The Promise of Purposelessness

Alternative Temporalities and Experiences of Otium in Contemporary Indian Fiction in English

Inaugural-Dissertation
zur
Erlangung der Doktorwürde
der Philologischen Fakultät
der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität
Freiburg i. Br.

vorgelegt von

Melina Munz
aus Filderstadt

SS 2020

Erstgutachterin: Prof. Dr. Monika Fludernik

Zweitgutachter: Prof. Dr. Christoph Reinfandt

Vorsitzender des Promotionsausschusses
der Gemeinsamen Kommission
der Philologischen und der Philosophischen Fakultät:
Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Bernd Kortmann

Datum der mündlichen Prüfung: 24.03.2021

To Marion, without whom none of this would have been possible.

Table of Contents

Preface. Otium between Europe and South Asia – An Attempt at a Critical Location

During my journey to Calcutta in 2019, I visited the Tagore house. Wanting to browse for books or postcards in the museum shop on the early afternoon of my visit, it took me some time to identify the little shack attached to one side of the building. As I approached the shop, I saw the man working at the shop eating some snacks while reading. He did not seem to notice me while I tried to read the book covers arranged behind him, and when I eventually addressed him, he looked up at me reluctantly and replied in an offended voice: “can’t you see that I am eating?”. Apologising that the shop had seemed to be open, I asked when his break would be over. “Come again later”, he said. “When exactly?”, I asked. “Just later”, he replied angrily.

The man in the shop puzzled me with his refusal to define more precisely when his break would end. His vague reference to “later” implied not only that his late lunch break was of higher importance than selling anything. It also gave preference to his internal time perception over any external factors. I left feeling a little ashamed of my (Western) expectations of the man’s productive use of his time and of his availability during the opening times of the museum.

The anecdote is instructive to this study’s focus on experiences of purposelessness that are characterised by a deviant temporality. This book analyses the role of relaxed, fulfilling experiences without apparent aim in Indian novels written in English. On the individual character level, these experiences, for which I use the term “otium”, are defined by a sense of lingering or dwelling in the present. This non-linear time perception by the individual can reflect critically on questions regarding society and culture. Thus, such experiences can become significant for both a global modernity and the novels’ specific cultural frame of reference in India.

The research which forms the basis of this study was undertaken as part of a project on *otium* in contemporary South Asian fiction at the University of Freiburg

(project G4 of CRC 1015).[1] The project combined the analysis of Anglophone novels with research on vernacular languages, an interdisciplinary exchange on otium in South Asia which was extremely fruitful.[2] The project also combined diachronic with synchronic approaches. While the author of this book is located in a European context and has decided to use the concept of otium, which also stems from Europe, this study nevertheless hopes to contribute to research on South Asian literatures. In this respect, I agree with Dirk Wiemann that my cultural location is not "the ultimate and insurmountable horizon of my reading", which would imply a discursive "self-denial of agency" on account of my globally privileged position (*Genres* 11). Instead, I want to propose that it is possible to develop otium as a concept both coming from, and transcending, its original cultural context.

The Latin loanword *otium*, now outdated, was still used in English in the nineteenth century, though often only in literary, bourgeois contexts.[3] I am using the concept otium as an analytical term in my interpretations. The need for this terminology arose from the material and common motifs of my corpus of contemporary Indian novels. Otium and related concepts look back on a "long tradition of philosophical, religious and literary engagements" (Fludernik/Nandi 2). In its original use in Latin antiquity, otium on one level simply meant freedom from political and economic obligations. This meaning is also hinted at by its antonym, the word for business activities, *negotium* (cf. Martin 257; Burke 139-140; Fludernik/Nandi 4; Gimmel et al. 12). Otium was associated with self-fulfilment through education and culture, a time of "studious contemplation", as well as "a leisurely withdrawal from civic life" for Roman statesmen (O'Connor 33;

[1] CRC stands for Collaborative Research Centre, which is the official English translation for a format funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). https://www.sfb1015.uni-freiburg.de/en?set_ language=en.

[2] See Noor, Farha. "Leisurely Feelings: Conceptualising Emotional Manifestations of Otium in South Asia" [PhD thesis University of Heidelberg, in progress].

[3] According to the OED, *otium* is "[t]he Latin word for 'leisure, freedom from business, ease'", which is only "in occasional English use". The eighteenth and nineteenth century examples situate it in older, highbrow literary contexts. The OED further cites *otiose* as meaning "[a]t leisure or at rest; unemployed, idle; inactive, indolent, lazy", but also referring to something "[h]aving no practical function; idle, superfluous, useless" (Simpson and Weiner, "Otiose, Otium").

cf. Eickhoff). In this sense, otium is necessary for “the ideal political actor that we may sometimes be able to become only when we have the freedom to spend our time in philosophical reflection” (O’Connor 34). The later ideal of the contemplative life, which was emphasised in Christian mediaeval philosophy and monastic practice (*vita contemplativa*), was equally based on the withdrawal from private and public obligations (*vita activa*) (cf. Martin 257-258; Burke 139-140; Figal 32; Hasebrink/Riedl 5, 7; Gimmel et al. 12, 15; Eickhoff 2).

At the same time, contemplative otium was tied to a higher social standing so that the classical use of the term also implies a strong class prejudice, privileging “aristocratic relaxation from civic duties or war over the peasant’s, artisan’s or slave’s rest from toil” (Fludernik/Nandi 4). Hence, immersive, contemplative forms of leisure raise questions of privilege and social inequality: not everyone has access to certain places associated with otium, to quietness or to resources (cf. Gimmel et al. 83-84; O’Connor 58-59). As Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi point out, it can be informative to ask on what moral basis a certain form of leisure is condemned or even criminalised (7; compare 6. Society).

My understanding of otium is influenced by this contemplative tradition, but there are also crucial differences due to my focus on contemporary Indian novels. Firstly, I want to stress the *subversive potential of experiences of otium* instead of focusing on otium as an ideal that underscores class difference. This subversive, transgressive potential is crucial throughout this study. It will be important with reference to the colonial past, to social injustice as well as to global developments of temporality. Hence, this study follows a logic parallel to O’Connor’s understanding of the “implicit resistance” of idleness, whose “freedom is a pleasure, but it is one whose historical context gives it its content” (14, 171-172).

Secondly, otium can include *active and inactive* as well as *individual and communal practices*. Thus, the concept includes other experiences besides the high ideal of contemplation. This understanding ties in with the concept of alternative temporalit*ies* in the plural. My visit to the Tagore house museum shop gave me a glimpse of such different perspectives on time. The man at the shop blatantly refused to be included, at that moment, in a productivity-oriented time

dictated by time schedules. While I could in no way tell whether his lunch break meant anything like otium to him, otium does not have to be an unreachable ideal, but can be found in small moments and individual experiences.

A third divergence from the classical origins of otium lies in the importance of the fundamentally modern discourse of *alienation* to the relevant passages in the novels. The experiences analysed in this study relate to practices and values of Indian cultural modernity. At the same time, they can be discussed in the larger context of global concepts and insecurities about time in modernity. In both cases, nostalgic descriptions of practices and experiences are used to characterise a perception of time that has become inaccessible in the present. In that sense, otium can often only be understood as a negative foil to a present state of alienation.

Otium in these novels is part of discourses of temporality which subversively point to histories of colonialism and global, productivity-oriented acceleration. While my predominant perspective in reading the novels will not be that of postcolonial theory, my focus on experiences of non-progressive, present-focused temporalities carries a potential for critique, which is especially pronounced in non-European texts. This study of otium in South Asia aims to contribute to a *European discourse* about otium as a subversive concept of temporality by opening up a perspective on modes of experience outside Europe. At the same time, my readings of the novels are part of a *South Asian discourse*, which can be understood to rediscover older, modern understandings of time for the present due to their potential to rework hegemonic European conceptions of time. I argue that both the subversive potential of otium in its contemporary Indian representations and the concepts of time in modernity which these refer to are central aspects of these discourses between Indian and European perspectives on otium.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Professor Monika Fludernik for supervising this PhD thesis and for her constant support. Her constructive criticism and suggestions have greatly contributed to this book. I am particularly thankful for the collaborative work in the CRC[4] project G4 *Otium in Indian Fiction*. Our exchange has been a vital inspiration for my work.

Many thanks to Professor Christoph Reinfandt, for being my second supervisor even after I had left Tübingen. I fondly remember the trips to the Tübingen colloquium: this book has immensely profited, amongst other things, from the participants' healthy scepticism about the concept of otium. Thanks also to Professor Ingrid Hotz-Davies for her witty and valuable remarks.

I wish to acknowledge the support of the German Research Foundation, who have not only ensured my material security so that I could write this book, but also enabled important intellectual exchange. I also wish to thank the speaker of the CRC on Otium, Professor Elisabeth Cheauré, for guiding and mediating this exchange. Within the CRC on Otium, I want to also express particular gratitude to Gregor Dobler for his feedback as third supervisor as well as for the helpful dialogue with his project P2 on religious experience in Namibia. I want to specifically thank Anna Sennefelder and Antje Harms, who have, as managers of the graduate school in different phases, relentlessly supported me and the other PhD students over the last four years.

I also thank Professor Peter Philipp Riedl for initiating the work group on urbanity, which has led to an inspiring conference on the subject.

In the graduate school, my thanks go to my fellow PhD colleagues. I want to thank Farha Noor from our project G4, who has become much more than a colleague. I specifically thank Johannes Litschel, Inga Wilke, Yannick van den Berg, Johannes Bernet and Sonja Ehret. Thank you to Jochen Gimmel for the fruitful, wine-inspired discussions about philosophy.

[4] CRC stands for *Collaborative Research Centre*, which is the official English translation for a format funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). https://www.sfb1015.uni-freiburg.de/en?set_ language=en.

Benjamin Hedley was invaluable in the final stages of my PhD; thank you for your diligent comments on my chapters.

Thanks to my coach, Sebastian Philipp, for lifting some of the pressure.

To my hosts and friends in Delhi and Calcutta Sumit Dey, Akash Raha, Violina Borah, Sujay Thakur and Ved Prakash – thank you for making me feel at home and for making my stay in India a real pleasure.

Special thanks to my oldest friends from Stuttgart, Florian Neuner, Anna Krupp, Benjamin Krupp and Judith Becker. Thank you for always being there, for motivating me and, not least, for helping me relax.

I owe a large debt of thanks to Manuel Förderer for his proofreading, for enlarging my intellectual horizon in extended discussions at various bars and, simply, for being a wonderful friend.

Last but definitely not least: many thanks to my family. Special thanks to my brother Moritz and my little niece Allissia, who has brightened up the last years. My deep gratitude goes to my parents Marion, Michael and Dieter; and to my partner, Georg, who supported me continuously.

1. Introduction

1.1. Aims and Research Questions

There are a number of contemporary Indian novels in English in which a sense of aimless, unproductive leisure is not only recurring in the experience of characters, but even central to character development, the novels' structural forms, their narrative pace and stylistics. It is the representation and significance of these experiences in contemporary Indian fiction in English that will be the main focus of this study. In the course of my analyses, a central question will be in what ways central passages of the texts can be understood as representations of a common mode of experience, for which I am using the Latin term otium. I understand otium as a relaxed experience often linked to self-reflection or contemplation that can neither be produced intentionally, nor is it ever experienced as a means for some other objective (see 1.2.1 for further definition).

Related to the question about the role of a certain experiential quality is one about the novels' plot structure and form of representation. As I argue, each of the novels through its structure builds up a certain mood that is part of a textual performance. The text's narrative structure effectively slows down the reading pace and emphasises the central motif of otium in the characters' experiences. This link between practices of otium, on the one hand, and the narrative and stylistic choices by authors on the other draws attention to the literariness of the text (cf. Klinkert 16; Reinfandt 280-282; Fludernik, "Narrating"). The novels in which this link is especially obvious, self-consciously comment on the fact that the characteristics of otium, its specific temporality and its aimless character, become visible in the form of the narrative (cf. West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 83). The heterotopic potential of literature is emphasised, I argue, in narratives of otium (cf. Warning 21-25; Foucault, *Heterotopien*). Consequently, it will be necessary to shift repeatedly between the specific interpretation of a certain passage and the function of experiences of otium in the design of the novels.

More than being merely central motifs in specific fictional texts, the role of otium is connected to discourses about modernity and experiences of

temporality. As the framework of this study, I argue that experiences of otium serve as subversive moments of time perception on the individual character level, which reflect critically on wider societal and cultural contexts. These forms of alternative temporalit*ies* in the plural are defined by a sense of lingering or dwelling in the moment. Consequently, I situate the individual experiences depicted in the novels in relation to dominant, historically evolved structures of linear, productivity-oriented time, which are arguably linked with imperialist expansion and progress. They also demonstrate in what ways alternative temporalities have the potential to transgress social and cultural contexts strongly determined by these linear structures.

When experiences of otium figure as fragmental moments of alternative temporality, they are also repeatedly represented as part of an unattainable utopia and, at the same time, an unrecoverable nostalgic ideal. The possibility of experiencing otium is more or less explicitly connected to a nostalgic reflection from a present position of precariousness either on an older Indian cultural modernity or, more generally, on un-alienated social relations. Hence a subsidiary question of this book will be to ask whether the (apparently unproductive) dwelling on the past can be understood as a utopian strategy and a possibility “to claim alternate memories if not histories” (Noor, “Negotiating” n. pag.). Its utopian potential lies in a critique of experiences of temporality that are latently affected by the colonial past and that reinforce global inequalities. This means that temporality in general, and nostalgia as a form of temporal experience in particular, are continuous motifs throughout the interpretation chapters.

The analytical category of otium makes it possible to focus on different discourses such as the response of contemporary novels to cultural practices and temporal structures of modernity, their relation to postcolonial theory, and their transgressive and utopian potential of unproductivity and uselessness. The ways in which these discourses become enmeshed in Indian-English Fiction will be examined throughout the chapters of this book.

1.2. Otium as an Analytical Term

1.2.1. Definition and Central Characteristics of Otium

The term *otium* is used in the current context primarily to analyse a certain quality of leisurely experience and the exceptional sense of temporality that plays a role in the experiences of individual protagonists. It is also an important factor in the structure of the novels. As Monika Fludernik has suggested in her paper "Nostalgia for Otiose Leisure", otium is close to what would colloquially be called "*quality time*" in English (17). Practices associated with otium need not be calm and passive but can be very active as well. During an experience of otium, it is possible "to meditate or to listen to music; to relax while hiking, dancing, or swimming; one can also engage in a burst of musical composition or in a work flow of concentrated reading or writing" (Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 17). As will become apparent through the analyses presented in this study, it is impossible to identify certain defined practices of otium, or specific Indian cultural traits of otium. Instead, various practices play a role in the novels, and the commonality of their representation lies in the quality and function of unproductive experiences of otium as well as in stylistic choices. I define the experiential quality of otium as a relaxed experience often linked to self-reflection or contemplation that can neither be produced intentionally, nor is it ever experienced as a means for some other objective (for instance, being fit for work after a period of recreation) (cf. Figal 31; Gimmel, Keiling 11, 31-32, 36, 40, 63, 77).

The following section further identifies central characteristics of experiences of otium, using examples of both older and more recent Indian fiction. Otium can be characterised according to the cardinal aspect of **purposelessness**; **a positive freedom to act**; **an exception from everyday temporality** and **a feeling of lingering or dwelling in the present**. A final aspect relates to the **representation** of such experiences in literary texts. These experiences are depicted in the novels through **narrative techniques that mirror the sensory experience of the protagonists**. In my readings of the novels, I work with these aspects on the level of character experience as well as novel structure as a

heuristic definition, which is informed both by the experiences portrayed in my corpus and by the current research on otium and related concepts.

The concept of otium central to this study is defined by its **purposelessness** or absence of external intention. It is, just as O'Connor says with reference to his understanding of idleness, "experienced activity that operates according to no guiding purpose" (5). This lack of aim and purpose can be illustrated with reference to a passage from Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to Be Happy* (1958). During a family outing to the ruins of the residency in Lucknow, most of the characters are engaged in some leisurely pursuit, whether they are exploring the ruins, reading or sleeping. Their relaxed pastimes are contrasted with the contemplative stance of Govind Narayan, who "seemed content to sit smoking, looking idly out over the garden, enjoying as though it had been a tangible thing the caressing orange-scented air" (34). Govind is represented as an integral part of his surroundings, being at ease as if there were no temporal distance between the eras of Mughal decadence, which the ruins represent, and his own perspective.[5] Moreover, both his positive feelings ("seemed content") and the purposelessness of his activity of smoking and looking around ("looking idly") are mentioned explicitly.[6]

---

[5] Lucknow, in whose air Govind thrives, is closely associated with "the magnificent era of Mughal power" between the sixteenth and the early eighteenth century (Sharar 13). In his monograph *Lucknow. The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture* Sharar describes how the courtly culture of Lucknow and also life for different classes in society "was sweet and gracious, free from worldly cares and anxieties, a life of affluence, devoted to luxuries and leisured activities" (13). Monika Fludernik comments on how "courtiers were involved in extensive literary and artistic practices, among which music and dance as well as the delivery of poems and theatrical performances were common. Both the practice of the arts, for instance poetic composition or the performance of *ragas*", she argues "*and* the enjoyment of these arts on the part of the courtly audience can – given the suitable attitude – be associated with otium" ("Nostalgia" 8). Just as the cultured leisure of Lucknow at this time is almost stereotypical, so is the decadence and demise of Mughal culture in connection with English rule as well as of its cultural traditions with independence and partition (ibid. 16; see also Ahmed Ali's novel *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) as well as Satyajit Ray's notable film version of Munshi Premchand's short story *The Chess Players;* see also Noor, "Semantics" n. pag.). The Residency of Lucknow, residence of the British Resident General at the court of the Nawab, stands emblematically for these developments (cf. Sharar 52).

[6] See also Farha Noor's discussion of Urdu leisure terminology, in which there are several terms "depicting a physical languor" as well as the phrase '*tamash been'*, which "refers to the two sensory engagements of sight and movement", including "*tamāšā* […] a verbal noun of the Arabic *māši'ī,* 'to walk, stroll leisurely'" ("Semantics" n. pag.).

Furthermore, the purposelessness of the experience is often expressed in useless and random observations about an enjoyable incident, which are inserted as digressions from a novel's narrative. Thus, the narrator in Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* (1993) comments on his walks in his parents' residential area in Calcutta through:

> by-lanes, which were like shrunken versions of the bigger ones, miniature portraits of them […] a distinct island of life that had formed itself, consisting of cats, shrubs, birds, and an absence of people. I was always grateful for, without knowing precisely why, the detour of passing through these by-lanes. (238)

The narrator's aimlessness and lack of a reason for not heading towards a clear destination is central to both the surprising plenitude he encounters in the alleys as well as to his feelings of gratitude. His experience is defined by "noncompulsion and drift" (O'Connor 5). He finds a similarly surprising – or even counterintuitive – sense of gratification when he listens to a fellow Indian student at Oxford, who reads to him in order to improve his English pronunciation:

> His reading practice in the mornings, executed with the single-mindedness of a child practising scales by thumping the keys, remains for me one of the most relaxing memories of Oxford; me lying on the bed and patiently listening, a time of rootedness and plenitude, even of equable solitude […] Mandelstam, read by Sharma, took on a different, unsuspected life, odd, cubist, harmlessly egotistical, and atmospheric. (187)

Despite its unproductive character – neither taking a detour nor distractedly listening to an uninteresting text serves any obvious purpose – the experience of otium is often perceived as enabling, because of a felt distance from everyday concerns and an opening up to new perspectives and creativity that might turn out to be very productive in the end (cf. Fludernik/Nandi 8; Hasebrink/Riedl 4; Gimmel, Keiling 49, 64-65). A key characterisation in this passage is the narrator's reading as "a time of *rootedness* and *plenitude*", that is, an experience focused on (or rooted in) the present, but open to a wealth of possibilities. A previously unknown alley becomes an "island of life" to be observed, and Mandelstam becomes "cubist […] and atmospheric".[7]

[7] The openness that is at stake here and its fundamental role for human experience have been conceptualised by Victor Turner in his notion of play as a crucial element of cultural practices (11-13), see also 1.2.2.

In this sense, otium is tightly linked to **freedom** understood as a self-fulfilment through meaningful ways **to act**.[8] The freedom *from* constraints in everyday life may at times be a *prerequisite* for experiencing otium, but an opening up of possibilities *to act or think* is *constitutive* of the experience (cf. Berlin 166-217; Turner 36-37, Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 17). In Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993), a former civil servant decides to take on the management of a government rest house as a means for early retirement. In the unfolding narrative, he contrasts his former, busy, metropolitan life and professional ambition with the way in which he perceives his surroundings in the present, framing his retirement as a form of religious retreat and himself as "someone who has retired to the forest to reflect" (*Sutra* 1). By freeing himself from the constraints of his career pursuits, as well as from the expectations of others (cf. O'Connor 171), such as the people he knew in the social life he led in Bombay, the narrator is open to the perception of the surrounding nature in his meditations and walks, leading to an intense experience. He makes "the river […] the object of [his] reflections" and comments on the wealth of plants and jungle animals (*Sutra* 3). As O'Connor writes: "[the] anticipation of idleness alone amounts to anticipation of liberation from tasks and pressures. And idleness appears to be valued because it is the actual experience of that liberation" (173). The experience of otium goes beyond this liberation or *negative freedom* and turns into a *positive freedom*, as an openness or *potentiality* of positive freedom (cf. Berlin 166-217; Hasebrink/Riedl 3; Gimmel et al. 63-64, 68, 78-79). The experience of positive freedom can be compared with a sense of agency that provides identification and the feeling of mastery over one's actions (see also 3. Practice; cf. Jaeggi 23; Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 17).

Furthermore, positive freedom is tightly connected to the perception of time, for the experience of otium holds "a promise of a freedom expressed in the physical and the emotional capacities of subjects and their autonomous hold on

[8] The concept of freedom this aspect is based on goes against understandings of ethical autonomy and agency that are associated with effort and control. See also O'Connor's discussion of Immanuel Kant, who associates freedom with "an ongoing inner tussle" and the "endless oscillation between reason and desire" rather than with relaxation and openness (176; cf. 37-57). I follow O'Connor in his claim that "idleness may, in certain respects, be considered closer to the ideals of freedom than the most prestigious conception of self-determination found in philosophy" (2).

time" (Noor, "Semantics" n. pag.). As an **exception from everyday temporality**, otium is usually experienced within a limited time frame, in which time is perceived differently. Both with reference to positive freedom and to the experience of time, otium is therefore marked as a time that is perceived as exceptional from everyday structures and routines (cf. Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 17). Thus, even in what O'Connor discusses as a "life of idleness", experiences of otium would be the exception to everyday perception (although not to work rhythms) (5-6). The progressive, sequential passing of time is not felt as consciously, "time seems to stand still or has slowed down" (Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 17; cf. Bergson 77). The difference in time perception can be understood as a "low degree of time-consciousness" in what Maurice Roche frames as "'inner', subjective or 'lived'" time (58-59). Lived time or, to use Bergson's term, 'time as duration' as opposed to "[c]locktime or calendar time", is often described as a sense of *being* in the present, as well as an experience with an emphasis on sensory perception (Roche 58-60; cf. Bergson 60-105; Hasebrink/Riedl 3; Sennefelder 106-112). An example for this can be provided by a passage in *Afternoon Raag*, which describes the peculiarly enjoyable temporality, the "paradoxical confluence of timelessness and movement" of a crowded café. There, "one was always feeling grateful or obliged, strangely powerful or powerless; one shrank and hunched, and then graciously expanded again, in regular accordion-like time" (198-199). The situation in the café is characterised by its own temporal rhythm which is set apart from everyday temporality. The example can also be indicative of the *transgressive potential* of otium, transcending binary contrasts between contemplative ("timelessness") and active ("movement") experiences.

Otium is also characterised by **a feeling of lingering or dwelling in the present** or what could also be framed as a feeling of "being at home with ourselves" (O'Connor 178; cf. Figal 30-31). In Nayantara Sahgal's independence novel *A Time to Be Happy*, the narrator captures the attraction of a beautiful bronze statue of a goddess as follows: "[f]or her […] tomorrow had no meaning. There was all eternity to admire and be admired" (25). Significantly, Govind Narayan, the owner of the object, states that it was "relaxation just to look at her"

(21). In another scene, when the narrator meets Govind in his garden, Govind shows him a beautiful necklace and the narrator muses about how in this place "time had a way of lingering, and nothing was of any significance except the sunlight on the gems I held and the stillness that was studded, gem-like, with a hundred muted sounds" (64; cf. Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 21). The temporary freedom from everyday concerns, schedules and time perception is so important in this context because of a focus on the present instead of a perspective on future plans.[9] This characteristic is shared despite all differences in other respects by the situations of the busy yet timeless café and the piece of art that suggests eternity.

Since there is often a lack of semantic terms explicitly referring to otium, such as concepts like *contemplate*, *meditate*, *relax(ing)*, or someone *strolling leisurely* (Fludernik/Nandi 4), potential instances of otium are identified on the basis of *emotional states or sensuous impressions*. Therefore, the **representation** of experiences of otium in the literary text through **narrative techniques that mirror the sensory experience of the protagonists** is as much subject to this study as the experience itself. The location of an experiential quality in the "senses and the bodies" of the characters is represented through stylistic devices in the texts (Noor, "Semantics" n. pag.). The same is the case in the vernacular literature. Terms directly referring to leisure, idleness or similar experiences are, when they appear, frequently "used […] in a deliberately critical manner to differentiate between classes, gender roles and cultures" (Noor, "Semantics" n. pag.) A typical example of the *indirect* thematisation of otium is a passage from Sohaila Abdulali's *The Madwoman of Jogare* (1998), a description of the twilight-time of *Gaudhuli*. The term refers to a smell, to light and to colours, as well as to a season and to the time of day reserved for certain agricultural labours (68). Referring to her perception of the valley before her, the painter Ifrat captures this mood both as it emanates from her surroundings and impacts on herself:

> […] warm sunshine without the sting and sweat of May or October. Flame-of-the-forest flowering orange fleshy blooms against the blue sky. Odd, beautiful, tiny flowers of purple, yellow, pink, bursting out of the cracks in the dry brown fields

[9] Being inactive, but in a state of expectation or future-orientation, is more likely to lead to stress or boredom (cf. Auerbach 4; O'Connor 103; Sweeny; Ehret et al. n. pag.).

