ARTICLE – RETHINKING MINOR LITERATURES

The Poetics of Movement and Deterritorialisation in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014)

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Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) can be read as a poetic autobiography in which memory spaces constitute themselves by means of a poetics of deterritorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari) and multidirectionality (Rothberg). Borderlines between past and present and different memory discourses are put into motion, as topoi of travel literature and physical movement are employed within an aesthetic of association. This article shows how the travelling subject moves between historical and fictional places, through physical and virtual spaces of European memory, interlinking the author-narrator's experience with that of Jewish family members, as well as with a wider global community. Challenging major memory discourses and narratives of belonging, as well as boundaries between fact and fiction, corporeal and digital movement, the performative 'minor' language of the narrative creates lines of flight and opens new spaces of memory.

Tweetable Abstract: Deterritorialisation and multidirectionality: How corporeal and virtual movement in *Vielleicht Esther* creates lines of flight and spaces of memory.

Introduction

In her 2014 interview for *Die Zeit*, Katja Petrowskaja described her book *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) as a non-literary, factual piece of writing.[1] Nevertheless, *VE* constitutes a highly poetic autobiographical narrative, in which 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 509) break through grand narratives and individual memory discourses, while revealing the fine line between fact and fiction and opening multidirectional memory spaces. This is partly achieved through a poetic language of movement, employing topoi of travel literature, physical and virtual movement within an aesthetic of association and distortion of reality. This article aims to show how the travelling subject finds itself in a continuous movement of locating itself in, and being dislocated from, places within and beyond European memory.

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[1] English versions of passages from *Vielleicht Esther* (=*VE*) given in square brackets, including page numbers, are taken from the translation by Shelley Frisch, *Maybe Esther* (=*ME*), published by Fourth Estate in 2018. Page numbers given in round brackets in the text without further detail refer to the German original.

Movement interlinks the author-narrator's experience with that of Jewish family members whose histories she follows – by means of archival and online research, and in her imagination – but also with a global 'Internet-Judentum' (52) [Internet Jewishness (*ME* 43)] and a wider, non-ethnic community.[2] Her journey through physical and virtual, social and political spaces in the present traces the movements of family members in the past, criss-crossing the paths of others, but also traversing existing national, ethnic, temporal and conceptual boundaries, thus creating a multidirectional (Rothberg) and multimedial space of memory. In the following, I will demonstrate how this poetic and highly self-reflective language of movement can be described as one of 'deterritorialization' in the sense of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*Kafka* 26).[3] This means a performative language which challenges, or puts into motion, existing boundaries between past and present, reality and imagination, and between different media; a language that transforms historical, social and cultural borderlines by means of creative lines of flight, moving between and opening spaces of memory delineated by narratives of family history, archival research and territorial concepts of belonging.

Such lines of flight as both a condition and form of human creativity are a central idea in the joint works of Deleuze and Guattari.[4] According to them, it is our desire to escape the status quo, to leave an established territory, which leads us to innovate. Lines of flight in this sense can be read as creative bolts of energy, operated by the author, that break through the cracks in a system of control and shoot off on the diagonal. By the light of their passage, they reveal the open spaces beyond the limits of what exists, a process of 'deterritorialization' of what is the norm. This idea also comes to the fore in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986 [1975]). Here, a 'minor' art practice or literature denotes a form of expression that involves the 'deterritorialization' of a major language, aesthetics or literary tradition and a 'becoming stranger' within one's own tongue (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 26) – with the crucial disambiguation that '[a] minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language' (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 16). A minority defines itself by separating its own language 'from the axiom constituting a redundant majority' (Conley 167 see Patton).

Kafka thus emerges out of a major language, or dominant literature, as a voice of a marginalised minority, in this case the Prague-German Jewish community, reappropriating the major language, transforming it into an innovative 'minor' aesthetics, and by doing so also questioning the major language's discourses on a social, political or economic level. While Deleuze and Guattari are close to Foucault in stressing collective forces in this process, authors are essentially seen as individual actors who may open such aesthetic lines in a text. In their book on Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari focus on 'deterritorialization' with regard to the way words and sounds lose their representative meaning, being taken over by 'creative utilization' in Kafka's writing (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 23), thus transforming the major language on a structural level. The concept of deterritorialisation can, however, be applied to different levels of literary and non-literary discourse. The latter is more pronounced in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987 [1980]), in which deterritorialisation is defined as the complex 'movement by which "one" leaves the territory', where a territory may be a system of any kind, conceptual, linguistic, social or affective. In literature, this 'one' can be applied to the author. The

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[2] In the following she is referred to as the 'narrator'.

[3] The spelling in the citation is in accordance with the US American spelling in the original text. This also applies to citations in the following.

[4] The line of flight or escape is a concept that runs through Deleuze and Guattari's work, with the French word 'fuite' in the original translated both as 'escape' and 'flight'. After it first emerges as a defined concept in *Anti-Oedipus* [1972], it then morphs as it passes though *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* ([1975] 1986), *A Thousand Plateaus* ([1980] 1987) and *What is Philosophy?* [1991]. Despite its fluctuation and varying uses, which is in line with the dynamics underlying Deleuze and Guattari's metaphysics in general, it maintains its basic function in creative processes of deterritorialisation (see Thornton).

'movement' 'is the operation of the line of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 509). It is worth noting that even though the concept of flight assumes a movement from one place to another, this seems not to be the case with the line of flight: 'The line is between points, in their midst' (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 299). On the one hand, such 'rhizomatic' thinking allows for multidirectional memory, '"knotted intersections" of history and memory that cut across categories of national and ethnic identity' (Rothberg 2010 8), as Godela Weiss-Sussex points out in her contribution to this issue. On the other, however, it is the momentum implicit in the concept of the line of flight that also allows one to think in terms of a crossing, transgression or interference of such categories and their boundaries, rather than their dissolution. A poetics with this *momentum* as a central feature still constitutes a multidirectional memory, and can be described as an 'assemblage' or 'rhizomatic writing' in terms of Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus* 18, 24).

