

Stephen Zaksewicz

Making Space for Place: Christoph Ransmayr's *Der fliegende Berg*

Abstract:

The experience of local places rarely needs explanation. Places are familiar, comfortable, understood. The movement into new space, however, particularly unfamiliar spaces and hostile environments, forces the experience of spatiality to consciousness, rendering spatial experience immediate. New, undifferentiated spaces become legible and meaningful through their concretization into felt, remembered places. The visceral experience of new spaces, then, either demands to be integrated into one's understanding of the world, or it challenges that understanding and makes possible the imagination of different kinds of worlds.

Drawing on theories of space and place from Lefebvre, Tuan, and Malpas, I interpret Christoph Ransmayr's "Bergsteigerroman" *Der fliegende Berg* (2006) to demonstrate the relationship between space and place through two different brothers with opposing motivations for and experiences of their expedition to an unmapped Himalayan mountain. Both brothers want to fill in this "blank spot," but they have vastly different understandings of what kind of world that spot belongs to. Whereas the one brother is motivated by his commitment to a technocratic-scientific understanding of the world, one that prioritizes the gathering and ordering of empirical knowledge, the rationalization, optimization, and mapping of existence and spatial awareness, the narrator seeks out the raw physicality and the experience of encountering a new place and is open to new mythologies. Relying on theories of the world from Spivak and Moraru, I argue that the novel plays out competing models of the world, critiquing the model of the "globe" as a product of globalization and imagining instead a "planet" as a place of experience, alterity, and mythology. Finally, I argue that literature itself involves a process of place-making and becomes the place for this reimagination and refiguration of the world. In the contemporary, globalized era, the "flying mountain" is the sort of figure that makes a reconfiguration of the world possible.

Bio:

Stephen Zaksewicz is a PhD candidate in the joint program in German Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University, USA. His dissertation is entitled "The Ends of the World: Planetary in Contemporary Austrian Prose" and explores how contemporary Austrian novels reimagine the "world" in an era of globalization. This project also considers how the experience of natural places is altered by the crises of the Anthropocene. In his free time, Stephen enjoys *Bergsteigen*, making classical music, volleyball, skiing, and games of all kinds.