alters slightly. Mukhina does give the last words of her play to the characters set outside of the illusory images, and the women's dialogue does question the definition of hero, of masculinity.

The center of Mukhina's play is an acknowledgement of an other, whether that is a lover, an outsider, or a new narrative. Freedman suggests that, "If the people of her play are guilty of criminal apathy in regards to the war they choose not to see, they are redeemed by their capacity for love" ("Introduction" xx). However, I assert that the "love" that we see in the play is not a true reconciliation and negotiation between self and other, but an interaction with the mythological, idealized narratives of Russian literature. The love emerging in the drama is

imaginary. Yana Meerzon interprets the love of city and woman in “Every Home Is Its Own Private Moscow: Between Geopathology and Nostalgia in Olga Mukhina’s IO/YoU” to be characteristic of geopathology and nostalgia. However, Mukhina’s characters are not all nostalgic or even sentimental about the city of Moscow. Meerzon claims, “Mukhina’s Moscow is a landscape of both “belonging” and “longing for” perfection, shared by both Muscovites and outsiders” (643). Instead, I argue that the play is not simply a love letter to Moscow (as many critics have argued) but a whisper of awareness and acknowledgement of the outside that is being ignored. It is not an attempt to join the Moscow myth, but to exceed it. Readers and critics, like those of Honigmann’s novella who desire to see the text as a performance of fruitful hybridity, as well as of Mukhina’s play, who desire only to see a love story, romanticize the postcommunist position and ignore the fissures and gaps in the texts.

Mazierska and Rascasoli note the same type of ambiguity and indeterminacy, as I have noted in Mukhina’s play, in the city geographies of postcommunist Russian cinema. They argue, “Large Russian cities, and Moscow in particular, become in the films of the 1990s sites of all possible pathologies and the epitome of the whole, tormented country, which neither resisted the change to democracy and the free market economy, nor liberated itself from the legacy of communism” (137-138). Unlike the other writers in this chapter, Russia’s particular context of neither resistance to or acceptance of the end of socialism results in a unique positioning of identity creation and negotiation with the double bind. Like Mazierska and Rascasoli, I agree that in consideration of Mukhina’s play, “It feels as if the main problem of present-day Russia is not its social and ethnic differentiation and fragmentation, but its resistance to change, its search for unrealistic and violent alternatives in the name of a return to some kind of utopia of ethnic, social, and cultural purity—a purity that in reality never existed” (159).

Mukhina's play *Ю, пьеса с картинками* likewise takes up this all-encompassing geography-based identity by reframing the myth of Moscow, as it has been developed in the literary and cultural imagination of Russia, as the heart of Russian identity, spirituality, and authenticity. However, instead of upholding this wooden image of a city, Mukhina challenges the reader to push beyond closed narratives of the city, to reconcile the double bind, and to recognize the slow progress of such changes. In the play, the much cherished image of Moscow, as the authentic site of Russian-ness is both comforting and beautifully naïve, as well as a stifling location of fear and ignorance. Mukhina's play, despite its challenge to the myth of Moscow, ends on a positive note of hope and continuity. Eshelman notes that the author controlled plot is never wholly satisfactory, yet the reframing of Chekhov and the subtle shifts in the text do leave the reader with a sense of hope. He argues, "if we choose the aesthetically mediated presence of the plot, we have the inspiration of love and a future which we can act on in an affirmative way" (Eshelman 67).

### 3.8 Reading the Postcommunist City

As Roland Barthes explains, the city is "the place of our meeting with the *other*" and these texts provide a varied account of that encounter in relation to each nation's particular postcommunist position (original emphasis, 96). For Honigmann that meeting place is within the self, while for Mukhina it rarely materializes in Russia's resistance to change. For Ugrešić the self and the other are indistinguishable. In Honigmann's and Ugrešić's texts of exile, the postnational, nomadic subject is complicated by the continued draw of national identity. The international exilic cities display opposing positions with Ugrešić's Berlin allowing for a negotiation between fixed and flexible borders and with Honigmann's Paris presenting the

irreconcilable position between the two. Inversely, the characters of Mukhina's play withdraw from the multicultural changes and shifting boundaries of the city of Moscow through restrained rebellion, through retreat into an overly romanticized image of the city, and through escape into romantic affairs and alcohol. Mukhina's play provides a third position where fear and claustrophobic spaces cause stagnant and repetitious actions.

The city emerges as the geography where characters meet the double bind directly. Whether writers agree or disagree with official national narratives, whether they are outsiders or insiders, the city materializes as a hopeful, yet limited site of postcommunist identity construction in the three texts explored in this chapter. Because of the specific national contexts associated with each text, the negotiation of insider and outsider function quite differently. Both Honigmann and Ugrešić view the city through narrators in exile, while dealing with the lingering effects of World War II on identity formation. Yet, Ugrešić's text, which encapsulates an uncanny city of foreigners, functions quite differently from the in-between position of Honigmann's narrator, who remains unsettled. Mukhina and Honigmann deal with the theatrical, illusory narratives of the city; however, while Mukhina's theater is a façade refusing to acknowledge the multicultural, multi-voiced outside world, Honigmann focuses on the pretense of the nation's own self-image. Through reconciliatory plots and familiar literary frames, these texts, while unresolved, create hope in subtle continuity, small shifts, and human relations. Eshelman notes that unless characters have a fantastical transformation (as seen in Maron's, Sadur's, and Krauß' texts<sup>38</sup>) the performatist subject invariably experiences a "partial" (37) shift. There is no *one* postcommunist city, but varied and diverse relations with the double bind of the postcommunist city.

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter Two: Authorial Narratives for a discussion of Maron's narrator's fantastical metamorphosis and Chapter Four: Transformative Perspectives for Krauß' use of metaphysical travels and Sadur's spiritual transformation.



## Chapter Four

### Transformative Perspectives: The Place of the Foreign in Postcommunist Literature

Instead of the situatedness of apartments and cities, this chapter explores texts dealing with foreign countries and flexible borders after 1989. The ambivalent reception and rejection of the Soviet Union's dissolution, the attempts to unite East and West Germany, and the traumatic war in the break up of Yugoslavia all generated texts of travel to foreign lands. Nina Sadur's *IOz* [*The South*], Angela Krauß' *Die Überfliegerin* [*The Over Flyer*], and Slavenka Drakulić's *Café Europa: Life After Communism* fashion travel narratives addressing changes in postcommunist space and identity. For all of these writers, the reimagining of postcommunist identity emerges through a new approach to transnational physical geographies. In the post-1989 double bind, where characters struggle to find a way to reconcile their desires for a stable, singular identity and a flexible, multifaceted identity, the transnational setting is highlighted.<sup>1</sup> Here we encounter a negotiation of both national and postnational identification, as well as of personal integration of stable and shifting identities. The characters in these texts strive toward unlimited power through performatist techniques<sup>2</sup> such as theist narratives and themes of self-perfection and spirituality. These travel narratives capture subjects whose travel to foreign lands motivates personal, spiritual conversion (*IOz*), fantastical, exploration of the universe (*Die Überfliegerin*), and flexible, peripatetic guidance (*Café Europa: Life After Communism*).

For these writers, foreign countries provide the location from which identity is negotiated as an interaction with the foreign other. The narrators' sometimes traumatic and overwhelming navigation of an unknown country results in a counter measure whereby the narrators gain God-

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1: Introduction, pages 4-6, for a detailed discussion of the *double bind*.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1: Introduction, pages 14-19, for a review of Raoul Eshelman's notion of *performatism*.

like power. In *IOz*, Sadur's protagonist feels no reprieve from her postcommunist double bind while on vacation in the south. The south emerges as a site of violence and foreignness resulting in confession, conversion, and spiritual release. For the narrator of Krauß' *Die Überfliegerin*, foreign lands facilitate a textual and personal escape from the laws of the physical universe through forgetting and imagination. Lastly, in the autobiographical *Café Europa: Life After Communism*, foreign countries emerge as a fruitful location to distance one's self from the confining limitations of excessive nationalism, while at the same time providing a space to juggle a national and postnational identity. The narrators attempt to reconcile their fearful (Sadur and Krauß) and divided (Drakulić) positions by implementing structural techniques and plot twists that move their narrators toward an elevated notion of the self (Krauß and Drakulić) or an abased self (Sadur). Raoul Eshelman notes that in performatist texts "new monist aesthetic revives theist myths and reworks them in contemporary settings" (13). Seemingly outdated literary trends are recast in these texts. The geography of the foreign country allows Krauß and Drakulić to play God, and Sadur to approach the divine.

#### 4.1 Reading Postcommunist Travel

The act of traveling is of significant importance to the postsocialist context. Travel outside of the nation was highly restricted during socialism. Thus, the simple act of being able to travel, being in motion, is a significant movement within these texts. Travel has become a possibility in the unbounded post-1989 framework, encouraging and perhaps initiating new representations of travel. Yet the lack of travel restrictions is not the only reason for the theme of travel in the postcommunist world. Gorges Van Den Abbeele argues in *Travel as Metaphor* that travel within literature opens up new ways of looking, and thus calls into question existing

orders. According to Abbeele, travel functions both as literary trope and as metaphor for the questioning and negotiation of language. Travel, like language, presupposes an original starting point (home) and moves outward from this point following the traveler's itinerary with the possibility of encountering or facilitating detours. The structure of a journey mirrors the structure of language as a place of possible deviation, as well as of reification. Within the three texts addressed in this chapter, travel provides new modes of perception, but also new ways of pushing language and literature to its limits.

Sadur, Krauß, and Drakulić trouble Abbeele's conceptualization of travel. According to Abbeele, the travel narrative, because of its known starting and ending point, is "an attempt to contain that other" (xix). The unknown becomes subsumed within the boundaries of a narrative structure with a beginning and ending point. Abbeele notes, "The travel narrative is then one in which the transgression of losing or leaving the home is mediated by a movement that attempts to fill the gap of that loss through a spatialization of time. This articulation of space with time smoothes that initial discontinuity into the continuity of a line that can be drawn on a map" (xix). In other words, the narrative of travel forces a positing of home and a relationship to home, likewise translating the outside into the language of home. However, the position of home in postcommunist texts is exactly what is called into question, uncertain, and in flux. Anke Pinkert suggests that travel in the post-1989 world forces a rethinking of the travel trope:

Travel generally implies the relative security of home, class privilege, and determined circuits that prevents the sliding of postcommunist cosmopolitanism into diasporic articulations. Yet, as the literary narratives attest, it is after all an acute sense of economic and historical crisis experienced in the aftermath of 1989 that infuses narratives of travel with modes of dislocation. (2-3)

The postcommunist traveler does not have the luxury of home because of the fragmented, restructuring of borders and nations. In many ways, the postcommunist traveler mirrors the exile.

Caren Kaplan argues in her book *Questions of Travel* that the literary trope of exile and displacement “defines modernist sensibilities and critical practices” (30). Throughout modern and postmodern literature the issue of displacement reoccurs consistently. However, the implications and importance of these subject positions have changed. Kaplan asserts that for the modernist writer and the modernist literary trope the subject’s position is a lost connection to an original community, while the postmodernist is more likely linked to a nomadic positioning of agency, which claims community on a global scale. But where does the postcommunist traveler fit into this framework? The cases within this chapter suggest that the struggle for the postcommunist traveler is not a case of either or, but one of both. The narration of travel in these texts is complicated by the double injunction, pulling narrators to avoid their bind through metaphysical and spiritual means. Writers like Drakulić refuse to relinquish either national identification or postnational identification. They remain in a paradoxical situation both desiring to have an established home and desiring not to be limited to that category. Literature emerges as a path, through which authors like Sadur, Krauß, and Drakulić redefine home and write their way out of the fragmented, forced, and oppressive postcommunist environments that asks them to settle on geographic boundaries, while accepting the permeability of ethnicity, religion, and culture.

#### 4.2 Travel Narratives in Russian and Soviet Literature

There is an enduring legacy of literature about foreign lands and travel in the Russian literary canon that should be addressed before engaging with the example at hand. In a rough generalization, I propose three modes of travel in Russian literature: colonization, modernity, and interiority. Texts, such as Alexander Pushkin’s *Капитанская дочка* (1836) [*The Captain’s*

*Daughter*] and Mikhail Lermontov's *Герой нашего времени* (1840) [*Hero of Our Time*], represent travel to Russia's own far reaching borders as a form of colonizing in the sense that through travel to the far reaches of the Russian Empire these texts construct national identities and cultural boundaries by narrating Russian identity in contrast to the foreign other. The unknown dangerous rebellions in western Siberia in Pushkin's tale and the exotic Caucasus in Lermontov's text both require a military presence to control the precarious regions. Foreign lands, their containment, and their narration were a large factor in the construction of Russian identity.

The turn of the century introduced new fears about foreign lands and modernity that appear in travel tropes. Leo Tolstoy's *Анна Каренина* (1875-77) [*Anna Karenina*] (1875-77) and Anton Chekhov's *Вишнёвый сад* (1903) [*The Cherry Orchard*] both represent travel as a metaphor for modernity and loss of a way of life. Tolstoy creates a divide between the falseness of city life corrupted by foreign language and manners and the authenticity of country life displayed in the contrast between Anna and Vronsky's relationship and Levin and Kitty's. The image of the train (travel) also emerges as a warning to this inauthentic way of life that modernity poses. The motif of the moving train, which is subtly introduced in the first chapters (the kids playing with a toy train) and inexorably developed in subsequent chapters (Vronsky and Anna meet at the train station for the first time, Anna's nightmare, etc.), foreshadows the novel's conclusion. Chekhov's play also implements the image of the train, along with power lines, as a harbinger of change and modernity that lingers on the edge of the cherry orchard and eventually secures a new way of life.

Lastly, because of Soviet restrictions on travel, communist literature about travel takes up an interior travel.<sup>3</sup> Svetlana Vasilenko's poem "Путь" ["Journey"], under the heading *Дурацкие рассказы* [*foolish stories*], displays the futility of travel, which becomes a literary performance instead of a reality. The poem reads, "Я вышла и пошла. Я шла шла шла шла шла... с ума и полетела" (Новые амазонки 311-312) [I have left and have gone. I went went went went went...mad and flew away].<sup>4</sup> The word "шла" ["went"] repeats for almost an entire page until the poem shifts and the narrator announces her arrival at madness and flies off the page. Likewise, in Venedikt Erofeev's *Москва-Петушки* (1960) [*Moscow to the End of the Line*], the narrator's trip to Petushki ends in an alcohol induced madness and death. The disjointed structure of the text, in which a single sentence lasts an entire chapter and in which one chapter is often joined to another chapter by a sentence that begins in one and ends in the other, parodies the narrator's inability to travel and the Soviet subject's controlled body.