> […]. And the sounds, the sounds of a January afternoon. Far-off hollow call of a monkey. Teak leaves, stiffened by the heat of the previous months, crackling crisply in the breeze. The merry whistle of a young man in a bullock-cart, king of the road, lounging as the cart finds its way home. Cartwheel of wood clattering across hard dry rock. (138)

The passage, inspired by Ifrat's contemplative mood, is among the most poetic of the novel. The aesthetic mode of contemplation is marked by a wealth of impressions that are depicted and emphasised by means of numerous adjectives, adverbs and gerunds (warm, flowering, orange, fleshy, odd, beautiful, tiny, purple yellow, pink, dry, brown, hollow, stiffened, crisply, merry) and the use of alliteration ("**F**lame-of-the-**f**orest **f**lowering orange **f**leshy blooms […]. Teak leaves […] **cr**ackling **cr**isply […]. **C**artwheel of wood **cl**attering a**cr**oss…"). The example shows how the form of representation has the capacity to depict a character's experience, mirroring the intensity of sensory impressions inherent in experiences of otium.

1.2.2. Otium and Related Terms

Though I use the term otium, similar experiences may be referred to by a set of other terms in current use. There is, however, no suitable term in either English or one of the Indian vernacular languages which could describe the experiential mode relevant in the corpus of this study. Despite the novels' use of the English language, and its "great currency in South Asia", the practices and experiences relevant in this context can only ever be approximated by English words such as *idleness, indolence, leisure, repose, relaxation, contemplation, meditation, immersion*…; a list that could be continued (Noor, "Semantics" n. pag.; cf. Fludernik/Nandi 2-3; 5). These terms have shifted significantly in their use and interpretation, depending on time and (cultural) context (cf. Burke 141, 148) and they often carry certain value judgements that contravene an equation with otium (cf. Noor, "Semantics").[10] Although it will not be possible to delineate these

[10] For diachronic changes in the evaluation of concepts compare the theoretical tradition of conceptual history, a method going back to the German historian Reinhart Koselleck and his project of *Begriffsgeschichte* (Olsen 167-202). What the founder of the theory, Reinhart Koselleck, and his followers were particularly interested in were cultural key terms and their change in meaning over time. In more recent publications, the project has been considerably widened both in the scope of its subject area to include international or, as it is often called,

developments in detail, the following section should give an overview over concepts related to otium. Their positive or negative evaluations support my choice of otium as a concept I derive from significant experiences and narrative structures in my corpus rather than from the term's specific historical meaning. After an overview of selected concepts in South Asian languages, I will devote a section each to leisure and idleness before coming to an example from Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to Be Happy* (1958) that further illustrates why I propose the additional concept of otium for the purpose of this study.

Since I am dealing with South Asian texts, there are a number of Indian words in this semantic field that need to be considered. I will name just a few from a north Indian context, where the novels discussed here generally take place: *avakāś* or *avasar* are Bengali words that can be translated as *leisure*, but also as *space* or *opportunity*; *furṣat* is used in Urdu and Hindi and can be understood as *leisure*, but also *opportunity*, *rest* or *ease*; c*huṭṭī* in Urdu and Hindi or *chuṭi* in Bengali can refer to a "release or freedom from something" (Noor, "Semantics" n. pag.).[11] Other Indian terms are marked by their communal nature, by "a space of communal interaction, sociality, bonding, recreation" rather than the aspect of inactivity or individual well-being and self-care (Fludernik/Nandi 4). A typical semantic and discursive instance of this is the Bengali concept of *āḍḍā,* a collectively recognized, contemplative leisure activity building on 'uncontrolled' chatter or musings that can lead to deeper self-reflection (cf. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 180-213). A particular practice like *āḍḍā* and the nostalgic discourse focusing on it are relevant to this project, but the term especially cannot be used as the main analytical category, as that would exclude other, meditative and solitary, experiences of otium.

None of these lexemes expresses by itself the various experiences and practices that have become central to the corpus of this study, for they describe

entangled history/ies, as well as in terms of discipline (cf. Pernau, "Whither Conceptual History?").

[11] I am grateful to Farha Noor, who helped me reach an understanding of the Indian terminology. For a more comprehensive discussion of the Indian terminology associated with otium see also her paper "The Sensory Semantics of Otium in South Asia: Asymmetries, Entanglements and the Affective".

activities as diverse as religious meditation and a leisurely car ride through a big city, to name just two examples. The Bengali *avakāś*, for instance, is translated as *leisure*; it means being free from regular business, but also to have an opportunity to do something else, like engaging emotionally, philosophically or even physically in other activities. The concept excludes 'mere' idleness and instead denotes something fruitful and thoughtful. Thus, as Farha Noor comments, "the leisure words like *furṣat*, *rāhat*, *ārām*, *avakāś* are closer to otium than the English leisure in its present-day meaning", especially because they all imply a "sense of 'opportunity'" ("Semantics" n. pag.). Another crucial observation by Noor is the absence of the "collocation with religious morality towards time or work. None of the negative words in the South Asian languages" – that is, words implying laziness or uselessness – "seem to imply a sense of 'sin' in their meanings" (ibid.). In the European context and in capitalist societies, however, the protestant work ethic has strengthened this association (s. 2.1.2., cf. Turner 37; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 121; Wajcman 17, 37-40, 51, 128). In the following, I want to turn to the connotations of *idleness*, *indolence* and *leisure*, which this comment is directed at.

While *idleness* and *indolence* sometimes still had positive connotations in the eighteenth century, especially in the context of Romantic literature, they acquired a critical, negative meaning in the context of changing work structures in industrialised societies in combination with a strict Puritan work ethic (cf. Jordan; Fludernik/Nandi 2-3, 6-7; Fludernik, "Spectators"; "Nostalgia" 16). From the eighteenth century onwards, "people were beginning to be defined less by birth and more by occupation and money" (Jordan 17). Sarah Jordan argues that "the virtue of industriousness" became in eighteenth-century Britain the central value "that held society together" and "the discourse of idleness" helped to define the "*true* British" and consolidate the nation against outsiders and misfits (15, 17). Consequently, idleness not only "posed a threat to one's status and self-definition", but it "had to be a terrible danger, a threat to the social order" (15, 18). Time was conceptualised as a material good or "property" that had to be put to use, so that time spent doing nothing was considered to be "wasted time" and perceived with a "*horror vacui*" (Fludernik, "Spectators" 152). Indolence was seen

as dangerous, producing weariness, boredom and melancholy and it was associated with the capital sin of sloth (cf. Jordan 18-19; Wajcman 39-40; Fludernik, “Spectators” 137-139; Auerbach 4; O’Connor 25-57, 100-134). In the face of ideals of productivity and thrift, idleness was interpreted as a vice; associated with “childlikeness, laziness without ambition, selfishness, becoming a creature of nature, indeed a sheep” (O’Connor 169; cf. 1, 8). It was even argued that embracing idleness would mean that “rational beings would no longer pursue any means of becoming worthy of their humanity” (ibid. 49; cf. 169). In the wake of this argumentation, idleness was associated with women and femininity as well as with the colonial subjects as counter-images to “bourgeois manliness” (Jordan 20-21, 123-152; see also 2.3.2.). Attitudes to idleness were extremely contradictory, since idleness was, on the one hand, seen with reference to the gentry “as somehow the desired reward for hard work, the ultimate attainment in social status”, while, on the other hand the criticism of idleness in both the gentry and the lower classes increasingly became “an essential part of middle-class ideology” (Jordan 18-19).

The negative connotations of idleness were implicitly questioned by Romantic idealisations of *indolence* or *idle contemplation* (cf. Levine 258-259, 254; Adelman; Fludernik, “Spectators” 135, 152; “Nostalgia” 16). As Richard Adelman describes it in his study on aesthetic discourses on idleness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and especially in Romanticism, “idle contemplation […] [is depicted] as a category invisible from certain perspectives but central to both poetic composition and human life more generally” (6). While the different discourses he analyses (“literary, philosophical, educational and economic”) define idleness “in relation to a notion of labour”, they concur in “the importance they assign to contemplation and repose” (6-8). Hence, “[i]dle contemplation is repeatedly raised above manual labour” (9). However, this positive perspective on idleness also strengthened juxtapositions between ‘genuine creative idleness’ and ‘mere trifling diversion’ (Fludernik/Nandi 5-6; cf. Levine 255-258).

Leisure, it is widely argued, has developed due to specific cultural factors and, in the separation of work and free time through modernisation and industrialisation, has come to be linked nowadays almost exclusively to

pleasurable *free time* activities.[12] While the valuation of work changed in Europe "for a middle class that began to define itself by its commitment to work", leisure was seen as a "dangerous and destabilising" form of distraction (Auerbach 4). Consequently, leisure is commonly understood to refer to "free, or unobligated time" as well as any "activity apart from obligations, such as work or family" (Chick 115; cf. Dumazedier 250; Rojek et al. 1-21). Furthermore, the modern connotation of leisure as recreation implies the aim to become fit for work again, which makes it "a non-work, even an anti-work phase" (Turner 36). It is "implicated in [life-shaping] demands" and can "renew our capacity to perform" (O'Connor 7). This understanding clashes with a notion of otium as a first and foremost unproductive state of being, out of whose inherent dynamic a particular productivity *can*, but does not *have to* emerge (cf. Dobler 54; Gimmel et al. 11-12, 14, 22-23, 63). As Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi put it in their introduction to the volume on *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature* "[p]eople do not merely long for more leisure time […], but for something less tangible: for repose, rest, inner calm or, quite simply, for a liberation from duties and responsibilities, from schedules and expectations" (2). By contrast, "our leisure is said to be […] overloaded with activities, subject to planning and even to meeting benchmarks" (Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 16). This makes the use of the term 'leisure' inappropriate for describing the experiences in the novels. Moreover, because of a cultural preference of leisure studies for Western societies (cf. Chick 111-112, 128),[13] it would be misleading to place the concept of otium within leisure studies.

At the same time, it is possible to interpret leisure as being very close to otium, particularly where it refers to "a state of mind, or a condition", also called "leisureliness" (Roche 65-66; Chick 115-116). 'Leisure' has undergone severe diachronic changes in word meaning. In older examples, the OED explains the word as "[f]reedom or opportunity *to* do something", in later examples only "[o]pportunity afforded by freedom *from* occupations" or "having time at one's

[12] For this line of argumentation compare Dumazedier 248-249; Turner 28-29, 32; Burke 137, 144; Rojek et al. 1-21; Fludernik/Nandi 4; Hasebrink/Riedl 4; Gimmel et al. 14-15; Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 16.

[13] Bhattacharya's article on Indian traditions is an exception, but apart from a vague summary including the old Sanskrit concept of *vinoda* as well as traditional arts and crafts, he mostly has a specific anthropological focus on the traditions of tribal groups.

disposal […], free or unoccupied time" (Simpson and Weiner, "Leisure"; emphasis added). Particularly older definitions still include the meaning of leisure in the sense of otium (cf. Dumazedier 250-1). In more recent publications, Cyril Barrett also emphasises the purposeless and useless character of leisure, particularly in "leisure activities *par excellence* and *per se*" such as "[m]editation, artistic production, creative thought, invention, imaginative play" (19, emphasis original). These leisure activities *par excellence* are some of the typical practices of otium. Similarly, in Victor Turner's close associations of leisure with play, leisure is defined with the help of Isaiah Berlin's differentiation between *freedom from* and *freedom to*, the latter including the "*freedom to* transcend social structural limitations, freedom to play…with ideas, with fantasies […] and with social relationships" (37, emphasis original). He adds "that no one is committed to a true leisure activity by material needs or by moral or legal obligations" and points to its "disinterested" nature (ibid.). The discourse on play follows, as Brian O'Connor comments, a "strand of thought […] beyond the tension between work and idleness" (O'Connor 136). O'Connor's own definition of "idle freedom" shares many of the characteristics of the definition of otium in this book (3). He defines idleness as "a […] truly human freedom, one that embodies spontaneity and the absence of all preconceived purpose" and he emphasises that the concept is "misaligned with negative freedom" (136, 180). Thus, both Turner's notion of leisure and O'Connor's notion of idleness are close to my understanding of otium. Nevertheless, colloquially the two concepts "tend to lead towards a new semantic value where leisure is inseparable from consumption and idleness is equivalent to societal taboo" (Noor, "Semantics" n. pag.). Thus, I maintain that for the purpose of this study it is necessary – despite the existence of open, idealistic understandings of the terms – to introduce the concept of otium.

An example from Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to Be Happy* (1958), a novel set at the time of the struggle for Indian independence[14], helps to illustrate the necessity to introduce another concept that transcends conventional understandings of leisure and idleness. In the novel, expectations about the value

[14] See also 2.3.2. for a discussion of the impact discourses about leisure and idleness had on the colonies.

of time are represented in two different characters: Govind Narayan is a landowner who enjoys appreciating art and being idle. His lifestyle agrees with the atmosphere of Lucknow that "still reflected the faded grandeur of an era when courtesy had been cultivated as a pastime and the improvisation of a couplet had been the hallmark of a gentleman" (17). Once, the narrator comments that "[h]e had never understood the feverish pursuit of excitement which characterized the modern concept of pleasure" (92). To his brother Harish, influenced strongly by English acquaintances and their values, "relaxation meant a cigar or a glass of port or, if the energetic mood seized him, to fling himself about the tennis court in pursuit of physical fitness" (21). He has "little time or inclination […] to pause in wonder or admiration" and instead "[t]ime was planned and apportioned to the last meticulously calculated minute up the sure path to success. A precious commodity, time, not something to be frittered in wanton fashion" (21, 25). In this contrast, otium (albeit an extremely refined, upper-class and ideologically framed version of it) can be located in Narayan's sphere, representing a "time structure […] replacing supposedly 'Western' activity and efficiency with the near-stasis or longue durée of Indian impassivity and sempiternity" (Fludernik, "Ideology" 204; cf. "Nostalgia" 20-21). In the novel, otium is represented as an experience that undermines or transcends expectations of usefulness, as something that matters fundamentally or even as an (albeit threatened) part of a concept of the good life.

With a view to the unconventional use of "otium" in the Indian context,[15] I agree with Garry Chick, who in reference to *leisure* argues against the notion that "conceptualization of [an] entity […] is […] impossible" in a particular culture if there is no exact linguistic representation in the culture's language (116; cf. 117-119). While otium is a concept formed in Western cultural traditions, it is understood in this study as a mode of resistance to dominant, singular narratives that can play a role both *within* Western culture and *in response to their hegemonic position in the past*. Consequently, my understanding of experiences of otium as forms of alternative temporalities makes the concept useful for an

[15] For discussions of the semantic meaning and use of otium as well as the problem of finding corresponding translations in different languages see also Fludernik's reference to the German *Muße* ("Nostalgia" 15-16), Cheauré for the Russian terminology ("Muße à la russe"), Feitscher and Sennefelder for a comparison of French, German and English terms.

analysis of its function in transcultural narratives that move beyond the classical European origins of the term.[16] These crucial aspects are neither captured by other English terms like *leisure* and *indolence*, nor by any single Indian word.

1.2.3. The Relation between Alienation and Otium

In the repeated connection between experiences of otium and nostalgia, a modern state of fragmentation and loss is mourned. Thus, another way of thinking about otium is by analysing its relation to alienation. If alienation can be defined as a failed appropriation of the world, as "powerlessness and relationlessness with respect to oneself and to a world experienced as indifferent", the experience of otium is its opposite (Jaeggi 2-3). When alienation is discussed as an infliction that individuals suffer from, it refers not only to a condition of "impoverishment of the relation to self and world", but also implies an un-alienated relation between ourselves and the world (Jaeggi 26-27; cf. Khair 3; Rosa, *Resonance* 175). Hence, whenever experiences of otium are represented as a utopian ideal, a basis for a good life or nostalgically as a mode of experience that is lost, alienation is the negative foil upon which these representations are built (cf. O'Connor 19-20).

The idea of otium as an un-alienated state of being frequently questions its relation to work. Interpreting it as an experience distinct from work presupposes an understanding of work – the fulfilment of prefixed aims and thus a means to an end – that has developed through industrialised production and spread through globalisation (cf. Turner 32, 36; Jaeggi 14; Dobler 54). In Marxist philosophy, un-alienated work that is "(at least also) performed for its own sake" is "the paradigmatic human relation to the world" in which "[t]he human being produces herself and her world in a single act" (Jaeggi 13-14; cf. Khair 23-25; O'Connor 86-99, 157-160; Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit* 27-28). In alienated relations of labour, the process of externalizing "the world as the product of her activities" is interrupted and "the product of one's labour is not merely outside of oneself but

[16] See also chapter 2. Alternative Modernities as well as Noor, "Semantics", a paper in which this approach is located within the tradition of "'entangled histories', based on the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic aspects of so-called boundaries between cultures" (n. pag.).

owned by others […] alien to one's powers and needs" (Khair 4; Jaeggi 14-15). Alienation describes how the commodified products of labour have become silent and unresponsive due to the instrumentalised attempts at their appropriation. However, it has been suggested that work that is task-oriented (rather than aim-oriented) is less focused on limited work times (Bhattacharya 85). If workers can find their own rhythm or decide on which tasks to fulfil, even repetitive tasks can become meditative and workers feel less alienated by gaining back some control and identification with the process and products of their work (Jaeggi 12; Dobler 62-63, 68). Thus, the border between work and the possibility of otium changes with the definition of work as well as with the degree to which work is either "under foreign command", that is, heteronomous, or self-determined (Jaeggi 13; Dobler 66-68).

On a more general level, Hartmut Rosa argues with his concept of *resonance* that exactly because more of the world has been made accessible in modernity, the dominant human relation to the world is one based on aggression, control, improvement and possession (cf. *Unverfügbarkeit* 12, 16-17, 22-26, 99; *Resonance* 22-25). However, a "successful, fulfilling and un-alienated experience of self and world", to which belong experiences of otium as I understand them, "implies an aspect of constitutive inaccessibility" and therefore eludes us the more we intentionally attempt to create it (*Resonance* 174; cf. *Unverfügbarkeit* 43). Following from this assumption, he diagnoses a greater longing for a responsive relationship to the world, the more silent it becomes. *Resonance*, a concept he introduces for his sociology of "the good or successful life", is defined by Rosa as "a kind of relationship to the world, formed through af←fect and e→motion, intrinsic interest, and perceived self-efficacy, in which subject and world are mutually affected and transformed" (sic, *Resonance* 174). By contrast, he understands alienation as "a mode of relating to the world in which the subject encounters the subjective, objective and/or social world as *indifferent* or *repulsive*" (ibid. 178). His position is typical of discourses of alienation, in which "freedom and self-determination and the failure to realize them" are understood as fundamentally modern problems (Jaeggi 6; cf. Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit* 59, 63, 120; *Resonance* 25-26). Thus, Rosa's concept of *resonance* shares with otium

its emphasis on openness and purposelessness as well as its inaccessibility based on a present situation of alienation (cf. Sennefelder 112).

Consequently, alienation is a useful concept to reflect on the characters' relation to the world/others in otium: despite the focus on the self and subjectivity in many experiences of otium, they can be enabling on the personal level as well as being an opening up towards the world (cf. Jaeggi. 5-6; Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit* 28, 29, 42). As Hartmut Rosa argues, "both sides – subject and world – are first formed, shaped, and in fact constituted in and through their mutual relatedness" (*Resonance* 32). Both sides change in an un-alienated encounter between humans and humans/animals/the surrounding world, which is "not an echo, but a responsive relationship, requiring that both sides speak *with their own voice*" (*Resonance* 174, emphasis original; cf. *Unverfügbarkeit* 42). This dynamic of the relationship between individuals and their environment is reflected in this study (see also chapter 5. and 6. respectively). The most obvious example of alienation as a foil to otium is the situation in Navtej Sarna's extremely nostalgic novel *We Weren't Lovers Like That*. The main character chronically suffers from his alienated relation to his constantly changing urban surroundings (see also 5.3). The novel culminates in his moving out of the city back into the small town of his childhood and encountering the love of his youth. Moreover, I argue that in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* alienated work relations form a negative foil on which a utopia of otium is imagined (s. 4.2.).

In this way, individual practices of otium can relate to and be subversive in relation to contemporary social conditions of acceleration and the temporal structures of (late) modernity (cf. Hasebrink/Riedl 1, 4; Dobler/Riedl 1-2; see also 2.1.). Consequently, experiences of otium do not, despite their association with classical conceptions of the good life, need to be entirely positive, but can incorporate an element of crisis due to the disruption of habitual ways of acting (cf. Jaeggi 14; Dobler 66, see also chapter 3.). Due to both this element of crisis and the understanding of positive freedom as a space of possibility, the concept can be associated with Foucault's notion of heterotopia – other or counter space. As a heterotopian experience, the experience of otium itself can be seen as a secluded area that changes the way other spaces (or, metaphorically, social

space) are seen, therefore carrying a transgressive potential (Foucault, *Heterotopien* 10-11, 19-20; Hasebrink/Riedl 3, s. also chapters 5. Environment and 6. Society). Thus, I agree with Tabish Khair that "alienation – which is based on a recognition of conflictual spaces in discursive and socio-economic terms – remains an enabling concept" (347). The experiences of otium in the novels refer to a utopian and, in many ways, inaccessible state of being, and they draw attention to the conflicts that make fulfilling relations to the self, to the surrounding world and to others impossible.

1.3. Corpus

1.3.1. Indian Fiction in English

This study deals with contemporary Anglophone fiction from India in order to analyse how experiences of otium reflect on the temporal structures of late modernity as they become relevant to the characters of the Indian novels. This framework makes it possible to analyse concerns such as identity formation, the representation of space, work and leisure as well as social roles. My focus on recent works of fiction in the Indian context will shed light on the position and genre expectations of contemporary Anglophone novels in the development of the English-language novel in India.[17]

In my research on otium in contemporary Indian fiction in English, I have read roughly sixty novels published between the late 1980s and the present, as well as relevant anthologies and collections of criticism that provide an overview over the genre (cf. Mukherjee, *The Perishable;* Chaudhuri, *The Picador*; Khair;

[17] See also Wiemann's *Genres of Modernity*, where he comments how contemporary novels "partake of, arise from, and feed back into, pre-established fields of possibilities of language use, commonsensically called genre" (41). In this study, he analyses the role of the novel form in recent fiction from India for our understanding of temporality and the public and private spheres and how they impact on interpretations of modernity (cf. 4, 7, 10, 13, 23, 25, 29, 42-48, 53-83, 291). I refer to Wiemann's theses on modernity and temporality in 2.1 and 2.2 His "interrogations of modernity" differ from my project in that he focuses on various texts with both postmodern and modernist, private and public tendencies and ties them together as "*transmodern interventions*" in order to overcome the binaries of postcolonial theory (10). I will return to the question of how experiences of otium can be situated in relation to Wiemann's study in 7. Conclusion.

Mehrotra; George, *Indian English*; Senft). Out of this research, around thirty texts have proven to be relevant for a study of otium, from which I then chose six representative novels (s. 1.3.2 below). The novelists that have become central to my study of unproductive, leisurely experiences often align themselves in their thematic focus and stylistic choices with the literary culture of modernity. The style and narrative technique of most of these texts are modernist rather than postmodern, thus they do not easily fit into the globally visible image of Indian-English fiction shaped by the well-known bestselling novels in English by authors such as Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy. Hence, otium texts participate in a movement or tendency within contemporary Indian literature in English (see also Majumdar, "Far from the Nation"; *Prose* 28, 35-47; Fludernik, "Narrating"): rather than being defined by a focus on postcolonial themes, an eclectic playfulness, magic realism (cf. Kluwick), metafictional strategies and a flamboyant multiplication of unreliable voices, most of the texts relevant to a study of experiences of otium are shaped by attention to local or private scenes and preoccupations, internally focalised narration and a sense of an almost spiritual elusiveness of experience that the protagonists want to capture.

According to conventional periodisation, the novels I have chosen belong to the "decisive, cosmopolitan and globally popular phase" of Indian-English writing starting in the 1980s (Ashcroft, "Re-Writing" 29). There is, however, no decisive break with older stylistics and forms in these more recent novels. One could argue that a text like Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* can be compared more easily with the phase of writing immediately after Indian independence and authors such as Nayantara Sahgal, Arun Joshi or Anita Desai rather than with contemporary postmodern fiction. As Narayan and Mee comment on the seldom-discussed phase of English writing after 1950: "[P]erhaps the dominant concern of the literature of this period is with character development and psychological depth, often combined with a sense of the alienated individual, dissatisfied with modern life" (247, cf. 250-252, 254-258; cf. Joseph 118-119, 134-135).

Due to this tendency, the arguments about otium need to be aligned with a critique of a problematic narrative about an evolutionary movement in the history of Indian-English writing. This widespread thesis is expressed in formulations that

describe a process of how Indian-English writing "came into *full flower* in the period inaugurated by *Midnight's Children*" or how "*Midnight's Children* (1981) can be regarded as the founding text of a *new generation*" with Rushdie as their "*messiah*", subsequent authors being labelled as "*Midnight's* Heirs" (Mee 258-259 emphasis added; Ashcroft, "Re-Writing" 30, 34; cf. Huggan, *Exotic* 69-70). Thus, Indian fiction in English allegedly reaches its maturity in the 1980s and 1990s, at which point it became, according to a notorious comment by Rushdie himself, "perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books" (Rushdie; cf. Mukherjee, *The Perishable* 23; Khair 56; Mee; George, *Indian English* 45-46; Anjaria 9). The texts that will be important in this study are part of a more complex picture; many of them drawing on older traditions and some of them being little known outside India, such as Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*.