I am mainly interested in how lines of flight are created and operated on a textual level in *VE*. My reading embraces the dynamics inherent in this process, the question from which territories, or narratives, the author escapes by creating such lines and, in turn, where she positions herself. Petrowskaja, I would argue, can be seen as part of a contemporary, German-language European literature that opens new 'Eastern' or post-Soviet Jewish perspectives on Holocaust memory through autobiographical writing, and which can be regarded as a minor literature within the German literary canon (as well as in German and post-Soviet culture). Rather than suggesting the impossibility of remembering twentieth-century European history, the deterritorialisation of major German, German-Jewish and Soviet memory narratives in *VE* envisages different modes of remembering from a second- or third-generation Jewish *and* post-Soviet point of view. Major axioms in this case refer to grand narratives related to nation-states or political systems, and individual memoirs reflecting these, but would also include prevalent modes of memory in contemporary German writing. Before analysing narrative structures in *VE* as lines of flight through and from existing narratives, I will give a brief overview of these.

In her article from 2017, Jessica Ortner states that 'a considerable number of Eastern European migrant authors of Jewish origin are currently lifting Holocaust memory in a German context to a new level' (Ortner 38). Writing in German about events taking place in the 'European East' – in formerly communist countries which tended to be regarded as far away from a (West) German perspective during the Cold War, and as a cultural 'Other' in different historical periods – they expand the German framework of memory, from a national to a transnational one.[5] Exploring interconnections between two great European traumas, the Holocaust and the Gulag (Assmann; Leggewie and Lang), these writers contest the view of the Holocaust as the pivotal trauma of Europe, and at the same time recontextualise the Holocaust in its specific local environment (Ortner 39).

According to Maria Roca Lizarazu, *VE* taps into this 'Eastern European turn' (Haines) in recent German-language literature, with German-Jewish writing in particular having seen a surge in voices from Eastern Europe since around the turn of the millennium.[6] Many of these young authors, including Dmitrij Kapitelman, Lena Gorelik or Olga Grjasnowa, no longer centre their writing on the Holocaust but tackle the issues surrounding transnational Jewish identities in modern-day Germany.[7] However, as Lizarazu points out, Petrowskaja's narrative

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[5] On the transnational trend in recent German-language literature, see also Herrmann and others.

[6] This was already part of the rationale on the part of the jurors who awarded the 2014 Bachmannpreis to Petrowskaja. In a report by the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) on the jury's decision-making process, its chairperson, Burkhard Spinnen, is cited welcoming *VE* as part of a growing European and non-European 'Ost-Element' [Eastern element] to contemporary German literature (ORF).

[7] While some of these are children of the 'Kontingentflüchtlinge', i.e., Jewish families who in the early 1990s moved to Germany from the former Soviet Union, Petrowskaja came to Berlin with her German partner, after having graduated from the University of Moscow, to escape Putin's increasingly authoritarian rule.

differs from this, 'by foregrounding the postmemorial search for a family history that is deeply marked by the Second World War and the Holocaust' (Lizarazu 169). This includes *VE*'s participation in an ongoing trend of autobiographical family or multigenerational novels about the Holocaust and Second World War since the 1990s, which explore literary ways of relating to a history that the narrator has not personally experienced (Eigler 88; Fuchs), the latter a phenomenon Marianne Hirsch refers to as 'postmemory'.[8] In many of these texts, this quest takes the form of a journey through time and to historic places.

Petrowskaja, born in the Ukrainian capital Kiev in 1970, grew up in a family where being Jewish, and a specific historical experience linked to it, was not much talked about. This was at least in part due to the official discourse in the atheist Soviet Union, which excluded religious or ethnic belonging from its grand narrative of twentieth-century history and identity. In *VE* the narrator traces the history of her ancestors through the twentieth and back into the nineteenth century, with a focus on those who fell victim to the Holocaust and other instances of historical violence. Her journey leads her across Europe, to cities like Vienna and Moscow, to the Warsaw Ghetto, Babi Yar and Mauthausen – all of them in some way sites of her family history. On her journey she is again and again confronted by 'Leerstellen' [voids] in this history,[9] which constitute a central feature of the narrative. Realising that she can no longer rely on the memories of her family members, she turns to historical sites and archives. Scholars such as Jessica Ortner or Dora Osborne have argued that *VE* is a pivotal example of an 'archival turn' in memory culture (Stoler 2002), which signals not only the central position of the archive in retracing the past, but also the increasing critical scrutiny of the status and role of archive in this endeavour (Ortner 2017; Osborne 2016). This archival turn seems to apply to an even greater extent to third-generation Jewish writing, also in international literature, with younger writers tending towards explicitly factual writing or meticulously researched (meta-)historical fiction (Aarons 2016; Catani 2016).

In the following I intend to show that, while participating in these trends, Petrowskaja's narrative maps lines of flight which open spaces of memory and belonging not only beyond dominant German and Soviet narratives, but also going beyond the archival impetus described by Osborne. The crossing and movement of borderlines between fact and fiction means that concepts of factual – and historical – truth also underlying second- and third-generation postmemorial narratives of family history are challenged.

Mapping Voids and Lines of Flight

In *VE* the narrator's biography and family history are linked to specific – historical – places. These are both remembered by her or other family members, and physically explored and experienced by the narrator on her present-day journey. The subject's movement between places connects these to each other and to different points in time, by creating an embodied literary space in the sense of Michel de Certeau (1988), who in turn draws on ideas from Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*. This space is therefore not merely a mental construct, but both physical and symbolical, real and constructed.[10]

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[8] Postmemory 'approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects', and is characterised by an oscillation between emotional closeness and distance from the events of the one engaged in 'postmemorial work' (Hirsch 31). Hirsch uses family inheritance as one model for postmemory. However, postmemory can go beyond such 'familial' frameworks towards an 'affiliative' postmemory (Hirsch 111, emphasis in the original).

[9] Taking into account seminal texts on the topic by Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauß, Bernhard Dotzler defines such a 'Leerstelle' broadly as a more or less openly marked absence, and points out that the (im-)possibility to close or leave such gaps open results from the language system itself. The understanding of 'language' in this sense can also be extended to Deleuzian major and minor languages.

[10] This would, for example, also apply to Edward Soja's concept of 'place', in contrast to Homi Bhabha's largely immaterial, metaphorical, thus placeless 'Third Spaces'.