Nina Sadur joins a host of post-Soviet writers now addressing the theme of travel after socialism. From Russian émigré Dina Rubina's texts set in Israel, such as *Вот идет Мессия!* (1995) [*Here Comes the Messiah*], to Maria Rybakova's epistolary novel *Анна Гром и ее призрак* (1998) [*Anna Grom and her Spectre*], to Russian expatriate Vladimir Kaminer's 2002 text *Die Reise nach Trulala* (*The Journey to La-la-land*), written and published in German, travel narratives have are in demand. The interest presumably stems from the tangible possibility of actively engaging in international travel, as well as because of the ability of travel narratives to force questions of identity, nationality, and otherness.

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<sup>3</sup> There were of course privileged Soviet writers who were able to travel and wrote autobiographical texts about their journeys, including Vladimir Mayakovsky *Мое открытие Америки* (1925) [*My Discovery of America*], Osip Mandelstam's *Путешествие в Армению* (1933) [*Journey to Armenia*], and Ilya Ilf and Eugene Petrov's *Одноэтажная Америка* (1810-1935) [*One-Storyed America*]. Exile narratives also proliferated by writers like Vladimir Nabokov and controversial writer Edward Limonov's 1978 *Ето я, Едичка* [*It's Me, Eddie*].

<sup>4</sup> All translations my own unless otherwise noted.

#### 4.3 Conversion in Foreign Lands: Spiritual Subjectivity in Nina Sadur's *IOz*

The journal *Znamia* published the novella *IOz* (*The South*), written by Nina Nikolaevna Sadur (1950-) in 1992. Primarily known as a playwright, Sadur is included in the company of “new wave” dramatists with Olga Mukhina.<sup>5</sup> In the eighties, Sadur worked on plays, turning to prose in the nineties.<sup>6</sup> Tatyana Novikov dubs Sadur “the leader of modern Russian ‘violent fiction’” (“Angry Women’s Voices” 277). Her texts have been included in the voluminous number of works by women emerging in post-Soviet literature.<sup>7</sup> Novikov proposes that Sadur “directly confronts the problem of what it means to be a woman in Russia” (“Angry Women’s Voices” 276). Sadur has published seven collections of plays and prose often characterized by flat narration of horrible and astounding events with folkloric elements and female characters who refuse to conform to societal norms. Women in *IOz* are confronted by a harsh world of environmental ruin (radiation and pollution), inept and violent men, and a legacy of patriarchal stereotypes about women both in literature and in culture.

Sadur’s novella *IOz* follows the soul-sick protagonist, Olya, who leaves her country life and her husband to go south on vacation in the hopes of reviving herself, “но легкая и невидимая сила жизни вытекала из тела” (114) [but the invisible power of life kept ebbing away (100)]. After Olya seduces her landlady’s mentally challenged son and is expelled from the hut she has rented, her mental condition continues to deteriorate. She encounters sailors, a

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<sup>5</sup> Sadur was born in Siberia into a working-class neighborhood. She is partly of Tartar descent and she forefronts her experiences at the margins of society in her work. Her mother was a teacher of Russian literature and her father was a poet. She later moved to Moscow to study drama at the Gorky Institute of Literature. After graduating, she worked as a cleaning lady at the Pushkin theater until 1987 when her play *Чудная баба* (*The Marvelous Old Woman*) was staged as a student production at Moscow State University and then following at more established theaters.

<sup>6</sup> For further scholarship discussing Sadur’s dramas, see Catriona Kelly’s *A History of Russian Women’s Writing 1820-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Helena Gosciolo’s “Perestroika and Post-Soviet Prose: From Dazzle to Dispersal” in *A History of Women’s Writing in Russia* (Eds. Adele Marie Barker and Jehanne M. Gheith. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 297-312) provides a general overview on the progression of emerging women writers from late-Soviet to post-Soviet times and Harriet Murav’s “Engendering the Russian Body Politic” (*Genders* 22 (1995): 32-56) discusses the role of women’s literature in relation to the nation.

disabled Georgian man, a government interrogator, and other male characters. Her psychological state crumbles to such an extent that Olya is unable to speak and the third-person narrative from the focalization of Olya is forced to resume from the first-person narrative of one of two women who find the mute and starving Olya on the beach. Olya joins the women on their pilgrimage to New Athos Monastery in the Republic of Georgia along the Black Sea. Tonya and Valya rename Olya, Maria, giving her a new religious identity. Eventually, Olya regains speech proclaiming that in fact her name is Maria.

Scholars of Sadur's work have concentrated on identifying features of insanity, gender relations, fantastic elements, and folklore to address the singular attributes of Sadur's work.<sup>8</sup> Reviewer Arnold McMillin describes Sadur's work noting, "Fantasy, even magic, and prosaic reality mingle in many of the stories [...] Nothing is fully predictable in Nina Sadur's powerful writing. Whimsical and sometimes savage streams of consciousness, frequent unsignaled changes of narrator, and, especially, nonlinear chronology all create a feeling of instability in which madness and violence flourish" (409). While *IOz* approaches all of these characteristic angles—insanity, female violence, fantasy, unconventional characters and narration—the goal of

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<sup>8</sup> For further women and gender scholarship on Sadur, see Alexandra Smith's article "Carnivalising the Canon: The Grotesque and the Subversive in Contemporary Russian Women's Prose (Petrushevskaja, Sadur, Tolstaia, Narbikova)" in *Russian Literature in Transition* (Eds. Ian K. Lilly and Henrietta Mondry. Nottingham, England: Astra Press, 1999. 35-58), arguing that women authors respond to masculine prejudices of canonical literature "by carnivalizing the canonical male authors" (36); David J. Birnbaum and Karin Sarsenov's "Who is the 'Cute Little Redhead'?" Nina Sadur's 'Milen'kii, ryzhen'kii': A Literary Conversation" in *The Slavic and East European Journal* (48.2 (Summer 2004): 203-223), exploring female sexual discovery and how folk tales innumerate this process in Sadur's work; Tatyana Novikov's "'Requiems': Liudmila Petrushevskaja's World of Death" in *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* (58.1 (2004): 31-47), analyzing "female violence as the source of freedom" (33) in Sadur's plays; and Karin Sarsenov's discussion of women and madness in "Sadur and Madness: Problems of Representation" *The Oeuvre of Nina Sadur* (74-89) (Eds. Karin Sarsenov, Helena Goscilo, and David J. Birnbaum Pittsburgh: The Ohio State University Working Papers in Slavic Studies, 2006). Others such as Helena Goscilo in "Paradigm Lost?: Contemporary Women's Fiction" *Women Writers in Russian Literature* (Eds. Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994. 205-228) investigate Sadur's fascination with language and Nadya L. Peterson examines the fantastic in Sadur's work as a departure from "socialist realist dogma" (3) and "an articulation of resistance to dominance" (164) in *Subversive Imaginations: Fantastic Prose and the End of Soviet Literature, 1970s-1990s* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997).



this section is to explore how this particular novella, pointing to the rest of Sadur's work as well, investigates place as a site that illuminates issues of alterity and otherness.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4.3.1 *Uncertain Borders*

Sadur's *IOz* opens with the text's protagonist at the beach with her feet in the sea, watching a young boy playing in the water. The location of Olya's sea holiday (although never specifically named) may be the Black Sea resorts of Yalta, made famous in Anton Chekhov's short story "Дама с собачкой" ("Lady with a Lap Dog"). Alexandra Smith argues that Sadur responds to masculine canonical literature "by carnivalizing the canonical male authors," in this case Chekhov (36). She comments, "[Sadur] re-evaluates Chekhov's romanticized Black Sea resort of Yalta as a source of inspiration" (50). Olya does not go to the seaside to find a new love, but to "celebrate the bodily pleasures of life, to bring her body back to life" (Smith 50). However, unlike the Lady with the lapdog's found romance, Olya finds only more turmoil as her mental condition worsens during her stay. Continuing the comparison with Chekhov's "Lady with the Lapdog," there is a striking difference between the upper-class Yalta of Chekhov's story and the working-class crowds of Sadur's text. "Понаехали люди на юг, поднакопили деньжонок, вгрызались в шахты, трудились надрывно. Грубый приехал народ, натруженный—с рассвета до ночи на пляже, за свои деньги—все солнце юга" (113) [Crowds of people came south. They saved up their money, went down the mines, worked flat-out. Rough, hardworking people, they sat from dawn to dusk on the beach wanting their money's

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<sup>9</sup> Karin Sarsenov's book *Passion Embracing Death. A Reading of Nina Sadur's Novel The Garden* (Lund Slavonic Monographs, 3. Lund: Lund University, 2001), which focuses on close analysis and intertextual references, does note the connection between Sadur's garden and St. Petersburg, pointing to the same challenge to interrogate the role of space in Sadur's work that I investigate in her novella *IOz*.

worth of southern sun (99)].<sup>10</sup> The romantic, elite setting of Chekhov's text with its womanizing male protagonist is transformed into the weary female protagonist of Sadur's text who finds herself, not in a refreshing and renewing environment, but in one which causes fear and panic. Sadur's carnivalizing is a form of reframing in a postcommunist mode that uncovers the futility of prior literary frameworks for the post-Soviet writer and reader. Prior to 1989 there was a sense of placelessness within a stable framework, but now after the end of socialism there is a real experience of placelessness and fragmentation. Sadur's reframing of canonical authors challenges previous perceptions of foreign places and Russian identity. As Serguei Oushakine argues in his work on post-Soviet "retrofitting," the reframing of familiar frameworks provides Sadur a stable and known format, but ultimately an empty one that provides no meaning.<sup>11</sup>

Sadur's reframing of Chekhov displays the inability of previous frameworks to provide new meaning for the current post-1989 timeframe. The crowds are too imposing, causing Olya to remark, "море есть, но я же здесь не одна. Море глазами не выпить. Сколько я не буду с ним рядом, все равно уйду неутоленной" (113) [there's the sea, but I'm not alone. You can't drink it in with your eyes, so I'll leave still thirsty (100)]. She is unable to access the healing nature of the sea or to restore her sickened inside because of the clang of peoples. "Ее оглушала, пугая, грузинская речь. Она думала: «Все здесь чужое»" (113) [Georgian words deafened and frightened her. 'Everything's foreign here,' she thought (100)]. Even at the local café, while listening to the foreign music, Olya contends, "Музыка была страшная" (114) [The music was frightening (100)]. Everywhere she turns, Olya encounters others—Ukrainians, Georgians, Jews, Greeks, and Germans. Black eyes and hair, along with foreign languages and broken Russian

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<sup>10</sup> All quotations are taken from Nina Sadur's *Юг. Ведьмины слезки: книга прозы* (Москва: Жур. Глагол, 1994. 113-166) with English quotations from Cathy Porter's translation of *The South in Witches Tears and Other Stories* (London: Harbord Publishing, 1997. 99-159).

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 1: Introduction, pages 10-14, for further discussion of retrofitting in the scholarship of Serguei Oushakine.

affront Olya. Chekhov's romantic and exotic foreign location is now Sadur's traumatic nightmare.

Whether Sadur's south is in fact Yalta, or simply Southern Russia, the opening to the Caucasus, Sadur purposely leaves her setting vague. While she does interact with canonical male authors like Chekhov and Gogol (as will be discussed later), I suggest that Sadur's location is less important than the intimation that the place is somehow unnamed and foreign. It is a direction without a clear geographical position, certainly marked by alterity and otherness. As Nadya Peterson writes about Sadur's work, there is definitely an "aggressively asocial, split between the empirically verifiable and the fantastic" (163). Just as the tension between otherness and the individual is only hinted at, somewhere between factual strain and the paranoid imagining of the protagonist, the setting of her text remains equally vague bouncing between reality and fantasy.

Olya herself, like the south, has a shifting and ill-defined identity. The reader is left to wonder what her ethnicity may be, knowing only that despite her time in the sun her skin "не может загорать" (128) [won't go brown (116)], that she hails from the country, living in a dacha all year round, and that her name is indistinct as it shifts from Olya to Maria within the course of the text. Olya's name, a diminutive form of Olga, suggests a distinctively Russian ethnicity. Yet, even this identity appears to be uncertain in the text. Olya notes that her only distinguishing characteristic is a plain ring, which she wears, "Чтоб не потеряться. Да, чтоб всегда было видно, что это я. Как птица. Она улетит куда-нибудь, а ее по колечку узнают—это та самая птица..." (123) [So I won't get lost, so people will know it's me—like a bird. The bird flies off, but people know which bird it is because of the ring (110-111)]. Like the birds that fly

south in the winter, Olya has no definitive home. It is only the ring that marks her identity, not her geographic location.

As Carol Adlam points out, in Sadur's work "the encounter with otherness is central" (51). Characters, like Olya, allude to the fragmented self after socialism and the renegotiation of otherness within the restructuring of borders. Adlam observes,

Sadur's narratives not only demonstrate the loss of the concepts of inviolable national wholeness and Russian national superiority that were propagated by Soviet Russia, and their replacement with a radically fragmented sense of self, but they confront the darkest fears of contamination and expulsion that accompany this precarious constellation of identity forms. (65)

The obscure reference to the south, along with Olya's indistinct ethnicity, points to the nebulous reorganization of national borders and ultimately ethnic relations. The reader is left to question whether the south is within southern Russia or a part of the Ukraine's autonomous Republic of Crimea or even within Georgia. Is the post-Soviet traveler a tourist in her own nation or in another? Are there clear distinctions between these nations, where languages and ethnicities mix? Sadur's *IOz* delivers nothing to answer these questions. The breakdown of language and ethnicity emerge as a sign of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the narrator's fearful reaction to it.

Understanding the position of the south in Russian literature may provide a productive strategy for understanding the place of travel and foreign lands in Sadur's work. Much has been written on the role of the Caucasus in literature as an engagement with Russian cultural identity. Susan Layton's book *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* delves into the manner in which Russian identity and the Russian empire were constructed in nineteenth-century literature through travel literature to the Caucasus. Layton explains that the Caucasus becomes for Russia "their own orient" (1). The area was depicted as

both romanticized and uncivilized, giving Russia, argues Layton, the ability to define itself as semi-European and semi-Asian. Although the tension remains in Sadur's text regarding the south—intriguing place of wonder or violent place of otherness—the happy medium that Layton analyzes as appearing in nineteenth-century literature finds no place in Sadur's confusing, violent, and mysterious narrative. Identity is not found in the south, but is lost, resulting in a spiritual conversion that evades the double bind.

#### 4.3.2 *Encountering the Other*

This transformation takes place as a conversion narrative, in which Olya, the subject of the narrative, is in search of a transformed self, freed from the postcommunist bind. Viewed through a performatist lens, Sadur's plot represents that of "*perfecting the self*, usually in the sense of communing with an animate nature or entering or approaching Nirvana" (original emphasis, Eshelman 18). Elizabeth Skomp notes that Sadur's novella situates her "protagonist within an older established Christian framework of sin, punishment, and salvation, even though the action takes place in a secular context. The path of transgression, suffering, and redemption [...] demonstrates that hope may surface from bleak circumstances and there is a place in society for these martyr figures" (287-288). Whether viewed from within a Christian framework or through Eastern philosophy, Sadur's text displays "the *identificatory* value of sacrificial centering that is completely alien to the ethos of postmodernism" (original emphasis, Eshelman 18). Olya's transformation comes about, as in many conversion narratives, not in the reclamation of the self but in the loss of the self.