An interpretation of these novels as alternative, subversive experiences should, however, not fail to take into account the writers' privileged status in India as part of an English-speaking elite (see also chapter 6). On the one hand, since the success of authors like Salman Rushdie or Amitav Ghosh in the 1980s, writing in English has been celebrated internationally. It can be interpreted as part of the project of "writing back" to the metropolitan centre from a postcolonial perspective. English is chosen by authors because they feel that they have a better or a similar literary competence in that language than in their vernacular tongues; it may also reflect a choice for the language understood by the largest number of readers (cf. Mukherjee, *The Perishable* 169; Mehrotra 25-26; Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin; Anjaria 9). On the other hand, the choice of English is frequently criticised for catering to international and Western audiences and for acquiring a problematically representative status for the writers' culture of origin (cf. Huggan, *Exotic* 26-27). Writing in English is seen as "an indicator of class" (Khair xiii; Mehrotra 25). This argument is underlined by statistical numbers citing between 5 and 12% for the English-speaking population of India (Trivedi 34; Khair 10; George, *Indian English* 15; Joseph 9). These numbers suggest that writing in English is produced and read only by a privileged, often metropolitan group rather

than by a larger number of literate Indians.[18] Moreover, because so many Anglophone authors have received their education abroad or continue to live outside India, writing in English is connected to the "dominance of the diaspora" (Dharwadker 253). Criticism often suggests that it is more essentialising and homogeneous, not able to capture nuanced traits of the regional cultures (cf. Mukherjee, *The Perishable* 171-172, 199-201; Khair 21, 99-101; Anjaria 9).[19]

The uneasiness about English being linked to British rule in India is often countered by reference to its naturalisation in literary use and its pervasive appropriation in Indian everyday life. The English novel's derivative nature from European traditions must be qualified by the fact that fiction in the regional languages developed at the same time and alongside English writing. The "novel in India which began under English tutelage soon began to acquire its own distinctive character" (Mukherjee, *Realism* 3, 18). It became, as Mukherjee convincingly argues, a "synthesis of a borrowed literary form and indigenous aesthetic" similarly entangled with nationalism and the rise of the Indian middle classes (ibid.).[20]

I argue that the narratives of otium which I analyse in the following chapters emphasise this element of synthesis that is already inherent in the novel as a modern genre, focusing on local scenes and regional traditions (such as classical Hindustani music, see chapter 3) and, at the same time, employing European modernist literary forms where it adds to their mode of representation. While this may be a privileged cultural perspective, it is more rooted in local contexts than the postmodern narratives of many of the bestselling novels of Indian fiction.

---

[18] Although the percentage of speakers of English is greater than that of some of the vernacular languages, the situation is exacerbated by the fact that translations are more often made into English rather than from one vernacular language to another (cf. Mukherjee, *The Perishable* 188-196; Huggan 78-80; Joseph 8-9).

[19] The situation is, however, hardly as simple as Joseph portrays it in her opposition between authors representing the "experience" and such representing a mere "idea of India" (6). Her generalised, fierce criticism of the "threadbare themes" of Indian diaspora novels does not do justice to the English writing of authors such as Jhumpa Lahiri or Sunetra Gupta (13). The contrast between diasporic (unoriginal) and native (original and authentic) writing can hardly be upheld to such rigour.

[20] For the argument of Indian English writing as a synthesis of foreign form and indigeneous aesthetic see also Mukherjee *The Perishable Empire* 2-3, 173-174 and "The Beginnings of the Indian Novel" 105-106; Trivedi 209; Khair 51-52; Chaudhuri, *The Picador* xx; Mehrotra 10-14; Wiemann, *Genres* 42-44 as well as Harder, "Naturalisation" 346.

Postmodern literary strategies may be employed in order to evoke different, subversive forms of temporality, but they do so with an explicit political agenda, placing the arbitrariness of poststructuralist theory in opposition to dominating narratives of history and nationalism.[21] By contrast, the leisurely practices and experiences analysed here are usually characterised primarily by their unproductive uselessness. Thus, they can, but do not obviously have to, develop a transgressive potential directed at dominant historical narratives.

1.3.2. The Choice of Texts

The earliest South Asian Anglophone novels relevant to a study of otium can be found from roughly the 1940s onwards, shortly before and after independence, two major examples being Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to Be Happy* (1958). Ali, who lived in Pakistan after the partition, wrote a novel which connects with the nineteenth-century Muslim tradition of nostalgia for luxurious idleness. Sahgal's *A Time to Be Happy*, from which many of the examples in 1.2.1 are taken, is a novel about the Gandhian Non-cooperation movement and the engagement and (often also intensely nostalgic) responses of the indigenous elites during Indian independence.[22]

As Farha Noor shows in her study on "Leisurely Feelings: Conceptualising Emotional Manifestations of Otium in South Asia", in Urdu literature, the connection of nostalgic remembering and idleness plays an important role earlier in the nineteenth century, while otium-related discourses in Bengali writing can only be found in the writing of Rabindranath Tagore (cf. Noor, "Semantics"). For Urdu, Margrit Pernau has shown how nostalgia subversively refers to ideals of progress and could even become a "critique of colonialism and a source for resistance" ("Nostalgia" 94; cf. 76-77, 88). With reference to Bengali, Amit Chaudhuri writes about the "superfluous", "purposeless" or "meaningless" (depending on translation) in Tagore's writing on Bengali nursery rhymes, which

[21] Compare Wiemann, *Genres* 61-83, 291; Mee 358-359, 369, 376; Kluwick 168-189; George, *Indian English* 47; Ashcroft, "Re-Writing" 29-30; Senft 1-6.

[22] The references to and nostalgic mood associated with the courtly culture of Lucknow in Sahgal's text, show that the novel does not exclusively focus on Hindu perspectives, see FN 2.

he strengthens “in favour of the clarity and the perspective of rationality” (*Clearing* 25). However, the explicit discourses about idle contemplation and aesthetics only appear in Tagore’s essayistic writing rather than in his novels (cf. Noor, “Semantics”). In similarity to this observation for the absence of an older Bengali tradition parallel to the Urdu texts, research for this study of *Anglophone* texts has shown that otium only becomes a major trend in fiction from the 1980s onwards.

The oldest text I will be working with is Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August* (1988), a novel which is relevant for the relationship between work and leisure as well as the question of what a fulfilling life is. The protagonist Agastya starts to work in the Indian Administrative Service and during his dull routine he reflects on the meaning of (his) work and how he spends his time. Amit Chaudhuri’s *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991) is a novel written entirely in a leisurely, digressive mode. It portrays everyday life in Calcutta from the perspective of one family, suggesting, through the point-of-view of a little boy, that this is a portrait of an older, fleeting experience of the city. In *A Sin of Colour* (1999) by Sunetra Gupta potential practices of otium, for example playing Indian classical music and appreciating aesthetic objects, play a major role in the characterisation and development of the protagonists. Both Gupta’s novel and Pankaj Mishra’s *The Romantics* (1999) are important for a negotiation of Western cultural practices with particularly Indian cultural practices. In the coming-of-age novel *The Romantics* the narrator is aimlessly drifting through life. He is unable to find his place between religious tradition and secular modernity – a situation ironically emphasised by a group of characters from the West who are obsessed with Indian spirituality. Navtej Sarna’s *We Weren’t Lovers Like That* (2003) is an extremely nostalgic novel that mostly dwells on the present impossibility of certain leisurely practices, freedom, personal agency as well as more open temporal structures. The most recent novel, Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), is in some ways an exception in this corpus of texts. Both in terms of stylistics and international visibility, Desai’s novel can be compared to previous internationally acclaimed Indian-English novels.[23] However, because of its

[23] Particularly since it won the Man Booker Prize in 2006 as part of a series of bestsellers from India including Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) and

contrasting of a local Indian with a globalised perspective and its emphasis on how time is experienced and represented, an analysis of this text was indispensable. Particularly in chapters 5 and 6 of this book, the novel's structurally different treatment of temporality helps to narrow down the ways in which otium figures in the other novels.

Previous research relevant to the role of otium in the chosen novels was mostly centred on questions of temporality, narrative structure or the representation of aspects of Indian culture in the novels. Generally, otium has not been a major research focus for South Asian fiction. The relevant criticism on aspects such as cultural modernity, temporal structures, nostalgia or sensory perception in the novels will be cited where appropriate in the individual chapters.

Of particular importance are Monika Fludernik's publications "Nostalgia for Otiose Leisure. Laying Claim to an Indian Tradition of Otium" (2019/2020) and "Narrating Otium – A Narratology of Leisure?" (Forthcoming, 2021) as well as Farha Noor's paper on "The Sensory Semantics of Otium in South Asia. Asymmetries, Entanglements and the Affective" (Forthcoming). In "Nostalgia for Otiose Leisure", Fludernik formulates the thesis that the nostalgia linked to leisurely experiences in Indian-English fiction is directed at a "yearning for the recuperation of a lost way of life that may be linked to class privilege" (15). Both her analysis of the connection between leisure and nostalgia, particularly in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*, and her contextualisation with the help of theories of autoexoticism and re-orientalism are relevant to my argument about artistic as well as spiritual practices of otium and the protagonists' crises of the self (see 3.2 and 3.3). However, in my final interpretation chapter on the social dimensions of otium, I also emphasise, in addition to the role of otium as a marker of class, its transgressive, subversive potential.

In her paper on "Narrating Otium", Fludernik addresses the question whether there is something like a particularly leisurely narrative style and supports her

---

Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) (for a discussion of the role of the prize and its problematic complicity in neo-colonial economic structures see also Huggan and Allington). As Allington comments: "While *The Inheritance of Loss* breaks with the traditions established by Rushdie in its apparent rejection of multiculturalism […], it retains clear stylistic traces of his influence" (125, cf. 127-128).

thesis with analyses of *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *A Sin of Colour*. Although she concludes that there are "no exclusively 'otiose' narrative strategies", her analysis of the correlation between "the representation of otium and the inducing of a leisurely reading experience" through "a recurrent use of a number of particular narrative, syntactic and stylistic options" will be relevant when I focus on structural and formal patterns in the novels (n. pag.). I return to Fludernik's argument about the particularly *modernist* narrative strategies she analyses not only in my readings of the novels in chapters 3-5, but also in my conclusion.

Farha Noor's analysis of the "Sensory Semantics" of otium in Urdu and Bengali is an extremely valuable contribution to discourses of otium in the South Asian context. As was described in section 1.2.2 on terms, her overview of this semantic field in two vernacular languages makes it possible to compare and situate not only the semantic field surrounding otium, but also the discourse about temporality in the English language in its cultural and linguistic context.

1.4. Chapter Outline

The focus on experiences of otium sheds light on the entanglement of different discourses: based on my understanding of otium as a form of alternative temporality, the following theoretical chapter (2.) focuses on four dimensions that will continue to be relevant for the interpretations of the chosen novels. First, I introduce the relevance of theories of alternative temporalities in opposition to a historically evolved hegemonic notion of temporality (2.1). As a necessary basis for these theories, a second section (2.2) will focus on perspectives on the relevance of (Indian) modernity as a cultural formation crucial to the present late modernity in which the contemporary novels are set. This discourse on Indian cultural modernity as an alternative development to a hegemonic Western modernity is entangled with the concepts of alternative temporalities and the possibility of resistance to linearity and functional progress. Moreover, the notion of an exclusively Western modernity spreading to the rest of the world is formed upon the imperialist basis of modern nation states. Consequently, the third

theoretical perspective (2.3) is the relevance of postcolonial theory not only with a view to subversive alternative temporalities, but also taking into account how colonial history is formative of concepts, practices and representations of otium. A fourth section will focus on the role of nostalgia and its utopian potential (2.4). The uselessness of nostalgic remembrance connects both with the idea of alternative temporalities and the orientation towards older cultural traditions. Moreover, it throws into relief the inaccessibility of otium as a utopian ideal.

The subsequent four interpretation chapters each emphasise one aspect of my definition of otium: positive freedom (3.), purposelessness (4.), sensuous perception (5.) and, again, the positive freedom/transgression in experiences of otium (6.). At the same time, the chapters each address one way in which experiences of otium change how characters relate to other characters, their environment or their social context. The temporal quality of otium and the idea of individual alternative temporalities runs through all of the chapters. Similarly, throughout these chapters, the motif of nostalgia and the narrative form of the novels are a central part of the interpretations. Thus, the analysis of experiences of otium will always have to be conducted on three levels. On the level of plot, character action and motifs, characters' experiences of otium and their function in the novels will be analysed. On the structural level, these findings are linked to stylistic devices and modes of narration. And on a more abstract level, my findings will be repeatedly connected to the framework of alternative temporalities and the nostalgia for cultural modernity.

3. Practice. Otium as the Freedom to Act takes as its starting point the idea of a *freedom from* obligation turning into a positive *freedom to act* as well as the resulting sense of openness through which otium becomes manifest in concrete practices free from expectations of productivity. This chapter is an important starting point to show more precisely where I locate experiences of otium, and it is the only chapter that predominantly focuses on what characters *do* when they experience otium. The artistic practices analysed in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* (3.2.) are central to the development of the protagonists and their constructions of identity. Moreover, I argue that they have an existential component connected to crises of identity. The crisis situations of the

protagonists raise questions about the appropriate temporal representation of their experience. Similarly, the spiritual semantics used for experiences of otium in Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics* and Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* (3.3.) does not only shed light on how the experience is semantically characterised in the text, but is also central to the characterisation of the narrative and its protagonists. In my examples, spirituality is extremely close to the idea of otium in its characterisation as an experience of timelessness, as being opposed to aim-oriented striving or as retreat and meditation. Through the focus on practices, this first interpretation chapter pays attention to the individual identity of the protagonists and the inherent self-reflexivity and potential for agency of experiences of otium. Moreover, individual practices of otium express a nostalgia for an alternative mode of acting as well as for older cultural practices (artistic as well as spiritual).

The chapter on practices is followed by almost its opposite: chapter *4. Inaction. The Subversive Potential of a Refusal to Act* analyses inaction as an intentionally subversive comment on the novels on expectations of progress, productivity and usefulness. Therefore the chapter is directly linked to the aspect of purposelessness in experiences of otium. Part 4.2. is about Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August*, a novel which raises questions about what a successful life should look like, or how one should spend and conceptualise time. In Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*, I analyse the predominance of useless everyday practices and digressive narrative techniques (4.3.). The novels express a nostalgic longing for an idyllic idle life or for the time perception of a certain phase during childhood and more or less explicitly mourn the present impossibility of otium. The crucial argument is that inaction and nostalgia here transcend the protagonists' passivity and become part of a critique in the narrative structure of the novels, which is why questions of representation will be in the foreground in this chapter. I argue that through this oppositional stance of the texts, a new agency is developed in the absence of purposeful action. The subversive potential of the refusal to act connects the chapter both with the theory on linear, hegemonic forms of temporality and progress and with the subversive transgression of social roles that is the subject of chapter 6.

5. Environment. Otium as a Space of Potentiality is about the parallel between the felt emphasis on space and sensory perception (rather than the passing of time) in the experiential mode of otium and the way in which space is represented and constructed in the novels through the interplay of practices *in* as well as the perception and imagination *of* space. The analysis of the novels moves from a focus on identity to the relation between a protagonist and their material environment. The first half of the chapter is centred on natural spaces in *The Romantics* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (5.2.), the second on the urban space in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and Navtej Sarna's *We Weren't Lovers Like That* (5.3.). I argue that a space of otium is determined not by its natural or urban characteristics, but by the way in which it is perceived and made use of as well as represented in the text. Through certain motifs, narrative pace and stylistic choices, the literary text itself becomes the space in which otium might be accessible to the reader. The urban and the natural spaces are characterised by being set apart from each other, but the utopia and nostalgia directed at a spatial context in which otium might be possible often undermines these boundaries as cultural constructs.

The final chapter *6. Society. Otium as Distinction and Transgression* further opens the experience of individuals to inter-human relations and returns to the *freedom from/freedom to* formula. On the one hand, the chapter analyses how societal constraints and expectations of social distinction make experiences of openness and freedom unlikely. On the other hand, because experiences of otium are non-functional as well as impossible to intentionally create, the chapter argues that their utopian promise lies in their potential to transgress alienated, precarious situations. In section 6.2 I interpret an alternative, nonhuman temporality in *The Inheritance of Loss* as a hopeful perspective against the precariousness that is associated with the absence of experiences of otium in subaltern classes. 6.3 focuses on *The Romantics* and how the protagonist fails to identify with a position in society that is associated with his Brahmin caste background. The section argues for the development in the course of the novel of a critical perspective through experiences of otium. Finally, in section 6.4. I analyse gender roles in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*. In this case,

transgression lies in the representation of the female protagonist as sublime through her connection with a time and leisure practice which is her own. The transgressive potential of otium in these examples is to varying degrees tied to temporal structures, narrative perspective and focalisation. Nostalgia here culminates in a longing for an un-alienated mode of existence.

At the end of this book, the different ways in which the triad of ideal experiences of otium, narrative techniques and nostalgia is manifested in the novels will be tied together. The Conclusion (7.) comments on a modern understanding of the literary text which is enacted both in modernist techniques and in the uselessness of experiences of otium. It will be necessary to assess the relationship between the inaccessibility of otium, its nostalgic/utopian character and its scope in the context of contemporary Indian-English fiction. Here, I also connect my conclusions to existing discourses about modernity in Indian-English fiction. I return to the arguments of the theory chapter and summarise how my interpretation of otium as a motif *and* as a form of alternative temporality which forms the structure of the novels, is tied to the entangled discourses of modernity, postcolonialism and nostalgia.

2. Alternative Temporalities and the Nostalgia for Cultural Modernity

Otium, as it is relevant for the novels, is based on an individual form of temporality, an experience of a novel's protagonists that is linked to larger questions of time in modern Indian society. This individual temporality can be understood as part of alternative and multiple temporalities that have a subversive potential vis-à-vis hegemonic norms of temporality. Thus, in the following, the first section traces the development of a historically grown concept of time that is influenced by the linearity of historicism, by a unified understanding of time as homogeneous, abstract and empty, by teleological narratives of colonial domination as well as the acceleration and efficiency of globalised capitalism.

If experiences of otium are to be understood as instances of alternative temporality, the recurring suggestions of alternative, subversive temporalities on the level of individual practice are usually embedded in a critique of modernity as an essentially Eurocentric project spreading from the Western countries to a supposedly 'underdeveloped' rest of the world.[24] In the second section, I develop an understanding of Indian cultural modernity as various responses to modernisation processes, which are frequently at the same time practices of otium.

Both concrete practices and motifs, as well as a more pervasive narrative structure, style and mood of the contemporary novels, refer back to an older moment of cultural modernity in a critical impulse directed at the contemporary, late modern, neo-colonial[25] and capitalist moment. Because of this critical

[24] Eurocentrism can be understood as "*the belief, implicit or otherwise, in the world historical significance of events believed to have developed endogenously within the cultural-geographical sphere of Europe*" (Bhambra 5, emphasis original).

[25] I use the term neo-colonialism to refer to, as Spivak writes, "dominant economic, political, and culturalist manoeuvers emerging in our century after the uneven dissolution of the territorial empires" (*A Critique* 172). Pratt significantly characterises the neo-colonial experience in connection to the expectations of the modern nation state as "a predicament. […] While modernity imagines a progressive process that will eventually make all nations equally modern, neo-colonialism acts to limit a state's ability to develop itself. […] norms generated elsewhere

impetus, it will be necessary, in a third step, to position cultural modernity and the concept of otium within the various forms of critique in postcolonial theory.

The last section addresses the temporal gap between the current fictional literature and the more or less obvious relevance of an older modernity: nostalgia as a recurring mood of the novels will be an important aspect of the analysis. I understand a nostalgic, utopian longing as made up of the two entangled wishes for the practices and temporalities of an older Indian cultural modernity as well as for the possibility to experience otium.

What I define as the experiential quality of otium is a mode of experience that can be analysed against the backdrop of these historical dimensions. The analytical concept is therefore the lens through which it becomes possible to focus on the novels' comments on how individual temporalities and cultural practices are embedded in certain narratives of modernity.

2.1. Theories of Time

> *[T]he angel of history […] is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage […]. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise […]. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.* (Benjamin 258)

The analysis of otium in contemporary Indian fiction is tied to questions of temporality in modern Indian society. Literary representations of subjective perception during experiences of otium can have a subversive potential against hegemonic views of temporality determined by the linearity of historicist time,

cannot be implemented where one is, but cannot be refused either. One is forced to be a second class member of a club in which membership is not optional" (226).

teleological narratives of colonial domination and the accelerated time of globalised capitalism.

Temporal factors are essential for the quality of experiences of otium. The passing of time and plans for the future cease to be of relevance, so that this time presents an exception from everyday temporality. Through heightened sensory impressions, it is accompanied by an awareness of the present (cf. Figal 31; Figal et al. 1-2; Sennefelder 106). Instead of a progressive succession of moments and an orientation towards the future, this embedded time can be perceived to stretch out and take on an almost spatial quality (cf. Hasebrink/Riedl 3; Figal 30; Figal et al. 1). This subjective awareness for the present is not perceived as a singular moment, but as a stretching out of present time (cf. Nowotny 15, 21). Otium is thus characterised by the feeling of *being*, *lingering* or *dwelling* in a time without specific duration (cf. Figal 31). In this way, experiences of otium are singled out from other experiences due to their different temporality. This difference refers to a 'normal' temporality, which is not a given, but has developed historically and has been spread through imperial conquest and globalisation.

2.1.1. The Linear, Hegemonic Time of Modernity

Conceptions of temporality are influenced by different factors such as philosophical concepts, religious and social ideals and values, interpretations of history, but also technological inventions. Clocks and other ways of measuring 'empty' time without connection to space only gradually became more widespread throughout early modern times until, in the nineteenth century, an "increasingly complete saturation of the spaces of everyday life" with clocks and other ways of measuring time had been reached (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 17; Wajcman 37-38, 42). The establishment of Greenwich Mean Time in 1884 plays an important role in the development towards a standard measurement (cf. Kalliney 27). Technical novelties brought forward the "idea of a linearized and homogenized scale of measurement" (Nowotny 56).

In the colonies, the introduction of chronometric time was much more abrupt, so that "clocks, watches, and time-discipline were brought to colonial India more or less simultaneously, across a couple of generations, starting *c.* 1800" (Sarkar

10). The effect of the spreading of clocks and watches is, in different cultural contexts, described as a dissociation – and alienation – from space and "from the natural world", since time had become abstract and calculable, broken up into "mechanical segments" and increasingly seen as a linear progression (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 17-18; cf. Soja 32-33; Giddens 16-18).[26] What seems the norm today – a segmentalisation of history into centuries, for instance – only became normal over time (cf. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 75-76).

The historical development of this occidental norm of time was, in conjunction with technological inventions, influenced by the nineteenth-century historicist ideal and its preference to draw on past events as explanation and to locate an emancipatory value in historical changeability (cf. Soja 15, 31-33). The physical, technological side of time measurement here tips over into an abstract ideal of progress and linearity, whereas the real experience of a multiplicity of temporalities becomes superseded by a singular ideology of progress and calculable linearity. This ideology also transforms the Judeo-Christian teleology of eschatological time into a secular ideal. The resulting secularised historicist narrative is closely linked to the development of modernity and "the nation state, which demands a historiography reflecting its own claims […] of a founding tradition" (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 64; cf. Giddens 5; Dube 6, 18-19; Ashcroft, "Modernities" 86). Historicism brought with it the universal claim of an objective, homogeneous historical time, which "relies on the principles of chronological and continuous linearity" and "degrades […] the present to an evanescent moment of transition" (Wiemann, *Genres* 54-55; cf. Bergson 92; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 76).[27] Time became predominantly seen as linear, with the timeline as its main

[26] While hegemonic, linear, abstract time can be traced over the course of its historical development, its contrast with a previous natural order is also part of problematic essentialist ideologies. In his article on the development of leisure, Burke criticises the "discontinuity thesis" and the resulting stark historical division into a pre-industrial "festival culture" and a post-industrial "leisure culture" (138-139).

[27] In philosophical debates on historicism, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel is an important influence. However, the teleological outlook of Hegel's perspective on history is more complicated than he is given credit for. It would be wrong to conflate his model of history with historicist thinking, if only because of ambivalent comments about how "history only comes into focus when the mode of consciousness attached to it is in decline" (Ganguly 165). Instead of the exclusive focus on philosophy, I understand historicism as influenced by a conglomerate of

visual representation and the "plurality of coexisting temporalities" were henceforth "evaluated in relation to one dominant model of time" (Wiemann, *Genres* 293).

Moreover, the historicist ideal of history, and with it the maxim of progress is based on an Enlightenment idealisation of personal freedom and agency (Nowotny 12, 45), which, however, implies a new compulsion to act. Jochen Gimmel argues that teleological concepts of history are based on a transfer of concepts of action to historical developments, endowing them with an intentional structure and aim (cf. 309; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 73-76; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 56, 59, 64). This teleological narrative of history has been constructed since the Enlightenment as the unfolding of (a European conception of) freedom and emancipation (cf. Ganguly 169; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 159, 163-164; Wiemann, *Genres* 55-56; Senft 1). It implies the expectation of continuous historical progress, in which individual practices become a mere function of a concept of freedom, a necessity to act rather than a free choice of action (cf. Gimmel 310-313).

I argue that experiences of otium can be a subversive alternative to this dynamic through their actual freedom and openness as well as the possibility to remain inactive. What is more, in Chapter 4 I argue that Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* and Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* are novels which use the absence of action or progressive temporality as a programmatic factor. The novels' plotless and non-progressive structures disappoint expectations of plot development. In the dialectic between inaction as a structural characteristic and a recurring practice of the novels' protagonists, they negotiate our assumptions about what constitutes purposeful action.

The epistemological bases of nineteenth-century history had far-reaching influences on the organisation of different branches of knowledge as well as on the constitution of the *ideology* of Eurocentrism (cf. Young 15; Lazarus, *Unconscious* 126-127; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 59, 65-66).[28] Thus, linear time

---

discourses including social developments and the role of an "emergent European bourgeoisie" (166).

[28] Neil Lazarus has suggested to talk about the "ideology" rather than the "episteme" of Eurocentrism. The use of the term *episteme* suggests, according to him, that it cannot be

and straightforward notions of cause and effect are often gendered masculine, on the basis of "connections between masculist individualism, national histories based on invented traditions and violent geopolitical aggression, and a Euro-American glorification of 'progress' driven by technological knowledge and instrumental reason" (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 102, sic.; cf. Cowman/Jackson 35, 38, 48; Dube 6). McClintock describes the paradoxical connection between nationalism and gender through the relevance of family metaphors and understandings of temporality. The nation as a metaphorical family could help create a "single historical genesis narrative […] while […] the family as an institution became voided of history" ("Family Feuds" 63; cf. Pernau/Jordheim 9-10). As a result, "female subjectivity" was often by contrast associated with cyclical time (Cowman/Jackson 48). In the novels relevant here, however, non-progressive temporalities shape the central formative experiences that are credited as values in themselves. At the same time, I see them as part of a discourse on cultural identification which avoids direct correspondence with national ideals. Moreover, I show with reference to Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* how the experience of otium tends to undermine the gendered context (in this case the role of the dutiful wife) in which it arises (see 4.3).