The fragmentary character of the space constructed in the course of the journey is reminiscent of a mosaic with gaps and 'Fugen' [joints] (12). According to the Ukrainian writer Juri Andruchowytsch, the 'autogeographic' (*Kleines Lexikon* 12) interlinking of biography and geography through an associative aesthetic which distorts reality is a feature of a Central Eastern European 'geopoetics', a minor literature that reclaims European identity and history from narrow Soviet discourses (Andruchowytsch, 'Restaurierungsarbeiten'). *VE* is also to be seen in this context of post-Soviet writing in various languages.[11]

The narrator sets out on her journey to fill gaps in her family history and, by virtue of this, build a community beyond her immediate family. On the one hand, she feels a sense of pride in being part of a family lineage whose members have placed high value in educating themselves and others throughout different generations, thus representing a European tradition of Enlightenment (*VE* 91, 94).[12] 'Die Meinigen' [my own] (28, 34), that is, those family members whose histories the narrator traces tend to be exceptional individuals in their respective social or political contexts. This applies to Simon Geller, an enlightened Jew who in around 1860 founded a school for deaf-mute children in Vienna to teach them to speak, and, in doing so, began a family tradition to be continued through several generations. Since deaf-mute children were regarded as mentally handicapped and found themselves excluded in traditional Jewish culture, where spoken language played a central role, enabling them to speak was a significant step towards their emancipation and potential inclusion. On the other hand, many of the narrator's ancestors seem to have found themselves in outsider roles which made them victims rather than progressive agents. This also applies to her great-uncle Jeguda Stern, an unemployed non-party member who was classified as mentally unfit by the Soviets, following his attempt to assassinate a German diplomat in 1932 in Moscow.

The narrator identifies with their outsider status within and beyond an imagined historical Jewish community, as enlightened Europeans and victims of violence and persecution. Their traces form part of the topography of European history she maps on her journey. Some of these traces point to Petrowskaja's affiliation beyond a wider ethnic Jewish community, or to marginalisation within this community, due to physical disability or gender.[13] However, systematic persecution affects primarily Jews in *VE*, as members of an ethnic community who find themselves categorised according to binary concepts of identity and excluded within power structures based on these concepts. The narrator's filiation with the suffering of family members as part of a greater Jewish community through references to the colour yellow and the star as a motif (28), or to an inherited wound, thus makes her part of the Jewish community as a community of victims: 'Ich hatte keinen Grund zu leiden. Trotzdem litt ich, von früh an, obwohl glücklich und geliebt, umgeben von Freunden' (23) [I had no reason to suffer. Yet I did suffer, from early on, although I was happy and loved and surrounded by friends (*ME* 17)]. This quasi-physical experience of inheriting a traumatic past as a contagion or contamination draws on the postmemorial trope of affliction (Lizarazu 173), which differs noticeably from the narrator's identification with an enlightened tradition.

In the course of her search, the narrator becomes increasingly conscious that by virtue of her Jewishness and the history associated with it, she is brought to a place beyond choice,

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[11] See Egger, 'Literarische Grenzbewegungen', 346–9.

[12] See also the narrator's interpretation of her aunt's recipe for Kwas as a utopia: 'als ob Europa und die Juden aus einer Wurzel stammten […] dass alle Juden, auch die die gar keine Juden mehr waren, sich zu den letzten Europäern zählen durften, schließlich haben sie alles gelesen, was Europa ausmacht' (31) [as though Europe and the Jews were descended from one root (…) that all Jews, even those who were no longer Jews at all anymore were among the last Europeans, having, after all, read everything that constitutes Europe (23)]. On the role of Jewish education culture as the 'Kitt' [glue] holding together the now lost multicultural Central European society, see Schlögel 14.

[13] An example for both seems to be the narrator's great-grandfather Ozjel's deaf-mute first wife Estera (130).

historical facticity and understanding in a Kantian sense. At the same time, however, this constitutes a line of flight beyond assemblages of ethnic identity: Trying to comprehend the scale of the massacre of Jews committed by the Nazis at the ravine of Babi Yar in Kiev, one of the largest mass executions of the Holocaust, confronts her with an experience of alterity – and community – going beyond family or ethnic boundaries, to the level of humanity itself. When walking around the site of the killing, she is struck by the absence of humanity it signifies for her, also in relation to the official commemoration of the event: 'Was mir fehlt, ist das Wort Mensch' (191) [What I am missing, is the word human (*ME* 171)]. Inextricably linked to the narrator's place of childhood, Kiev, it is a site of genocide, a crime against humanity, with members of her own family among the victims: 'Kiew war einer von vielen Orten, wo es passierte, man sagt, es sei das größte zweitägige Massaker des Holocaust. 33771 Menschen tötete man in zwei Tagen. Eine merkwürdig genaue Zahl' (186) [Kiev was one of many locales where it took place; it is said to be the largest two-day massacre of the Holocaust. Thirty-three thousand, seven-hundred and seventy-one people were killed in two days. An oddly precise number. (*ME* 166)]

Babi Yar constitutes a central *Leerstelle* in the mosaic of the family history and, in this way, provides a key focus for the narrative. It is a historical site of genocide, located on the eastern margins of Europe, which seems to have been equally forgotten within Ukrainian, (post-) Soviet and German discourses of memory. Having been turned into a public park, the site bears hardly any traces of what happened here. The few monuments the narrator finds are largely hidden from view behind bushes and commemorate only select groups of victims. In contrast, Kiev being named as one among many other sites of genocide as a crime against humanity in *VE* stresses the paradigmatic function that Babi Yar and the Holocaust take in terms of a multidirectional memory. At the same time, the scale of this massacre, with the overall number of victims even exceeding the number given above, and its incomprehensibility, both on a rational and affective level, also makes it a *Leerstelle* in Paul Celan's sense, demanding a process of memory in spite of its incomprehensibility, without any closure imaginable, as an example of human suffering made tangible through remembering individual experiences of loss. These are lines of flight that can only be created in literature, but which can also affect perceptions of reality outside the literary text.[14]

The multidirectional narrative in *VE* takes account of members of different communities, and individuals who happened to be in the wrong street at the wrong time, killed in Babi Yar before and after the two-day-massacre: 'Kriegsgefangene, Partisanen, Matrosen der Kiewer Flotte, junge Frauen, […] Passanten, die von der Straße weg festgenommen wurden […], ukrainische Nationalistem, die zuerst mit den Deutschen kollaboriert hatten' (186) [prisoners of war, partisans, sailors in the Kiev fleet, young women, […] passersby who were apprehended right on the street […], Ukrainian nationalists who had first collaborated with the Germans (*ME* 166)]. In the face of the ongoing marginalisation of Babi Yar in major Soviet and Ukrainian narratives, the narrator does find positive examples of a minor, multidirectional art and its impact, even in the context of those major narratives. Such beacons of hope, tracing a forgotten event through narrative, in spite of all physical traces having disappeared from the site, include the work of Anatoly Kuznetsov who witnessed the massacre as a child and began to bring visitors to the site as well as collect interviews by other witnesses (191; *ME* 170) for the first book on Babi Yar, published in 1966. One of the visitors at the time was the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko. The publication of Yevtushenko's poem on Babi Yar after his visit, in which he empathises with the Jewish victims and mourns the lack of remembering from