Olya's identity breakdown is a process that occurs through a continued encounter with otherness in *IOz*. The chief sources of alterity in the text are male characters. In her analysis of

Sadur's work, Nadya Peterson contends, "Overall, Sadur makes the male point of view inaccessible to the reader. Males are presented externally, as an opposition group of sorts" (166). The male characters in *Юэ* do not understand Olya. She is unable to communicate with them or express her "illness" to them. They fit into a three-part scheme of men: those who are unable to understand, those whom Olya rejects as unworthy of understanding, and those who do not want to understand.

The first type of man Olya meets is one with deficiencies. She encounters a mentally challenged, fifteen-year-old boy, whom she tries to seduce, and a physically disabled Georgian man. Both of these characters are unable to understand Olya's needs. Kostya, the young boy, does not understand Olya's advances and her need for someone to confide in. Instead, she must trick him into kissing her and coming to her room, when all he wants to do is play trains with her. While Olya hopes that Kostya can provide her with a way to sooth her soul-sick body, the disabled Georgian man evokes feelings of inspiration in Olya. She is amazed that the man without legs is happy, "Он уползает к морю, чтоб глядеть, пока не защиплет глаза, пока не увидится,—оно легче неба. Да, в этом можно летать" (116) [he drags himself off to look at the sea until it tweaks his eyes and he sees it is lighter than the sky—yes, you could fly in it! (103)]. While watching the man, Olya imagines that her psychological state is not as pressing as she had thought. However, the possibility of happiness that the Georgian man connotes is abolished once he tells her, "Видишь, у меня наружность обрезанная, а у тебя внутри ничего не осталось. Видишь, как по-разному с людьми происходит. [...] Зачем женщине ум, а хоть и голос? Ей нужно лицо и ноги" (157) [See, I'm all cut off outside. It's different for different people. With you it's all inside—there's nothing there. [...] What does a woman need a brain for anyway, or a voice? All she needs is legs and a face (149)]. He is unable to understand

her weariness and her position, reducing her to her gender and erasing any feelings of camaraderie that she believed they shared.

The second category of men Olya rejects outright. The Greek waiter, who tries to exchange pleasantries with her, is dismissed because he “горько пахнет” (145) [smelt acrid (135)]. A man who attempts to help her on the beach is discarded because of his deficient Russian. “Зачем лэжишь? Савсэм один? [...] Пайдешь в рэстаран? Зачем лэжать? [...] не найдя больше слов, закричал не гремучем своем языке проклятья” (151) [‘Why you lie here all alone? [...] You want to go to restaurant? Why you lie here?’ [...] unable to find more words he starts yelling obscenities at her in her resonant language (142)]. He stumbles over his words and becomes angry when Olya refuses to respond to him. Yet, the most striking dismissal is that of Olya’s husband: “Оленька как-то увидела Алика в городе. Среди прохожих он сильно заметен был. Оля чуть не заплакала: белесая тубетейка зачем-то на грязно-отросших его волосах, свитых в тугие кудри, щетина на впалых щеках, сутулый и шаркал, как старенький” (119) [Olya saw him once in town. He was strikingly conspicuous amongst the other pedestrians. Olya nearly wept: a whitish skull-cap on top of dirty, unkempt hair twisted into tight curls, sunken cheeks covered in stubble, shuffling along like an old man with bent back and two dark eyes starring fixedly through the life around him (106)]. According to Olya, after a dream in which he imagines that all people are caged inside themselves unable to communicate with others, he becomes distant. The young man “ей очень нравился” (117) [she was very fond of (104)] comes to be marked as an outsider—Jewish and elderly.

The third type of man Olya meets attempts to define her within certain categories instead of listening to her and communicating with her. One evening she happens upon a man on a walk who, despite her insistence to the contrary, keeps diagnosing her with neurasthenia (a state of

excess fatigue due to emotional conflict). While Olya attempts to tell him of her deepest fears, “Да я же сказала: я всех боюсь” (129) [I’m frightened of people, don’t you understand? (117)], he simply dismisses her feelings as a condition that will soon right itself. Another “categorizer” is a man she meets in a park, who turns out to be a government interrogator. He fears vacationers because they “выдают иностранцам наши тайны” (138) [giv[e] our secrets away to foreigners (126)]. He targets Olya as unlike other people and reveals his secretive profession. After listening to the man’s explanation of how he tortures and kills people regardless of whether they are actually guilty or not, Olya, “большой и указательный скрючила клешней и поднесла к носу Хоттабыча-Грязных-Дел, твердо захватила ноздри, сжала и потянула вниз, пониже— в поклон раскаленной дорожке песка, убегающей в розы, в комнату смеха. Он не спешил распрямиться—замер подумать о новом предателе родины” (139) [brought her thumb and index finger together in a claw, grabbed his nostrils and pulled his nose down, lower and lower, to the hot sandy path which wound through the roses, into the room of laughter [the interrogation room]. Not hurrying to straighten up, he froze on the ground to think about this new traitor to the motherland (128-129)]. Here Olya, in a fantastical literary turn, attempts to remove the interrogator’s power. Like Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov, in Nikolai Gogol’s “Нос” [“The Nose”], who loses his nose and subsequently all of his public status, Olya undertakes to de-nose the unjust government agent.

Olya’s encounter with literary figures is not uncommon in her text. The park in which she visits with the government investigator happens to have a statue of Gogol in it. “Оля встала, вытерла пальцы от соплей следователя и пошла мимо Гоголя. Мельком глянула на Гоголя—смертный пот на известковом лбу. Пошла по песчаной дорожке в кусты роз” (139) [Wiping the interrogator’s snot from her fingers, Olya stood up, walked off past Gogol,



and glancing back briefly at the deathly sweat on the statue's plaster brow, she walked down the sandy path through the rose bushes (129)]. As Sadur's novella continues and Olya's process of transformation persists, the textual world begins to breakdown and the fantastical breaches its borders. Olya reframes or literally attempts to recreate a familiar narrative in response to her postcommunist position. However, the interrogator's nose does not come off and the recasting of Gogol proves to be ineffective. Later in the story, another literary recycling emerges when Olya imagines that she is a dog (perhaps the dog in Chekhov's "Lady with a Lap Dog"). While in both instances Sadur enacts a fantastical reframing of Chekhov and Gogol, she also ventures a challenge to the literary greats. Olya throws a look back at the figure in the park, noting that Gogol's statue has a "deathly sweat" as if nervous of his own displacement. In the post-Soviet environment, their works provide a familiar frame, but an unproductive and impotent content.

Besides male characters, female characters also inhabit the seaside resort. While the male figures are challenged and rejected, the women in the short story are depicted as having unnatural relationships with the natural world. One of Olya's fellow borders comes "из шахтерского города Макеевка" (119) [from the mining town of Makeevka (106)] where "у них там нельзя дышать, в легких уголь" (121) [people can't breathe, their lungs are choked with coal (108)]. Other borders come from a town heavily affected by radiation. The people complain of living in a city with unsafe radiation levels full of strontium (a metallic element) that settles in the bones and causes their hair to fall out. Misuse of the natural world has altered their bodies and directed their lives. One of the two women works in a slaughterhouse, the other in a hospital. Olya is not drawn to the women searching for suitors or those that "смеются над радиацией" (126) [laugh about radiation (113)]. Women are represented as bodies (physically or mentally) altered by unnatural cultural or environmental forces. Skomp points out in her article,

that the women in the novella “seem unaware of and perhaps unwilling or unable to control their outsider status. In this sense, the female links naturally with the grotesque” (288). The female tourists and natives are depicted as altered and grotesque bodies. Because of their grotesque nature, the women, like Olya, are separated from nature and themselves. The encounter with the other, both male and female, fails to profit Olya in her search to heal her shattered soul. The journey, as discovery of the self, does not come through an other, but through a spiritual recognition and transformation.

#### 4.3.3 *Spiritual Transformation*

The narrative voice in *Юэ* demonstrates the inaccessible identity that Olya is searching for in the south and her emerging transformation. At the beginning of the novella, the narrative voice is an omniscient third-person narrative with the focalization of Olya. A third-person narrator relates the tale and Olya herself reveals her lack of voice, of identity. Olya laments, “Я теряю голос, я боюсь слышать чужие слова, мне тяжело отвечать. Я боюсь что-нибудь ляпнуть не так” (127) [I have lost my voice, I am afraid of other people’s words, afraid of answering, afraid of saying the wrong thing (115)]. As Olya’s mental condition worsens, the mode shifts to an objective third-person narrative, her name disappears in the text, and she is only referenced with the pronoun “she.” The protagonist’s identity increasingly diminishes and she becomes less interactive at this point as well. Instead of speaking with other people, the only information we receive about Olya is through other characters’ interactions with her. When Olya breaks with reality completely near the end of the text, the third-person narrative shifts to the first-person narrative of Valya, one of the older women who find Olya. As Olya begins her process of transformation from the complete loss of identity to the rebuilding of a new spiritual

identity, the objective third-person mode resumes. In the last page of the text Olya returns as a viable character symbolized by her returning voice. She answers Valya's question, "а как твое имя?" ["What is your name?"] with "Мария,—сказала она" (166) ["Maria," she spoke (159)]. This shifting narrative voice emphasizes Olya's transformation as she releases her identity and then begins to reestablish a new one.

John Freccero, in his book *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, discusses how literature of confession and conversion creates an Archimedean point, a hypothetical vantage point from which the narrative subject can perceive the action at hand and yet remain independent and detached from it. In this manner, Olya removes herself from the narrative, so as to see it in relation to everything else, but yet remain independent of it. Freccero notes, "literature of confession needs a point outside of itself from which its truth can be measured, a point that is at once a beginning and an end" (133). The loss of the self, in this case, produces a formless subject detached from the narrative mode and from cultural and environmental constructs. Therefore, what appears to be a disintegration of sanity (a loss of connection with society and one's own identity) emerges as a neutral perspective from which Olya loses her tormented self and transforms into a yet amorphous subject. Her encounters with others move her further and further away from herself. It is only after the loss of the self and reaching the Archimedean point that she is able to voice a new, yet still indistinct, identity.

As the opening scenes of the novella depict, Olya's problem is one of not being able to connect with the sea due to the crowd of people. However, Olya's mental and physical state changes before conversion to one of harmony with nature. The women who find Olya are forced to leave the main road and walk next to the sea, as Olya refuses to leave the water's edge. The description of nature shifts from simple descriptive techniques early on ("Блеск смыло ветром,

и оно засветилось самим собой” (115) [Washed away by the wind, the sea’s sparkle shines on from its own reserves (102)], to nature as an active member of the pilgrimage group. “Рядом шептали море с Вале́й” (165) [The nearby sea whispered with Valya (157)]; “Верх смотрел, как идет” (165) [The sky watched her walking (158)]; “Сады смотрели вниз, молчали” (166) [The gardens looked down and were silent (158)]; “Море немного шептало, угасало” (166) [The sea whispered a bit and pulled out (159)]. Directly following this last moment, when the sea whispers to Olya, she is able to pronounce her new name. The natural world is revived, just as Olya is, and emerges as another character in the text. Once Olya achieves harmony with nature, she is able to commence her spiritual metamorphosis.

Reconciling with nature materializes as a major theme in the novella. During the course of her transformation, Olya confesses her misuses of nature. Like the other female characters, discussed in the previous section, Olya is at odds with her physical environment. She must make amends with the environment that she has in some way neglected or destroyed. She relates how she killed all of her goldfish as a child and left a stray dog to die on her balcony. Her memory of the dog that she failed to save is the last straw that pushes Olya into a form of insanity. At this point the narrative begins to deteriorate, punctuating Olya’s movement toward the Archimedean point. A dog (real or imaginary) begins to follow Olya and she herself starts to behave like a dog, “Бегала вместе с силой, рычала сильно, разбитый верх отвечал” (154) [Growling, she ran with the power, and the shattered sky responded (146)]. As the passage displays, Olya’s conversion emerges not only as a respite from her own identity and other people, but also as a reconnection with the natural world.<sup>12</sup> After Olya’s final break with reality, following her

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<sup>12</sup> The location of New Athos, the destination of the women’s pilgrimage, provides additional evidence pertaining to Olya’s transformation. New Athos monastery in Georgia, built in the 1880s, was established by Russian Orthodox monks leaving the monastery on Mount Athos in northern Greece because of fears that the Ottoman Empire would banish the Russians from the area during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. The monks of Mount Athos were

expulsion from the holiday resort and the loss of all of her possessions and money, Olya leaves behind her seductress ways, stops eating, and finds a communion with nature that allows her to become a new subject—characterized by spirituality instead of gender, ethnicity, or nationality.

This new spiritual identity starkly contrasts with the national identities encountered in other tangential narratives within the text. Olya relates a childhood story in which she and a friend beat up a German boy who lives in their apartment building. “Нужно бить немцев за красных,—сказала Таня.—Или ты не пионерка?” (115) [“We must smash the Germans for the Reds!” said Tanya. “Are you a Pioneer or not?” (101)]. Later in the text, Olya encounters a group of school children on an outing. The teacher prods them, “Это море мы отбили у турков. Это море—часть нашей родины. Дети, вам нравится море?” (126) [We fought the Turks for this sea. This sea is part of our country. Do you like the sea, children? (114)]. In both of these instances geography is connected to national identity and national narratives. Olya’s transformation rejects national borders and identification.

Sadur’s transformation in no way provides a clear solution to the postcommunist double bind. Olya’s encounter with the other examines post-Soviet identity construction as a complex reorganization of identity in relation to geography. Adlam argues that, “both fragmentary narrative organization and a concomitant absence of an explanatory narrative voice in much of Sadur’s work leaves racist discourse and commentary unchallenged” (54). This unreflective style results in neither an outright rejection of ethnocentrism and racism, nor a completely apolitical narrative. Adlam writes that Sadur has “an ideologically conservative slant that might please neither the determinedly apolitical, asocial stance of contemporary artistic vanguard, nor the critics from whom her work offers glimpses of pluristic social structures” (51). Sadur’s

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practitioners of Orthodox mysticism—Hesychasm. Although Olya’s transformation does not include the acceptance of Orthodoxy or the application of the specific postures, breathing patterns, and prayers of Hesychasm, the text does indicate that Olya experiences an acquisition of inner stillness and spiritual transformation.

transgressive qualities reside in her questioning of ethnicity and borders and not necessarily in her direct assault upon ethnocentrism, racism, and sexism.