Secondly and directly related to the perspective on gender, the described hegemonic temporality was an ideological basis for colonialism. The civilising mission given as a reason for colonial domination and exploitation was justified by a Christian teleology of progress and a notion of history with Europe at its centre (cf. Young 10, 15; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 73-76; Wiemann, *Genres* 56). The binary between the modern European and the premodern non-European implies that cultures outside Europe are primitive, stuck in a past cultural state (cf. Dube 6, 185; Mbembe 11; Wiemann, *Genres* 56; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 163) or a void outside history, so that only foreign rule and domination could bring them into the framework of modern European history (cf. Nowotny 102; Jordan 137; Ashcroft, "Modernities" 84-85; West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 9, 119, 132-133; Chaudhuri, "The Flute" 60; Pernau, "Nostalgia" 89).

criticised and is pervasive in all of European thought and modernity, not just parts of it (Lazarus, "Introducing" 10-13).

To legitimise the quest for *spatial* control, societies in the former colonies were described as “a place without history”, “resistant to change”, “stationary”, their cultural timeframe described in “repetition and cycles”, in short, from the perspective of European modern temporality, in a terminology of non-being and lack (West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 9; Mbembe 4, cf. Nowotny 23, 148; Sarkar 11; Pernau/Jordheim 4-5). In the Indian context, colonial, Orientalist perspectives on Hinduism were tied to a characterisation of India “as an essentially spiritual land immersed in the contemplation of eternal verities” (Barua 149; cf. Chaudhuri, “The Flute” 60). An alleged essence of Hinduism was equated with “stagnation/degeneration” whereas Europe and Christianity were equated with linear “advancement/progress” (Barua 148). Even the current positive clichés about Indian spirituality associate cyclicality with Hindu, and purpose, goal and direction with the Christian religion (cf. ibid. 148-149, 150-152).[29] Thus, the European historical “narrative of self-becoming” has silenced “the role of non-European actors” (Ganguly 169; Wiemann, *Genres* 55; cf. Senft 1).

2.1.2. The Temporality of Globalised Capitalism

One aspect of the perception of time in modernity is its gradual independence from both locality and a natural and spiritual order in which it was previously subsumed. Despite the intricate links between space and time, space in modernity becomes increasingly separated from temporal aspects, or even eliminated through the predominance of temporality (cf. Soja 4, 15, 31-35; Giddens 16, 22; West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 104-105; Rosa, *Acceleration* 60-61). Experiences of otium are, by contrast, defined by a sense of time embedded in the present, comparable to Bergson’s notion of time as duration or what Nowotny calls “proper time” (cf. Bergson 60-105; Nowotny 41, 145-146).

[29] “Hindu philosophical-religious traditions” were denied any “historical sense” and reduced to the belief “that individuals are chained to never-ending cycles that do not lead anywhere, with all sense of meaning or purpose thus drained from temporal existence” (Barua 147-148; cf. Brück 83-84). Hindu religion was diagnosed in one of the most well-known nineteenth century characterisations of India by Hegel with a general passivity which would necessitate a coming to historical consciousness in the future – a transformation that can only be achieved with the help of European domination and influence (cf. Hegel 178, 202-203, compare also West-Pavlov’s reference to Marx in *Spaces* 119, 132-133).

The temporality that is abstract and dissociated from space and context is influenced by "profitable mechanisms of late capitalism", which thrived on the foundation of the linear, progressive time of Enlightenment philosophy and historicism (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 5-7, 120; cf. Soja 32-33). Time in capitalist late modernity is represented as an alienated temporality since it is "no longer immediate but are instead […] mediated by money" (Jaeggi 4; cf. Giddens 22). Money in many ways equals time, which in turn dominates human activity (cf. Nowotny 10-11; 47, 55; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 35). The central development in this process was the perspective on time not as a factor, but as a product, a shift going back to the protestant work ethic and "notions of time as a resource to be economized, […] as a fetishized and reified commodity" (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 121; cf. Turner 37; Wajcman 17, 37-40, 51, 128).[30] In conjunction with this reification of linear time in the capitalist economy, industrialisation had an effect on the perception of time through the everyday realities of work.

Before chronometrical time, something like a predominantly cyclical, seasonal understanding of time is often assumed (cf. Giddens 16-18; Nowotny 37; Sarkar 16-17; Bhattacharya, 85; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 13-14). In industrial production, time not only became separated as an "abstract standard of measurement" from the task at hand as well as from seasonal or religious rhythms, it also had a disciplining effect, segmenting the work process parallel to the segmentation of the production line (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 122, 124-126; cf. Postone 189-192; Sarkar 17, 20). Even if the clear distinction between pre-industrial rhythms and the post-industrial leisure/work division is criticised as simplistic or essentialist, the conscious conceptualisation of leisure or free time

[30] Dirk Wiemann argues against this line of argument in that he disputes the singularity of capitalism "folded into the unified structure of the mode of production" and argues instead for a multiplicity of temporal realities of capitalist modes of production, which would also imply heterogeneous temporalities already in European modernity (*Genres* 58-60). He assumes that the ideology of homogeneous time and "its disciplinary aspects in the organisation of industrial labour processes" was ineffectual even in European modernity, which always retained an "actual multiplicity" of temporalities, but that Europe made a point of exporting the singular ideology in its colonial expansion (56-59). He thereby criticises authors such as Chakrabarty and Ganguly in the debate about modernity for an indiscriminate picture of Western modernity, but at the same time agrees with the fundamental premise that the Eurocentric ideology of homogeneous time was enforced in the colonies.

is a reaction to increasing discipline and regulation (Burke 149; cf. Turner 28-29, 32).[31] The "measurable" time of capitalist production "has enabled the enforcement and internalisation of modern time-discipline" (Sarkar 17; Nowotny 23). Clock time came to dominate work processes oriented at efficiency and productivity rather than the fulfilment of certain tasks (cf. Jordan 137; Bhattacharya, 85; Dobler 62; Wajcman 39-42, 128). Through the function of time as a "measure" of activity, the distinction in capitalism is less between natural, cyclical and linear time, but between concrete and abstract ideas of time (Postone 189-192; Sarkar 16).

The commodified time of capitalism, if the idea is taken literally, is "torn out of its original context, shorn of its erstwhile immediate use-value, and now floats free on the ebb and flow of market forces"; it becomes unhinged from its past, and the process of how this particular notion of time came to be produced is forgotten (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 128). Consequently, discussions about work and idle or leisure time often conceptualise leisure as a commodity that can be exchanged with other goods or balanced out with higher income from work. Opposed to that are understandings that define leisure close to otium "as an intrinsic, non-substitutable component of particular conceptions of the good" (Levine 263). How we think about time, whether we see it as contextually embedded, influences the way in which we think about leisure, idleness or otium. The effects of capitalist production processes on understandings of temporality coexist with the absolute linear time of progress, they continue mechanisms of (Western) domination and exploitation in the economic realm and they effectively speed up temporal processes of modernity.

2.1.3. Social Acceleration

Since Hartmut Rosa's sociological study of the phenomenon, the *acceleration* of contemporary societies has become a recurring catchphrase for analysis of the

[31] Victor Turner centres his argument about liminality on a subversive "capacity for variation and experiment" in social practices, which "becomes more clearly dominant in societies in which leisure is sharply demarcated from work, and especially in all societies which have been shaped by the Industrial Revolution" (29).

(late) modern condition. Because of the profit and turnover of capitalist economy, time is perceived to speed up and become “increasingly fluid” (Nowotny 10-11; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 131-133; Wajcman 17, 40-41). This perceived acceleration of time comes in waves and is always linked to the dynamic stabilisation in the course of processes of modernisation, economic growth and structural innovation (cf. Giddens 6; Nowotny 26; Rosa, *Acceleration* 39-41, 51; Wajcman 13-18, 33; Krause 1). Rosa defines acceleration as the “*decay of action-orienting experiences and expectations and as a contraction of the time periods that determine the present*” (*Acceleration* 76, cf. 44; see also Koselleck, *Futures Past* 263-270; “History”). Moreover, in globalised late modernity, the “world is being reconstituted as a single social space”, because the separation of and control over time and space through their measurement favours the impression of synchronicity of events (Brennan 123; cf. 125, 130; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 23; Krause 1).

However, acceleration is only perceived as negative or problematic, Rosa argues, when processes of modernisation and accelerated temporalities are *not synchronised*, for instance if social processes on the one hand, and individuals and their self-perceptions on the other hand become asynchronic through these developments (*Acceleration* 40, 44-46). Current time is perceived as alienating individuals due to different levels of time, such as the separation of the time of everyday events, biographic time and historical time, making one’s own life narrative incongruous with society at large or with the past or future as reference points (cf. Koselleck, *Futures Past* 263-270; Rosa, *Acceleration* 46 ; Koselleck, “History”).

In *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembe deplores the failure of social theory with regard to African countries “to account for *time as lived*, not synchronically or diachronically, but in its multiplicity and simultaneities, its presence and absences, beyond the lazy categories of permanence and change” (8; cf. Nowotny 41, 145; Spivak, *A Critique* 38-39). The radical difference of the temporality of otium from the accelerated time of capitalist late modernity is an important aspect of the novels’ comments on contemporary Indian contexts, as it is often put forward from a perspective of nostalgia and loss, a “longing for a

differently lived time" in the face of accelerated change (Nowotny 136). This is the case in Sarna's *We Weren't Lovers Like That*, in which the narrator deplores the impossibility to experience the accelerated, contemporary Delhi in a leisurely way (see 5. Space).

Furthermore, Rosa emphasises that the basis for processes of acceleration is the described linear, abstract, 'commodifiable' and ultimately Eurocentric conception of time. While in his study of acceleration he focuses on Western modernity, Rosa also points out that the transformation of temporal categories in modernisation processes are a global and universal process (*Acceleration* 63). He suggests that in a neo-colonial dynamic large marginalised groups in the countries of the Global South systematically suffer from the effects of desynchronisation. On the one hand, modernisation and globalised capitalism have their (often negative) impact on the acceleration of the lives of many, but on the other hand fundamental structural and cultural developments of modernity are unavailable to a majority of the world's population (ibid. 48-49, 63). He does not, however, address how the ideology of Eurocentrism itself formed, in alignment with colonial domination, the basis of global capitalism. Therefore, I agree with Miriam Nandi that there is a "lack of understanding of the role colonialism and hence the Global South has played in the formation of acceleration" ("Idle Poor" n. pag.; cf. Daniel 98).[32] This nexus shows how theories of acceleration are particularly relevant for the complicity of abstract, linear temporality with the colonial past. The experiences of otium in contemporary Indian novels refer to these processes *ex negativo* by being exceptional from the temporality of everyday life.

2.1.4. Alternative Temporalities

Since homogeneous, empty time is hardly ever a reality but rather an abstract, utopian or hegemonic concept, other temporalities or even "chronodiversities" in the Indian context have been analysed before (cf. James 583-585; Chatterjee,

[32] Nandi justifiably suggests "that 'we' ([…]meaning the Euro-American world) accelerated 'them' (the former colonies in the Global South)", referring particularly to the poor and the victims of outsource manufacturing in the Global South ("Idle Poor" n. pag.).

The Politics 7; Wiemann, *Genres* 60, 63). As Partha Chatterjee insists, heterogeneous time is therefore the actual time of modernity, including linear or cyclical, traditional or progressive forms of temporality (cf. Chatterjee, *The Politics* 7-8; Bakhle 18-19; 265).[33] If the "coexistence of simultaneous time(s) is decidedly modern, […] to posit it instead as the romantic alternative time of the premodern is to maintain the privilege of a fictive dominance of homogeneous time" (Bakhle 18-19; cf. Chatterjee, *The Politics* 7-8). While I agree with the necessity to analyse multiple temporalities instead of accepting a stereotypical premodern time, I also emphasise their oppositional role against an at least seemingly hegemonic view of time.

As Farha Noor argues, "in the context of our postcolonial landscape, discourses of time […] are asymmetrically formed within the interaction of two communities – the colonisers and the colonised" ("Semantics" n. pag.). She points out how the "failed revolt of 1857[34] […] brought in renewed feelings of distrust between the British colonisers and the upper-class educated Muslim elite in the United Provinces and Punjab" (ibid.). Subsequently to this moment, two increasingly distant attitudes to the past resulted in "split perceptions of time": on the one hand there was the modern ideal of progress as a reaction to the perceived "decay in Muslim civilisation in India, an after-effect of the decadent, extravagant, idling lives of the upper-class"; on the other hand there was a sense of regret and nostalgia for the older idleness of "courtly aesthetics" (ibid.).[35] This turn to the past could, in fact, have a critical impetus in Urdu literature and offer

[33] It is, however, part of the establishment of "homogeneous empty time" to accept "a plurality of coexisting temporalities evaluated in relation to one dominant model of time" (Wiemann, *Genres* 293; cf. Pernau/Jordheim 13). The existence of other models does not question this hegemonic domination, but the "multiplicity of different historical times" in some way "relate to the idea of progress as a kind of 'standard time' that can be embraced or rejected, but never ignored" (Pernau/Jordheim 13).

[34] This refers to the Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the rule of the British East India Company, which posed a threat to British power, but was ultimately unsuccessful. William Dalrymple describes in his research on the long-term effects of the revolt how Delhi's Muslim population and culture was almost replaced by Hindus (*City of Djinns*).

[35] This includes images of oriental luxury such as "the glittering jewels, the nightly gatherings in the gardens, amidst flowers and fountains, […] the elegance and timelessness" (Pernau, "Nostalgia" 95, cf. 93-103).

the possibility "of voicing an alternative worldview" in a situation of censorship (Pernau, "Nostalgia" 76).

Another important contribution to the situation during colonial times in India is Sumit Sarkar's chapter on "Colonial Times. Clocks and Kali-yuga", which describes how frequently "Hindu cyclicity represented the polar opposite of the allegedly unique Judeo-Christian notion of linearity" (Sarkar 11, s. FN 9 above). More important than an imposition of linear time by the colonisers was time as an abstract measurement through which modern time-discipline was imposed in different areas of colonial society (cf. Postone 189-192; Sarkar 17, 20-21). Instead of a clear break between pre-colonial and colonial concepts of temporality, the continued use of motifs of cyclical time[36] in the colonial era is a response "to the new pressures of colonial time-discipline", emphasising the moral degeneration of the present (12, 14; cf. Dumont). Instead of the clash between old and new notions of temporality, Sarkar finds a more nuanced picture in which the acceptance of time-discipline in the name of progress and upward mobility coexists with a "sharply negative response to the rigours of time-discipline associated with office work" (24-26, cf. 32, 34). This account of changing temporalities from qualitative, concrete time to abstract time expresses some reservations about the linear/cyclical binary (cf. Nowotny 54-55, 57). However, it reaffirms the epistemological connection between modern temporality and the West, which was influenced by stereotypes like the traditional cyclicity of Hindu time.

Because Europe was equated with modernity, it is difficult to escape this ideology. Thus, arguments of postcolonial theory against abstract, uniform and linear temporality often keep the binary premodern/modern intact and represent pre-modernity as a positive attribute without questioning the Orientalist binary at work in its definition (cf. Ganguly 163; Kaviraj 501; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities*

[36] The notion of cyclical repetition of eras exists in Hinduism as a sequence of "Satya, always followed by ever-more degenerate Treta- Dwapar- and Kali-yugas", at the end of which the cycle starts anew (Sarkar 10-11). Arguably, the fixed sequence of ages is a fixed element of linearity and the unimaginable scale of these ages as aeons of time makes cyclicity less important as it removes the next cycle far from the present (FN 4, 13). At the same time, the revolving of the cycles figured as a religious backdrop but was hardly relevant to the history of "[d]ynastic eras and chronicles", which "could be perfectly precise about dates" (15).

162-164). Among the attempts to escape a binary perspective of 'Western, modern, linear / postcolonial, pre-modern, cyclical', Mbembe emphasises the multiplicity of temporalities in "every age" (15; cf. Senft 1). He analyses present time as one of "disturbances", one that is "not a series but an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depth of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones" (16). Alternative temporalities "conceptualize time as an integral and structuring principle of experience […] rather than as a valueless or a priori horizon", which entails avoiding the assumption of postcolonial difference (Ganguly 177; cf. West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 42-43).

Such "alternative temporalities" in the plural can "remain latent and active under the threshold of linear time" (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 6, cf. 54, 59, 141-142). A "plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself" also needs to be presupposed by alternative histories, such as perspectives on "subaltern pasts" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 109). The temporality of otium could be such an alternative time pattern that exists outside binary categories and in pockets within an accelerated, de-synchronised time of late modernity and comments on larger discourses of temporality (cf. Hasebrink/Riedl 4). My argument links with a tradition of identifying cultural traditions and local experiences with a subversive agency against a dominant narrative of modernity (cf. Gikandi 630, 633, 639; Dube 19, 155). Alternative temporality is, in this context, not based on scientific relativity, postmodern fragmentation or a political project of alternative historiography, but on a smaller scale on the portrayal of individual, subjective experience in fiction.

2.2. Modernity Revisited

> *Everywhere, at every national/cultural site, modernity is not one but many; modernity is not new, but old and familiar; modernity is incomplete and necessarily so.* (Gaonkar 18)

There is a tendency in contemporary Anglophone Indian literature to turn away from the paradigm of postmodern writing which certainly aided in making Indian writing globally visible. At the same time, there are attempts in theory on literature, history and culture alike to find alternative and equally relevant perspectives to postcolonial theory. I claim that there is a link between the two, namely, between a strengthening of modernity as central to discourses about Indian culture and a choice of contemporary writers against the postmodern hybrid aesthetics so famously inaugurated by Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Some of these novels' aesthetic choices link them to an older (modernist) aesthetic. It is, arguably, no coincidence that many of the novels relevant to a study of otium in Indian writing belong to this group of texts. The stylistics and aesthetics of modernist writing, if they are defined by a troubled relation to many of the developments of modernity, might be well suited to represent a mode of experiencing that is subversive vis-à-vis linear temporal structures and mechanisms of usefulness.

2.2.1. The Concept of Modernity

What do the terms modern/modernity mean? As has become apparent in the focus on temporalities, both Imperialism and the Eurocentrism that outlived it are based on forms "of knowledge that [are] self-centred but directed outwards" and that were central to Western modernity (Young 17). Modernity is thus usually defined with a *Eurocentric* focus as "modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence" (Giddens; cf. Soja 33). Connected forms of knowledge, most of all the replacement of "divine providence" with reason and empiricism in the course of the Enlightenment, are always already linked to the advent of European notions of "political modernity",

citizenship and democracy (cf. Giddens 48; Dube 6-8; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 4).

Through the impact of colonialism, the political sphere of Indian modernity was influenced by the Enlightenment ideals "of rationalism, science, equality, and human rights" as well as the cultural sphere – which is most visible in the development of the Bengali educated middle classes – by "a universal and secular vision of the human" bringing with it the values of "reason, freedom, and individualism" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 4; Brennan 133). By favouring individualism, this vision prefers a strict public/private divide over collective or communal perspectives (cf. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 39-41; Ray 34).[37] The Eurocentric narrative of modernity suggests that "[t]he growth of European power […] provided security and offered emancipation from the dogma of tradition" (Giddens 48).

Because of the different uses of terminology in debates about modernity, it is necessary at this point to clarify the three dimensions of modernity that I work with. First, the idea of a *Eurocentric, hegemonic modernity* associated with historicism and linearity, with novelty and progress, cannot be ignored since it is founded on the imperialist project, and Indian concepts of modernity tend to position themselves in some kind of relation to it. Second, *late modernity* is understood here as the present moment in which the contemporary Indian novels are written and situated. It has already been introduced as a continuation and intensification of modernity, characterised by capitalist globalisation and social acceleration (cf. Soja 27-28; Giddens 52, 63). Finally, and most importantly for the current argument, *cultural modernity* refers to the responses in practices and art to the experience of modernisation, but also to a productive discourse in contemporary Indian literature and criticism that wants to make this understanding relevant to the late modern moment. I use cultural modernity rather than modernism in order to keep the "historical specificity of modernism" and will only refer to modernist textual strategies in my readings of the novels (Osborne

[37] Compare Rosinka Chaudhuri's historical perspective on the development of the Indian drawing room, which had gradually become "a confluence of the public and the private within the space of the home [which] were mediated by the development outside it of certain practices, institutions and spaces characteristic of modernity everywhere" ("Modernity" 120).

7; cf. Soja 29). The discourse on modernity in India refers to a mixture of motifs and cultural practices that can only sometimes be paralleled with modernist writing.

Despite the difficulties in defining modernity, most analyses share the same conclusions on the distinction between processes of modernisation and the concept of modernity. Modernisation processes can be understood as global changes in "expanded communication, growth of states and populations, intensification of the use of land, and diffusion of new technologies" (Chakrabarty, "The Muddle" 668; cf. Rosa, *Resonance* 28, 307-310). These modernisation processes are integral to modernity, yet the analytical concept is incomplete without the "development of a degree of reflective, judgmental thinking about these processes" (Chakrabarty, "The Muddle" 669; cf. Soja 27-29). We only talk about *modernity* in the sense of contemporaries' experiences of, and reflection on, processes of modernisation, while they themselves do not yet constitute modernity. Therefore, the term cultural modernity should refer to any of the reactions to modernisation processes on the level of both everyday *and* artistic practices.

Furthermore, modernity can be conceptualised in addition to its concrete cultural formations as "a unique kind of rhetorical effect" which is "self-referential, if not performative, since its appearance signals […] a decisive break with previous forms of figurality" (Jameson, *Modernity* 34; cf. Osborne ix-xii; Brennan 122, 129; Wiemann, *Genres* 14). Assuming that modernity relies on the difference of what went on before, it is being revived in contrast to postmodernity, since the repudiation of grand narratives in postmodernity, a "proliferation of […] breaks" is itself, again, part of this rhetorical effect (Jameson, *Modernity* 151; cf. 4-5, 197-210; Giddens 3, 45, 48, 51; Osborne ix; Gaonkar 1-9). Thus, "the 'post' does not connote a time after, but rather a heightening of modernity" (Brennan 122). Postmodernity is, arguably, part of the temporal logic of modernity itself, as it "defines itself through its relation to […] modernity, by simple temporal negation" (Osborne 3; cf. 4-10; Jameson; *Modernity* 4-5; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 140). While postmodernity can be framed as a position of acceptance of temporal desynchronisation, terms like late modernity describe a moment when integration

or synchronisation is no longer possible and the project of modernity as a striving for individual and collective autonomy is threatened (cf. Rosa, *Acceleration* 49-50; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 140; Jaeggi). Thus, I use the term late modern rather than postmodern to describe the contemporary moment in which the novels I analyse are written and mostly situated.

2.2.2. Alternative Modernities

Despite the relevance of European modernity, notions of *alternative modernities* can be based on diverging cultural outsets, the "heterogeneity of pre-conditions" in different parts of the world, so that there is no longer one authoritative modernity, but a variety of paths to modernity that are global and different (Mbembe 10; cf. Gaonkar 15; Dube 11; Kaviraj 500). The idea of *alternative temporalities* in different cultural contexts, practices and experiences as it was developed above can be one such instance of heterogeneity.

Instead of all modern societies eventually converging "in acultural terms" into one universal Western paradigm (Ashcroft, "Modernities" 84), elements of modernisation are argued to be differently assembled and the "*sequence*" may determine the "*form*" of modernity as much as its pre-conditions (Kaviraj 503, 514). According to this argument, that which existed *before* modernity is still present in the kind of transformation that came about *with* modernity.[38] Hence, approaches to alternative modernities transcend the inflexible and constructed contrast between the traditional (local) and the modern (uniform and global), which would necessarily lead and indeed has "led to monstrous misidentifications" of present situations, such as the characterisation of "the

[38] However, that does not entail an understanding of entirely separate, heterogeneous developments. The disagreements about a singular modernity versus different kinds of modernities have evolved in the social sciences between theoretical frameworks focusing on varieties and frameworks encompassing world history or world society. In systems theory, for instance, variety is conceptualised as internal differentiation of the general system and thus denied an internal logic (cf. Luhmann 1997). I focus here on a middle ground that can take into account both global phenomena of convergence *and* contextually specific developments as well as their mutual impact on each other (see also Ashcroft, "Modernities"; Hayot/Walkowitz; Kalliney). Instead of a basic structure of modernity followed by cultural formations, they form the basis upon which structures of modernity emerge or are imposed, the reaction to which leads to new (and specific) cultural formations (see also Schwinn 454-455; 462-463).

crowd, grime, and pace of present-day Calcutta" as traditional rather than modern (Kaviraj 501). This binary is based on the exclusive superiority of European civilisation and the "march of progress towards reason and enlightenment", which as an ideology creates "falsely homogeneous" pictures of both European and other civilisations (503; Ashcroft, "Modernities" 84, cf. 87-89).

The focus on local cultural factors allows for a productive discussion of cultural influences. The novels relevant to this study refer to other cultures and thematise cultural displacement, and nonetheless they make a point of being at home in the Indian context (cf. Gikandi 629; Gaonkar 1; Freedman 116, 119-120; Kalliney 30-32). Thus, Amit Chaudhuri mentions elements of Impressionism being linked to his concept of Indian modernity as well as Walter Benjamin's *flâneur* figure as a point of reference for the aesthetics he is trying to describe in the Indian context, an aesthetic that includes an experiential mode comparable to otium (*Clearing* 31-32).

Not only does the diversity of the pre-modern history of various places on the globe need to be accepted, but so too does their continuing diversity and exchange against the ideology of history converging into one singularity need to be taken into account (cf. Gikandi 641; Kalliney 32). Instead of seeing particular developments in non-Western parts of the world as failed copies or anomalies, approaches of alternative modernities conceptualise them as different instances within the framework of modernity and as possibilities to oppose European imperial power (cf. Kalliney 34-35). In an understanding of alternative modernities, a "creative adoption" and play with forms, both on the level of everyday culture as much as in the aesthetics of art forms, is an integral part of the "counterintuitive dialectic" of appropriation and difference (Gaonkar 18; cf. Ashcroft, "Modernities" 83, 90-93).

In the novels analysed in this study, it is the experiential quality of otium that functions as a small, transgressive element against a singular perception. Not only is otium characterised by openness and potentiality, it also frequently transgresses the social and cultural contexts in which it arises. Be it the spiritual traditions in *The Romantics* that are put into perspective by the protagonist's secular form of retreat or the domestic role of the housewife in *A Sin of Colour*

qualified by the public role of a singer of classical music, it is often cultural practices and experiences of otium which enable the characters to find new attitudes towards their situations and which make a singular cultural interpretation impossible. Moreover, the portrayal of experiences of otium is a form of alternative temporality situated in a culturally specific Indian modernity. In this way, cultural practices can impact back on the way in which modernity itself is conceived (cf. Ashcroft, "Modernities" 102).