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[14] Such an understanding of literature is not limited to Deleuze and Guattari but also shared by more recent works on the basis of discourse and systems theory, e.g., Jürgen Link.

a human perspective,[15] in a Russian literary journal in 1961 had a considerable impact on a number of levels:

> Die Menschen riefen einander an, erzählte meine Mutter, wir weinten vor Glück darüber, dass man über das Unglück nun endlich öffentlich sprach. Ein russischer Dichter hatte sich der jüdischen Opfer angenommen [...] In seinem Gedicht waren es nicht mehr die Toten, die Toten der ewig anderen, und es stand gedruckt in der Zeitung. (190)

> [The people were shouting to one another, calling each other up on the phone, my mother told me; we were crying for joy that the catastrophe was finally spoken about in public. A Russian poet had shown sympathy for the Jewish victims (...) In his poem it was no longer their dead, the dead of the eternal Others, and it had been printed in the newspapers. (*ME* 169)]

'Within a month the poem had been translated into seventy languages' (*ME* 169), and set to music by Shostakovich in the adagio of his Symphony No. 13. Yevtushenko's poem proposes a literary form of memory that maps lines of flight, thus creating new connections between existing narratives of identity and interlinking these with others on a European and global level. However, as the narrator also notes, with regard to the possible impact of literature on antisemitism engrained in political structures in the post-Soviet, Orthodox Kiev it would take a further six years before at least a small monument was erected, and she points to ongoing suppression of public acts of commemoration on the part of the Ukrainian state to the present.

Translation as a Metaphor of Movement

The encounter with voids or gaps, both on the part of the reader and the author, is a structural feature of the text. It affects real and imagined spaces of belonging the narrator places herself in at various points in her own life and family history. An example of this, which also illustrates to what extent these questions have been part of the narrator's everyday life and that of other family members, is her attempt as a child to identify with an idealised, imaginary Poland. This Poland is both the birthplace of her grandmother Rosa and a place of longing for her father, a centre of Central European high culture from the family's perspective. His, and her own, longing is linked to ethnicity being marginalised in the Soviet system that the child grows up in. However, while the family's Jewishness does not seem to feature in the internationalist Soviet discourse, it remains present under the surface, also resulting in certain career paths remaining out of bounds for family members of previous generations. The girl thus experiences the family's Jewishness as a gap the narrator unsuccessfully tries to fill with Polish national pride:

> Als ich in Kiew aufwuchs, war Polen unser nächster Nachbar, auf Russisch Polscha, unsere Nachbarin, ein unerreichbares, schönes Ausland. Dort lebten anmutige Frauen, die Männer hatten Manieren, man glaubte dort an Gott [...]. Oft verkündete ich ohne Anlass, dass meine Großmutter Rosa, Rosalia in Warschau geboren wurde, als stecke in dieser Nachricht ein gewisser Eigensinn. Ich war stolz darauf, dass meine Großmutter aus Polen stammte, es war ein Trumpf in einem Spiel, das niemand mit mir spielte. (91)

> [When I was growing up in Kiev, the country next door, Poland, our nearest neighbour, Polsha in Russian, was an unattainable, foreign land. Graceful women lived there, the

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[15] 'Über Babij Jar, da steht keinerlei Denkmal./[...] Mit ist angst.[*sic*!]/ich bin alt heute,/so alt wie das jüdische Volk./Ich glaube, ich bin jetzt/ein Jude' (189) [No monument stands over Babi Yar./[...] I am afraid. Today I am as old as all the Jewish people./Now I seem to be a Jew (*ME* 168)].

men had fine manners, people believed in God […]. I often announced, for no good
reason, that my grandmother Rosa, Rosalia, was born in Warsaw, as though this piece
of news harboured an act of defiance; it was a trump card in a game that no one was
playing with me. (*ME* 79)]

Some of her fellow students had 'distinctly Polish names' (*ME* 79),

wir waren aber sowjetische Kinder, alle gleich, mit dem gleichen Nebel in der Famil-
iengeschichte, der vielleicht gerade die Voraussetzung für unsere Gleichheit bildete.
Ich war stolz, als hätte ich selbst einen Hauch von polnischer Anmut, Manieren und
Glauben, […] noch ist Polen nicht verloren, und dies der Erkenntnis zum Trotz, dass ich
nie dazugehören würde. (91)

[but we were Soviet children all the same, with the same haze surrounding our fam-
ily histories, which may have been the very reason for our sameness. I was proud, as
though I myself had a whiff of Polish grace, manners and faith, (…) Poland is not yet
lost, and despite knowing quite well that I would never belong. (*ME* 79)]

The narrator's childhood experience points at the same time to the suppression of ethnic dif-
ference in the Soviet system and to the complex, somewhat arbitrary nature of such a sense of
belonging. Both her own and her father's infatuation 'with this poor Poland' (*ME* 80) reflects
a complex, multidirectional deterritorialisation of major victim–perpetrator discourses. Her
father was 'ein Kriegskind, und Angehöriger des auserwählten Volkes, das in seiner Stadt
Kiew, vor allem aber in Polen, fast vollständig ermordet worden war, yet he trauerte großher-
zig um Polen' (92) [a child of the war, one of the Chosen People, nearly all of whom had been
murdered in his city of Kiev, and even more in Poland, yet he forgivingly grieved for Poland
(*ME* 80)]. Remembering the 'polnische Tragödie' is painful for him, as if he could face the suf-
fering of 'his own people' – as a collective Jewish suffering – only by means of remembering
the suffering of others, as a kind of translation: 'Den Gram zu hegen, den er in sich trug, wäre
ihm unanständig vorgekommen' (92) [He would have considered it indecent to let his grief
fester within him (*ME* 81)].