Nadya Peterson and Karin Sarsenov both read Sadur's work as a commentary on the position of women in a male dominated society. Peterson suggests, "Sadur departs from the traditions of realistic representation to examine the strategies of the injured and to suggest a view of life as a perpetual battlefield" (167), while Sarsenov claims Sadur "speaks to the uncomfortable position women inhabit when confined to the position culture assigns them" (78). Both critics address Sadur's transgressive performance and yet acknowledge Sadur's lack of answers or escape. I suggest that Sadur's text speaks to the tensions inherent in a post-1989 space through the indecisive qualities of the text. Olya does not uncover a new way out of the postcommunist double bind, but reframes an old motif of conversion and itinerancy. In *IO2*, Sadur secures a pre-national understanding of Russian-ness as transcendental homelessness, connected to marginal religious figures like pilgrims and Holy Fools.<sup>13</sup> Sadur herself noted that the women in the novella are "Christians who help her to understand the nature of love. She has, to that point, been a pilgrim who does not realize that she has been journeying towards a new life. This kind of unconscious journey is an eternal theme in Russian literature" (Salter 73). The holy fool, a prominent motif in Russian culture, poses an itinerant figure who behaves strangely, but inversely also recognizes and reveals truths about society.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Sadur creates for the reader a familiar figure, which one can identify as typically Russian in nature. However, this figure in its disconnection to the real world pushes and challenges the boundaries of what that

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<sup>13</sup> Karin Sarsenov addresses Sadur's novel *The Garden* in "Is it a Sin to Travel?: Itinerant Women in Post-Soviet Narrative" (*Osteuropa* 6. 2006). Similar to my reading of Sadur as a return to pre-national Russian images, Sarsenov's analysis of *The Garden* also notices Sadur's inclination toward the social margins and her rejection of nationality based on (blood and soil) for one based upon pre-modern, religious notions of Russian-ness.

<sup>14</sup> For further scholarship on the holy fool in Russian literature, see Harriet Murav's *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992) and Ewa Thompson's *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1987).

Russian-ness pertains to and definitely rejects a political, national reading of Russian identity. Olya's new identity is not clearly defined, as the pilgrims never reach the monastery in the space of the text, and remains fluid like the natural world she has come to recognize. Her altered perspective, call it insanity or conversion, remains a formless and fluid state.

#### 4.4 Travel Narratives in German and East German Literature

In the case of German literature, writing about travel to foreign lands, similar to the Russian examples, was an early search for a homeland, a definition of Germany as a nation. Works by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, as well as Heinrich Heine's 1844 satirical verse-epic, *Deutschland: ein Wintermärchen* [*Germany: A Winter Tale*], employ travel as a means of nation building and criticism. Modern authors like Thomas Mann in his 1912 *Der Tod in Venedig* [*Death in Venice*] found foreign lands, such as Venice, an unknowable city built on water with turning and twisting streets, productive settings to discuss the transformations that sickness, decay, and excess could have on the stifling traditions and civilizations of Europe.

Following World War II, travel to foreign lands emerges as a nation-building project in different ways. For some like Wolfgang Borchert, the country of Germany is reimagined as a foreign land. In *Draußen vor der Tür* [*The Man Outside*] a German soldier returns from war to find that his former understanding of home does not exist. The hopeless soldier, who finds that every door is closed to him, cannot even commit suicide (the river spews him back) after discovering that his beliefs, his family, and his home have become foreign spaces. For exiles and immigrants, foreign countries served as a reestablishing of identity elsewhere and a coming to terms with the traumatic past. Looking to East German literature, figures like German Jewish writer Anna Seghers, in her novel *Transit* and other short stories like "Der Ausflug der toten

Mädchen” [“The Excursion of the Dead Girls”], address the horrors of the war through travel. Foreign countries provide the distance necessary to approach trauma. Even forty years later Christa Wolf’s 1976 *Kindheitsmuster* [*Patterns of a Childhood*] uses the trope of a family vacation to approach the narrator’s memories of the Nazi regime and her involvement in the party and the war. The travel trope allowed Wolf, a supporter of the GDR, to investigate her role in the Nazi regime and approach responsibility for her actions.

Again after 1989, the travel narrative appears as an investigation of national identity in a transitory time period. Following 1989, a flood of authors writing in German (many of them immigrants) also took up the theme of travel in their works, including Herta Müller, W. G. Sebald, Libuše Monikova, Barbara Honigmann, Wladimir Kaminer, and Zafer Senocak. Travel to foreign lands emerges as a way to revisit Germany identity after unification in a country needing to rewrite a national narrative taking into consideration both the inclusion of foreign immigrants and guest workers, as well as the reworking of two separate (East and West German) war narratives. Angela Krauß’ post-Wende *Die Überfliegerin* [*The Over Flyer*], in a similar vein to all of the writer’s mentioned above, applies the travel narrative in her text at a difficult moment in German history. The foreign again provides the distance and perspective necessary for Krauß to address her loss of the historical past and her new placeless identity.

#### 4.5 Cosmonaut in Foreign Lands: Challenging Space in Angela Krauß’ *Die Überfliegerin*

Angela Krauß (1950- ) published her first post-wall text, *Die Überfliegerin* (*The Over Flyer*),<sup>15</sup> in 1995.<sup>16</sup> Like many of her other later texts, such as *Milliarden neuer Sterne* [*A Billion*

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<sup>15</sup> *Die Überfliegerin* has not been translated into English. Most English references to the text chose to title the text *Flying Over Countries*. Literally, the title translates “one who flies over” and the word as a noun also refers to an over achiever, someone for whom success comes easily. Additionally as a verb, “überfliegen” means to skim through something or to browse.



*New Stars*] (1999) and *Sommer auf dem Eis* [Summer on Ice] (1998), *Die Überfliegerin* focuses on German post-unification tension.<sup>17</sup> Although Krauß' works have not been translated into English and scant scholarship has been done on her work, her novella provides an exploration of foreign lands, not tainted by violence, hardship, and distance as in Sadur's novella, but characterized by fancy, self-discovery, and recuperation. Reviewer Julie Klassen describes the novella, "Far from any documentary style, the narrator's description of people and events combines precise observation with philosophical-psychological reflection and a delight in exaggeration and satire" (948). Bordering on hallucinatory and psychedelic, Krauß' mixture of antiquated diction and embellished metaphors provide an uncommon reading experience. Like Sadur's *IO2*, in which Olya can stretch noses and turn into a dog, Krauß' *Die Überfliegerin* also pushes the boundaries of fantasy and reality. The first-person narrator in the novella travels from her apartment in Leipzig to the United States and to Russia. Her journey is a purposeful mingling of realistic travel narrative and fantastical space travel. Krauß' metaphors and images duplicate her actual journeys in airplanes as imaginative self-aviation. Both Krauß' and Sadur's texts stage metaphysical journeys beyond the physical limitations of the universe. While Sadur ventures into the interior and religious, Krauß contemplates the cosmos and beyond.

The reclusive narrator of Krauß' novella lives in an apartment in Leipzig overlooking the train station. Presumably the text is set after unification; however, the narrator avoids any direct references to political changes that have taken place. Instead, the only indication that the text is

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<sup>16</sup> Krauß was born in 1950 in Chemnitz, a city in Eastern Germany. In 1972, she started her studies in Berlin focusing on advertising and communications. In 1979, she began her studies at Johannes R. Becher Institute for Literature in Leipzig. Since 1981, she has been a free-lance writer and lives in Leipzig. Krauß was awarded the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 1988 and the Berlin Prize for Literature in 1996.

<sup>17</sup> See also Hannelore Scholz's article "'O doch. Es geht um Zukunft, wissen Sie. Was bleibt. Was bleibt.'" (Christa Wolf). Zum Problem Angst und Macht in Texten von Monika Maron, Agela Krauß, und Christa Wolf vor und nach 1989" for further discussion of anxiety and angst in Krauß' early works ("*Ich will meine Trauer nicht leugnen und nicht meine Hoffnung: "Veränderungen kultureller Wahrnehmungen von ostdeutschen und osteuropäischen Frauen nach 1989.* Eds. Helga Grubitzsch, Eva Kaufmann, Hannelore Scholz. Bochum, Germany: Dr. Dieter Winkler, 1994. 105-123).

set after 1989 is the narrator's repeating phrase, "Die Russen sind fort!" (14, 95) [The Russians are gone!].<sup>18</sup> As she watches passenger arrival and departure at the station, the narrator decides that it is time to act. She begins redecorating her apartment by tearing down wallpaper and dismantling her grandmother's sofa. Her bout of deconstruction in the apartment turns into a larger accomplishment—she journeys outside of her apartment to address the changing world that she has been avoiding. On her trip to the United States and Russia, the narrator pushes beyond the limiting categories available to her (East or West, United States or Russia, national geographic borders, and physical laws of the universe) to expose a new viewpoint found in imagination and in the dismantling of imposed boundaries.

Anke Pinkert's analysis of *Die Überfliegerin* investigates Krauß' text through the lens of Kaja Silverman's notion of "world spectatorship." She notes, "Instead of sliding toward an ostensible point of origin—the void or non-being repeatedly invoked in Krauß's story, the text ultimately calls to 'represent what we yearn for in new ways' (Silverman 92)" (Pinkert 10). While Pinkert highlights Krauß' insistence upon perspective and spectatorship as "the postideological fantasy of an agency that continually discloses the world to itself irrespective of social discourse and political histories" (11), I will focus on how Krauß' novella also reveals a spatial reimagining, both in terms of the narrator's physical environment and relating to the text's multifaceted narrative structure.

#### 4.5.1 *Dismantled Space*

Like Sadur's protagonist who travels abroad in the hopes of finding a way out of her "soul sickness," Krauß' unnamed narrator is also searching for a way forward. Although Olya

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<sup>18</sup> All German page numbers refer to Angela Krauß' *Die Überfliegerin* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995). All English translations are my own.

loses an old identity to gain a new one in her travels to foreign lands, the narrator in *Die Überfliegerin* has a much more modest project—to forget the past. During the first section of the text in the apartment, the narrator reveals her personal struggle to simply take an action:

Das ist vorbei. Schon daß der Schmerz eine Reaktion ist, macht ihn jeder Aktion unterlegen. Mit Schmerz beginnt nichts; das Fühlen steht immer am Ende, und selbst dort noch, am Ende, lähmt es. Es nährt den Zweifel; jegliche Tat aber entspringt der Überwindung des Zweifels, und sei es für einen Sekundenbruchteil. Der Tatmensch hat vor die Handlung die Selbstbetäubung gesetzt. Sie ist es, die ich immer verachtet habe, die Selbstbetäubung. So fiel es mir noch schwer, auf die Tatmenschen mit leichter Herablassung zu sehen, zu denen ich nie gehörte. Aber das ist vorbei!” (38)

[It is over. Already that pain is a reaction makes it inferior to every action. Nothing begins with pain; feeling always stands at the end, and even then at the end it paralyzes. Feeling feeds doubt; however, any action arises from the overcoming of doubt, if only for a split second. The person of action puts self-numbing before action. It is this which I have always despised, the self-numbing. Thus, it was still difficult for me to see persons of action (to whom I never belonged) without light condescension. But this is over!]

This passage clearly depicts the narrator’s struggle as one of remembering or forgetting. To act, in her estimation, is to forget, to ignore the pain that she is going through. The narrator’s unsentimental demolition of her apartment and grandmother’s sofa, her travel to foreign lands, and her transformation of reality into dream and metaphor attest to her attempt to act, to move beyond the pain. While Sadur’s Olya travels to discover herself, Krauß’ narrator uses the foreign as a way to escape the past and her present double bind. The current space of open borders, new national narratives, and lost national narratives is debilitating for the narrator.

The journey to foreign lands, in *Die Überfliegerin*, begins in the space of the apartment, moving in the latter two sections to the United States and Russia. In the first section, the narrator proceeds to recount her attempts to “abzureißen” (10) [demolish] her apartment. Her travel to foreign lands emerges as a response to this demolition at home. The reclusive narrator’s redecoration efforts hinge on her desire to become a participant in life. Instead of sitting all day

and watching the people move around the country from the train station, the narrator wishes to act, exclaiming, “Eine Tat. Das ist nicht zu übersehen. Wie hat es mich nach einer Tat verlangt! Alle um mich herum handeln längst” (24) [An action. This is not to be overlooked. How I desire an action! Everyone around me has been acting for a long time]. She explains, “Vor fünf Jahren zerfiel ich in meine Einzelteile. Aber langsam, ohne daß ich es merkte. Zwei Jahre hat es gedauert, bis ich merkte, daß sich die Einzelteile nicht mehr zu einer Tat aufrufen ließen, die von mir stammt” (31-32) [Five years ago I disintegrated into my individual parts. But slowly, without me noticing it. It has taken me two years to notice that I could no longer call the individual parts into an action, which arises from me]. The rearranging of the apartment, of place, directly correlates with the narrator’s identity that has become fragmented. In order to reclaim her sense of self, the narrator undertakes a reorientation of personal space and, as shall be shown in the next section, transnational space.

For the narrator, the act of forgetting begins as a demolition of place and self. She pulls the wallpaper off the walls, tears up the carpet, and dismantles the sofa. The dismantling of the sofa mirrors the narrator’s own attempt to leave behind the past and her inner conflict. The diction used to describe the painful and corporal nature of the sofa’s destruction highlights the narrator’s position:

Ich zerlege alles bis auf das Skelett. Und dann setze ich es fehlerlos wieder zusammen! Drei Stunden lang habe ich meine Füße in Schuhen in die Eingeweide gestemmt, meine Hände von Lappen umwickelt, um einen metallenen Bügel gekrallt, ein Eisenstück von der Stärke einer Stricknadel und der Länge der Sitzfläche, das in Höhe der Kniekehlen mit der Holzwolle verwachsen schien und an beiden Enden im Holzgerippe wurzelte. (40)

[I disassemble everything up to the skeleton. And then I compose it perfectly again! For three hours I pressed my feet in shoes in the bowels, my hands wrapped in cloth, clawed around a metal bracket, an iron piece the strength of a knitting needle and running the length of the seat, had grown together with the wooden stuffing at the height of the hollow of the knee and was rooted at both

ends in the wooden skeleton.]

The sofa is given human attributes—bones and intestines. As a hand-me-down from her grandmother, the sofa holds particular connotations of the past that must be disemboweled, emptied of its interiority, to move forward. In an interesting twist, the narrator admits that even as she disassembles the sofa, she also reassembles it and begins again. This action, perhaps only an imaginary disassemble and reassemble, is presented in the present tense, while the physical tearing apart of the sofa is written in the past tense. The physical labor and work of moving on is presented in the past tense as if to emphasize its finished quality, while the textual and imaginary disassembly and reassembly, the action that the narrator now has control of, is placed into the present tense. The three-hour chore is extremely physical and the narrator makes sure to note that she guards herself with shoes and cloth from the offending object. She protects herself both physically and psychologically (with the past tense description) from the memories contained in the sofa.

The narrator's dismantling of her apartment corresponds to the same dismantling of time and space that occur in the novella. As the narrator begins to tear down the wallpaper in her apartment, she says, "Ich stieß das Fenster auf. Fliegen wären schön. Gleich ist es Mitternacht" (9) [I pushed open the window. Flying would be nice. It is soon midnight]. In this passage, the text shifts from the grounded perspective of her apartment to a bird's-eye view above the train station. The passage also marks a sudden shift in time. As the narrator manages to distance herself from the past and from herself, these jarring changes in time and place occur more frequently. While traveling in the United States, the narrator has a skewed sense of time, mixing up time differences between the United States and Germany. She also confuses states and geography, locating San Francisco in the middle of America. Even the structure of Krauß' text

encourages the unsettling of fact and question. Often after relating a fact, a sentence will end in a question mark instead of a period.