Criticism of alternative modernities in the social sciences argues that the multiplication of cultural formations of modernity, no matter how heterogeneous, does not change the fundamental assumption that "original modernity […] was born in and of the West" (Bhambra 6). The theory could ultimately imply an expectation "that non-Western peoples must now begin to engage their traditions with modernity in different forms of hybrid 'modernities'" (ibid.). "All that is allowed in the alliterative form of modernity", Bhambra goes on to argue, "is the subsequent pluralization, adaptation, and domestication of processes that are regarded as originating in Europe" (150). In addition to this criticism from a postcolonial perspective, weaknesses of alternative modernities approaches are also addressed by critics whose aim is the reaffirmation of a singular capitalist, globalised modernity:

> Everyone knows the formula by now: this means that there can be a modernity for everybody which is different from the standard or hegemonic Anglo-Saxon model. Whatever you dislike about the latter, including the subaltern position it leaves you in, can be effaced by the reassuring and 'cultural' notion that you can fashion your own modernity differently, so that there can be a Latin-American kind, or an Indian kind or an African kind, and so forth. (Jameson, *Modernity* 12)

However, when Jameson claims that the cultural focus "overlook[s] the other fundamental meaning of modernity which is that of worldwide capitalism itself", he blurs the institutional and economic factors with the cultural and social factors (12; cf. Schwinn 463; Wiemann, *Genres* 59). In the formation of late capitalist modernity, the latter often form a subversive counterpart. However, it is exactly this desire for an ambivalent and subversive cultural modernity that is expressed in some of the contemporary literature through which modernity becomes a desideratum, or, as Jameson himself formulates: "something of a Utopian figure" (*Modernity* 34; cf. 215). Moreover, the perspective on alternative modernities can

even be justified with understandings of Eurocentric modernity, which "is always in one way or another a rewriting, a powerful displacement of previous narrative paradigms" (35; cf. Senft 1-6).

The emphasis on culture has to focus on the interconnections between existing cultural frameworks and historical conditions as much as on a "relationality", that is, the contrasts and relations in global history (Wiemann, *Genres* 10, 17; cf. Conrad/Randeria 10; Schwinn 464). What is alternative about this perspective on modernity is not an *actually* separate history, but a "mutual embeddedness" and coeval situation of European and Indian modernity (Ganguly 169). Thus, the fundamental problem that needs to be addressed is the assumption that only Western society ripened into modern consciousness without contact with other parts of the world (cf. Bhambra 149, 69-70; Wiemann, *Genres* 10, 17). Thus, modernity can be understood neither *exclusively* as the teleological spreading of European modernity to other parts of the world, nor *with an exclusive focus* on supposedly hermetic cultural facets (cf. Conrad/Randeria 12).

In a more specifically Indian context, Dipesh Chakrabarty reflects in his study *Provincializing Europe* on the value judgement implied by the line of historicist philosophical thinking that naturalised the historical sequence "first in Europe, then elsewhere" and that consequently delegates any culture outside Europe to the "waiting room of history", only aspiring to its level of institutional development (7-8, cf. 39; cf. Young 3, 17-19). For Indian modernity not to become a mere "semblance" or quite-modernity, it is necessary to question that tradition, but at the same time it is impossible to discard it (Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 62). Chakrabarty observes, on the level of cultural manifestations, how native traditions have been banned from South Asian countries or embedded in a reproductive, unoriginal narrative of history.[39] Instead, it is necessary to think about a plurality of

[39] In the social sciences, Chakrabarty argues, drawing on earlier thinkers from European philosophical traditions is not unusual without situating them historically, while it would be rare to reference older texts in the Sanskrit, Persian or Arabic traditions outside historical research (*Provincializing* 5-6). At the same time new conceptualisations could imply understandings of the modern that incorporate a "peasant-but-modern political sphere" and with it the contemporaneity of political participation within a nation-state *and* the very real belief in the "agency of gods, spirits, and other supernatural beings" as well as its relevance for the public sphere (*Provincializing* 13).

modernities with facets that may be Indian, European or global, in order to avoid juxtaposing the *traditional* Indian with a *modern* culture imported from elsewhere (cf. *Provincializing* 14-15). The relevance of these arguments for a study of otium in the South Asian context becomes apparent when we observe how Chakrabarty situates the leisurely practice of *āḍḍā* firmly in Indian cultural modernity.

In *Clearing a Space*, Amit Chaudhuri wonders that "if Europe is a universal paradigm for modernity, we are all, European and non-European, to a degree inescapably Eurocentric" (61). If there is just one Indian modernity and the language with which to address it is highly influenced by European culture, this language has to be scrutinised in a form of critique; "subjecting to interrogation some of the fundamental notions by which we define ourselves" (Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 66; cf. Kaviraj 524). This is all the more important because of the connection of modernity with colonialism, in which it was "never accorded more than a provisional and slightly controversial acceptance" (Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 105). In the described impulse of critique, cultural modernity continues to remain meaningful to contemporary authors in the late modern moment. As Satish Poduval formulates it, modernity is in this discourse "not an originary gesture, not a re-founding or a return to true origins, but a call for transforming the contemporary moment" (13; see also Wiemann, *Genres* 6-7).

2.2.3. Indian Cultural Modernity as an Alternative to Postmodernist Aesthetics

References to the modern in Indian writing and its revival at present, is inseparable from a scepticism of postcolonial criticism and its celebration of postmodern textual aesthetics and poststructuralist ways of arguing. These critical preferences make "postcolonial criticism" according to Ariela Freedman "blind to the continued reinterpretation of modernism in Indian literature and art", including strategies of appropriation of Western models and ideas (Freedman 115; cf. Majumdar, *Prose* 36). Amit Chaudhuri, writing as much about his own work as about contemporary Indian writing in general, criticises "the terms of the argument as they're given to us today, with the so-called '*bhasha'* or Indian-language writers on the one side, and Rushdie and his putative progeny on the other" (*Clearing* 13). Neil Lazarus even suggests that:

> there is in a strict sense only one author in the postcolonial literary canon. That author is S. R., whose novels […] are endlessly […] cited in the critical literature as testifying to the instability and indeterminacy of social identity, the volatility and perspectivalism of truth, the narratorial constructedness of history, the ineluctable subjectivism of memory and experience, the violence implicit in the universalist discourse of the nation, the corresponding need to centre analysis on the notions of migrancy, hybridity, diaspora. (*Unconscious* 22)

If "these days one is more likely to locate modernism along the Ganges than along the Seine", looking back at the formations of cultural modernity in India could provide a new perspective (Freedman 115). Amit Chaudhuri suggests "shifting the focus" with the help of the category of modernity, which he defines as a way of thinking and representing an alternative form of secular cultural identity rather than a national identity, as well as a different form of reflection on Eurocentric modes of thought (*Clearing* 13, cf. 29-31, 58-68). As Majumdar remarks, in the "later years of the century […] a handful of writers from locations in the global South begin to *consciously* question" not only an "aesthetic practice", but also the "national narrative of decolonization, independence, and development" (*Prose* 36).

Authors and critics who identify with this shift emphasise the "*ongoing* critical dimension of modernist literary practice" (Lazarus, *Unconscious* 30). This global modernism, which is part of cultural modernity as I use the term, is critical because it points to the coexistence of very different realities, while postmodernism risks a smoothing out of ruptures (cf. Lazarus, *Unconscious* 109; Kalliney 30-32). Moreover, this tendency is not only relevant as a continuation of modernism in "formal experimentation", but is "rooted in the social experience of colonial modernity", for instance in the modern relations of centre and periphery that are entangled with colonialism (Majumdar, *Prose* 5, cf. 6-7).

Amit Chaudhuri's writing – both in his fictional and theoretical works – is deeply concerned with the phenomenon of cultural modernity as well as, more specifically, the high cultural conceptualisations of a modernist aesthetic. The shift in perspective towards the modern is, according to him, a shift towards the trivial and against the canonical, towards the ordinary and a poetry of everyday objects (*Clearing* 14, 25, 33-34). Thus, modern writing is aimed at everyday life even as it "is an elusive object: it is concrete, but fragmentary; it is immediately

present, but in flux" (Gaonkar 4). The focus in modern culture as well as modernist art is on the present moment, on immediacy (cf. Gaonkar 13-14). Stylistic features of the modernist paradigm include the fragmentary, stream of consciousness, a refusal of temporal sequentiality and the inclusion of different cultural influences. Temporally, modernist aesthetics reflect on the "collision between past and present" much in the way in which Chakrabarty observes a reflexive thinking about processes of modernity and Chaudhuri links a tradition of nineteenth century "Bengali humanism" in the course of the Bengal Renaissance to the literary reactions vis-à-vis processes of globalisation and capitalism (Freedman 126; Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 13, 31-32). Instead of the linearity of progress, this perspective on modernity privileges visions of the present as "shot through" with bits of past and future. This is a formulation taken from Walter Benjamin's fragmentary philosophy of modernity, which posits a heterogeneous temporality oriented at the present against a linear, homogeneous historicism (Benjamin 263; cf. 255, 261-263; Ganguly 176; Wiemann, *Genres* 55).

"The process of emergence of a Bengali middle class, whose public life was marked by its literary and political endeavours" is seen by these authors as central to "the history of modernity" (Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 124). Their thinking was, quite in contrast to Western or recent political visions of India, shaped by values of "the secular, the rational, the 'high' cultural: indeed, Enlightenment values and a humanist vision of the world in general, and of India in particular" (Ray, *Exploring* 31-34; Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 101). It "entailed the melding of two traditions which were seemingly unconnected and even contradictory – one being the Indian cultural and philosophical past, the other the Western creative and intellectual tradition" (Dasgupta, *Renaissance* 4). Through the engagement with different traditions of thought, well-known representatives of this intellectual movement from the middle of the nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century were engaging in ways of "coming to terms with, and shaping changes in their history and identity" (Chaudhuri, *The Picador* xix; cf. Dasgupta, *Renaissance* 4-6).

This entailed the evolvement of a new bourgeoisie, the changing of social structures as well as innovations not only in literature but in fields like "social and

religious reform, […] nationalism, education and the mother tongue" (Chaudhuri, *The Picador* xix; cf. Ray, *Exploring* 33-35; Chaudhuri, "The Flute"). Many of the writers and thinkers belonging to this group were torn between opposing values on various levels. "[T]he rational, humanist, secular" ideal of middle-class modernity is at odds with "[t]he romantic creation of a spiritual India" that is also part of Indian modernity, be it from perspectives outside India or from cultural developments within (Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 107; "The Flute" 60). Amit Chaudhuri particularly emphasises the rift or ambiguity in the middle classes between a past that had become inaccessible and the present that could not easily contribute to a creation of identity (cf. "The Flute" 25-26, 28, 36, 38, 49, 53). This peculiar modern situation increases a tendency of nostalgic remembering that I will return to in the last part of this chapter. Thus, the culture of the Bengali middle class is often described as formed by hybrid cultural influences: the whole description of the social practice of *āḍḍā*, a communal, conversational practice, is described by Chakrabarty as part of "the struggle to make a capitalist modernity comfortable for oneself, to find a sense of community in it, to be […] at home in modernity" (*Provincializing* 180). These inner contradictions helped develop a "poetic sense of rootedness in, and exile from, the country they belong to" (ibid. 107).

The programme described by Freedman and Chaudhuri is similar to what Chakrabarty criticises as high cultural modernist aesthetics. However, in Chaudhuri's description of a "privileging of the 'real' and the 'ordinary' […] and the mundane", notions of high culture and everyday practices are blurred and a clear separation is not possible – even though the relevant authors clearly belong to a high cultural tradition (*Clearing* 14, 20-21, 23). In an analysis of a Tagore text on Bengali nursery rhymes, Chaudhuri defines this move as "a reconfiguration of emptiness, or a crack, a gap in the everyday realm of valuation" which goes against a tight link between identity and meaningfulness (ibid. 25; cf. Noor, "Semantics"). In contrast to postmodern devices like pastiche, however, there is a sense that the modernist stylistic choices, both in their focus on the real and the everyday and in their cultural appropriation, are "not done to flatten or parody the object but to enhance it" (Freedman 116). As Brian May suggests "in some of these novels the various images, intimations, and sensations of the physical or

the material occupy attention or 'consciousness' as if to rescue it from a bad postmodern dream of celluloid two-dimensionality or sheer rhetoricity" (923).

Moreover, the fixation on the real and the everyday can even have a spiritual dimension: due to the loss of symbolic structures, the attempt to capture or grasp the real or the everyday in art can seem equal to a spiritual heightening, even though it has a "grounding or ballasting function for sensation" aimed at "an essential reality that is revealed in immediate experience" rather than abstraction or transcendence (Schwartz 6; May 924; cf. 4-10; Gaonkar 3). Despite the secular nature of the interest in modern everyday culture, "the 'raw material' of the commonplace" is made "foreign or strange", "defamiliarized" in artistic representation (Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 93-95).

This is particularly the case in Chaudhuri's own novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*, which is characterised by the elusiveness of a momentary transcendence that is expressed in the novel in surface observations (see chapter 3.2). The representation of aspects of modern culture thus corresponds with the modernist style of the novel in a peculiar elusiveness of the materiality of everyday life (cf. Majumdar, "Dallying"; Shetty). Moreover, this very elusiveness is a parallel on the structural level to the impossibility to intentionally seek an experience of otium or, more generally, to grasp the present moment (cf. Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit* 22-26, 111; *Resonance* 163, 172, 174; Sennefelder 107-109).[40] This poetry of everyday objects enables "a sophisticated, leisurely modernist attentiveness to the changed value of the appurtenances of existence" (Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 33-34).

Chaudhuri points out the relevance of director Satyajit Ray to this particular artistic perspective, which includes a gaze on "verandahs, advertisement hoardings, waiting rooms, pincushions, paperweights" that becomes "full of spiritual urgency", but at the same time goes against the spectacular or exotic (*Clearing* 93; cf. Noor, "Love and Leisure"). With his cinematic perspective, Ray alludes to conflicts "between modernity and tradition, sexuality and society, work

[40] An intensive experience of the presence has been framed as the temporary illusion of eternity. The impossibility to really grasp the present and thus overcome the passing of time and the fear of death is therefore part of a sense of lack in modernity due to the loss of religious belief (cf. Sennefelder 107-112).

and leisure, desire and duty" (Noor, "Love and Leisure", 21). As a result, a feeling of self-division is emphasised as a central characteristic of modernity: protagonists of cultural modernity feel or have felt situated between high and low cultural realms, between a sense of spirituality and a clear association with secular ideals of humanism as well as between the English language and the native languages (cf. Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 14-16; 20-21; 55). The emphasis on these struggles is part of the distinctly *modern* and *modernist* character of these contemporary novels.

2.3. The Significance of the Colonial Past

> *[T]he native colonial and post-colonial literatures in India are not 'different', […] and […] the differences from Western culture are subtle and challenging rather than obvious.*
> (Chaudhuri, *The Picador* xx).

The argument about modernity and a modernist aesthetic ties in with recurring discussions about the crisis, or waning, of postcolonial theory. Despite the focus on a wider discussion of cultural modernity in India, some aspects of postcolonial theory are nonetheless relevant to the novels under discussion here and to the discourses around otium exactly because of their connection to the theories of modernity delineated above. After recapitulating these aspects, I focus on the colonial discourses about leisure, idleness, indolence and laziness, and their connection to theories of (auto-)exoticism.

2.3.1. The Crisis of Postcolonial Theory

For a while now it has been pointed out that "it would be problematic to reduce English literatures across the globe to the notion of 'marginal' writers who were and still are predominantly concerned with 'writing back' to the 'centre'" (Eckstein 17; cf. Young 19; Khair x, xiv). Colonial discourse analysis in the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism* as well as the paradigm of "writing back" are criticised for their favouring of the colonial past over true alternatives for the present – alternatives that have often been discredited as essentialist (cf. Spivak, *A Critique* 1; Khair

15-16; Schulze-Engler 24-25; Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin). In *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Graham Huggan argues that the status of postcolonial writing mirrors late-capitalist market mechanisms "in which such terms as 'marginality', 'authenticity' and 'resistance' circulate as commodities available for commercial exploitation" (xvi, 29; cf. Khair 61; Dube 4). Postcolonial theory in its multiple definitions as "a historical transition, an achieved epoch, a cultural location, a theoretical stance" runs the risk of becoming a "subdisciplinary ghetto", a metaphor for global cultural criticism as well as a form of cultural capital; being emptied in the process (Spivak, *A Critique*; Parry 66; cf. Khair xiv; Huggan, *Exotic* 1-2, 5, 28).

In this study, I argue that the novels themselves neither endorse a postmodern aesthetic that lends itself to postcolonial theories in the poststructuralist tradition, nor would exclusively postcolonial interpretations do them justice. Instead, theories of alternative modernities, which are nevertheless connected to questions of postcoloniality, can address the centrality of experiences of otium and their relation to cultural practices in these texts. The aim is to take into account the growing complexity of understanding both culture and difference, instead of focusing on a simplistic idea of cultural difference, which would lead to a process of *negotiation* between "discrepant globalised modernities" (Huggan, "Derailing the 'trans'" 58; cf. Schulze-Engler 26-28; Kalliney; Hayot/Walkowitz).

As was described previously, the novels relevant to a study of otium are not primarily concerned with the present consequences of the colonial past. Instead, the relevance of experiences of otium is tied to cultural practices of Indian modernity, which, however, implicitly reflect on the assumption of an originally Western, Eurocentric understanding of modernity and linear, abstract time. Moreover, in a globalised, late modern context, experiences of otium are understood here as reflections on such developments as temporal acceleration and expectations of productivity in capitalist societies. The colonial history of India plays a role in these discourses, but an interpretation exclusively based on this aspect would overlook the novels' emphasis on (local) Indian culture.

The conceptualisations of cultural modernity, as they have been described above, can never be understood without also taking the impact of colonial history

into account. Ideals of "'civilization,' 'progress,' and latterly 'development'", are tied up with colonial domination and at the same time European modernity, bourgeois individualism or the "self-fashioning of the West" could not come into being in a vacuum, but only through "the dialectic of Europe and its others" (Ganguly 169; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 45). The fundamental relevance of postcolonial writing lies in representing cultural diversity, speaking for those without a voice, using different narrative registers and focalisation to draw attention to conflict (cf. Lazarus, *Unconscious* 141-143).

Postcolonial writing often aims at uncovering alternative traditions to existing hegemonic theories – an aim that should not be obscured by its own increasingly hegemonic position (cf. Lazarus, *Unconscious* 35). These aims are addressed when analysing how Western linear notions of time themselves become inadequate, while not reducing their subjects of research to the colonial/postcolonial or pre-modern/modern relationship (cf. McClintock, "Angel" 91). Postcolonial theory continues to be important for its aim "to dismantle and displace the truth-claims of Eurocentric discourses" in the context of modernity and temporality, while a predominantly postcolonial approach would neither be appropriate for the setting of the novels in an Indian cultural context, nor for their aesthetics (Parry 67).

2.3.2. Otium and the Colonial Past, Exoticism and Autoexoticism

I will now turn to the direct impact of colonial history on discourses about otium and related concepts. Studies like Alatas' *Myth of the Lazy Native*, or Konishi's "Idle Men: The Eighteenth-Century Roots of the Indigenous Indolence Myth" analyse how the idea that people living in countries of the Global South are idle, slothful or lazy – "one of the most devastating colonial stereotypes that persists in the cultural imaginary of the West" – evolved as part of the colonial ideology, in conjunction with the ideals and dynamics of early capitalist economics (Alatas 1-2; Jordan 123-152; Fludernik/Nandi 7; cf. Fludernik, "The Performativity" 134-136). Sarah Jordan devotes a central chapter of her book on idleness to the relevance of such stereotypes in the context of imperialism in Africa. She analyses how "[t]he picture of the African […] [was] one of […], above all,

indolence" (125, cf. 135-152). With reference to India, she refers to the reported "indolence and effeminacy" (Jordan 140). At the same time, these negative traits continuously threaten to infect the white colonisers (cf. 144-152).

Such assumptions about idleness and race have evolved in the course of a Eurocentric narrative of progress, thrift and industriousness that delegated indigenous communities in colonised countries to the realm of the premodern, ahistorical, savage and primitive (cf. Jordan 137-138, 144; Konishi 100). Characterising the 'natives' as indolent or lazy helped to justify European domination in its mission to modernise and civilise (Alatas 1-2, 7; Jordan 124, 146).[41] Colonialism brought with it "the promise that the disadvantages of the present could be overcome, and thus even those classified as barbarians or semi-civilized could rise to the higher […] echelons of civilization" (Pernau/Jordheim 5). The nexus between indolence and the colonial subject was further emphasised by pseudo-medical, racist theories and the arguments of climate theory, which suggested that tropical climates naturally produce lassitude and are harmful to intelligence and industry (cf. Jordan 137-141, 144-146; Konishi 100, 102, 110; Fludernik, "The Performativity", 137). While the studies of Alatas, Konishi and Jordan are based on material from different countries, the theories on which these prejudices were based are surprisingly similar and often go back to the same European authors through which "[i]ndigenous people were construed *a priori* as unduly indolent and ignorant" (Konishi 117).

Otium can be seen as a critical category to analyse the social inequalities that arise in its context, an aspect on which I will focus in detail in chapter 6. The example of the 'lazy native' is an instance in the colonial context of the social dynamics in which idleness is condemned in the social other. Hence idleness is privileged "as a marker of class" in particular practices of the upper and middle classes – or in this case the British colonizers –, but this valuation is inverted with reference to groups perceived as inferior, such as the colonial subjects (cf. Jordan 139; Fludernik, "The Performativity" 130). The "aspirations to become rich and to

[41] One important aspect which Alatas mentions in his analysis of the Malays is the misplaced responsibility of negative effects of colonialism being, at a later point in time, blamed on the supposed faults of the colonized peoples themselves (205-207).

imitate the style of living observed among the native elites" among the British in India led to the clichéd figure of the nabob who is said to imitate so-called "Muslim indolence" at the Mughal courts (Fludernik, "The Performativity" 130, cf. 133-135, 139-144; "Nostalgia" 19). Moreover, the English in the colonies had their own clubs as secluded spaces to enjoy their leisure time. The same aspiring middle-class representatives of Empire frequenting these clubs would in turn condemn any sign of idleness in the lower-class native (ibid. 133, 135). Since this style of living in the colonies contrasted sharply with English ideals of thrift and industry, the condemnation of idleness in the (particularly lower-class) native other often seems tied up with guilty projections of the ambivalences of English morals (cf. Fludernik, "Distinktion" 168). Moreover, the laziness of the coloniser was also largely excused as deserved and rightful rest from his important work, an argument that draws upon the idea of the "white man's burden" of bringing civilisation to forsaken and supposedly wild places (170; cf. Jordan 139).

Apart from the charge of laziness and a lack of a will to work, there is also a tradition of idyllic representations of the "noble savage", which goes back to antiquity and often stands for virtues civilised Europeans had supposedly lost or were striving for (especially in the context of the French Revolution) (Lovejoy/Boas 287-367; Fludernik, "Der Edle Wilde" 160-161, 170-172; "The Performativity" 138-139). The noble savage was particularly popular in Romanticism, which was attracted by ideas of withdrawal from the world for meditation in an earthly paradise of *exoticist loci amoeni* (cf. Fludernik, "Der Edle Wilde" 166-170; "The Performativity" 137-139). Regardless, the picturesque pastoral idylls, of the Himalayas, for example, had little to do with actual encounters with the natives, although they continue to influence the perception and representation of space in Indian fiction (cf. Kennedy 64-65, 87; Munz, "Village Idyll").

With a view to otium, leisure and idleness, there are instances of both Edward Said's *manifest* and *latent* essentialist Orientalist clichés about colonial subjects. The alleged superiority of the West is reinforced in criticism of the inferior morale for work in the colony, and at the same time discourses of aestheticisation and idealisation of practices observed in India testify to the emotional involvement of

the coloniser, an aspect that is still relevant for the practices of otium in the contemporary novels (compare chapter 3; Said 203-208; Fludernik, “The Performativity” 131-132). Moreover, in many contexts the two tendencies go hand in hand, be it in discourses on sexuality, the character of a ruler, or, in fact, the attitudes to leisure and work. The imitation of exotic indolence was a recurring *latent* Orientalist practice of the British in India themselves. Thus, what seems to be a clearly negative criticism is actually an ambivalent discourse in which negative stereotypes of native affluence can tip over into repressed wishes to escape the morals dictated by a Puritan work ethic (cf. ibid. 133, 139).

The described discourses continue until today, albeit in modified forms. The stereotype of the alleged laziness of people living in the countries of the Global South proves very resilient, and its ostensibly positive, latent Orientalist side continues in the West, with the desire for Eastern forms of religious meditation and inner peace that finds its expression, to name just a few examples, in the Yoga hype, the popularity of Indian ashrams, lifestyle books and magazines as well as in the tourist industry (cf. Nowotny 132; Fludernik/Nandi 7; Gimmel et al. 33-35, 40; Nandi, “Idle Poor” n. pag.). These dynamics play a role in the context of spiritual practices, particularly in Pankaj Mishra’s *The Romantics*, in which the Brahmin narrator attempts to find his own path between the striving after the Orientalist stereotypes of spirituality that he observes in his European friends and the religious traditions of his ancestors which have become meaningless to him (compare chapter 3.3). Another novel to which these discourses become relevant is Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*. Through a juxtaposition of the Indian setting with the precarious work of an illegal immigrant in New York, the novel negotiates different temporal structures and ironically portrays the globalised exploitation of the poor for First World leisure practices such as eating out in ‘exotic’ restaurants (compare chapter 6.2).