Translation works here as a metaphor of movement,[16] addressing alterity. The father's
feeling of belonging to an idealised Poland is unthinkable without the knowledge of his
own alterity as a Jew from the perspective of a Catholic Poland, and not without a sense of
pain because of this knowledge. Thus, he mourns 'um Polen – der Kanal, der Warschauer
Aufstand, die polnischen Teilungen, Katyn' (92–3) [for Poland, when contemplating the sew-
ers, the Warsaw uprising, the Polish partitions, Katyń (*ME* 80)] and, through the selected
events remembered, puts himself into the role of the perpetrator, as a member of the Russian
Empire which had first deprived Poland of its status as a free nation-state, and then left it to
the Germans. The daughter is even more aware of this guilt factor as a representative of the
Soviet power: 'Wenn ich neue Polen kennenlernte, pflegte ich mich zunächst für die drei
Teilungen zu entschuldigen und dann dafür, dass die sowjetische Armee im Jahr 1944 am
Ufer der Weichsel wartete, bis der Warschauer Aufstand niedergeschlagen war' (92) [When I
met new people from Poland, I started by apologizing for the three partitions and then for the
fact that in 1944 the Soviet army waited at the shore of the Vistula until the Warsaw uprising
was subdued (*ME* 80)].

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[16] The metaphorical meaning of the word 'Übersetzung' [translation] in different European languages can be
traced back etymologically to the Latin *transferre* (and its participle 'translatus') or to its translation, for example
into German. The Latin verb *transferre* consists of 'trans', i.e., 'hinüber' or 'über', and 'ferre' ('tragen'). These refer
to the concept of space and the crossing or bridging of this space (Hermans and Stecconi 3).

This multidirectional perspective makes her own family history an example of the complex entwinement of victimhood and guilt in Central and Eastern Europe, which does not allow for clear boundaries between victims and perpetrators and affects questions of belonging. This also becomes apparent from the narrator's research into the part of individual family members in historic events, as Jessica Ortner (42) remarks. By reconstructing her grandfather's role as a socialist official, he is not reduced to a victim of Stalin's warfare and later a prisoner of war in Germany; instead, he might also have been an accomplice in the Stalinist atrocities which took place before the war.

Translation or 'Übersetzen' features in different places in the text as an image of movement between two points or sides of a borderline. In addition to the dynamic of events in narrative texts, understood by Jurij Lotman as the movement of a persona across the borders of a semantic field (see Lotman 238), the ideas of translation in *VE* also create Deleuzian structural lines on other narrative levels. In passages such as the one cited above, about neighbouring, yet unattainable, Poland, translation creates moments of similarity or encounter, without negating persistent alterity or polarity between different ethnic groups, national identities or generations. When the narrator refers to the origin of her family history as a translation without an original, this turns the narrative into a movement, with a gap as one of the two poles of this movement. This gap can only be filled creatively: 'So gründet die Herkunft unserer Familie in einer fragwürdigen Übersetzung ohne Original, und ich erzähle die Geschichte dieser Familie nun auf Deutsch, ohne dass es für sie je ein russisches Original gegeben hätte' (52) [Our family's heritage is predicated on a questionable translation without a source text, and I am now telling the story of this family in German without there ever having been a Russian original (*ME* 44)].

The Conjunction of Mutually Exclusive Memories

Variable focalisation and both subtle and abrupt changes of tone reflect different perspectives and experiences of individual family members recounted in *VE*. There are frequent moments of empathy, even identification, with those whose histories are being traced. Slipping into the roles of different family members, the narrator often puts herself physically into their places by visiting historical sites where they led their lives, making this both an emotional and a sensory, almost tactile experience (135; *ME* 118). This also extends to her level of identification with Holocaust victims she encounters through factual research. In both instances, however, she exposes such roleplay as a construct, an imaginary act, created by means of language:

> Die Vermeidung des Konjunktivs macht aus einer Vorstellung eine Erkenntnis oder sogar einen Bericht, man nimmt die Stelle eines anderen ein, katapultiert sich dorthin, auf diese Tabelle zum Beispiel, und so erprobe ich jede Rolle an mir selbst, als gäbe es keine Vergangenheit ohne irgendein Als-ob, Wenn oder Falls. (45)

> [Avoidance of the subjunctive turns imagination into recognition or even statement, you take another's place, catapult yourself there, into this chart, for example, and thus try out every role for myself as though there was no past without an *if*, *as though*, or *in that case*. (*ME* 36; emphasis in original translation)]

While remembering and belonging thus turn into a performance, apparently giving a free choice of roles to play, this freedom of choice is immediately taken back again. At the end of the prologue, the narrator compares her journey to a Google search limited by algorithms (12; *ME* 6), thus already alerting the reader to existing boundaries of free movement, whether virtual or physical, applied to historical research or one's imagination. Agency and the choice of self-positioning are both emphasised and questioned here. There are ethical boundaries confining

the remembering subject, as the 'guardian' of her family history (Hirsch 1), in her movement.[17] Temporary acts of transgression further highlight this, constituting a dialectical movement: It is, in fact, the physical movement across these boundaries, or such a movement imagined, which makes these boundaries visible, or even tangible, through a poetic language of movement.

When she tells stories of family members in a humourous way, or comments on them ironically, the narrator also acknowledges the questionable nature of such an approach from an ethical perspective. She continuously struggles to find a coherent frame in which to bring together different stories and perspectives, gradually accepting both its fragmentary and fictional nature as an essential feature of her narrative – a creative, literary act which allows for a highly sensitive and empathic approach to the experience of those remembered, sketching out a multidirectional movement. The episodic chapter structure is equally fragmentary and associative, drawing the reader's attention to constantly emerging gaps, despite extensive archival research undertaken on the part of the narrator. While Ortner stresses that Petrowskaja 'rejects any censorship of the truth', which extends to her documenting the search process and laying open the disappointing results (Ortner 46),[18] Osborne addresses the presence of such gaps as an intricate, self-reflective feature of contemporary archival post-memory. In addition, however, there are frequent moments of self-reflection on the part of the narrator. The sometimes ironic tone raises fundamental questions of truth and authenticity, concerning both individual and collective memory. This goes even further than the 'oscillation between emotional closeness and distance from the events' described by Hirsch (31) as a feature of postmemory, since it raises profound questions of fact and fiction, both with regard to individual memory and grand historical narratives.