The physical and mental disconnection with the past, which the narrator is leaning toward, occurs coetaneous with the textual breakdown. Again and again fantasy and imagination that defy logic and physical laws intrude upon the text such that it becomes impossible to distinguish between the two. The structure of the novella works such that the narrator moves from the microcosm to the macrocosm. The personal, the apartment must be remade and reimagined in order for the global, the earth to be broached. One could conceive of Krauß' text as a reverse creation story. Instead of delineating, framing, and containing, the narrator functionally unhinges, releases, and unfashions her narrative world.

#### 4.5.2 *Travel Abroad*

Unlike Sadur's protagonist who seeks desperately to find someone with whom she can connect and commiserate, Krauß' narrator denies the encounter with the other, as well as inner reflection. Instead of looking to the other to define the self, the narrator refuses to supply information about herself and often rejects dialogue with other people. Her depictions are superficial with hints of psychological turmoil, most often resulting in denial or avoidance.

While in Michigan the narrator relates the following conversation:

Während der ganzen Zeit, seit meiner Ankunft, hatte ich das Gefühl, langsamer zu werden, als verlöre ich an Dichte, als würde etwas lockerer, blasser, durchlässiger. Wie ist das eigentlich bei dir? Hatte Lilly gegen vier Uhr morgens gefragt. Was? Nun, überhaupt. Ich weiß nicht. Wie? Ich weiß wirklich nicht. Ich gab ihr noch einen Gutenachtkuß. Ich wollte ihr zeigen, daß es keinen Grund gab, sich sonderlich um mich zu kümmern. (80)

[During the whole time, since my arrival, I had the feeling of becoming slower as if I lost density, as if I became a little looser, paler, more permeable. So, what's up with you? Lilly asked at about four o'clock in the morning. What? Well,

generally. Eh? I really do not know. I gave her one more goodnight kiss. I wanted to show her that there was no reason to especially look after me.]

Although Lilly wishes to hear about the changes in Germany and her life, presumably since unification, the narrator avoids the subject even feigning ignorance. Just as she chooses not to reveal outright the temporal setting of the text or to discuss any details of unification or *Ostalgie*,<sup>19</sup> the narrator also ducks difficult questions about the times and herself. Travel for the narrator is not composed of delineating a route or of fixing a home or end destination. Instead, the narrator attempts to escape thinking about herself within a particular national (spatial) or temporal frame. Her escapism leads to hiding, sleeping, sinking, and dreaming.

The United States furnishes little more than jet lag, sleepiness, and a sense of overwhelming capitalism for the narrator. While in San Francisco shopping, the narrator encounters a transvestite sales clerk. She comments, “Hier, mitten in Amerika, versank ich bereitwillig in einem Haufen von Kleidern aus zweiter Hand, der mir deutlich machte, daß die Welt wirklich unendlich ist. Ich sank und sank und wußte, daß ich hier bleiben wollte” (85) [Here, in the middle of America, I sank willingly into a heap of second-hand clothes which revealed to me that the world really is infinite. I sank and sank and knew that I wanted to remain here]. After a page-long description of the type of clothing the narrator hides under, she notes, “Ich sank und fiel und blieb schließlich in einem Lager liegen, dessen weiche Polster, Schlingen, Zipfel und Knoten mich so entschieden in die Szenerie schmiegtten, daß ich mich auf der Stelle vergaß” (86) [I sank and fell and eventually remained lying in a nest whose soft cushion, loops, corners and knots nestled up to me in that scenery that I forgot myself right away]. The narrator imagines herself as if in the scenery of a play, just a character playing her role without agency. The clothes are the only agents of action in this passage and, just as the narrator lost herself in

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<sup>19</sup> A portmanteau of *Ost* (east) and *Nostalgie* (nostalgia), referring to nostalgia for life in the former German Democratic Republic.

the tangled memories of her grandmother's sofa, here she drowns in capitalism. The abundance of the United States not only provides a place for her to escape, but it also evokes an ambivalent position. The transvestite's double identity and the narrator's own description suggest a conflicted position. The words "Lager" and "Schlingen" can also be translated in a more ominous manner referring to "camps," "entrapment," and "nooses." What appears to be known and comforting, the soft and cozy nest of cloths the narrator finds herself in, is simultaneously a prison. The narrator's depiction of a world confining and infinite, depressing and promising appears in her continued employment of metaphors, words connoting double meanings, and fantasy, which offer multiple ways of seeing.

On her journey to Russia, the narrator persists in her strategy of turning the uncomfortable and mundane into the imaginative and freeing. As Pinkert suggests, "[T]he postcommunist subject is reinvented with the capability to dream differently" (9). The third section of the book begins and Krauß makes her narrator's dreams a reality:

Fliegen ist schön. Die Mongolen sind harmlos, sagte ein Fluggast neben mir, aber in Nowosibirsk leben Sie als Amerikaner gefährlich. Ich bin kein Amerikaner, antwortete ich schon ein bißchen träge und schlief den Rest der Reise. Ich drehte mich im Schlaf um, winkelte die Beine, zog die Knie an die Brust wie im Mutterleib, und als ich mich träumend auf die andere Seite warf, kippte das Flugzeug und legte sich ebenfalls auf die Seite, ein Flügel ragte senkrecht in den Himmel. (93)

[Flying is nice. The Mongols are harmless, said an airline passenger beside me, but in New Siberia, as an American, you live dangerously. I am not an American, I answered already a little bit sluggish and slept the rest of the trip. I turned around in my sleep, bent my legs, pulled my knees up to my breast like in the womb, and as I curled myself up on the other side dreaming, the airplane tipped and lay down likewise on its side, a wing rose vertically in the sky.]

Again, this short dialogue reveals that the narrator is not interested in interacting with anyone or in betraying her own identity. Instead, she retreats into her dreams and comments that the world appears to mirror her fancy. Sleeping, dreaming, and fantasy are recurring motifs in the text



providing the narrator escape from the reality of life that requires answers. However, it is also the unsettling style of the text that forces the reader to question the narrator's own sanity. Her fantastical alteration or avoidance of difficult questions about German unification and her own identity suggest that the way forward for the narrator is a forced forgetting, a forced transformation of what appears impossible. It is through fantastical narrative, dreams, and imagination that the narrator accomplishes this feat. The postcommunist double bind cannot be resolved for Krauß in a world where words have double connotations, countries have dueling desires, and transvestite identities are doubled. Krauß reveals the double bind as both liberating and constraining.

#### 4.5.3 *Expanding Universe*

From the apartment, to foreign lands, to the universe, Krauß' text expands outward. The ending of *Die Überfliegerin* is left unfinished and in process. After an elderly Russian woman suggests that the narrator marry her son, the narrator escapes. Her car ride to the airport is reimagined as a flight into the cosmos. Since the beginning of the novella, the narrator has been moving toward a transformation that frees her from the boundaries of earth. From the first pages of the text, the narrator's vocabulary often relates to the sky. The narrator looks out of her window at the moon, at the sun, at the stars. She discusses the heavens and the earth. The general language of "Himmel" and "Erde" [heavens and earth] resituates the gaze of the text from that above the details of apartment, nations, and continents. As mentioned earlier, Krauß posits a reverse creation story that undoes and forgets the narratives of construction, borders, and explanation. She recasts her narrative with a God-like omnipotence that disregards the irresolvable double bind and eludes the issue all together.

The narrator's postcommunist world is one on which "Die Naturgesetze sind nicht auslegbar. Sie sind weder gut noch böse" (33) [Physical laws are not up for interpretation. They are neither good nor bad.]. In the strict yet ambiguous post-wall environment, the narrator is not interested in reconciling an impossible tension. Instead, she uses literature as a mode of escape. In the narrator's imaginations physical laws become mutable and shifting. Eshelman observes that, "In terms of plot, *playing God* is perhaps the most direct way of emulating a transcendent, personified source" (original emphasis, 14). The narrator reclaims her postcommunist position by establishing herself as creator of her narrative and world.

In the text's title, *Die Überfliegerin*, the reader is reminded that the narrator is the "over flyer." The emphasis here being that her travels do not form an itinerary with arrival and departure points, but refer to a method of flying over or, as the verb "überfliegen" suggests, a browsing through from a distance. She does not want to become enmeshed in the details, but to rise above them. As Pinkert notes, the narrator gains "a scopic or visual agency" (10) to transform her isolated apartment view into a universal cosmic perspective. Eshelman suggests that "The spatial haven of the *theist* perspective has been restored—but with a built-in personal or human dimension of self-deception (original emphasis, 51). This self-deception can be viewed as creative license or imagination. The title's most notable and common meaning, as an "over achiever," truly marks the narrator as a subject attempting to step above the usual, to elevate herself to a position of omnipotence, even if that position is implausible.

In the last scene of the novella, the narrator's liberation from the ties of earth finally materializes. The elderly Russian woman tells her, "Alles, was [der Mensch] von draußen erkennen kann, ist er selbst" (118) [All that we can discover from outside is ourselves]. The narrator obviously takes this woman's words to heart and as she has done throughout the entire

novella, she rejects them, saying “Ich fliege gerade ab. Sie blickte mich so erwartungsvoll an, als schickte ich mich an, ein Gedicht zu rezitieren. In diesem Moment fliege ich, sagte ich fest. Sie wies mit ihrem Arm in den Lüster. Ich nickte” (116-117) [I am about to fly away. She looked at me so expectantly as if I was about to recite a poem. At this very moment I am flying, I firmly said. She pointed with her arm in the chandelier. I nodded.]. Instead of accepting the limitations of earthly travel, the narrator reinvents her perspective in order to give herself a different outlook from which to view the world. Even the woman seems to view the narrator’s assertion as some kind of literary production. The narrator exclaims, “Mit einem Satz war ich bei der Tür” (123) [With a dart I was by the door]. Even though she claims that she is going to the airport, the trip to the airport by car becomes a fantastical flight into the air. The passage above holds a similar double movement in that the word “Satz,” which can be translated as “movement” or “dart,” can also be translated as “composition.” Here the narrator acknowledges her power to direct by both action and word. The earlier passage (“Ich zerlege alles bis auf das Skelett. Und dann setze ich es fehlerlos wieder zusammen!“ (40) [I disassemble everything up to the skeleton. And then I compose it perfectly again! ), relating to the dismantling of the sofa, also points to the power of narrative. The verb “setze” can be translated as either assemble or compose. The present tense of the sentences, in comparison to the following past tense action of the tearing apart of the sofa, reinforces the power of narrative to deviate from physical laws, to rebuild what has been destroyed.

This acknowledgement of action and word, which the narrator comes to understand, is reiterated in the last paragraph of the novella. She describes the trip to the airport to leave Russia thus,

[W]ir schlugen aus dem Loch heraus steil in die Höhe, ein Fluggerät im Überschlag, steigen wir auf in die Luftkorridore, und ich sah die

Flugzeugzusammenstöße unter meinem Fenster und die Eisenbahnzusammenstöße in der Luft und die Bahnhöfe aller mitteldeutschen Kleinstädte und lauschte ihrem verloren nachhallenden Klang in den Armen meines Liebsten. Alles zog an mir vorüber in der letzten Minute vor meinem Tod. Ich will nicht sterben! Schrie ich da mit glasklarem, beobachtendem Geist, mit einer ganz neuen Art von Begeisterung. Achtung! brüllte Semjon, wir landen! (124)

[We blast off from the hole precipitously upwards, a flying vessel in a somersault, we ascend on the air corridors, and I saw the airplane collisions under my window and the railroad collisions in the air and the railway stations of all Middle-German provincial towns and eavesdropped on their lost reverberating sound in the arms of my darling. Everything passed by me in the last minute before my death. I do not want to die! I shouted, now with a crystal-clear, observant mind, with a completely new kind of enthusiasm. Attention! Semjon roared, we land!]

The narrator is unchained from the pull of the earth; she flies above the devastation of accidents and collisions below. Through the lens of her new position above the earth, as a narrator of a new vantage point, the narrator is able to reclaim her desire to live in a world where she is not so bogged down by the pressures of the personal and individual. She finds instead, a cosmic vision of the world. For the first time in the novella, the narrator asserts a desire. She is not simply pretending or escaping memory through her travels, but she declares an affirmation of life. The fact that the novella ends with Semjon's voice, suggests that the narrator has managed to pull him into her newly acquired viewpoint. The optimistic, imaginative, fancy that the narrator buys into can be seen in Semjon's own playacting as a pilot. The narrator's creation has been recognized and accepted by an outside source giving it power and credence.

There is a certain agency in narrative that Krauß projects, where the fantastical narrative, pushed beyond the boundaries of the usual, can result in new perspectives that carry over into the reader. While Sadur and Drakulić, as shall be addressed in the following section, employ writing as a means to disrupt legacies of viewing the world in a particular manner, through Russian imperialism and nationhood or Western European dominance over the Balkans respectively,

Krauß uses writing as an equally powerful weapon to look beyond the cultural legacies available and to push the very limits of the physical world.

#### 4.6 Travel Narratives in Croatian Literature

The idea of a travel narrative in Balkan literature, or even specifically in Croatian literature, challenges the notion of the genre. Because of the area's conflicted past, in which an ethnic Croat may be living in the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, or even fascist Italy, the adherence to travel emanating from a home base is already problematic. Without an ethnic or linguistic based notion of nation, the Croatian writer's definition of travel is in itself altered. Writers of Croatian Romanticism, like Matija Mažuranić, and Antun Nemčić, attempted to relieve this problem by consolidating ethnic Croatian feeling through narrative poems influenced by Lord Byron's model of *Childe Harolds's Pilgrimage*, thereby constructing a sense of Croatian-ness. Antun Gustav Matoš, considered the father of Croatian Modernism, wrote travelogues. For Matoš, the setting functioned as the main character. His most famous text, *Oko Lobora* [Around Lobor], employs an impressionistic style in which the landscape functions as the starting point for all of the narrator's rambling thoughts. The region of Lobor (comprised of communities in Krapina and Zagorje County Croatia) is established as the center of all thought, identity, and existence. Like the Romantic writers, Matoš strives to create a geographic sensibility of Croatian identity.

Later texts dealing with Yugoslav attempts at mixed ethnic nationalism, such as Ivo Andrić's 1945 *Na Drini Čuprija* [Bridge on the River Drina] and Miroslav Krleža's 1932 *Povratak Filipa Latinovića* [The Return of Philip Latinovicz], challenge notions of home and away. The characters in these texts may represent multiple ethnicities, but there is a confusion of

nationality.<sup>20</sup> Krleža's protagonist returns from Paris to his childhood home in Croatia to discover the identity of his father. His personal heritage, along with the mixed peoples of Croatia, alluded to in Philip's last name (a Latin and Slavic combination), remain contaminated and unclear. The bridge metaphor in Andrić's famous novel similarly has a cast of characters traveling from parts of Turkey, Croatia, Bosnia, and Austria. In many ways, the notion of travel breaks down in such cases where a stable conception of home is missing. The geography of home is just as multiple and displaced as foreign geographies.