In addition to Orientalist representation, the idea of exoticism and the marketability of exotic cultural practices or “the global commodification of cultural difference” as described by Graham Huggan, shows the current relevance of these discourses: exoticism is defined as an “aestheticising process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar” (*Exotic*

vii, ix). Many postcolonial books become, in this understanding, products of imperialism that are taken out of their original context and consumed in a neo-colonial market dynamic (16). On the one hand, novels may critically represent problematic Western imaginations of exotic Indian practices of otium in a "strategic exoticism", while on the other hand, they may be part of the "otherness industry" as aesthetic representations of these imaginations and as commodities on the literary market (Huggan, *Exotic* XIII, 6-7, 32-33, 72, 77; cf. Young 19; Kluwick 130-167). Thus, the "imagined access to the cultural other through the process of consumption" in exotic texts can be accused of the "reification of people and places into exchangeable aesthetic objects" (19). Exoticism moves somewhere between strangeness and familiarity, offering to make the other familiar and comprehensible, but it "renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them", because the allure of the commodity is heightened through mystification of historical context or concrete experience (13, 18-19). The exotic can be said to be obsessed with notions of authenticity, which again go back to a Eurocentric modernity in the sense that the idea of authenticity is closely associated in Western thought with its alluring position outside modernity (Seshadri-Crooks 5, 9; cf. Huggan, *Exotic* 29; Lazarus, *Unconscious* 35). Colonial clichés of India "as available spectacle, as alternating object of horror and fascination, as world of magic, mysteries and wonders; [...]; as romantic tourist goal, and so on" (81) resurface in contemporary Indian fiction in English.[42]

A different perspective connected to *The Postcolonial Exotic* is the idea of Autoexoticism – a relatively recent and more optimistic reinterpretation. It formulates practices of taking over stereotypes in order to undermine the very power relations that originally shaped them, so that these instances of exoticism show a self-reflexive and subversive potential. Through the "re-appropriation of cultural capital" it can be possible to reach new forms "beyond both Eastern and Western notions of authenticity" (Li 393-394; Hill 406; see also Khair 49; Pernau, "Nostalgia" 93-94). After the "decline" of connotations of the word "exotic" after

[42] Not only does Huggan draw attention to authors of fiction catering to exoticist stereotypes, but he sees the postcolonial position of resistance itself entangled with the process of commodification (cf. *Exotic* 2, 28-29).

Said, it is necessary to acknowledge that the Orient is also produced by people *from* the Orient and that this realisation complicates the question of positive and negative connotations (cf. Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 90-92). However, the concept is not as recent as it purports to be, as the phenomenon could just as well be described in terms of Huggan's "strategic exoticism" (Huggan, *Exotic* xiii, 32-33, 72, 77).

While certainly not a universally applicable paradigm, the idea will be relevant to some of the representations in the novels discussed here, where stereotypical notions of practices of otium are part of a discourse of different modes of living negotiated in the text. Autoexoticism is understood here as a form of cultural transfer based on stereotypical representations of traditional Indian culture in the discourses about cultural modernity (such as Indian classical music), of contemplative forms of otium (linked to Indian spirituality), as well as of traditional social ties. In Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Western cultural concepts like that of the *flâneur* are introduced to invoke Calcutta's cultural modernity, which is presented as founded on a cultural stereotype of rural Bengal (compare chapter 5). This rural space is treated as (romantically) backward, a depiction that resembles (latent) colonial stereotypes about rural India.

Another example is *The Inheritance of Loss*, which suggests a criticism of a Western accelerated modernity and the global neo-colonial economic power relations connected to it through the cliché of rural peace and un-alienated social relations of a community in the mountains in Darjeeling (compare chapter 6.2). The novel shows how in Western societies a leisurely lifestyle is seen as the deserved counterbalance to a hectic everyday life, yet is only made possible in a globalised world through the exploitation of developing countries or immigrant workers. While poor immigrant workers are deprived of leisure and a sense of identity, the novel simultaneously portrays a strong romantic idealisation of India and uses latent Orientalist stereotypes of less industrialised countries with a view to praising a slower pace of life.

Because of the colonial history of practices and ideals of otium in the light of Orientalist critique, the analysis of contemporary novels needs to take both a historical and a contemporary dimension of exoticism into account, questioning

what cultural image or ideal is transported through the depiction of experiences of otium as well as what sources that image claims to draw on. Therefore, one aspect of the following interpretations will be how aspects of otium function as stereotypes that are adopted as one aspect of a new self-image. However, the cultural representation is never unambiguous, but the significance of these aspects of cultural transfer lies in the negotiation of (Western) heterostereotypes about Indian cultural practices, concepts and modes of life between ironic distancing on one end, and their appropriation and reformulation on the other end of the spectrum.

It is particularly the nostalgic attitudes towards cultural practices associated with otium in which these strategies become apparent. Thus, the novels make use of a strategic (Auto-)exoticism in their nostalgia for the possibility to experience otium in cultural practices of an older Indian modernity, for moments of spiritual serenity and for unalienated social relations.

2.4. Nostalgia for the Possibility to Experience Otium?

> *And yet perhaps there remains a need, particularly in our highly managerial, grossly market-dominated times, to hold on to a dream […] of a world set free from totally rigid time schedules and insurmountable divisions of labour.*
> (Sarkar 36-37)

If, in the sense of Hartmut Rosa's theory of acceleration, practices of otium can be seen as subversive counter-practices against the temporal structures of accelerated late modernity as well as its paradigm of usefulness, they are also frequently linked to nostalgic remembering. In fact, the whole discourse of modernity, its practices as well as the relevance of an older middle-class culture, is suffused with nostalgic remembering that contrasts the possibility of otium with its impossibility or decline in current society. As Margrit Pernau and Helge Jordheim analyse in their introduction to *Civilizing Emotions*, the modern "rhythms of progress are closely linked to different emotional regimes, and also include specifically temporal emotions, such as nostalgia, feelings of loss, impatience,

eagerness and anxiety" (16). In the context of experiences of otium, nostalgia is an emotion repeatedly expressed.

Otium is associated in this study either with a pervasive sense of nostalgia (*A Sin of Colour*), with certain cultural and social practices of Indian cultural modernity (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, *The Inheritance of Loss*), with a nostalgic longing for older practices and times of leisure (*The Romantics*), with un-alienated social relations (*The Inheritance of Loss*) as well as with sites and contexts in which it could be practiced (*We Weren't Lovers Like That*). Since "twentieth-century representations of Indian society frequently resort to vignettes about Indian leisure as either a reality or a nostalgic memory of a way of life now long lost", it will be necessary throughout their interpretation to analyse the role and interplay of these two tendencies of a structural mood of nostalgia and the reference to lost practices and experiences (Fludernik, "The Performativity" 146). Against definitions of nostalgia that see it as a problematic and potentially ideological reworking of the past, the postcolonial context offers more positive perspectives in which nostalgia can be one way of constructively dealing with the past. An intentionally counterintuitive "nostalgia for modernity" can be seen as a longing for a critical potential inherent in cultural practices of Indian modernity, which problematize the Eurocentric bias of modernity as quintessentially Western. What is certainly not intended by this formulation is a contrast between "a postmodern West in relation to a still modern 'Third World'", as should have become clear with the necessity of revisiting received assumptions about modernity and modernist cultural practice *globally* (Wiemann, *Genres* 68; Kalliney; Hayot/Walkowitz).

2.4.1. Theories of Nostalgia

"Nostalgia, in today's current usage, is an affective kind of remembrance that bestows the thing that is remembered with an emotional surplus and combines a rather positive memory with a sense of loss" (Harder, "Nostalgia" 190). Formulated positively, nostalgic recollection is a remedy or defence against the mass of unfiltered past events that would necessarily lead to "experiences of dissonance" (Dames 11-12). Nostalgia is always rather absence and lack of

memory than memory itself, for it is often understood as “a mental escape to an imagined past”, although it usually functions as “a memory that is […] the necessary prehistory of the present” (Smith 513, cf. 517-518, 523; Dames 4). Thus, nostalgia is an edited memory that only recalls the pleasurable. The term *nostalgia* was first used in the seventeenth century as the medical condition of intense homesickness of Swiss mercenaries (cf. Boym 3-8; Walder 8). It is partially because of this origin that in many comments on nostalgia there is a tendency to see it in a negative light, as “inherently non-progressive”, implying “some kind of manipulation” of the past, while it can, in its present, temporal significance, just as well be seen as a “fundamental form of consciousness that is linked to “identity-stabilizing functions” (Harder, “Nostalgia” 191, 204).

In its current meaning, nostalgia is a phenomenon tightly connected to modernity. Kimberly Smith characterises nostalgia in its focus on “the […] significance of the past” and its connection to a sense of “social dislocation” as a “key concept in the political conflict over modernity”, seeing in it an emotion “unique to modern times” (505-507; cf. Boym 19-32). It can be correlated with the peculiar accelerated temporality of modernity, the “increasing pace of change and the corresponding feeling that the past, even the recent past, was radically different”, in which the repetitive patterns of tradition become unattainable (Smith 517; Harder, “Nostalgia” 191; cf. Shaw/Chase 6-8). In this widening gap between what Koselleck has called the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectation”, “experiences relating to the past no longer hold any value, either for understanding the present or for shaping the future” (*Futures Past* 263-270; Pernau, “Nostalgia” 79). To draw on an example from the following chapters, the narrator of Mishra’s *The Romantics* suffers from his inability to connect to religious traditions and at the same time has an extremely nostalgic and timeless understanding of their value and function for the individual (compare chapter 3). Dennis Walder and Margrit Pernau both suggest that “[a] cyclic view of time […] would make nostalgia unattractive, whereas a view of time as linear […] would promote it”, because in it, “the past becomes irretrievable” (Walder 10; Pernau, “Nostalgia” 78). Nostalgia in the context of modernity also becomes nostalgia for

a perspective on the past, for the link between history and identity in circumstances of alienation (cf. Shaw/Chase 6-7).

Amit Chaudhuri argues that the middle classes in Bengal are torn between an unrecoverable past and a present defined by accelerated change which makes it hard to identify with (cf. “The Flute” 25-26, 28, 36, 38, 49, 53). To draw on an example from Bengali literature, the most famous object of nostalgia is Rabindranath Tagore. In more than just a celebration of a famous author, he is both a larger-than-life-figure and an extremely intimate reference, since it is often described how his readers, since childhood, see the world through his writing (Harder, “Nostalgia” 206). In his article on Nostalgia and Tagore’s autobiographical writing, Hans Harder points out that “the cultural community of his readers […] have construed him as a signifier of Bengaliness and Indianness, removed in time but still thoroughly entrenched with the present” (ibid.) Or, as Chaudhuri writes about the celebration of Tagore’s birthday, it is “a ritual by which Bengalis not only commemorate an anniversary but also observe the passing away of something more than Tagore, […] something that defined themselves and their Bengaliness” (“The Flute” 17; cf. Lange 368-369). Thus, Tagore is a frequent reference in modern as well as contemporary Indian writing and with Sunetra Gupta and Amit Chaudhuri, two of the authors central to this book are examples of how references to Tagore are used to signify some fundamental truths or emotions about modern Bengali or Indian consciousness (cf. Lange; Harder, “Nostalgia” 206). As Chaudhuri writes, “Tagore’s poetry, especially his songs, are among the first and the most profound utterances of a secular Indian sensibility, and they speak of an old world that is lost but is being transformed into something new” (“The Flute” 36). Thus Harder suggests that Tagore’s own writing has a melancholic or nostalgic dimension due to which “[n]ostalgic retrospection multiplies” from the current reader, the parent generation, down to nostalgia in Tagore’s autobiographical writing or his lyric poetry (“Nostalgia” 207). In this sense, Amit Chaudhuri links the importance of Tagore with the inaccessibility of the past that “the Indian modern ceased to have recourse to” (“The Flute” 25-26). In this dilemma, nostalgia can offer, especially in the context

of modernist aesthetics that open up a spiritual perspective on the everyday, an "epiphanic experience of the past" (Walder 9; cf. Boym 8; see 3.3; 4.3).

For the particular historical background of colonialism, a certain "affinity" between postcolonial history and nostalgic remembering has been diagnosed (Desai, "Old World Orders" 23). Gaurav Desai differentiates between the tendency of nostalgia and the countertendency of melancholia, the former being defined by the celebration of a struggle, of willpower and the search for a meaningful life, the latter by a sense of being trapped in history and mourning the loss of the nostalgic dream (34). That which is negative, in this case the colonial trauma, is again forgotten and the nostalgic memory is future-oriented with the wish to create a "coherent narrative", nostalgia simultaneously being about forgetting and remembering (35). Yet this nostalgia is always a fragile construct under threat of the melancholic (cf. 35). Desai especially points out the danger of reading a cultural practice (like the various forms of otium in the novels treated here) as only enabling; instead he repeatedly emphasizes their contingency and the danger of erasing the melancholic aspects in favour of a celebratory interpretation (cf. 38, 41, 50, 53). Nevertheless, this implies a positive evaluation of nostalgia as one way of engaging with the (colonial) past. The colonial past itself operated with nostalgic representations of people in the colonies – after all, latent Orientalist stereotypes, like the idea of the noble savage, were part of a civilisational critique and nostalgia for pre-industrial times (Fludernik, "Der Edle Wilde" 166-172).

A literary example for nostalgia is the novella "The Museum of Final Journeys", which is analysed by Monika Fludernik as a nostalgic memory of a lifestyle that is long lost. In the novella, nostalgic idealisation and decadent decay are closely related. It weaves the leisure of the British in India, "echoing the lifestyle of the native ruling classes", a useless desolate museum that houses an exotic colonial collection and a dying elephant into a tale that invites allegoric interpretations about the degeneration of the Indian ruling classes as well as the British Empire (cf. "The Performativity" 144-146). Nostalgia is expressed emblematically in the novella through the "ruinous condition of the house, museum, elephant and keeper", which "can perhaps be read as an allegory of

the final collapse of the Indian *zamindar* class and its cultural pretensions. The leisure of these landowners has lapsed into idleness and social insignificance, their cultural capital wasted" (ibid. 145). The nostalgic view towards the past, "the remainders of former Mughal glory (note the elephant)", is clearly contrasted in the novella with characteristics of the present, so that the "museum can be read as a failed Indian attempt at mimicry of British civilization" (ibid.). The narrator of the story stands for the present state of affairs, being too engrossed in his current career to show an interest in the past by his refusal to help the museum and the elephant as its most special 'exhibit'. The discourse of idleness is used here to draw attention to questions of the transition between colonial and postcolonial times and is, with its focus on somehow disparate layers of time, a text that belongs to the current interest in modernity. In its use of idleness and leisure, it comments on the symbolic capital attributed to them in the colonial context. The text quotes colonial clichés of progress and culture as well as of a past Indian culture in decadent decline, only to undermine these stereotypes through its complex layers of meaning.

I argue that the nostalgic mode used (albeit to different degrees) in the contemporary novels at stake here focalises certain cultural practices and previous historical situations. At the same time, nostalgic discourses are used for a reflection on or critique of some of the developments of modernity.

2.4.2. Nostalgic Utopia and Indian Modernity

In the current context, the Nostalgia for modernity or older practices of otium can be characterised as a productive discursive site resisting a loss of identity in the process of "merging" with hegemonic Western modernity, but also avoiding a position of clear difference from that hegemony that would reinforce the pre-modern/modern binary (cf. Mbembe 12; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 162-164). Since "ideologies of the future, particularly the ideology of 'progress'", have become problematic, it is the past that has a new creative potential, and more particularly the past that was already modern and struggling with the same notions of progress (cf. Shaw/Chase 8; McClintock, "Angel" 93; Shetty 59). In this sense, the nostalgic mode of these texts can be seen as utopian if that utopia is

understood as “a belief in the […] transformative power of writing”, writing being itself a practice of otium potentially subversive in a late modern capitalist context (Ashcroft, “Utopia” 2; cf. Khanna n. pag.).[43] Utopia (or, as Nowotny has it, *Uchronia*, 136-142) has to be, particularly in the postcolonial context, “a possibility emerging from the past”, a negotiation of the “past in its relation to the present, through the memories of the self as both actor and spectator” (Ashcroft, “Utopia” 4; Walder 9; cf. Jameson, *Modernity* 215; Ashcroft, “Modernities” 101; Pernau, “Nostalgia” 79). This utopian perspective is emphasised by interpretations of nostalgia as politically progressive (in Boym’s terminology “reflective nostalgia”) rather than conservative (Boym’s “restorative nostalgia”) (41-55). Self-conscious melancholic memory can have an inherent “critical agency” with a view to “injustices performed in the name of […] novelty” and progress (Smith 506; Khanna n. pag.; cf. Gilroy, *Melancholia*).[44] Margrit Pernau portrays “nostalgia for a lost world […] [as] a sentiment associated with those left behind in the race towards the future and unable to face the challenges of rapid change” (“Nostalgia” 89).

Re-visiting modernity is felt to be necessary in the Indian context partly due to the feeling that some crucial aspect of modernity has always been missing. Through a focus on modernity and the nostalgic impulse in contemporary writing, it might be possible to overcome the sense of “a lack, an absence, or an incompleteness” of an “indigenous, home-grown modernity, in whose narrative the problematic moment of colonialism never occurred” (Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 105). This nostalgic, “secret, utopian longing […] for another, ‘purer’ modernity”,

---

[43] See also Brian May’s concept of postcolonial nostalgia, which emphasises the openness and “imaginative” impulse of nostalgic affect (901).

[44] Compare Margrit Pernau’s comment on how after the Rebellion of 1857 nostalgia in Urdu writing offered, even though it is often “viewed as an emotion turned exclusively towards the past and lacking the will to confront the present and the future, [...] one possibility of voicing an alternative worldview” (“Nostalgia” 76, cf. 77). She further analyses how at the time rulers whom “the British had turned […] into a symbol of everything they abhorred in Indo-Muslim courtly culture” were unequivocally praised as ideal rulers in Urdu memoires (ibid. 88). In a logic similar to the idea of autoexoticism, she observes “the appropriation and reinterpretation” of discourses about “oriental rulership”, which are thus “turned into a critique of colonialism and a resource for resistance” (ibid. 94). She also underlines the parallel between these discourses and “the many nostalgic descriptions of Delhi before 1857, which began to be published from the end of the nineteenth century onward”, such as the previously mentioned *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) (ibid.).

a part of history or cultural life that never happened, hinders a full engagement with the "implications and radical achievements" of actual Indian cultural modernity (ibid.). The utopian dimension behind this lies in the hope that different cultural perspectives on Indian modernity can productively emphasise ambiguity and openness against a homogenous narrative of gradual independence and the establishment of the Indian nation-state (cf. Conrad/Randeria 12; Ashcroft, "Re-Writing" 30). The novels' nostalgic perspectives put forward "tiny ingrown fictional spaces over the grand sweep of national history", as Sandhya Shetty argues with a view to the "dissident materiality" of Amit Chaudhuri's fiction (58-59).

I argue in my analyses that the nostalgia for different practices and temporalities (of otium) can actually incorporate a relevance for the present and an ongoing utopian potential. Moreover, there is a frequent misunderstanding between cultural formations and their reactions to, and framing of, modernity (what I call cultural modernity), and modernity as a more general reference to socioeconomic developments (capitalist late modernity). The more specifically cultural side is where Chaudhuri would probably locate modernity's "implications and radical achievements", which respond to processes of modernisation. The nostalgia for *cultural* modernity can be a tool for criticism or creative artistic practice.[45] Because the characteristic "nostalgic" is often accompanied by a dismissive tone, associated with "self-indulgence and misperception", to articulate a sense of dislocation and alienation in modernity as nostalgic can be part of self-conscious and intentional "modes of resistance" (Smith 523; Walder 9; cf. 517-519, 522; Khanna n. pag.).

Furthermore, nostalgia is also present throughout the discourse of alienation and possible remedies against it, hence the "paradoxically utopian nostalgia of

[45] Compare the "impressive amount of mourning and nostalgia" which is dedicated to the cultural practice of *āḍḍā* in Calcutta's urban modernity and which manifests itself in the documentation and commentary on it (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 181-3; 213; cf. Noor, "Semantics"). In its "leisurely work ethic" and its politics of "let go" it is opposed to any specific purpose or particular time limit, having a subversive dimension with a view to capitalist productivity (cf. 180-181; Sil 3, 46-47). The practice challenges the "purpose driven materialism" of the capitalist economy as much as allegations of mere laziness in the context of colonialism (50-52). Esha Sil analyses how nostalgia here is the source of "telling gaps" in an essentialist Bengali identity that needs to be critically "infiltrated" (43; cf. 3, 46; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 181, 212-213). Yet the quintessentially modern practice also carries a possibility for "multiple cultural imaginaries" with its "'illegitimate' oral narratives of gossip, rumour and small talk" (Sil 43, 60).

much grand social theory" (Shaw/Chase 8). In his definition of "resonance", Hartmut Rosa defines that experience as an affective coming closer to the world or (re-)appropriating it as opposed to the alienated, objectivising relation to the world in late modernity, in which it is no longer possible to have a responsive relationship to the world, or other beings in it (cf. *Unverfügbarkeit* 12-16, 22-29, 42, 50, 63, 120; *Resonance* 26-31, 47, 310-356). The different experience of resonance instead enables a relation to the world in which we let ourselves be affected as well as affect the part of the world we engage with (cf. *Unverfügbarkeit* 50, 63, 42-43, 120; *Resonance* 38-39, 167-169, 174). However, Rosa and the whole discourse about alienation, which he links with modern (left-wing) philosophy from Marx and Lukács to Marcuse and Adorno, is sometimes criticised for implying a Romantic longing to some original, essentialist or even natural relationship of humans to the world; a parallel which Rosa concedes (cf. *Unverfügbarkeit* 26-29, 58-59; *Resonance* 174-175, 320-356; Peters/Schulz 12-19; Taylor). Rosa's and others' argumentation is based on the assumption that "if our consciousness is fragmented, there must have been a time when it was integrated" (Shaw/Chase 8). Implicitly, Rosa suggests in his elegiac and mournful tone that a premodern, unalienated relation to the world would be preferable and ties his theory to New Materialist approaches, which themselves respond to Romantic subject-world relations (Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit* 58-59).

Neither Rosa nor the New Materialists are, of course, actually proposing a return to a Romantic perception of the world, nor does Rosa offer a purely negative definition of resonance through a vague melancholic sense of loss (cf. Figal/Keiling 26). Nonetheless, his gesture of critique is similar to that of nostalgia in the present context. The suffering from present circumstances necessitates a re-evaluation of past modes of knowledge, which are not exhausted in repetition, but attempt to form new evaluations for the present. With his additional emphasis on the uncontrollability of a fulfilling world relation, Rosa's concept of resonance offers a profoundly nostalgic and at the same time utopian theory (*Unverfügbarkeit* 43-45; 50-51).

The meditative, internal dimension of otium in many of its representations in the novels is particularly conducive to the construction of a nostalgic atmosphere.

In contexts such as the nostalgia for *āḍḍā* as well as the postcolonial interpretation of Anita Desai's text, practices of otium can be seen as instances of an autoexotic representation of particularly Indian cultural formations. Moreover, nostalgia is a crucial aspect of the discourse on Indian cultural modernity as an alternative to postmodern playfulness: nostalgia as a melancholic affect can be linked to the suffering of the modern consciousness from social alienation and the coexistence of non-synchronous historical events. In a way, the novels nostalgically turn back to modernity *and* already become part of it through the melancholic dimension in the cultural modern.

3. Practice. Otium as the Freedom to Act

3.1. Practices of Otium and Agency

In the analyses of my novels it is possible to identify protagonists' experiences of otium by their engagement in open and purposeless *practices*. In this chapter, practices will be understood as specific actions, which are fundamentally opposed to *events* in that they are defined by an intention or meaning for the subject and are embedded in social structures (cf. Emirbayer/Mische 963-965, 968-970, 985, 994; Daniel 90-91; Gimmel 293-294).[46] In this understanding, practices often play an identity-shaping role for the subject that identifies him- or herself with them and sees some fundamental meaning in carrying them out. In this introductory section, I will shortly explain the connection between otium and practices. I then move to the relevance of agency and its temporal structure for the nostalgic representation of otium in the novels. Finally, I describe the parallels between otium and artistic and spiritual practices in particular in order to justify the focus of the following readings of *A Sin of Colour*, *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *The Romantics*.

Experiences of otium manifest themselves predominantly in practices: particularly because otium is situated at the point of divergence between negative and positive freedom, it becomes visible in concrete actions, since positive freedom is defined as a freedom *to* act rather than a mere freedom *from* constraints. As O'Connor remarks with reference to idleness, "idle actions are spontaneous expressions of what individuals prefer to do as they act within the contexts they have chosen" (3). However, the experience of otium is not identical with particular actions, but rather provides a free space or context for them to unfold. Therefore, an *experience of otium* and a *practice of otium* are not on the same conceptual level; just because an action can be identified as a practice of

[46] Depending on the theory of practice, they emphasise an element of individuality or understand practices as the basis that constitutes the fabric of society (Reckwitz "Toward a Theory", 249). In the present context, practices cannot be analysed without their (cultural, societal, situational…) context, which cannot be neatly separated from the individual process of a practice (cf. Daniel 90).

otium, this does not guarantee that it can be experienced as otium. Thus, the experience of otium is fundamentally contingent and inaccessible (cf. Sennefelder 107-109; Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit* 22-26, 111; *Resonance* 163, 172, 174). Practices of otium are therefore instances of *acting in* otium.

This can be illustrated through an example from Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*, a novel entirely focused on religious and spiritual experience. In the frame narrative of the novel, the state of mind which the Jain monks strive for through their meditative practices can be interpreted as close to the experience of otium. When the narrator, who is deeply impressed by the examples for ascetic retreat and the meditation he encounters, tries to meditate, he does not always succeed. He is distracted by the manifold manifestations of life around him, his household staff and his picturesque surroundings. The ending of the frame narrative suggests that he tries too hard to reach serenity in meditation; a meditation based in a strict opposition between life and distraction on the one hand, and retreat and isolation on the other.

The example shows that while a practice can create a situation that is experienced as otium, this cannot be guaranteed, because otium is an experience that by definition counteracts the intention of its creation (Gimmel et al. 33-34). At the same time, only the *experience of otium* turns an action into a *practice of otium*, changing its character, representation and, consequently, its understanding by the reader. This fundamental shift lies in an action transitioning from having an external aim to being an end in itself.