Specific historical narratives are thus deterritorialised. In part, this is achieved by moments of ambiguity which simultaneously call for a choice between different meanings or content to fill emerging gaps or voids while, at the same time, making this choice impossible.[19] The reader's attention is constantly directed to such moments in the text as well as the paratext. The 'perhaps' ['vielleicht'] in the book title immediately alerts the reader to ambiguity as a central feature of the narrative, and in turn, of various modes of historical memory. It is further expanded on in the blurb: 'Hieß sie wirklich Esther, die Großmutter des Vaters, die 1941 im besetzten Kiew allein in der Wohnung der geflohenen Familie zurückblieb? [...] Wenn aber schon der Name nicht mehr gewiss ist, was kann man dann überhaupt wissen?' [Was her name really Esther, the father's grandmother who was left alone in the apartment of the family who had escaped? (...) If not even the name is a certainty, what can one know at all?] This places a question mark not only over the father's memory of the loss of his grandmother Esther, but also over the existence of distinct boundaries between fact and fiction, hence any structure or remembrance 'defined by a set of points and positions' (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21).

The same applies to different versions of the family legend about the narrator's great-grandfather Ozjel Krzewin, thus leaving it open to the reader which version might be historically 'true'. The narrator proves wrong parts of the myth about Ozjel who, rather than having continued the tradition of selflessly teaching deaf-mute children, passed on to him from his father, seems to have been the illegitimate son from a first marriage, and left his own

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[17] Cf. Godela Weiss-Sussex's contribution on this guardianship in the context of Jewish writing.

[18] This also manifests itself in the way factual evidence, such as archival sources and photographs, resulting from the narrator's research and throwing a light on previously dark corners in the family history, is presented in a documentary fashion.

[19] What is meant by ambiguity here 'is the conjunction of mutual exclusives' (Rimmon 13). It goes beyond double meaning or ficticious elements as general features of fiction, but refers to a textual strategy that creates a double system of mutually exclusive interpretations, similar to lenticular images.

first wife Estera, herself a deaf-mute, before marrying Anna, the narrator's great-grandmother (130).[20] The knowledge the narrator obtains – against her own mother's wishes – shatters the family myth which used to give her shelter and a stable sense of origin (94). However, the questioning of 'truth' goes deeper, as conflicting versions of the story about her father's survival and the killing of his *babushka*, whose name might have been Esther, show. Like Ozjel's second wife, Anna, she perished in the massacre of Babi Yar in 1941. According to a neighbour's version of the story, Esther was shot by a German soldier whom she approached to ask the way when the Jewish inhabitants of Kiev were rounded up (221–2). By constantly reflecting on her uncertainty about how to tell this event and about her inability to picture the scene of Esther's death in a realistic manner, Petrowskaja indicates the fictional, possibly factitious, character of her account.

As she struggles with what she perceives as an existential question regarding historical truth, when confronted with conflicting stories about the circumstances of her father's narrow escape from Kiev (217; *ME* 193), her father puts all this aside quite lightly, in favour of a coherent, and in its own way meaningful, if partly fictional, narrative: 'Manchmal ist es gerade die Prise Dichtung, welche die Erinnerung wahrheitsgetreu macht' (219) [Sometimes that pinch of poetry is the very thing that makes memory truth (*ME* 195)]. The importance of trying to give meaning to events that seem meaningless, such as Esther's death or her father's survival, from a subjective and creative perspective, is highlighted by his statement, in spite of the apparent futility of this endeavour and the narrator's realisation that any factual information is fundamentally unreliable. This positions Petrowskaja between reflecting on her ethical obligation of guardianship and a postmodernist approach to history, in view of her remark that 'wir unser Leben einer Fiktion verdanken' (220) [we owe our life to a fiction (196)].

'Those who don't lie can't fly'
There is an obvious parallel between the father's statement about the pinch of poetry and the narrator's own thinking about her reply to an elderly American who approaches her in the new Berlin Hauptbahnhof. The latter is disturbed by a feature of the building which seems to be in sharp contrast to his expectations of a new Germany that has learned from its history. When the American enquires about the meaning of an advertisement consisting of the word *Bombardier* displayed in large letters on the wall of the train station, she effortlessly takes on the role of the Berliner, happy to inform him about coverage of this in local media, on the basis of what she has read on the internet. However, in the course of the conversation, she begins to identify with the American visitor who turns out to be a Jew whose family emigrated from Tehran to the United States – in other words, he is representing a global Jewish community she feels part of. As he is 'desperately seeking an explanation' for the large-lettered title on this site 'because he was about to set off' (*ME* 2), the narrator starts to contemplate the nature of her own process of remembering and its authenticity, as she herself is about to set off on her quest. This not only recalls images of the 'wandering Jew' as a point of identification between her and him; in his question, she recognises her own inner voice, in view of the lack of sensitivity underlying this kind of marketing for a musical in a place both of them perceive as a historical site. Furthermore, the advertisement turns the site into a postmodern 'non-place' (Augé), preventing visitors from gaining any historical understanding from the location as a physical entity. Placing this encounter in the prologue makes the fictional nature of remembering an overarching theme of the narrator's quest for her family's past.

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[20] Unlike Ozjel, who fled Warsaw in 1915 together with his second wife, Anna, and their daughter, Rosa, Estera and her sons by Ozjel, Adolf and Zygmund, as well as her daughter-in-law, Zygmund's wife, Hela, either perished in the Warsaw Ghetto or were deported and killed (see Ortner 45–6).

In her initial reply to the American, the narrator lets herself be taken away by a narrative which develops its own dynamic:

> Ich glaubte immer mehr an meine Worte, obwohl ich keine Ahnung hatte, was dieses Bombardier am Dachbogen des Bahnhofs bedeutete und woher es kam, aber das, was ich so begeistert und fahrlässig erzählte und was ich auf keinen Fall als Lüge bezeichnen würde, beflügelte mich, und ich schweifte immer weiter ab, ohne die geringste Angst abzustürzen, ich drehte mich immer weiter in den Kurven dieses niemals gesprochenen Urteils, denn wer nicht lügt, kann nicht fliegen. (3)

> [I believed what I was saying more and more although I had no idea what this Bombardier on the arc of the central station meant and where it came from, but as I was speaking so enthusiastically and offhandedly and saying things I would certainly not define as a lie, my imagination took wing, and I drifted further and further without the slightest fear of going over the cliff, coiling and recoiling into the curves of this verdict that had never been pronounced, because those who don't lie can't fly. (*ME* 3)][21]

While this image of the narrator fearlessly spreading her wings as she 'enthusiastically' merges fact and fiction is a largely positive one, there are already undertones of danger and betrayal present in it. They are implied by the adjective 'fahrlässig' in the original version,[22] and the explicit mention of the potential risk of crashing, both further strengthened by the following subclause: '[because] those who don't lie can't fly'.[23] The idea of an 'imagined' family history is equally ambiguous in other passages in the narrative, for example when the narrator refers to the origins of her family history as a translation without an original or in her description of the family memory as a tradition of Jewish humour, which, according to Freud, contains dialectical elements of self-depreciation and self-praise. She finds herself continuing: 'Ein Witz ist wichtiger als eine richtige Antwort, das Wort ist mehr wert als das Ergebnis' (166) [A joke is more important than a correct answer, the word more than the outcome (*ME* 146)]. In both instances, the subject imagines escaping from dominant frameworks determining what is factually true or false.