Most travel related narratives in Croatia stem from historical crisis and political dissent: from the Romantics lack of national identity, to Yugoslav literature's confusion of national identity, to Danilo Kiš's 1965 *Bašta, pepeo* [*Garden, Ashes*], relating the journey of his Jewish family from Croatia to Hungary during World War II, to Miroslav Krleža's texts about travels to Berlin, during his expulsion from the communist party. Post-1991 travel writing during the war in Yugoslavia again turned to the construction of a single, pure national identity similar to the writers of Romanticism. Ivan Aralica employed historical travel narratives to insist upon a clear-cut national identity for Croatia, thus insisting upon the ethnic purity and credibility of the Croatian people.

As a writer considered a dissident by the wartime Croatian government, Slavenka Drakulić's text does not emphasize Croatian identity. Her travel narrative is twofold. On the one hand, it rejects the large body of European travel narratives written about the Balkans.<sup>21</sup> On the

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<sup>20</sup> See Andrew Baruch Wachtel's book *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998) for an insightful exploration of the Yugoslav national narrative and its shifting incarnations throughout its history.

<sup>21</sup> No text about the Balkans is as well known as English journalist and novelist Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (New York: The Viking Press, 1943). West's narrative of her 1937 journey through the first Yugoslavia describes the Western image of the Balkans as a region characterized first and foremost by violence and conflict. Besides the large volume of literature about the Balkans prior to Yugoslavia's dissolution in 1991, a new onslaught of travel narratives about the war emerged as explanations of the war: *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin, 1993) by Misha Glenny a journalist from Greece; *The Road to Kosovo: A Balkan*

other, it attempts a travel narrative without the fixed position of home and nation that the genre and her wartime national discourse calls upon.

#### 4.7 Travel Writer in Foreign Lands: Erasing Borders in Slavenka Drakulić's *Café Europa: Life After Communism*

Between 1992 and 1996 novelist and journalist Slavenka Drakulić (1949-) wrote *Café Europa: Life After Communism*, an autobiographical collection of essays.<sup>22</sup> The essays' roving narrator moves from country to country in search of the location where the socialist past and "our longing for Europe and all that it stands for" meet (4). Drakulić's assortment of essays ranges from sociopolitical critique to personal narrative to descriptive exposition. From beginning to end, Drakulić's narrator travels across both geographic borders and psychological borders utilizing the framework of travel narrative. Unlike Sadur and Krauß' metaphysical explorations of place after socialism, Drakulić's text centers on geographic, cultural, and political notions of place. While Sadur's protagonist and Krauß' narrator escape the physical boundaries of their texts and their narrative worlds, Drakulić's narrator searches for practical solutions within the

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*Diary* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999) by Greg Campbell, journalist from Colorado; *The Impossible Country: A Journey Through the Last Days of Yugoslavia* (Boston, Massachusetts: D. R. Godine, 1994) by Brian Hall, American journalist and travel writer; *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) by American journalist Robert D. Kaplan; and *Origins of a Catastrophe* (New York: Times Books, 1996) by America's last ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmermann.

<sup>22</sup> *Café Europa* was originally published in English in the United Kingdom by Abacus in 1996. The first American edition was published in 1997 by W.W. Norton and Company. It has never been translated into Croatian, nor published there, due to the author's strained relationship with the Croatian government. The war rhetoric and extreme nationalism in Croatia at the height of the war in Yugoslavia was nothing short of automated and habitual propaganda. On December 11, 1992, an anonymous article, "Witches from Rio, Croatia's Feminists Rape Croatia," in the Croatian nationalist newspaper *Globus* accused Drakulić and four other women (one of whom was Dubravka Ugrešić whose text is addressed in Chapter Three) of being unpatriotic in their anti-war attitude by focusing on the general sufferings of women in war, instead of specifically on the sufferings of Croatian and Muslim women at the hands of Serbian men. Drakulić was discounted as a "witch" and eventually driven into self-imposed exile. For further scholarship on the "witches" of Croatia, see Vesna Kesic's "Confessions of a 'Yugo-Nostalgic' Witch." *Anna's Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe* (Ed. Tanya Renne. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997. 195-200), as well as her article "From Reverence to Rape: An Anthropology of Ethnic and Genderized Violence." *Frontline Feminisms: Women, War, and Resistance* (Eds. Marguerite R. Waller and Jennifer Rycenga. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000. 23-39).

newly organized post-1989 spaces. Her employment of the travel narrative opens up the highly political concerns she confronts. The power dynamics involved in the act of tourism (in occupying someone else's space and in gazing at the other) invites a postcolonial reading of the text.<sup>23</sup>

The Balkans have been a subject of European travel writing, in a similar vein to Orientalist travel writing. Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* takes an in-depth look at "Balkanization" as a "crisis of representation" (9). According to Todorova, "'Balkanization' not only had come to denote the parcelization of large and viable political units but also had become a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian" (3). The dominant characteristic of the Balkans became its transitory status of in-between-ness or "imputed ambiguity" (Todorova 17). Unlike Orientalism, the Balkans have no element of escapism, mystery, or appeal to the West: "The Balkans [...] with their total lack of wealth, induced a straightforward attitude, usually negative, but rarely nuanced" (Todorova 14). In other words, the image of the Balkans holds neither the fear of the unknown other nor the appeal of the mysterious other. In this construction, the Balkan region represents the fear of a Europe changed from within by the infiltration of the other, in its "semi-Oriental" and "semi-colonized" state (Todorova 16).

The immense literature on narratives of travel relating to the power structures of postcolonialism testify to the constitutive nature of both scholarship on narratives of travel and those narratives themselves. Postcolonial writers, feminist scholars, and critics all attest to the power of literature to construct identities and national narratives. Postcolonial theorist Mary

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<sup>23</sup> Admittedly the postcolonial connection to postcommunism is tenuous and fraught with tensions that must be dealt with. However, the postcommunist reimagining of self within narratives of travel often address new identifications in relationship to the Western or global world that are similar to the postcolonial situation. See the postcommunist-postcolonial discussion in the "Are We Postcolonial? Post-Soviet Space." Forum: Conference Debates. *PMLA* 121.3 (May 2006): 828-836.



Louis Pratt proposes in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* that travel writing is traditionally a male dominated field of mastery and discovery. However, Pratt points to women's travel writing as an intervention into a genre dominated by the imperial, hegemonic gaze. Through the dynamics of "transculturation," in which the marginalized culture is able to select and invent their images of the dominant culture, Pratt discusses how the subordinate female gaze negotiates its relationship to the dominant structure, including its genre and cultural narratives, by disrupting the binary of "us" vs. "them" and "self" vs. "other." Unlike the majority of travel narratives whose narrator is a visitor to the area they are traveling in, Drakulić's narrator rides the line between tourist and local, "us" and "them." She posits a position that is neither inside nor outside of Europe. Instead of allowing Western Europe to determine what Eastern Europe is, the narrator proposes a reversal. The reversal that the narrator proposes is complicated by her binary, revealing the lack of borders and binary between "them" and "us." The figure of the tourist in Drakulić's travel narrative reinterprets national borders and national gazes.

Because of the staunch opposition to much of Drakulić's work I suggest a more nuanced reading of *Café Europa* through the lens of postcolonial theory and travel literature in general. Critics like John Kraljic dislike the way in which Drakulić has become the primer voice in the United States and much of Europe on all things Balkan, citing that media like, "*The New York Times* relies on the opinions of a handful of intellectuals, on the extreme left or on the extreme right, who have minor roles in the daily political process in Croatia" ("Croatia and Croats in 'The New York Times'"). Kraljic notes that Yale historian Ivo Banac wrote in *Foreign Policy* (Winter 93-94) that Drakulić's work has "an air of a child or an uninformed outsider" ("Croatia and Croats in 'The New York Times'"). Even fellow feminists report the dangers of her work that as

Jelena Petrović claims shows “how even anti-nationalist writing can fall into the trap of essentializing otherness and of repeating the stereotype of the Balkans as the dark province of bickering barbarisms” (“The Women’s Writing in the 1990’s—Manipulation vs. Subversion”). By engaging with Drakulić’s *Café Europa* as a direct confrontation of travel narratives and the gaze of foreign lands, I argue that Drakulić’s text can be analyzed as a productive rethinking of place after socialism. The double-sided, transnational (or transcultural to use Pratt’s terminology) subject that Drakulić puts forward provides a thought-provoking manner of dealing with the double bind. Instead of essentializing and reducing all to an unspecified, unified identity, Drakulić enacts a textual *negative capability*, holding on to both her Croatian and her postnational identities. This strategy creates a productive shifting of identity and space, forcing readers to question their narrator’s subjectivity, as well as their own subjectivity.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4.7.1 *Open and Closed Borders*

Drakulić’s narrator’s geographical position is never stable within *Café Europa*. The narrator has not one home, but four—Vienna, Zagreb, Istria, and Stockholm. Her geographic movement and shifting home base leave little room for a constant national identification. Just as the narrator’s departure positions are multiple, so is her itinerary. In the twenty-four essays in the

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<sup>24</sup> The “right” to tell the story becomes a contentious post-Yugoslav positioning. Scholars like Renata Jambrešić Kirin worries that war narratives by writers like Drakulić, whose experience of war is mediated, will come to stand as representative of war experience, thus effacing the immediate experiences of others. In this manner, mediated war narratives could come to be seen as a minimizing of immediate war and trauma. She suggests that the hybrid subject position of Croatian mediated wartime narratives like Drakulić’s—both “insider” and “outsider”— encourages a postmodern identification of “the mutant’ with hybrid cultural identity and of *no fixed abode*” (original emphasis 81). A “mutant” subject position whose agency is in its instability may be acceptable for mediated narrators of wartime trauma who choose their situations, but this unstable identification is complicated by immediate narrators for whom an unstable, hybrid identity is not empowering. Jambrešić Kirin fears that what she believes Drakulić and other mediated war narrators propose with their narratives is a “homogenous community of immigrants and individuals in Diaspora”(82) that bypasses the experiences of those whose positions are not chosen. Although Drakulić’s text indirectly addresses the war in Yugoslavia, she focuses mainly on the postcommunist experience. Drakulić’s autobiographical mode heightens the tension with scholars like Jambrešić Kirin. My project suggests that Drakulić’s text does not put forth a hybrid identity, but an unresolved subjectivity characterized by “negative capability” and travel narrative’s “transculturation.”

book, the narrator “visits” sixteen countries, including an impromptu memorial for the dead communist dictator Ceausescu in Romania, an interview with Croatian concentration camp director Dinko Šakić in Buenos Aires, a personal lecture in Tel Aviv, a shopping outing to buy a vacuum cleaner in Croatia, a report on the marriage of the Serbian war criminal Željko Ražnatović-Arkan in Belgrade, and a personal diatribe on the state of dental health in America. The narrator’s shifting locations insist upon a collective group of people who are experiencing life after socialism and, even more importantly, a collective that is already changing the face of life in Europe, as well as physically living and occupying space in Western Europe.

Drakulić’s travel narrative functions as a reversal of the “imperialist eye” of travel narratives whose authors are travelers in the area, not natives. Drakulić strategically challenges prior restrictions on travel by writing herself across borders, while maintaining a postnational subjectivity anchored in her Croatian nationalism. Her travel narrative form allows her to rise above the strict wartime nationalism in Croatia by shifting between open international borders and her own personal, everyday experiences in Croatia divorced from the war. By positioning her narrator as occupant of multiple nations and subject positions, she acts as a model of transnational subjectivity. The transnational subject fits neatly into neither the postnational (“free floating signifiers without psychic and material investment in one or more given particular geopolitical spaces” (Lionnet 8)) nor the national (identity based solely upon one’s geographic, ethnic, linguistic position). Instead, as Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih aptly differentiate, “By contrast, minor transnational subjects are inevitably invested in their respective geopolitical spaces” (8). Drakulić struggles to find a position of agency in the double injunction and invests herself in both her current émigré status and in her Croatian nationalism. Of important note is

that the transnational refuses the “either/or” theory that one must be either international and open or national and closed.

Drakulić’s narrator removes borders by writing them out of existence and yet the rules of travel and borders impose a strain. The title of the book alone exposes the tension between the idea of “Europa” (a postnational notion) and the psychological divide between its Eastern and Western parts. The narrator depicts the end of socialism as the colonization of Eastern Europe by Western Europe. Thus, despite her insistence that national identifications are nonfunctional in Europe proper and that Eastern Europe is always already a part of Europe, the material reality of geographic and psychological borders remain. She uses the travel narrative as a form of political dissent to force readers to reimagine these rigid categories. Noemi Marin argues that the narrator’s paradoxical position as both insider and outsider is a form of resistance that endorses dissent and attempts to “legitimize resistance and transform discourse” (682). This transformation comes about through both personal and collective refashioning and acknowledgement, which I contend proposes a subjectivity that lies within the tension between national and postnational. Drakulić proposes a revision of Eastern Europe’s self perception in relation to the West, as well as an examination of the past.

The individual’s transformation is one of identity. “Café Europa,” the first essay in Drakulić’s book is an observation on the images of Western Europe that appear in many Eastern European countries: “In Prague, Zagreb, Bratislava or Ljubljana and other Eastern European cities, towns—even villages—you can eat, drink, sleep, dress or entertain yourself in places with Western European and, to a lesser extent, American names” (9). According to the narrator, the image of the West that so permeates Eastern Europe is a desire to “belong to a preconceived idea of Western Europe” (10). Yet she questions, “Can’t you see that we belong to the West too,

except that we have been exiled from it for half a century?” (10) The narrator’s position is precarious because she moves between a transnational identity in the concept of Europa and a nationally situated identity. She argues that in order for Eastern Europe to not be subsumed into Western Europe it must first recognize that it is in fact part and parcel of Europe. Eshelman notes “performatism suggests a *reversibility* of center-periphery” (original emphasis, 17). There must be a revamping of the national and personal postcommunist narrative in order to access the transnational space Drakulić purposes.

An acknowledgement of the past accompanies this transformation. Drakulić argues that in order for Eastern Europe to reconcile its position in the double bind it must come to terms with its past. This memorializing work of socialism and WWII forces an interaction with the past that postcommunist Croatia specifically denies, ignores, or erases. Thus, although transnational identification is the ultimate goal for herself and her fellow Europeans, the narrator maintains that one must create memory and deal with the past in order to find agency in that position. Drakulić’s text focuses on creating beautiful unities amidst the turmoil of the postcommunist double bind by finding modes of reconciliation (through center-periphery reversal, through acknowledgement of shaming historical moments, and through utopian, theist positions).