Following from this connection between otium and practices, *agency* is fundamental for actions connected to experiences of otium, since it is often tied to both philosophical debates about free will and "expectations of self-efficacy" and to the temporal dynamics of actions (Rosa, *Resonance* 170).[47] Agency can be understood as "our capacity to be effective with regard to the lives we make for ourselves through reflection on our beliefs and the norms around us" (O'Connor 177). Moreover, agency is a "temporally constructed engagement",

[47] By introducing agency, I am deviating somewhat from Reckwitz's understanding of practices as being *always* repetitive routines and of the individual as "the unique crossing point of practices, of bodily-mental routines" ("Toward a Theory" 255-257).

with three elements that are present in any action: an “iterational element”, which refers to the re-activation of past patterns that sustain and stabilise identity; a “projective element”, which is imaginatively directed at possible future action; and a “practical-evaluative element”, which emphasises the ambiguity of a present situation by comparing it with “alternative possible trajectories of action” (Emirbayer/Mische 970-971, cf. 963-964). This temporal framework can help to analyse the (shifting) experience of temporality in otium: our conceptions of time have an impact on our actions, particularly whether we think of the future “as something fixed and determinate, or conversely, as something open and negotiable” (ibid. 985). Thus, the “ways in which people imagine, talk about, and make commitments to their futures influence[s] their degree of freedom […] in relation to existing structures” (ibid. 985, 991-992). The dominant temporal orientation in the novels analysed here is a nostalgic reflection on the past rather than a projective vision of the future. However, instead of giving up the possibility of engaging in plans for the future, nostalgic reflection is important for individual characters to work through past experience and its significance for future action. I analyse this nostalgic dimension in the context of otium as a calmly reflective vantage point from which the protagonists gain a new perspective on a personal crisis.

In the context of debates about alternative temporalities as I have described them in their relevance for otium, this would mean that it may be necessary to find gaps in a hegemonic, linear, abstract temporality to be able to subjectively lay claim to agency. Agency is, for instance, foregrounded and can turn into a form of resistance when familiar scripts associated with a situation, such as its temporal organisation or rules of conduct, are violated (cf. Emirbayer/Mische 1000-1005). This is the case in *The Romantics* when Samar refuses to accept the assumption that, as the son of a Brahmin, he has to study and pursue a higher career. It becomes clear that his decision to leave the former trajectory of his life and live a withdrawn, simple life in the mountains on the one hand disappoints his father, but on the other hand makes Samar himself feel more free and self-determined and offers him experiences of otium that were previously impossible.

Consequently, agency has to be understood in some relation to constraining structures and it always carries the potential for change.

Furthermore, the temporal triad of agency reflects a tendency for thinking about action/agency in terms of an internally focalised fictional text. If the way in which we make sense of (our own or others') practices often has a narrative structure that helps to map actions in our lives, this narrative structure is further emphasised in the literary representation of practices in a novel (cf. Emirbayer/Mische 989; Gimmel 297-298). At the same time, narrative devices for making sense of action/agency can reinforce a change in conceptions of temporality and the relation of the past and future during moments of crisis, which have a more pronounced reflexive awareness of experience.

The relevance of practices of otium lies in their transformative impetus: the definition of otium as situated on the threshold of negative freedom *from*, to positive freedom *to*, implies that it is not always a pleasant, calm and harmonious experience, but that it opens the space for moments of crisis both on an individual and on a societal level (cf. Gimmel et al. 66, 77). Idle, unproductive practices might question our notion of "self-constitution (the task of making ourselves into integrated moral beings)" (O'Connor 3, 5). The shift towards positive freedom can interrupt and change habitual, subject-forming patterns of action and thus can disturb a character's self-conception. Thus, experiencing otium can also entail experiencing tension or insecurity.

This is particularly the case in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*, where the protagonist Debendranath fakes a punting accident and disappears from his former life to live as a recluse in a hill station. It is suggested that his solitary life in the hills helps him overcome his ill-fated, obsessive love for his brother's wife. In this context otium functions as a space safe from the pressures of social norms and expectations, in which fundamental structures of life – among them more or less habitual and regulated practices – can be questioned (ibid. 74-75). This space can open up, because otium is the exception from everyday or familiar ways of doing things.

The transgressive potential of otium, which becomes visible in its practices, lies in the potential of an effect on, or even a reformulation of, the relation between

an individual and his or her cultural/social environment (ibid. 250; see also chapters 4 and 6). With reference to his concept of resonance, Hartmut Rosa suggests that resonance is a relation to the world in which we let ourselves be affected as well as affect the part of the world we engage with (cf. *Unverfügbarkeit* 42-43, 50, 58-59, 120; *Resonance* 38-39, 167-169, 174; see also 1.2.3 and 2.4.2). He emphasises the uncontrollability of a fulfilling world relation, even though the suffering from present circumstances necessitates a re-evaluation of past modes of knowledge and a potential change for the present and future. While this reflective understanding is central to the analysis of practices of otium, it has also been understood as a fundamental trait of fiction and the meaning-making processes of narratives.[48]

For the juxtaposition of the alienated and the resonant experiences of the world, a story from Mehta's *A River Sutra* provides a striking example: in a stereotypical narrative of conversion, a Jain monk characterises his previous life as one of idle distraction in which "even at the moment of gratification, the seed of new desire was being sown" (20). He explains that he has taken the decision in the hope for a "pleasure that could be sustained", being glad to have gained "the freedom to find this state of bliss" (29, cf. 14-16, 48). With secular life being defined by numbing routine, renouncing the world, for the monk, is not primarily a closing of his eyes to its manifold pleasures (which he perceives as shallow and superficial), but a waking up from a life that "was like a dreamless sleep" (30). What is more, the harshness and suffering of asceticism and poverty is integral to the monk's new, resonant experience of the world: "I could never return to the anaesthesia of wealth that had for so long numbed me to the suffering that could make me human" (34-35).

This chapter is separated into two categories of practices, because both practices of art and spirituality share fundamental characteristics with the experiential mode of otium. My readings will aim at the quality of characters' experiences and the relevance of otium in the context of these practices. Between

[48] This is particularly the case for approaches to literature that follow the Russian formalists. Compare Warning's understanding of literature as inherently counter-discursive, because in it the rules of societal discourses (such as transparency and succinctness) are suspended (Warning 21-25).

the two categories there are significant overlaps. Thus, for instance, the dominant motif of art in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*, is represented in such a way that it becomes almost spiritual. At the same time, one of the everyday practices of *A Strange and Sublime Address*, which figure as instances of spiritual epiphany, is when a character sings a song in the shower.

Artistic practices are in themselves defined as aimless, open and creative, and the practices of poetry and singing relevant to *A Sin of Colour* have a background in cultural traditions in pre-independence India. Fludernik refers to "the Mughal and Hindu courtly traditions […] [of] extensive literary and artistic practices, among which music and dance as well as the delivery of poems and theatrical performances were common" ("Nostalgia" 18). In the course of the nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century, the different traditions of classical Hindustani music[49] evolved in their present form (cf. Bakhle).

Artistic practices often relate to periods and settings that stand outside everyday life. Aesthetic creativity can be conceptualised as a free play in which, ideally, the orientation towards a specific result or insight is suspended as are the routines and standardized ways of perception linked to everyday life (Laner 32). The purposelessness of otium can evolve into a space for the active creation or contemplation of the work of art for its own sake (Laner 30, 31, 50). Thomas Klinkert suggests that the potential for literary writing to become an experience of otium lies in the self-referential playfulness of poetic language (cf. 3, 8). He defines art as an institutionalised form of play, which offers a free space of otium, because it is defined by different rules from everyday life – or, in the context of literature, from other texts (6, 8, 10). The artwork's structural emphasis on the pleasure principle, Klinkert argues, provides us with relief from the daily worries of existence and livelihood (10). Victor Turner situates art in the context of liminality as a kind of "performance" which expresses meaning about societies in a condensed way (13, 15). Through his theory of cultural artefacts as part of the "liminoid", they are associated with existential crises, but with the possibility of

[49] Hindustani classical music is the classical music of the northern regions of India (having developed roughly from the 12th century onwards) as distinct from Carnatic music, the classical tradition in South India.

leisurely play at the same time (32-33). What is more, creativity is for Turner part of a particular kind of leisure that can incorporate the *freedom to play* (37).

In terms of temporal experience, it is not only ideal for playful creativity to let time unfold and engage in art without having either a concrete result or a deadline in mind, but the contemplation of a work of art can be understood as an action endorsed, for its own sake, in a mood of otium (Laner 31-33). Active and receptive practices can become experiences of otium, because positive freedom is both a prerequisite for the creation of art as well as an element of its appreciation free from particular aims and implications of the work of art (33, 34, 54). Contemplation as aesthetic experience is an active, agentic, open-ended practice in which social actors, such as the characters in the novels analysed here, position themselves in relation to the world. To summarise, the relevance of practices of art lies in the opening of a free space in which it becomes possible to engage in the creation or contemplation of art, both of which are marked by a different kind of perception from everyday life. Ultimately, the unfolding of these practices of art is dependent upon the space and temporal openness of otium.

Both in South Asian and European contexts, spiritual practices have been conceptualised close to experiences of otium. Based on the contemplative tradition in antiquity, *religious* contemplation evolves in late antiquity and the European Middle Ages into the principal ideal of otium (Gimmel et al. 24). Despite the relevance of religious practices in India from a sociological perspective (cf. Bhattarachya 76, 86), they have an ambivalent role in the novels I analyse (*A Strange and Sublime Address* and *The Romantics*). With reference to spiritual practices, protagonists ironically distance themselves from religion, or struggle with religious traditions.

This is partially due to a discourse of latent Orientalist stereotypes based on the idealisation of Asian spirituality. For instance, the current popularity of Asian philosophies and practices of meditation in the West, employed to counterbalance life in accelerated modern societies, is a symptom of a “Western colonial desire for Eastern relaxation, calm and inner peace” (Gimmel et al. 33-35, 40; Fludernik/Nandi 7). The desire for Eastern spirituality finds its expression in the Yoga hype, the popularity of Indian ashrams, Sufism as decontextualized

Oriental spirituality, in lifestyle literature and in the tourist industry as well, and it has its roots already in Romantic idealisations of an Eastern-styled “withdrawal from the world” (Fludernik, “The Performativity” 137; cf. Nadeau 140-181). It has been argued that the positive stereotypes of a “quality of Eastern mysticism and its sense of time” are, as forms of “latent orientalism”, as much a part of the colonial heritage as the negative stereotypes about the “Hindu character” (Nowotny 132; Mishra, *Poetics* 2; cf. Said 201-225; Fludernik, “The Performativity” 131-132). Thus, stereotypes about cyclical, repetitive religious beliefs can deny a society its contemporaneity and dismiss it as “an enchanted place of ancient myths and verities”, on the basis of which productive agency is made impossible (Chaudhuri, “The Flute” 60; cf. Barua 147-148).

Nevertheless, because spiritual practices are associated with timelessness, and with retreat and meditation (as opposed to aim-oriented striving), what is represented as relevant spiritual experience is extremely close to the idea of otium. Along with their proximity to mystical, non-institutional religious practice, the spiritual practices described in the novels share a quality of experience that opposes a spiritual, presentist temporality to a future-oriented functionality. Practices of spirituality are thus close to otium when they are evoked through concepts such as contemplation and timelessness. In these novels, spirituality is taken out of the original context of religion and employed in the context of personal, individual perception and experience, making it relevant to protagonists’ ability to experience a sense of agency.

The practices of art and spirituality that will be discussed are central to the protagonists’ definitions of identity, for they play a role, through the positive freedom to act, in the individual protagonists’ concept of self. In *A Sin of Colour*, potential experiences of otium are connected with classical Indian music and together form an intensely nostalgic longing for home from the perspective of the Bengali academic studying and working abroad. Moreover, art is introduced in the novel as a response to a crisis of the self from which any course of action no longer seems possible. In *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *The Romantics*, spirituality is separated from a potentially inhibiting, institutionalised religion and

applied to other contexts, through which experiences are characterised as otium through their association with spirituality.

3.2. The Openness of the Creation and Reception of Art

The potential practices of otium that are important in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* are linked with questions of identity, as several protagonists struggle with relationships of love, kinship and friendship over three generations. The internal development of the characters that is presented through shifting internal focalisation is tied to the active creation or contemplative reception of art, since the protagonists are either intellectuals or artists.

The two protagonists whose internal development is described most extensively are Debendranath Roy (Deben) and his niece Niharika. The two family members from different generations both experience moments of emotional crisis caused by unrequited love, and their stories have parallel structures. Thus, the first two chapters, "Amethyst" and "Indigo", focus on Deben's illicit love for his sister-in-law Reba, a musician who symbolises classical Indian culture, and on Deben's studies at Oxford and his marriage to a plain English girl named Jennifer. This first part ends when Deben disappears and is thought to have drowned in the Cherwell. The chapters "Azure" and "Jade" develop Niharika's – that is, Reba's daughter's – story of her time at Oxford, where she gets to know and love the photographer Daniel Faraday, who is married and has children. Despite their intense love for one another, Daniel stays with his family and eventually moves with them to Australia, while Niharika goes to live in New York where she gets to know Daniel's old friend Morgan. The last chapters of the novel ("Saffron", "Ochre") bring the two plot lines together: when Niharika moves back into the family mansion in Calcutta, Deben suddenly turns up after his long absence, and Niharika – like Deben, in his marriage to Jennifer – tries to rid herself of her love for Daniel and instead build a more solid relationship with Doctor Rahul, whom she meets in Calcutta. The final chapter, "Crimson", brings both Deben and Niharika back to Oxford. Daniel Faraday suddenly turns up and Niharika disappears while punting with Daniel on the

Cherwell, like her uncle many years ago. Despite the many structural parallels, the ways in which Deben and Niharika experience their diasporic situation in England and the United States, and how they relate to India, are significantly different: Deben belongs to an older generation and had left for England in the 1960s, while Niharika has fewer links with tradition and moves abroad in the 1980s (cf. Kuortti 190-191).

Moreover, the connection between Deben and Niharika's situations are deeper than the plot itself as, first and foremost, the characterisation of their feelings of love at an almost obsessive intensity that makes them live through a crisis of identity, which can only be solved by their disappearance. The artistic theme of exceptional experience is also used in the novel to distinguish their intense longing from the prospects of a 'normal' relationship with, respectively, Jennifer and Rahul. Finally, the artistic practices they engage in often evoke nostalgic feelings for the past. The omnipresence of nostalgia is reinforced by the fact that the only agency left to them in their oppressive situation in the present lies in disappearing. In what follows I offer an analysis of the two parts of the novel, with particular focus on practices of art. The first part focuses on Deben and Reba, while in the second part I also draw upon passages about Niharika and Daniel. I end by assessing the role of nostalgia in its relation to the possibility of agency of the protagonists.

3.2.1. Obsessive Love as a Nostalgic Desire for Home in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*

In this section, I interpret the practices of art, or experiences associated with art, as a way to express the intensity of the two dramatic, romantic relationships in the novel. Both the practices of art and the experiences of love have the potential to become, in exceptional passages, experiences of otium. I further argue that artistic practices are represented with a sense of nostalgia that frequently connects the narrative of a family or individual stories with a larger framework of a postcolonial sense of dislocated identity. Nostalgia is often closely tied to traditional Indian practices of art, particularly music and the songs of Rabindranath Tagore. The novel suggests that they become important

particularly when the main protagonists go abroad to study or work. This nexus between nostalgia – a nostalgia particularly for the home in Bengal or for the earlier family roots in Bangladesh – and classical Indian music is expressed by a recurring imagery of flowing water. Moreover, I argue that otium is important in this context because nostalgia for one's home is expressed not just with reference to a place, but to a sense of openness and a way of feeling at home which has become lost in the present.

In *A Sin of Colour*, Deben's love is defined by a deep fascination with Reba, emblematically figured in her music. "The faint strains of this melody" – which could refer to the song he first hears her play as well as to his emotional state – haunt him "while the world roared around him" (19). After having met another woman, "he would wake at dawn to the sounds of her practising on her *esraj*, and something in the desperation of its tone would make him feel that she knew he had betrayed her" (20). Deben's love for Reba thus continually oscillates between despair and the love for beauty. Being completely absorbed by a beautiful song or reflecting on it in hindsight can be an experience of otium both for the musician and the listener.

While Deben is in love with Reba, the only thing she loves is her music, once described as "her almost morbid dedication to her art" (54). Reba's musical practice is heightened by giving it an air of spirituality and devotion through the intensity of emotional longing expressed in it. Deben's infatuation with Reba is expressed repeatedly in the situation of her sitting alone in a room, playing on a *tanpura* or *esraj* and singing. Without at first knowing Reba very intimately, Deben is fascinated by her music "in whose depths he had first come face to face with the sublime expanse of her […] desperate loneliness that later he would find almost too beautiful to behold", and it seems as if everything – from her refined education, to her somewhat aloof melancholia, to her physical beauty – is captured in her music (19, 38-39).

A song quoted at length (in Gupta's translation) comes from Rabindranath Tagore's *Natir Puja*, a dance drama from 1926 ("Natir Puja"; cf. Kuortti 187). While the lines that Deben hears her sing are full of spiritual longing, they express at the same time *his* longing for *her*:

> Every atom of mine quivers in the *chant* of your grace
> As I am steeped in the *rhythm* of a new birth
> Every gesture of mine, every *song*, has become a prayer to you
> […]
> I tremble with an exquisite pain, *dark waves* rise within me,
> As your beauty destroys my calm
> Every fragment of my being, and my pain, strives to rise in prayer towards you,
> And I beg that my *song* will not die of shame at your feet
> […]
> It is only with *your music* that my limbs *stream*
> It is only *your music* that *spills* from my heart.
> (*Colour* 55-56, emphasis added)

With the semantic field of religious adoration, an intense feeling of joy is evoked, including an obscure sense of transcendental epiphany (here, physically, as a "*new birth*"). The references to music are used to express a spiritual longing in erotic metaphors and the imagery of water ("*dark waves*", "*my limbs stream*", "*spills from my heart*").[50] Since Deben's illicit love is, from the beginning, associated with this religious song addressed by a dancer to Buddha, it is from the very start marked as unattainable, as longing and adoration from a distance (cf. 16). Reba's passion while singing is not directed at another human being and therefore far removed from Deben: in the play *Natir Puja*, the simple dancing girl offers her dance to the Buddha because conventional worship is forbidden. Through her sincerity and truthfulness, she turns a sacrilegious act into an act of worship and takes off her ornaments to put them before his shrine ("Natir Puja" 136-139). What is more, she knows that she will be killed for it instantly so that the intertextual reference also emphasises both the intensity and the danger of Deben's love for Reba.

Fittingly, there is a reference to Reba's "strange communion with her instrument", the *esraj*, using the religious term to emphasise its importance (38). Her music is so all-encompassing that Deben's nostalgic love for her is expressed through musical metaphors: "it had been clear to both of them that this was no longer just a haunting melody, but the abiding rhythm of his life" (52). The spiritual

[50] The notion of erotic spirituality and its musical expression goes back to traditions like Sufism and the Baul singers in Bengal (Lewisohn 2-41). The Bauls are a religious sect in mostly rural Bengal, who are known as travelling minstrels. They focus on love and enjoyment of life, and therefore criticise the ideal of an ascetic life (Capwell 10-13, 20-32).

character of Reba's songs, which links artistic with religious practices, heightens and singles out the experience of art as one of special epiphanic meaning. Through an overlapping with the semantic field of religion, this characterisation emphasises the contrast between practices of art and everyday actions. Moreover, it underlines the structural parallels with otium: Reba's longing is dedicated only to her art, it does not serve any other purpose and is not directed at another aim (at least before she regularly performs, see 6.4), and still it is productive, because she creates something beautiful with it.

While most of the time Deben's longing and adoration are only focused on Reba, there is a parallel to her music in his fascination for physics and "the strange metaphors that men had constructed to rationalize the mystery of the stars without wringing it of its wonder" (*Colour* 41). The poetry of astrophysics is the only language in which Reba and Deben eventually talk to each other, and this discussion about the sun and the earth becoming one is fraught with significance, since it emphasises the impossibility of their ever being together as lovers (49-50). Although Deben's longing for Reba is never fulfilled, he finds small moments of inner calm in the time he spends with his niece, Reba's daughter Niharika. There is also an allusion to the two practices of art and astronomy coming together in the name "Niharika", which is not only the title of a poetry collection by Bengali poet Jatindra Mohan Bagchi, from 1927, but translates to "nebula" (cf. Kuortti 195). When Deben takes Niharika to the Planetarium, "he found his mind was spinning with the ecstasy of her perception of the universe, and he knew he had not been so happy in a very long time" (*Colour* 55). In this moment of joy, his interest in astrophysics and his fascination for Reba's music come together in a kind of spiritual epiphany and he again remembers her "singing of the devotee who knew not how to adore the Lord Buddha except through dance" (ibid.).

The exceptionality of Reba's practice of art as well as the inaccessibility of native Bengali culture are further underlined by the use of the terminology of the sublime in the description of both Deben's fascination with Reba and Reba's obsession with her art. He refers to the "*sublime expanse* of her loneliness", which implies both threatening inaccessibility and an awe-inspiring fascination, because

it triggers in him the “terrible beauty” of his love for her (6, 19 emphasis added; cf. Duffy 3, 7). After Reba’s musical practice has been described in terms of the sublime, Deben’s interest in astronomy seems a fitting parallel, since the unknown territory of the stars is also part of what can be called the “natural sublime” (cf. Duffy 22-24, 174-190). At the same time, the related capacity to be surprised and to feel awed is part of the experience of otium (Gimmel et al. 81).

Reba’s role in the novel can be read in a symbolic way, standing with her intimate connection to classical music for Indian traditional culture. As Kuortti has stressed, it is significant that she “had never learnt the piano”, even “had had it removed” from her room, rejecting Western music in favour of the *esraj* (*Colour* 3-4).[51] This can be interpreted as an action of “anticolonial resistance where the symbol of imperial presence is marginalised and replaced by its native equivalent” (Kuortti 186). In addition to parallels and associations on the content level such as the recurring water imagery, Reba’s songs are songs by Tagore, through which she is intimately associated with an older Bengali culture. The Tagore songs, which are almost a genre by themselves, evoke the “awakening” of modern Indian culture in the context of the Bengal Renaissance (Ray; Dasgupta, *Renaissance* 221-223; 227-228; 239; Fludernik, “Nostalgia” 23).[52]

The sadness which accompanies the beautiful and profound experiences is invariably framed as a nostalgic longing from the perspective of the intellectual who has left. Thus, Deben’s very “love for Reba stands for a nostalgic image of India” (Kuortti 185). In the diaspora context, homesickness automatically implies the impossibility to return to the same home (cf. Lange 366). This is an unchanged image of India from the past, which, by going away, Deben has frozen

[51] Bakhle comments on how the two musical traditions were not always seen as mutually exclusive. She references several projects in which the European notation system was used for Indian classical music but also notes that these attempts were discussed controversially as the “influence of colonial epistemology” (68).

[52] The Bengal Renaissance refers – although the term Renaissance, with its European associations, is debatable – to a period from the mid-nineteenth century, during which important developments in creative activity, the spread of print culture, reformist perspectives on religion as well as a new understanding of the public and “civil society” developed (cf. Ray 31-34). It also entailed “the melding of two traditions […] the Indian cultural and philosophical past” and “the Western creative and intellectual tradition”, so that for instance in Tagore’s songs both the schema of the Indian raga and Western influences play a role (Dasgupta, *Renaissance* 4, cf. 6, 21-23).

in his memory, and which cannot be recuperated upon returning. Significantly, Deben compares Reba to "the cavernous ruins of a great city, where he might lose himself without any regret" (*Colour* 18). In his fascination for these ruins "decay had become nectar to Debendranath Roy" (6). Like the emotion of nostalgia, ruins "reveal an ambivalent sense of time, at once the awareness of an insuperable break from the past that constitutes the modern age and the sense that some valuable trace has endured and needs to be cherished" (Hell/Schönle 5). The metaphor of ruins points to an older culture of modernity that has become inaccessible to the present moment just as his home in Calcutta has become inaccessible to Deben: at one point, he suddenly realises "I do not know her at all", a fact that does not diminish in the least his nostalgic longing. Because Deben has deprived himself of the presence of the desired object, his love itself is nostalgic (cf. Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 27) and his nostalgia refers as much to Deben's longing for Bengali culture, to the novel's expression of nostalgia for an older culture of modernity in Bengal as it refers to the woman, Reba.

Thus, Deben is obsessed with the past and throughout the whole novel the past repeatedly appears more significant than the protagonists' present, or their future prospects. Along with Reba, her entire family stands for the Bengali culture of the past. Her father was "a renowned professor of Ancient Indian History", and she has a "Bachelor's degree in Sanskrit" (17; cf. Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 26). Furthermore, Reba's family is contrasted with the Roy family even in details such as the appearance of their houses and furniture. The Roy mansion is characterised by its

> […] sterile interior, the furniture that had no meaning, no history, no past, while in her father's home, even the threadbare tablecloth had its dignity, bookshelves towered graciously above them everywhere spilling well-thumbed books, and the moth-eaten armchairs were steeped in the memories of a departed age. (*Colour* 17)

The contrast between the two families shows that the nostalgia for India's untouched past is not only a reflection of Deben's long absence from home, but also a general comment on a postcolonial search for identity. The Roy family, although they lack history and taste, have made a fortune in the Burmese teak trade, and have "purchased" their family mansion "from a departing Englishman,

and rechristened [it] 'Mandalay'" (9-10). They are characterised as shallow, 'nouveau-riche' traders whose success is intertwined with colonial politics and the upheavals in the context of independence and they are less connected to Bengali cultural traditions (cf. 37-38).[53]

Reba's family, however, is steeped in the past culture of Bengal but has little money, and Reba's mother is described as frail and bed-bound (cf. 17, 37-38). Deben's memories of leisurely academic discussions at her father's house belong to the most poetic and dense descriptions in the novels, in which the quality of experience is, at least in hindsight, comparable to otium:

> […] those wonderful evenings […] when he would sit enthralled but tongueless in the winds of a fierce and splendid debate, and with that he had at least a few choice words to offer, especially if, as was often so, she was there, at her father's feet, quietly voicing her own opinions, that he ached to endorse with an especially coruscating comment. (129)

It is a memory of something that used to happen repeatedly or a blending of several such occasions ("would sit"). Monika Fludernik analyses the "emotional quality of the memories" which "emerges from the lexical choice of the evaluative adjectives *wonderful* and *splendid*" as well as from metaphors such as "enthralled" and "tongueless", which do not refer principally to the academic discussion, but to his love for Reba ("Narrating" n. pag.). The relevance of the memory is underlined by alliteration that either emphasises the special, cherished character of the memory ("**w**onderful […] **w**hen he **w**ould") or the fierceness of the academic debate ("**c**oruscating **c**omment"). Moreover, the dense quality is heightened through "the syntax […] in which clauses are enchained by means of qualifications interposed between constituents" (Fludernik, "Narrating" n. pag.). This density of nostalgic memory is crucial for the role of otium on the level of how the text is structured: nostalgic narratives tend to "recollect[…] a bitter-sweet past with such emotional finesse so as to suck the reader into the 'time' and 'place' of the text", especially by minute details and observations about emotional

[53] Kuortti also points out that the class-related criticism that runs through several characters of the novel from Deben's mother, to his own fights with his father about their business, and to Doctor Rahul's medical care for the poor can be linked with "Tagore's own critique of Indian feudalism, and […] his protest about the living conditions of the poor" (189, cf. 193).

and sensory impressions (Noor, “Negotiating” n. pag.). They thus ask the reader to re-live the exceptional moment recalled in the memory.