The same applies to the image put forward by the narrator as her counter-image to a family tree. In it, iconic figures of Eastern European Jewishness are floating through the air, reminiscent of those in the paintings of Marc Chagall as well as of virtual-play figures in computer games. Apart from ideas of rootlessness, the former refers to a tradition of boundless imagination which the author places herself in:[24]

> Manche aus meiner Familie waren geboren um ihren Berufungen nachzugehen in dem hellen, aber nie ausgesprochenen Glauben, sie würden die Welt reparieren. Andere waren wie vom Himmel gefallen, sie schlugen keine Wurzeln, sie liefen hin und her, kaum die Erde berührend, und blieben in der Luft wie eine Frage, wie ein Fallschirmspringer, der sich im Baum verfängt. (17)

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[21] Petrowskaja 2014, 8.

[22] In the English translation changed to 'offhandedly' (3), 'fahrlässig' could also be translated as 'recklessly' to retain this aspect of meaning.

[23] While Deleuze's 'fuite' does not translate into 'flight' in the sense of flying, the use of this image in *VE* is of particular interest here because of the dynamics inherent in it.

[24] See also 'Ein Flug' (55) [A Flight (*ME* 47)] or 'Socken, der Kunstflug des Strickens' (21) [socks, the acrobatics of knitting (*ME* 14)].

[Some of my family members were born to pursue their callings in life in the unswerving, implicit belief that they would fix the world. Others seemed to have come out of nowhere; they did not put down roots, they ran back and forth, barely touching the ground, and hung in the air like a question, like a skydiver caught in a tree. (*ME* 11)]

Those of her ancestors she cannot, literally, pin down – that is, understand or empathise with – appear as airborne particles. In contrast to the forward dynamic of the narrator's forceful flight imagined in the prologue, however, this image is somewhat disconcerting: family members are perceived as helpless figures falling from the sky, suspended in midair or caught in treetops.[25]

If imagined as virtual figures in a computer game, this also implies they are controlled by the game logic, not by the player. This idea of not being the agent of her own motion is also present in the metaphor expressing the narrator's understanding of an apparently meaning-less fate that controls her movement, used in her conversation with the American visitor in Berlin: 'Gott googelt unsere Wege, auf dass wir nicht herausfallen aus unseren Fugen' (12) [God googles our paths, so that we stay put in our grooves (*ME* 6)]. This mirrors her under-standing of her research, both online and through archives or face-to-face encounters with people and concrete places, as a Google search, as suggested by the title of the prologue: 'Google sei Dank' (7) [Thank Google (*ME* 1)]. On the one hand, such an internet search would not result in *Leerstellen* but produce what is in line with the individual's search history and, if kept 'in its grooves', prevents the individual from falling but also from flying and from mapping creative lines of flight. It is the presence of both, creativity and 'fate', and moving between various concrete and virtual spaces in her search, that reinforces the ambivalent nature of the quest as a constant movement between fact and fiction in which no clear border or sense of agency can be maintained in the longer term.

Like the hotels and office buildings of a contemporary, globalised Warsaw, which have made the old world of the Eastern European Jewry and its destruction through the Holocaust disappear within the concrete urban environment, the new Berlin Hauptbahnhof that the narrator finds herself in at the beginning of her journey represents a similar site in its bar-renness (7), which is all the more haunting due to the narrator's strong awareness of this old world and its destruction. Her embodied experience of such historic sites is that of a spatial *Leerstelle*, similar to Babi Yar vis-à-vis the absence of definite traces of history, even if different with regard to the reasons for this absence. At the same time, the train station represents a place of movement and potential encounters which, through their reflection in a literary text, can open historical perspectives. This ambivalent view on topography and movement – with the narrator as a remembering subject the agent, but also object of such movement – links prologue and epilogue. It is this ambivalence which informs the narrator's perspective on her own biography, as she reflects in the epilogue, at the end of her journey: 'Ich bin als Kreuzung zweier Straßen mit deutschen Namen entstanden, Engels und Karl Liebknecht' (281) [My life began at the intersection of two streets with German names, Engels and Karl Liebknecht (*ME* 247)]. While the image of the crossing leaves the subject in a passive role as the product of her family history which is in turn a reflection of European history, this is counterbalanced by a different self-image of the narrator in the preceding chapter.

There she concludes her journey as an agent, creating an embodied narrative, with its lines of flight pointing beyond major modes of remembrance, both in German and Ukrainian or Soviet discourses: 'La-la-la Human Step hieß die Tanz-Performance, bei der ich wieder einen Hans kennenlernte. Danach gingen wir tanzen' (278) [*La la la Human Step* was the name of

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[25] The comparison with a parachutist as an alternative translation of 'Fallschirmspringer' might even encourage associations with the Second World War.

the dance performance where I met another Hans. We went dancing afterward (*ME* 248)]. The narrator and the DJ with the paradigmatic German name 'Hans' who she meets at a dance performance in Vienna spend all night dancing. This is after her research in an Austrian concentration camp on the reasons for her grandfather's survival of this camp leaves her without any clear insight regarding his guilt or innocence. The last page of *Vielleicht Esther* recalls, in a somewhat ironic tone, Hans and herself 'chatting' about their grandfathers who were both prisoners of war – his as a German in Siberia, hers a Soviet Ukrainian in Austria – before returning to the dancefloor: '[W]ir raveten, oder we were raving for peace, die ganze Nacht, für den Weltfrieden, für Dionysos und in memoriam Otto von Habsburg' (279) [we raved, or we were raving, for peace, the whole night, for world peace, for Dionysos and in memory of Otto von Habsburg (*ME* 248)] – the latter being, according to Austrian media covering his funeral in 2011, the last crown prince and quasi 'emperor' of a cosmopolitan Europe that was then destroyed by nationalism and antisemitism.[26]