In “A Croat Among Jews” and “My Father’s Guilt,” the narrator takes responsibility for her personal connection to the Nazi and socialist past. While in Israel, she acknowledges her personal accountability for the death of Jews in Croatia during World War II. The narrator displays the reclaiming of history as a current problem that cannot be dismissed simply because she personally was not the one doing the killing: “I realized that I had to deal with it not as an historical matter but in its present form” (140). In other words, the narrator questions what she is

doing today, what Croatia is doing today, to acknowledge their blame as complicate actors.<sup>25</sup>

Eshelman notes that performatist texts stress reconciliation and continuity. In a country where the first postcommunist president wrote a book minimizing the number of people who died in Croatian concentration camps and where a member of that fascist government is now a member of the Croatian parliament, the accountability to the past is not recognized.

“My Father’s Guilt” emphasizes the unbroken ties to a socialist past, which many postsocialist nations, like Croatia, tried to erase. Drakulić’s narrator comes to terms with her father’s involvement in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. She argues, “I believe we can’t just forget, but we have to deal with our recent communist past, as well as our fascist past. It is all part of our identity and of our growing up as individuals, citizens, and, for that matter, as a nation” (157). As this statement explains, the narrator’s writing of self, of a community, and of a nation is intimately intertwined. Her self-analysis serves as a model of transition, and her testimony as a public forum. The reader of *Café Europa* is the international and public audience who witnesses the narrator’s reclaiming of the past. She notes, “Every Croatian citizen bears a responsibility for his silent support of this government’s attitude towards the holocaust” (140). The narrator not only acts as tour guide, but as confessor as well. According to that setup, the audience becomes both tourist and witness.

Even in the essays in which the narrator moves outside of Croatia, the stories that she narrates are primarily about citizens who in their everyday actions are also coming to terms with their current relationship to their governments. For instance, when she travels to Romania in “A Nostalgic Party at the Graveyard,” people are gathering at the former communist dictator’s grave

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<sup>25</sup> Drakulić returns to the theme of culpability in her 2004 *They Would Never Hurt a Fly: War Criminals on Trial in The Hague* reporting on the war crime tribunal in the Hague with fictional additions and personal essays on the role of average citizens in the war in Croatia (New York: Viking, 2004).

on his birthday. In their own way, the people are coming to terms with their responsibility for the past. The new Romanian government executed the communist dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, and it is at his gravesite where he lies next to his wife that they gather. The narrator explains, “There they were, ordinary Romanians, giving a name to the anonymous grave of Elena Ceausescu, the name that had been denied her by the new men in power” (124). The Romanians erected a wooden cross and scrawled a name upon it, a name that the new government had tried to erase and forget. Thus, the narrator testifies not only to her own personal acts of taking responsibility, but also of the collective communities’ everyday acts. She writes into history and into a public forum the very history that new postcommunist governments attempted to forget, and the reader acts as witness to that telling.

#### 4.7.2 *Local and Tourist*

Although Drakulić’s text does not have the fantastical elements that Sadur and Krauß implement in their texts, her oftentimes naïve and overly optimistic position straddling the double bind creates a God-like stance of omnipotence. *Café Europa* is complicated by the tension between insider and outsider. Mónica Szurmuk argues, “travel writing relies on the existence—real or imagined—of two distinct communities” (8). Drakulić’s narrative, although articulating two distinct communities (Eastern Europe and Western Europe), works to erase the divide while simultaneously upholding distinctions between them. Two of the narrator’s homes in the book lie in Western Europe and two in Eastern Europe. The goal of the travel writer is to describe the foreign to an audience that is familiar. Szurmuk suggests, “In travel writing [...] being a traveler is resignified as being home, as having the authority for writing and describing. Those who are described, in contrast, are the foreigners, foreigners to the community of readers

that the travel writer is creating in his/her text” (8). The narrator’s position is complicated because she is not visiting a foreign place; she is visiting places in which she considers herself a part of the “we.” At the same time, the narrator, by virtue of the fact that she is reporting on the lives of foreigners to a familiar audience, acts also as a member of the Western audience that she is trying to reach. The narrator becomes both onlooker and looked at for the reader, both a tourist and a local citizen. This position is a space of movement where the narrator is both spectator and spectacle. Likewise, because of the narrator’s shifting positions, the reader also experiences a similar unstable shifting between ignorant other and knowing native. This narrative structure creates a form of theist, omnipotence with a narrator who is all things.

The Western readers of *Café Europa* are introduced to a foreign land that must be translated to them. The narrator plays the role of tour guide, relaying dates and historical events. In “A King for the Balkans,” the narrator recites the history of the Yugoslav royalty. In “Buying a Vacuum Cleaner,” the narrator relates the cost of food: “the local currency [in Croatia], the kuna, is 40 per cent overvalued, according to the International Monetary Fund, and is not even convertible. Food prices are on average 30 to 100 per cent higher than in Austria, one of the most expensive countries in Western Europe” (112). She acts as the audience’s guide, who provides the historical background, social and economic, as well as cultural information. In this manner, the narrator constructs a framework from which to understand the country.

In “The Trouble With Sales,” the narrator struggles between her two positions of outsider and insider. While her Swedish husband suggests that she buy expensive, quality items that will last longer, the narrator has trouble doing so. She is intrigued by sale items, and despite her ability to pay for quality clothing, the narrator finds herself drawn to the sale racks. In fact, she adds zeros to items that she buys so that her husband does not know the true cost of an item. She



reveals, “He does not grasp that I do not care too much about quality. Look, I am used to things falling apart, I explain to him. I don’t feel guilty when I buy them, because I am not throwing money away by paying too much. But that is exactly how you do throw money away, he argues. Maybe, I say, but I haven’t learned that lesson yet” (73). In this instance, she is both the narrator who explains the tension of postcommunist citizens who must redefine their habits in a capitalist context and the spectacle being examined.

Although Drakulić is our narrator, she is also the foreigner she is describing. Szurmuk suggests that where narrators position themselves within the text is important because it is there that they constitute themselves as both the object of the gaze and the subject of the gaze (10). When Drakulić’s narrator is at home or traveling in a Western country, she also acts as our guide to understanding the ways and lives of people there but from a postcommunist viewpoint. Thus, in the essay “On Bad Teeth,” where the narrator examines hygiene habits in the United States, she provides commentary and exposition of both positions, as object and subject of the gaze in each position. After seeing countless advertisements in America that feature models with glowing smiles and watching as her American friends’ children are fitted with braces, the narrator questions the symbolic meaning behind this dental obsession. “Seeing the boy’s brace, the connection between health and wealth in America became a bit clearer to me” (128). The narrator decides that because dental care is not free in America good teeth symbolize the wealth needed to take care of your teeth, as well as the value of the self that the process entails. Good teeth show that you take responsibility for yourself and you care enough about your self to spend the money on your teeth. After Drakulić narrates her exposé on the state of teeth in America, she reveals, “the whole nation had bad teeth” in Croatia:

It is a question of perception. In order to improve your looks, you have to be convinced that it is worth the trouble. In other words, we are dealing with a

problem of self-esteem, with a way of thinking, rather than a superficial question. Bad teeth are the result of bad dentists and bad food, but also of a specific culture of thinking, of not seeing yourself as an individual. What we need here is a revolution of self-perception. (132)

The narrator's analysis of both American and Croatian dental habits position her both within and outside of each, where she acts as translator of both sides to both sides.

The narrator's subject positions within the text tell much about her own imagining of self. Smith suggests, "the narrator is always engaged in the process of self-locating, and self-locating becomes an occasion for self-scrutiny, more or less consciously undertaken" (27). Thus, as the narrator of *Café Europa* writes a collective, relational story, she also writes her self and her shifting subject position into the text. From the perspective of the Western reader, Drakulić takes the identifying power of Western Europe and gives it to Eastern Europeans suggesting that they create their own identity. Eshelman contends that, "In performatism, victims are once more *centered*; that is, we are made to focus on them as objects of positive identification rather than as markers of endlessly receding alterity and resistance" (original emphasis, 17). The "others," the postcommunist Eastern Europeans, are elevated to a central position in the text. They are the makers of their own identity and the translators of their own nations. Drakulić speaks for herself instead of letting other travel narratives attest to her or her country and encourages others to do the same. In this case, (calling upon Gayatri Spivak's famous article) the subaltern can speak.

#### 4.7.3 *Transforming the Self*

Within any travel narrative, it is important to decipher where the narrator's journey begins and where it ends. *Café Europa* starts with the essay "Café Europa" and ends with "Bosnia, or What Europe Means to Us." In the chapter "Café Europa," the narrator describes the newly named cafes throughout Eastern Europe marked by Western names: "Youngsters are

seated round, fake-marble table, most of them drinking tea, probably because that is all they can afford here—the prices tend to be Viennese, too. But the nice thing about this café is that with your tea you get a small biscuit on a paper doily, just as, I suppose, it is served in Vienna” (7). In this chapter, through her descriptions of the changes in public spaces that take on Western European images, the narrator shows how people in Eastern Europe are attempting to remake themselves as Western Europeans. The narrator contends, “It symbolizes how people in those countries see themselves—or rather, where they would like to see themselves” (9). At this initial starting point, she claims that Eastern Europeans deny their own culture and buy into the belief that they are lacking because they are not Western Europeans. However, she attempts to resist this belief explaining, “Most likely, Europe is what we—countries, peoples, individuals—make of it for ourselves” (13).

In “Bosnia, or What Europe Means to Us,” the book’s end destination, the narrator tells the story of a family from Bosnia who were forced to leave their home because of the war and now live in Sweden. The family is the new face of Europe—immigrants and those in exile, people in motion. The narrator attempts to subvert the Western European construction of Europe by placing Eastern Europeans as the constructors of a European image: “It was us, the Eastern European, who invented ‘Europe’, constructed it, dreamed it, called upon it. This Europe is a myth created by us” (212). She suggests that Eastern Europeans imagined themselves as the lesser, as those lacking, as those in need of saving, and now they should come to realize that they are the definers of the situation instead of the defined. Just as the native narrator of the travel narrative assumes the position of tour guide, controlling the “imperialist eye,” the collective community is encouraged to claim its right to define itself. Their equally heterogeneous identities as transnational subjects can construct what Europe means to them, not what Europe means to

the West. Like the Bosnian family in Sweden, Eastern Europeans are already a part of Europe. There is a discrepancy between the transitory spaces of capitalism found in cafes, markets, shopping centers, and airports and the private spaces of families already established all over western Europe.

In the essay “People From the Three Borders,” the narrator describes a section of Croatia called Istria, which she utilizes as a utopian-like region from which a transnational subject position can already be seen. This region historically has changed hands between Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia. The narrator explains, “Istria is a territory of ten distinctly different Slavic dialects and four dialects of Italian origin” (162). The significance of this area is that people in Istria identify themselves with shifting nationalities. She notes, “To the Croat reporter, these people said that they were Croats, to Italian reporters that they were, of course, Italian and the Slovene reports were told they were Slovenes” (163). These identifications are not contradictory according to the narrator, rather a different way of perceiving identity:

But the locals saw no contradiction in claiming three different nationalities; neither would they describe themselves as opportunists. In their view, the misunderstanding lies in the fact that the journalists were posing a simple ‘either-or’ type of question. To the reporters, it was impossible for one person to be Croat, an Italian and a Slovene all at the same time. The journalists saw the villagers’ nationalities as political categories; the villagers were talking about their own identity, of which their nationalities were only one aspect. (163)

This example of a transnational subject position is the ideal imagining of identity for Drakulić as subjectivity in motion. The narrator’s friend in Istria says, “[N]o one will force us to identify with just one part of what we experience as our identity. I dream of that day, when nobody will hate me because of the food I prefer, my memory, or the language I speak” (169).

The example of Istria, the narrator’s travel and motion throughout Europe as borderless within the text, the reversal of the imperialist eye of travel narrative, and the multiple subject

positions of the narrator and the collective community produce a highly political argument. Drakulić's text is a process of self, collective, and national reimagining and repositioning. The text focuses on the process of self-creation and construction, where the self, the collective, and the nation can write itself into being as transnational subjects. Drakulić acknowledges that in everyday situations, like when an Eastern European crosses a Western European border, transnational identification and movement is not so easy. Despite the stereotypes and tensions between Eastern and Western Europe, Drakulić retains a fundamentally optimistic belief in the ease of coming to terms (for both sides) with the idea of a Europe, not divided by East or West.

The reimagining of practical concerns, like border crossing and shopping centers, is starkly contrasted with the psychological turmoil that Sadur's and Krauß' characters face. Yet in a similar manner, Drakulić attempts to approach a transformative perspective. While Sadur elevates the self through humility, Drakulić follows Krauß in elevating the narrator to an all-powerful creator who can glide over worldly limitations. Drakulić elevates the self to a position of agency removed from the intervening forces of oppression, discrimination, and psychological turmoil. In its own right, Drakulić's image of Istria paints just as fantastical and utopian an ending as Sadur's and Krauß' texts.

#### 4.8 Reading Postcommunist Foreign Lands

The issue of perspective emerges in all three of the texts addressed in this chapter. Each writer creating a theist or God-like perception that elevates the narrator to a position freed from the limitations of the natural world. Drakulić focuses on viewing the self in a new way in relation to the other by reversing the center-periphery, Sadur turns to spiritual outlooks, and Krauß advocates leaving the other and the world behind in a universal gaze from above. From loss of

the self, to loss of the past, to reframed borders, travel to foreign lands functions in these three texts as a way to move forward. The end destinations may not be the stable home and identity that traditionally occur in a travel narrative; however, an act of transformation does take place in each text. Olya's newly emerging voice, Krauß' narrator's desire to live, and Drakulić's narrator's unrestricted subjectivity. Each narrator exploits the power of narrative, whether that is in Sadur and Krauß fantastical elements or in Drakulić political essays, to challenge the status quo and introduce new vantage points. The role of the tourist in all of these texts prompts an altered and challenging method of viewing the postcommunist world. Postcommunist narratives addressing foreign lands are linked by their instance upon seeing in a new manner both the lands available to them and the travel narratives of the past.

There is a distinct separation between Drakulić's text, which adheres to a knowable and changeable problem of seeing based upon representations of the Balkan regions and the unknown sickness found in Sadur and Krauß' texts. The ill-formed transformations of Sadur's protagonist and Krauß' narrator require a revelation and a process that remains indistinct and in process. Both texts posit characters in an unknown state of illness, who muddle their way through their journeys, without guidance, agency, or clarity. While Drakulić's text foregoes fictional fantasy, her autobiographical essays focusing on everyday concerns appear just as fanciful. The attainment of sight, of an altered perspective, is the imperative connection among the three texts addressed in this chapter. Whether it is a spiritual view mirrored in nature, a cosmic survey from space, or a controversial transnational viewpoint, the postcommunist travel narrative forces an alteration of sight and a transformative perspective on both the part of reader and writer alike.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion: “A New Race of Nomads”<sup>1</sup>

When Alvin Toffler announced a new nomadic subject in 1971, the post-1989 subject with its unfathomable placelessness remained inconceivable. Following the end of socialism, we can declare once again that another “new race of nomads” has appeared. The postcommunist “nomad,” while still fragmented and placeless, is also torn between its postnational position and its desire for a stable identity construction. The reorganization of space after 1989 prompted a reinterpretation of geographic, location-based identity that subsequently altered and transformed other identifiatory categories, such as nationality, ethnicity, and gender. The geographic basis of this postcommunist transition suggests an affiliation with transnational studies and the burgeoning transnational subject.

Transnational studies usually focuses on diasporas, migration, and immigration. The unsettling of geography and physical movement mark the transnational subject who attempts to construct an identity while displaced between two sources of geographic identification—a past ethnic or national identity and a new diasporic identity. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih write in the introduction to *Minor Transnationalism*, “transnationalism designates spaces and practices acted upon by border-crossing agents, be they dominant or marginal” (5). The literature addressed in my dissertation treats characters living in exile, characters on journeys, and characters in stasis. All of these subject positions and relationships to geographic locations open up the term *transnationalism* and pose a new approach to the notion. The postcommunist space is indeed a place of border-crossing agents; however, in the post-1989 context we encounter subjects whose displacement and subsequent reevaluation of identity takes place at “home.”

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<sup>1</sup> Toffler, Alvin. *Future Shock*. New York: Bantam Book, 1971. (75)

I propose extending the concept of *transnationalism* to postcommunist studies as a mode of analyzing the multilocality of postcommunist identity. Although many of the texts that I explore in my dissertation do address issues of movement (from exile to travel), in the postcommunist context the dislocation and space of cultural exchange and influence takes place within the newly formed nations. The characters in my dissertation do not necessarily need to cross national borders in order to experience transnationalism. Because of the sudden and increased introduction of mass markets and international media, the postcommunist nation becomes a place of dislocation and cultural mingling. As Lionnet and Shih point out, “The transnational [...] can be conceived as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center” (5). From the standpoint of the marginalized postcommunist nations (Russian, Germany, and Croatia) instead of from a Western European perspective, we can see how transnationalism is not always a process that occurs within the dominant culture. The place of minor transnationalism is the postcommunist nation and the transnational subject is the postcommunist agent whose identity has “become fragmented within the nation-state context” (Kastoryano). To arrive at an analogous relationship between the center and the margin is the struggle that appears in the texts treated in this project, as the writers are forced to work out the push and pull of postcommunist dynamics. In other words, the contestation at hand is between the national and the postnational, the local and the global.

Lionnet and Shih point to minor transnationalisms not as something that is “contained within or easily assimilated into the dominant forms of transnationalism” (7). Instead, “the minor and the major participate in one shared and transnational moment and space structured by uneven power relations” (7). Postcommunist transnationalism is such a process whereby Eastern Europe



assumes just an important and dominant role as Western Europe. Derrida's representation of the end of socialism as an "earthquake" (19) and an identity changing historical moment for Western Europe points to the impact that postcommunism has not only on postcommunist nations, but on a global scale. The establishment of a postcommunist Europe (and postcommunist world) has forced a reevaluation of physical space, gender and ethnic relations, and even historical narratives. The focus on the secluded apartment in Vedrana Rudan's and Monika Maron's texts, on the enigmatic city in Dubravka Ugrešić's, Barbara Honigmann's, and Olga Mukhina's texts, and on foreign countries in Nina Sadur's, Angela Krauß', and Slavenka Drakulić's texts all highlight the importance of place and the quest for stable identities in the fragmented postcommunist environment.

In the search for geography-based identities, a pattern of themes emerges. The return to notions of stabilizing identity based upon locality, such as the nation-state, introduces a renegotiation of gender relations and ethnicity constructed by national narratives. Honigmann, Rudan, Mukhina, and Maron struggle to redefine gender relations. For these characters, the postcommunist reorganization of space forces a reevaluation of the roles between men and women. The female characters in Krauß' and Sadur's texts disassociate themselves from men altogether preferring to construct an identity on their own. These romantic relationships uncover not only a redefining of gender after socialism, but also a reconsideration of ethnicity. Ethnicity comes to the forefront in romantic relationships pressing characters to confront ethnicity in the interplay between self and other. From Rudan's mixed Serbian-Croatian narrator, to Honigmann's complicated German-Jewish narrator, to Mukhina's and Sadur's xenophobic characters, the reinterpretation of geographic identity leads to a renewed negotiation between self and other, whether that other entails a romantic partner or a person of differing ethnicity.

Another thread found in these texts is a reconsideration of national narratives, especially pertaining to World War II as they relate to the founding myths of socialist states. Barbara Honigmann's *Eine Liebe aus nichts* [*A Love Out of Nothing*], Slavenka Drakulić's *Café Europa: Life After Communism*, and Dubravka Ugrešić's *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* [*The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*] force questions of official national narratives as their characters confront their own individual reweighing of identity after 1989. Honigmann addresses the post-war anti-fascist myth of the German Democratic Republic, while Drakulić and Ugrešić confront Croatia's role as a Nazi puppet state during World War II. The reevaluation of the other and of the past is a direct effect of transnationalism. The newly acquired interaction between nations, the reorganizing of borders (significantly established after World War II and thus constructed from post-war narratives), and the spread of global media and mass markets demands a reconsideration of identity, especially an identity structured on post-war divisions.

The same negotiation of national narrative, especially pertaining to World War II, can be seen in current cultural and political debates. In Russia, the Kremlin has recently established a presidential commission to examine and counteract what it considers examples of "historical revisionism" that harm Russia's image.<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, Russia and Poland have been involved in heated disputes over historical interpretations of events in World War II concerning the beginnings of the war. Polish historians accuse Russia of seeking to seize Poland's historical territory in the war, while Russian historians argue that the Red Army helped save Poland from Nazism.<sup>3</sup> Newly released Kremlin records regarding Margaret Thatcher's opposition to the possible reunification of Germany before the fall of the wall also speak to the significant impact

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<sup>2</sup> See Anya Ardayeva's article "Russia Counters Criticism over World War II Role." *Voice of America*. (17 September 2009) 30 September 2009 <<http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-09-17-voa28.cfm>>.

<sup>3</sup> See the article "Russia Warns Poland over 'Genocide' Resolution" printed in *Javno* from the American Free Press. (24 September 2009) 30 September 2009 <[http://www.javno.com/en-world/russia-warns-poland-over-genocide-resolution\\_276257](http://www.javno.com/en-world/russia-warns-poland-over-genocide-resolution_276257)>.

the end of socialism had and continues to have on official national narratives.<sup>4</sup> Ethnic and foreign relations are likewise highlighted in post-wall Europe from Germany's Turkish guest workers, to Russia's ethnic tensions,<sup>5</sup> to Croatia's ethnic separatism.

Steven Vertovec suggests that transnationalism has been broached as "social morphology, as type of consciousness, as mode of cultural reproduction, as avenue of capital, as site of political engagement, and as (re)construction of 'place' or locality" (4). For the purposes of this project, I approach transnationalism as a type of consciousness that affects the (re)construction of place. Vertovec designates a *diaspora consciousness* "marked by dual or multiple identifications" (6). For the postcommunist subject, there is not necessarily a physical diaspora, but a postcommunist syndrome<sup>6</sup> or consciousness that can be discerned in representations of place in literature. In 1996, Robin Cohen attested to the idea that "transnational bonds no longer have to be cemented by migration or by exclusive territorial claims" (516). The postcommunist subject mirrors a diasporic subject's consciousness, in which Vertovec notes, "Compounding the awareness of multilocality, the 'fractured memories' of diasporic consciousness produce a multiplicity of histories, 'communities' and selves" (7). The postcommunist turn to performatism and to place in literature can be viewed as a new *translocality*, in which identity emerges across nation-states or situated communities. The postcommunist subject reveals an agent struggling to find or even produce an identity-structuring locality.

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<sup>4</sup> See Michael Binyon's article "Thatcher told Gorbachev Britain did not want German Reunification." *The Times Online* (11 September 2009) 30 September 2009 < <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article6829735.ece>>.

<sup>5</sup> Just one example of the rise of xenophobia in Russia can be seen in Boris Kagarlitsky's article "Literary Fascism" in *The Moscow Times* ((17 September 2009) 30 September 2009 < <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/383416.html>>.). He notes the rise in anti-Semitic tracts that are available in mainstream Russian bookstores, along with books on Russian history that depict historical events as a series of international schemes against Russia.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 1: Introduction, pages 4-6, for a detailed discussion of Richard Sakwa's notion of the *postcommunist syndrome*.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's term *minor literature*, unmistakably borrowed by Lionnet and Shih as they developed their concept of *minor transnationalism*, serves to remind that minor literature, as well as transnationalism, "is effected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (16). The task of minor literature/transnationalism is, "How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language" (19), or in relation to one's national identity. The literary and transnational double bind at work in these texts is always at odds with itself. The challenge of the post-1989 writer is to build up and to take down. In the search to reframe national and literary borders, there is much that is left out of the frame. The writing of minor literature and presumably minor transnationalism is by definition a political act. The study of recuperation and transformation invariably leads to questioning of what has been erased, covered, and left out.

Where does the minor transnational stand? There is a distinction here between scholars who conceive of transnationalism as either from "above" or "below." Transnationalism from above usually extols postnationalism and utopic opinions of globalization, such as the scholarship found in *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity*.<sup>7</sup> The texts dealt with in this dissertation are not satisfied with what has been called postnational or nomadic subjectivity—"free floating signifiers without psychic and material investment in one or more given particular geopolitical spaces" (Lionnet 8).<sup>8</sup> Instead, as Lionnet and Shih aptly differentiate, "By contrast, minor transnational subjects are inevitably invested in their respective geopolitical spaces" (8). The postcommunist subjects in these texts struggle to find a position for themselves in the places

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<sup>7</sup> *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity*. Eds. Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> For further scholarship, see Caren Kaplan's *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), May Joseph's *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), and Aihwa Ong's *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

that they occupy as they encounter the double injunction. All of the texts in this project (successful or not) strive toward a unified identification that is based on a geographic location. Geographic positioning after 1989 gains renewed primacy in these texts and for these characters.

In contrast to the positive analysis of globalization found in transnationalism from above, transnationalism from below includes dystopic views of globalization that offer counterhegemonic forces of resistance.<sup>9</sup> Much of diaspora and postcolonial theories of transnationalism, such as the work done by Gayatri Spivak, speak to the resistant forms of minority positions.<sup>10</sup> The forms of transnationalism in my dissertation are multiple. Like Lionnet and Shih, I contend that transnationalism need not make an “either/or” distinction between those that celebrate and those that condemn. The double injunction found in these postcommunist texts is a continuum and the role of a “minor” nation or literature is not relegated to a form of resistance, but is in participation and conversation within a shared transnationalism.

This understanding of transnationalism lays the foundation for performatism<sup>11</sup> as a literary aesthetic emerging from global capitalism and grounded in a new approach to unity and closure despite the impossibility of such in our multicultural, postmodern world. Raoul Eshelmann observes, “The criterion for performatism is ultimately not *whether* you are for or against global capitalism, but *how* you go about formulating your position within it” (original emphasis, 32). What makes the unifying, transformative style of performatism applicable to the post-wall situation is its flexible structure. Conservative and liberal writer alike can utilize the trend. Writers Slavenka Drakulić, Dubravka Ugrešić, and Vedrana Rudan implement performatism as a

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<sup>9</sup> See Benjamin R. Barber’s *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996) and *Transnationalism from Below*. (Eds. Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998) for examples.

<sup>10</sup> Gayatri Spivak “Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World,” *Textual Practice* 10.2 (1996): 245-269.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 1: Introduction, pages 14-19, for a review of Raoul Eshelman’s notion of *performatism*.

device of resistance and dissidence, while others like Monika Maron use it as characters attempt to connect with their new global identities. The characteristics of performatism encompass the seriousness of reconciliatory plots that approach family, ethnicity, and identity within oftentimes somber or even traumatic circumstances, as seen in Dubravka Ugrešić's *Musej bezuvjetne predaje* [*The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*] and Barbara Honigmann's *Eine Liebe aus nichts* [*A Love Out of Nothing*], just as well as it treats the absurd and comic transformations in Monika Maron's *Animal triste*, Angela Krauß' *Die Überfliegerin* [*The Over Flyer*], and Nina Sadur's *IOz* [*The South*]. The techniques of reframing and transformation encountered in postcommunist literature expose the challenges of the double bind and the ways in which writers textually navigate through or around the post-1989 reorganization of space.

The transnational space of exchange and participation is explored through spatial representations of apartments, cities, and countries. Via an exploration of place within postcommunist literature, I analyzed the tensions inherent to transnationalism (the double bind), as well as how literary representations of space and relationships with place uncover a new approach to identity construction, as well as to literature after 1989. The three nations represented—Russia, Croatia, and Germany—provided very different geopolitical experiences. From dissolution, to war, to reunification, the three nations furnish diverse reactions to the double injunction. The cross-cultural comparison reveals a myriad of responses, some of which attempt to reject the postnational and others that wish to embrace it. In general, the Croatian texts resolved their double bind by merging incompatible elements. This uneasy relation between the national and the postnational creates spaces in which impossibility, imagination, and discordant stances in no way erase or nullify the other, but create a subtle unification of identity. The German texts on the other hand attempt to pacify the conflicting positions and can be read as an

appropriation of identity, usually West German identity (sometimes successful and sometimes not). Likewise, the Russian texts work to quell the double bind by resolving the tension. Yet, unlike the German texts that embrace the global and postnational (to greater or lesser success), the Russian texts espouse a protected national space often characterized by fear, xenophobia, and denial.

This comparative analysis does not uncover a duality between those that refuse to acknowledge and deal with the double injunction and those that do not. Instead, the texts disclose a full continuum in which the negotiation of transnationalism is not always positive or easy. The formation of identity within these conditions remains multiple, diverse, and contingent upon context.<sup>12</sup> In the end, the performatist texts of postcommunist writers encourage a new way of reading and perceiving the world after socialism. Anke Pinkert suggests in her reading of postcommunist German cinema, “that the notion of the end of history demands new ways of thinking about human lives and the relational ties that sustain them. This style of reflection will require reparative rather than deconstructive modes and it will need to be open to the ever-changing and provisional nature of humanity, and in fact history” (*Film and Memory* 216). Like Alex’s altered narrative in Wolfgang Becker’s 2003 film *Good Bye Lenin!*, in which he reverses the narrative of the fall of the wall whereby West Germans desire to enter the East, we are invited to momentarily imagine a different outcome. Alex performs for his mother what is an impossibility and yet the audience and his mother enjoy the ruse. Alex’s farewell to his mother, and symbolically to socialism in general, underscores the beauty of an imagined narrative, the comfort of reconciliation, and the relief of agency rediscovered even if it is fanciful and self-created.

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<sup>12</sup> As Ludger Pries points out, transnational scholarship must be historical situated with well-defined groups for analysis. He notes, “Sometimes the terms *transnational* and *transnationalism* are used so vaguely and indistinctly that they are likely to become ‘catch-all and say nothing’ terms” (original emphasis, 1).

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