Conclusion

The structure of her search – in other words, the lines produced both by the narrator's physical movement from one place to the next, her virtual movement online, as well as the history and feelings of belonging emerging from it – may be described as a 'rhizome' comprising lines or 'directions in motion', as defined by Deleuze and Guattari, at least to a certain point:

> Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, the rhizome is made only of lines; lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. […] The rhizome is an antigenealogy. It is a short-term memory, or antimemory. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. Unlike the graphic arts, drawing or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight. (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 21)

In addition to the questioning of genealogy, family legend and parameters of alterity, the narrator constantly widens her community network – from her identification with the American Jew in Berlin to pondering about her own understanding of home when visiting the Polish town of Kalisz (128; *ME* 112–13), to expanding 'die Meinigen' to all of humanity, when reflecting on the roles of victims and perpetrators in Babi Yar: '[I]ch glaube, dass es keine Fremden gibt, wenn es um Opfer geht. Jeder Mensch hat jemanden hier' (184) [I believe that there are no strangers among victims. Here, everybody has someone (*ME* 164)]. Her online search for family members also appears to build a rhizomatic network, forming a wider community, with unexpected links appearing arbitrarily. This represents the formation of an open, global and virtual community, resulting from non-selective and inclusive internet research. At first sight, this seems both successful and not restrictive. Belonging appears momentarily

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[26] This also continues a family tradition. Petrowskaja's grandmother Rosa, to whom she feels very close, is remembered as someone who 'deftly danced her way into world history': '[…] und dann, so erzählt meine Mutter, hielt Rosa vor allen Kranken eine Rede, sie sprach über die zwanziger Jahre in Moskau, wie sie Tanzen gelernt hatte, tanzend erzählte sie von der Neuen Ökonomischen Politik und wie sie die Rede von Trotzki […] hatte miterleben dürfen, […] leichtfüßig tanzte sie mitten in die Weltgeschichte hinein.' (67–8) [My mother told me that Rosa gave a speech in front of all the patients, talking about the 1920s in Moscow and how she learned to dance, and while dancing she chatted about the New Economic Policy and how she had been present at Trotzki's speech […] she deftly danced her way into world history. (*ME* 58)] For a discussion of dance in *VE*, see Egger 189–208.

as performative, community membership as not binding. An example of this is the surprising encounter, resulting from an online search, with Mira Kimmelmann, a descendant of Ozjel's first wife Estera and a Holocaust survivor who immigrated to the United States. In contrast to the feelings of disorientation and isolation the narrator experiences during her visit to Warsaw due to her unsuccessful physical search for family traces in the city's urban landscape, her online browsing connects her almost immediately (118–22; *ME* 103–12).[27] However, the link established with Mira is not an arbitrary connection made to any member of the global internet community, and thus a line of flight, but a genealogical link to a (probable) member of the family and Jewish diaspora, reproduced by means of a new and efficient medium. Binary concepts of Jewishness and belonging are merely moved, not completely dissolved or deterritorialised. The wider family network emerging in the course of the narrative thus fundamentally remains an object of reproduction, of memory and genealogy.

At the same time, virtual movement may add further potential lines of flight to those emerging from physical movement in *VE*. While archival searches and visits to concrete places prove difficult, the internet seems to provide missing links more easily, because it constitutes a more densely woven network of connection points. In this regard, it is superior to other media or archives. From a cultural and media studies perspective, the internet can be understood as a virtual cultural and social space, allowing for new forms and manifestations of identity formation, interactivity and communication. Furthermore, the focus is on dialogical relations, reflected in terms such as the 'global village' or a 'virtual community', with conditions of simultaneity creating a situation of actual reciprocity. Physical movement allowing for a limited number of encounters, is on the internet replaced by communicative processes enabling a larger number of encounters, even if only virtual. This also applies to experiences of distance and alterity. While there remains a fundamental difference between 'virtual reality' and 'real reality' if thinking in terms of embodied experience, this distinction appears somewhat less fundamental in the light of current research arguing that existing social and cultural spaces gain a new 'Möglichkeitshorizont' [horizon of possibility] through the internet (Ahrens 165). Coincidence gains a new significance here, while the overwhelming array of possibilities forces the user to select according to factual and social criteria (Ahrens 173). Relations thus appear as forms of 'nicht-beliebiger Kontingenz' [non-arbitrary contingency] (Esposito 38). This also applies to the internet as a space of dialogue or action in *VE*. While the internet decouples social relations from physical places and spaces and, through this, from certain restrictions on mobility as well as from time, the constitution of virtual spaces through the subject's movement in them may be structurally similar to the constitution of physically experienced spaces (Faßler 76–7), as described by de Certeau. In this sense, the forming of relationships via the internet does not entail a radically new dimension, but may allow for an intensification or amplification of experiences also made in other social and physical spaces.[28] Through a creative language of movement opening wider *Möglichkeitshorizonte* for memory,

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[27] Through Facebook, a former student of the family's school, now living in Israel, is put in touch with the narrator's mother (85). A further link made effortlessly by means of the internet ist to Hila, a fellow historian in in Kalisz. Both connect easily, on a professional and personal level – not as members of a family or ethnic group, but of a younger global community of academics familiar with virtual communication (128).

[28] This includes, for instance, the collection of names from lists in churches or phone books (27–8). In *VE* the internet shares its seemingly coincidental principle with physical encounters and interrelations with human actors. The contact with Mira leads to the rekindling of the contact with a friend of the narrator's father, Viktor Rashkovski, who the narrator had met unexpectedly at a party in Berlin (122). The actual conversation with both Mira and Viktor does not take place virtually, since Mira does not own a computer, but over the telephone. In turn, various connections to members of the extended family that Mira makes in person during their conversation appear as contours on an imaginary map, reminding the narrator of her own lines of flight as reflected on in the prologue (125), and thus representing a kind of creativity or enthusiasm which embraces or transcends different media as well as boundaries between virtual and concrete reality.

both through embodied narrative and the inclusion of virtual spaces of dialogue, *VE* realises processes of deterritorialisation, thus constituting a minor art practice or literature.

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