Another parallel that could be drawn tentatively to classical Indian culture is to see the chapter titles as inspired by the classical Indian rasa theory of aesthetics, which conceptualised the heightening of certain “emotive predispositions” into “the concentrated joy of aesthetic sensations” or their emotional essence (Sarbadhikary 31-32). The rasa are a “formal pattern of possible aesthetic moments […] based on a taxonomy of emotional states”, which “correspond to the eight or nine known basic emotions” (Mishra, *Poetics* 19). These emotional essences (literally, rasa translated as “juice” or “flavour”) are first theorised in the context of Sanskrit theatre with a focus on the emotional response that should be evoked in the audience (cf. Mishra, *Poetics* 4-5; Tripathi). These emotional essences are linked to Hindu deities as well as colours, but there is no easy equivalence to the colours and the parallel can only be seen in the idea of an aura of essential emotions, “Crimson”, to take the last chapter as example, resonating with the threatening atmosphere of the *Threepenny Opera* quotes and Niharika’s disappearance. The title, *A Sin of Colour*, could therefore be understood to mean that the only sins the protagonists have committed are sins of intense emotion or, more precisely, of forbidden and unattainable love.

Reba’s identification with traditional Bengali culture is even further underlined by the fact that her longing and sadness are never directed at any other human. At one point, Reba comments on her Tagore songs when her daughter Niharika asks who they were written for. She explains:

> […] that it was better sometimes not to address such things to any particular person, for people, she tells her, come and go, but emotions last forever. It is to celebrate the beauty of love rather than their lover that poets weave words together and steep them in song. (67)

In this way, Reba and, through her practice of classical music, modern Bengali culture, are built up as the sublime objects of Deben’s longing from which he feels distanced and estranged.

The connection between love, memory and music is emphasised with the recurring imagery of water. The references to moving water in particular, of rain and the stormy sea, act as metaphors for the nostalgia for home in Bengal or a

childhood in Bangladesh as “a land of rivers” (*Colour* 27). Reba’s home and family are associated with “poetry and sad rainsong” (41). Moreover, the emotional motif of Reba’s musical practice and Deben’s love is in part inspired by a melancholic, unfulfilled longing. Although the concept of otium does not exactly describe either the experience of Reba’s art and aimless longing, or Deben’s despair in his love for her, these experiences are associated with moments of leisure and the enjoyment of cultured practices. As Fludernik argues, “[n]ostalgia and leisure seem to mutually depend one on the other in the novel”, because Deben’s nostalgic longing and continuous thoughts about Reba need time and the memories he dwells on are “scenes of cultured leisure, of music and intellectual exchange” (Fludernik, “Nostalgia” 27). At the same time, Reba nostalgically longs for childhood and her family home, which is in turn associated with “the nostalgia for an irretraceable past of Bengali cultural predominance” (ibid.).

Thus, nostalgia is not exclusively directed towards home as a place, but towards a leisurely temporality, towards certain cultural practices, and a feeling of being at home. This vague longing for a mode of experiencing emerges from the novel, because love for the woman Reba, nostalgia for Bengal and for past moments of joy are inextricably connected.

3.2.2. Otium and the Crisis of Identity

The perception of the world during an experience of otium can be radically open and allow crisis to be contemplated from a calmly distanced vantage point. Thus, the contemplative distance of otium can support a character’s reflection upon the “agentic orientation” of his or her actions, making it possible for them to “loosen themselves from past patterns of interaction” and emphasise the contingency of future action (Emirbayer/Mische 1010). Practices can be repetitive and habitual but may also be newly generated actions in which a situation of otium comes from a breaking with routine, creating “new possibilities for thought and action” (ibid. 984). Each of the protagonists in *A Sin of Colour* goes through temporally interlinked moments of crisis and insecurity. My argument in this section is that experiences of otium help to reflect on a situation of crisis and strengthen the protagonists’ sense of identity. Moreover, whenever this is the case, descriptions

of practices of art (the active production or the contemplation of art) suggest what cannot be explicitly expressed in language. I also argue that the nostalgia that correlates with the experience of crisis is ultimately directed at a resolution. Therefore, the nostalgic perspective of potential experiences of otium is always also productively aimed at the future.

Before his disappearance, Deben ponders feeling "weighed down by the same shadows, and found them suddenly too heavy for his widemeshed thoughts, memories fell through him like pieces of tarnished cutlery, he opened his eyes and realized that he was too full of holes to return to this world" (*Colour* 36). The situation on the river is portrayed as one of existential crisis, so that the reader is led to believe that he has killed himself, just as his family assumes him to be dead after a punting accident. The moment of existential crisis that makes Deben disappear temporarily from the novel had already been delayed by his fleeing to "distant Oxford, as far away from her as he ever might be" (4). The metaphor of a web that is both too loose to hold him together and too constricting to let him go already appears at the beginning of the novel when he is musing about his love for Reba and the "dense dark meshes of the desire that he had enshrined in the dead cabbage smell of his […] chamber" (5). The possibility of his disappearance is there from the first moment when he becomes attracted to Reba: "He had grown effortlessly into manhood only to dissolve piece by piece under her gaze" (20). Deben's love reacts to a longing within Reba, which he characterises as a "vast empty space" and which reinforces the threat of his disappearance (18). At the point of his disappearance, leaving his former life (as well as the novel) is the only solution, the only possible manifestation of his agency. It is as if his identity dissolves when he feels "too full of holes". At the same time language is no longer an adequate means of description as he is absent from the narrative.

When Deben decides to fake a punting accident on the Cherwell, his nostalgic obsession with Reba has reached a point of crisis. Art practices and potential practices of otium are both part of the development of this crisis situation and, eventually, of Deben's solution to it. The intense longing expressed in Reba's music and the epiphanic moments in which his astrophysics and her music come

together have caused Deben much pain, but they have also been exceptional experiences of their own temporality and have inspired a sense of being drawn from everyday life. When Deben eventually reappears in Mandalay, the reader learns that he spent the years of his disappearance in solitude in the Himalayas, "lived like a hermit" and "sealed [himself] away in the hills with people who are but relics of the Raj" (167). For his livelihood he "spent twenty years mending their absurd china", a very suggestive activity for someone who previously describes *himself* as "too full of holes" (ibid. 36).[54] Deben's stay in the mountains was intended as a process of healing surrounded by others who have lost a meaningful way of relating to the present due to their obsessive clinging to, in their case, the colonial past. Deben's only reason to return is that he is going blind and in the context of his nostalgic obsessive love "[b]oth the restoration of broken china and the advancing blindness are illustrative of the state Deben stands for: stagnation in the face of the impossibility of returning to the past" (Kuortti 192). The mending of broken china could, however, also be seen as the necessary meditative and creative practice for Deben to reflect on and live through his crisis of identity. After having mended his first piece, he remembers that he "had never felt more fulfilled in [his] life" and he tells his niece that he was "very happy" in his refuge at hill station (*Colour* 149, 150). A meditative space of otium might have allowed Deben the distance of reflection that he could not have while he was tied up in everyday affairs.

As has been noted above, the writing of Rabindranath Tagore is a constant intertextual reference in *A Sin of Colour*. The basic conflict of the novel, that is, the situation of Deben being in love with his brother's wife, can be read on the background of Tagore's novella *Nastanirh/Broken Nest*.[55] In Tagore's text, the

[54] Monika Fludernik points out the ironic dimension of Deben's activity in the hill station, but it is nevertheless described along the lines of the concept of otium ("Nostalgia" 27). After all, "[l]eisure seems to experience best when one's life is uncluttered by material objects and one's mental focus is on the moment, on the present" ("The Simple Life" 73).

[55] As Kuortti points out, on yet another level *Nastanirh* is often read as a reference to "a similar alleged relationship between Rabindranath and his brother's wife, Kadambari Devi" (Kuortti 185). This biographical dimension is of little importance here, except from the perspective that it is an example for the relevance of Tagore as a cultural icon in Bengal and thus an instance of what Hans Harder has called a hyper-nostalgia about Tagore, a multiplication of narratives about Tagore that comment on texts by him as well as his life (Harder, "Nostalgia").

young woman Charu is married to an older man, who is busy with his work as the editor of a magazine, and starts to spend a lot of time with her husband's younger brother Amal. When Amal marries and leaves for England, Charu cannot hide her despair. The story ends when Charu's husband understands the reason for her sadness and eventually moves to another city to escape his ruined marriage. The parallels between the two texts are not only obvious in the storyline, but also in the common interest that sparks Charu and Amal's affection: the discussion of literature and, soon, the quality of their own writing, are the reason for their meetings and conversations (cf. "Broken Nest" 12-13, 36-38). Based on these aspects, the parallel in *A Sin of Colour* is Reba's music. However, an important difference to the intertext is that the female part of the love relationship is characterised as mysterious and awe inspiring rather than young and impressionable. Still, in both texts the quality of the illicit love is interwoven with a fascination for art that makes it stand out from daily life (cf. "Broken Nest" 76). In both stories the husband as a "man of the world" forms a negative, uncultivated contrast to the aesthetic beauty that is the essence of the new, forbidden love (ibid. 21, cf. 20, 73). In Gupta's novel, Deben is the one who suffers most. The description of Charu as a "patient with a terrible disease" mirrors Deben's feeling of being "too full of holes" ("Broken Nest" 89; *Colour* 36). Even the geographical distance is part of Tagore's novella, for Charu and Amal are separated when Amal leaves for England because of his marriage, and Charu makes fun of him for becoming a "sahib" in "a hat and coat" and wonders if he will "recognise us dark skinned people" upon returning ("Broken Nest" 60). The intertextual reference is, in this case, not just one part of a web of nostalgic Tagore references, but also a more optimistic re-writing of Tagore's *Nastanirh*: In *Broken Nest*, Charu is left without any perspective, she disappears as a person and becomes increasingly isolated and lonely, while Deben, through his withdrawal from his own life, manages to overcome his crisis in a self-imposed isolation.

The second main character of the novel, Deben's niece Niharika, who is the main focaliser of the second half of the novel, is characterised with traits of both Deben and Reba. She is creative like her mother, though less obsessively so, and goes abroad to study and write her PhD thesis like her uncle. Already as a

child, she is introduced as being a creative writer, inventing and illustrating her own stories (*Colour* 65-66, 68). Later, in New York, she makes use of her "imagination – which had made so much out of far less" and turns her PhD subject – a pygmy that had been kept in the Bronx zoo – into a piece of creative writing that she manages to publish (96-97). When she returns to Calcutta, she eventually writes about her uncle's disappearance (cf. 109-110, 133, 203-206, 150).

To some extent, Niharika's creativity is sparked through her desperate love for Daniel Faraday, who was the last person to have seen her uncle when he disappeared. Although she never reflects on it that way, much of her writing happens during or after a period of intense crisis because of him. When she leaves, first for Oxford, and later for the United States, she seems better at adapting to life abroad than Deben, thinking of old friendships that "ha[ve] planted something within her which would not stop to grow in a new climate, but perhaps be fostered with more care, like orchids in a hothouse" (68). Despite the metaphor of the hothouse, which implies rapid changes, she seems generally optimistic about staying abroad. Although Niharika does not sing herself, she turns to her mother's singing when the drama of her affair with Daniel develops and she feels homesick (78-79). This again makes Reba, Tagore and classical Indian instruments symbolic for a vague nostalgic longing for her former home in Calcutta, for closer ties to her aloof mother, or for Daniel's love.

Practices such as the creation and reception of art are, for Niharika, interwoven with her crisis, which has been caused by an unattainable love; her engagement in these practices is like a sublimation of her despair. Although she sometimes feels these academic and artistic interests might help distract her from her pain concerning Daniel, they eventually always lead her back to him: her fantastic stories about the pygmy are the result of a long time spent focusing on that history with Daniel's friend Morgan in New York, whom she grows fond of. She feels happy in his company and their common interest in this study distracts her for a while, but when the book is published, she immediately wonders whether Daniel will find it in a bookshop (96-97). The Tagore songs she asked from her mother are mournful love songs, with the help of which she can plunge into her

pain about Daniel: "*if the doors to my heart should close upon you someday, I beseech you to break them down and not turn away defeated*" (79).

Niharika's relationship with Daniel is based on their mutual knowledge that they love one another but cannot be together because of his family. Their relationship is characterised most clearly in contrast with that of Doctor Rahul Mitra, whom Niharika gets to know and like upon her return to Calcutta. Where Daniel seems extravagant and passionate, Mitra is portrayed as dependable and reasonable. Daniel moves in and out of Niharika's life, while Mitra soon promises, through his actions and words, to stay. The time she spends with both men is linked to the appreciation of art. Just before Daniel leaves for a long time, he gifts her a brooch of a sailboat to remember him by (80-81). It reminds her of one of their first outings together to Tintern Abbey, where Niharika is impressed by "the drama of [the abbey's] sudden appearance against the mellow slopes of the Wye Valley" (82).[56] The time she spent with him, which "filled her with a profoundly rich ease", is linked to her mother's and uncle's experiences through references to "the music of that afternoon" and "the riverbed of her thoughts" (82). In the appreciation of a beautiful ruin together with someone she loves, her experience of otium is described with references to music and water. Her links to Daniel are defined by a focus on the past or the ephemeral beauty of a piece of art.

Her friendship with Daniel's friend Morgan in New York is similarly fragile. Morgan struggles with his depression, living an idle and neurotic life. Their friendship, which reaches a sudden end when Niharika's book turns out to be a success, is symbolised by "a locket with a lyre in it made of the hairs of Keats' head", the beauty of which deeply fascinates Morgan and Niharika (122). He bequeaths this object to her when he commits suicide. Niharika's intense relationship to these two men, one of love and the other of friendship, is characterised through the beauty of the two gifts. The short-lived beauty of their moments together is symbolised by them like "[a] collection of precious gems" (80).

[56] Both Tintern Abbey and Oxford can, in *A Sin of Colour*, be interpreted as "a site of […] Occidentalist nostalgia" (Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 29). For this potentially occidentalist view of Oxford see also Chaudhuri's portrayal of its "green, semi-pastoral life" in *Afternoon Raag*.

In stark contrast to these relationships, her dependable friendship with Rahul Mitra, who acts on stage in addition to his duties as a doctor, is accompanied with quotes from “The Ballad of Mack the Knife” from Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera*. As Niharika gets to know Rahul better, the narrative is interrupted less frequently by flashbacks and nostalgia. Her memories of Daniel become less frequent as do her hopes of seeing him again (cf. *Colour* 161-164, 169-171, 181-183). During her last stay in Oxford, she is gladdened by the signs of Rahul’s affection, for “with every letter it has become clearer to her that she would willingly return to take her place by his side” (189, cf. 206).). For Niharika, Rahul plays a similar role to Jennifer – the “simple country girl” – for Deben, whom he married to escape his love for Reba but who could never replace her (53). Consequently, Niharika’s resolve to settle down with Rahul is forgotten as soon as Daniel appears in Oxford. Deben’s faked punting accident, which in the first part of the novel was the result of a lack of options for future-oriented agency, becomes for Niharika a model, and possible solution, to the pain of living apart from Daniel. The contrast between Daniel and Rahul, as well as between Reba and Jennifer, is a contrast between, on the one hand, an intense, almost unearthly love, and on the other hand a pragmatic, future-oriented relationship based on mutual affection.[57] Both Deben and Niharika half-heartedly try, but cannot let go of the former relationship after they have made these intensely beautiful experiences, which is why more than half of the novel revolves around a nostalgic image of the past. A sense of stagnation, and lack of communication, is filled, in a web of memories and temporal layers of the narrative, with reflections on the past. Practices of art appear both as an expression of, and as an answer to, the gaps, holes and silences in the human relationships and crisis situations of the novel. Fludernik also comments on how “otium and nostalgia combine to cover up pain and illicit desire” in the novel (29). Reba’s music is both the source of Deben’s pain and of intense experiences of otium, and Niharika’s relationship to Daniel,

[57] Both characters are intent on doing good for others: Jennifer with Reba’s children, Rahul with his patients. Moreover, they want to improve themselves, something strikingly captured in Deben’s impression of Jennifer’s “desire to make of life a little more than what it appeared to offer her“ and “to make of herself a little more than what it was obvious she could be“ (46-47).

and the rare times they get to spend together, are symbolised by the brooch with a sailboat.[58]

The orientation of their practices of otium along past memories (for instance the Planetarium in Deben's case, Tintern Abbey in Niharika's) is part of a structural principle of the novel: the present is frequently interrupted by embedded memories of the past and forebodings of the future. However, the reflection of past events, which is additionally underlined by dense and poetic descriptions as well as variable internal focalisation shifting from one character's musings and memories to another's, can itself be understood as a potential experience of otium (cf. Fludernik, "Narrating" n. pag.). At the same time, the novel's emphasis on internal reflection is vaguely aimed at a resolution in the future. The vague and tentative resolution ties in with the insecurity that comes with unreliable narration: events foreshadowed are not necessarily going to happen in that way and memories, too, are heavily subjective and let us see the world though a filter of nostalgia.

Nevertheless, to speak in Emirbayer and Mishe's terms, Deben and Niharika's nostalgic practices seem to be *iterative*, but they eventually include a *projective* element. Because of the open and fragmentary ending, the future resolution lies, at least in Niharika's case, outside the novel's pages. In the final scene, the locket with Keats' hair is represented as a symbol of hope, being the last thing Deben can see. It comes across as a message to him by Niharika that she took his advice ("[i]f it is the same thing then I strongly advise my course of action") and found a solution in her disappearance on the Cherwell; it is also a last image of beauty "which he will revisit in his mind once darkness has set in" (*Colour* 153). Despite all parallels, a significant difference between the two stories is that the ending suggests that Niharika disappears together with Daniel, the love of her life. While Deben cannot ever join Reba, Niharika will be able to be with Daniel. The practices and objects of art in the novel function as either an

[58] As Gamper and Hühn in the introduction to the collected volume on the heterogeneity of aesthetic temporalities ("ästhetische Eigenzeiten") argue, material objects have their own temporality (11-12, 16). The silence of the material piece of art is particularly relevant for *A Sin of Colour*, in which silence repeatedly defines human relations and art becomes more expressive than any dialogue (ibid. 53).

expression or a positive reflection on a crisis situation that originates in the two love relationships. Art or beautiful objects appear in the novel when language can no longer express a certain knowledge or emotional state, which is instead suggested through the creation or reaction to intense art. Moreover, they are the visible symbols of places and past experiences which stand for the web of memory and the reflection the novel consists of.

3.3. Spiritual Practices

Another recurring category of practice, which is frequently represented as conducive to experiences of otium, is that of spiritual practices. There are instances of religious rituals enabling the characters to experience something like otium. More often, however, there are instances of a transfer of characteristics of religious practices to different contexts expressing a certain intensity of experience. I argue that there is an affinity between spiritual experience and the experience of otium, since both kinds of experience are singled out as particularly meaningful to the protagonists and the quality of spirituality shares some of the characteristics of experiences of otium.[59] Instead of providing a direct reference to religion, in these texts some of the characteristics of spiritual experiences are used to evoke a specific experiential quality that is close to the idea of otium. I am arguing that experiences in secular contexts are thus represented with the help of a semantics of spirituality that presents them as special, intense and character-shaping moments that transcend the mundane and everyday. This representation bears similarities to the exceptionality from everyday life that was already at stake in artistic practices, particularly with a view to modernist literary strategies of trying to capture the real and everyday. An experience of otium, while it can be intensely positive or painful, is in this way singled out as being meaningful to the protagonist. Thus, spirituality is used to enhance the description of a particular practice and its experience.

[59] A similar argument is often made about Hartmut Rosa's concept of *resonance*, which is directed at nature as a substitute of religious longing and adoration (Rosa, *Resonance* 444-459; Behrendt 234, 245, s. also 5.2).

Yet, in the same novels in which spiritual experience figures as a positive ideal, traditional, institutionalised religion is presented as ambivalent and problematic. With reference to the disagreements about a singular modernity versus different kinds of modernities delineated in the previous chapter, cultural semantics are seen as the basis on which structures of modernity emerge or are imposed, the reaction to which leads to new cultural formations (cf. Schwinn 462-463). One example could be how the "cultural grammar" of a religion can have a lasting impact on modern society (or get translated into a secular idiom that is just as effective) even while the social relevance of its representatives is dwindling (ibid. 461). In the following interpretations, this means that while everyday observations or secular practices are framed by spiritual semantics, direct references to religious practices and institutions are secularised or debunked almost as a negative counterpart to the ideal of spiritual experience.

In the following, I analyse the notion of spirituality as an important mode of experiencing what may or may not be connected to institutionalised religion, delineating how the vocabulary of the spiritual is transposed to non-religious contexts in Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991) and Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics* (2000). Although Chaudhuri's and Mishra's novels relate to very different kinds of practices (domestic scenes and extended walks in the Himalayas), what connects them is their recourse to spiritual semantics to enhance the depth of the protagonists' experience.

The second part of the analysis turns to two examples from the novels in order to demonstrate how traditional religious practices in these texts become problematic through their ironic representation, their secularisation or the incapability of the protagonists to identify with them. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, actual religious practices and rituals are commented on ironically by the narrator, who nevertheless perceives them as valuable, but secular, sensuous experiences. In Mishra's novel, the representation of religious practices oscillates between institutionalised practice and secularised experience. The text refers to an ideal of the intensity of spiritual experience, but it also draws attention to the ambiguity of Indian spirituality and religion. Religious practices are being negotiated between the two extremes of the values of traditional religious forms

on the one hand, and Western, orientalist stereotypes of South Asian spirituality on the other. In recurring references to these stereotypes, *The Romantics* both ironizes and reproduces spirituality and contemplative forms of otium in a secular context. Through my analysis of the similarity between the experiential quality of spiritual transcendence and otium, it becomes clear how these practices are represented as highly ambivalent, constantly shifting between institutionalised religion and exceptional experiences in secular contexts as well as between a desirable ideal and a problematic stereotype.

3.3.1. "Endless and unbroken flows the stream of joy."[60] – Spirituality in Secular Contexts

In many of the texts that represent spirituality as an intense human experience, spirituality itself has either lost any clear reference to a specific religion, or the texts ostentatiously play with an intermingling of the secular and the religious. Practices that seem to have no connection to religion are described with the help of the semantic field of spirituality in very subjective, character-oriented representations which enhance the quality of the depicted experience.

In the interpretations of relevant passages, a number of topoi can be identified that appear repeatedly and that are the major terms that organise the discourse of spirituality in these novels and make it relevance to a study of otium:

- *Transcendence* as an opposition to the phenomenal world singles out an experience as one that is *exceptional* from the normal or everyday experience;
- this is often combined with a sense of *timelessness or temporal boundlessness*;
- the relation of a character to the world is framed by an *intense feeling of love or longing for an abstract communion* or oneness with the universe or some higher being;
- this experience results in a kind of *rebirth* or *spiritual renewal*;

[60] Chaudhuri, *Address* 46.

- in these contexts, *language seems to reach its limits*, because these elements of experience are felt rather than known and belong to the realm of the mystical.[61] At times, the experience of a character can only be expressed with reference to song and sensuous/physical affect.

In the following, I will demonstrate how ostensibly secular practices are characterised as spiritual practices as well as in what ways this understanding of spirituality is relevant to experiences of otium. If a spiritual atmosphere is created in the most unlikely places and has the effect of characterising the protagonists' experiences as experiences of otium, this partially disengages spiritual practices from their conjunction with religion. Consequently, in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* and Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics* it is the porousness between religious and secular practices that is important.

A recurring motif in Amit Chaudhuri's novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*, is the transformation of practices associated with a higher, serious significance into charmingly circumstantial acts of everyday life, while at the same time banal everyday actions are shaped into religious rituals. When the little boy Sandeep and his friends and cousins observe everyday occurrences and objects in their neighbourhood, the descriptions of what they see invariably turn the objects into something significant and meaningful. Instead, as Majumdar formulates it, an "epiphanic significance" or "wholeness" is hinted at through everyday occurrences and objects but is constantly deferred ("Dallying" 456). Spirituality, in this context, does not stand for wholeness, but for longing or for fragmentary glimpses of some higher vision which remains elusive.

One example for this constellation is Sandeep's description of his uncle's bathroom ritual. Chhotomama's "pre-luncheon bath" becomes a "*sacrosanct ritual*" during which his "shaving instruments were *holy tools* and […] the act of *sprinkling water* on the face was somehow *profound*" (44-45, emphasis added). The secular practice is described as a religious ritual in order to enhance its status: shaving is associated with the sprinkling of holy water and the use of ritual

[61] Compare Vijay Mishra's notion of the Indian sublime as part of devotional poetics. It refers to that which "resists being articulated in language for the simple reason that the unrepresentable cannot be signified" (6).

objects as well as bathing with ritual immersion.[62] *A Strange and Sublime Address* playfully questions the boundaries between the religious, elevated and the secular, everyday practices. The passage also functions as one of the scenes that establish Chhotomama in his importance as head and breadwinner of the family, albeit with a certain ironic twist, owing to its location in the bathroom.[63] Rather than putting the emphasis on the parody of the religious, this scene's ritual character mostly has the effect of elevating what could be just a passage about a middle-aged man in the shower. Thus, little practices of everyday life are endowed with an aura of holiness.

At the same time, Chhotomama's choice of song while bathing is deeply spiritual, but without a clear religious affiliation: it is a song by Tagore, "a song of praise, a prayer-song" (*Address* 46). As I have emphasised with reference to Deben's homesickness and love for Reba and her music, Tagore himself is venerated in Bengal as a poet who "appears as one with Bengali culture and nature" (Harder, "Nostalgia" 206; cf. Lange). Moreover, Tagore's songs are frequently devotional, spiritual songs of prayer, but without that prayer corresponding with one specific religion (cf. Sen, "Introduction" xv–lxiii).[64] The line sung by Sandeep's uncle is translated as follows: "*Endless and unbroken flows the stream of joy. / Its timeless sound resonates beneath the great sky*" (*Address* 46). The two lines express transgression of temporal limitation ("endless […] stream", "timeless sound"), which is enabled through the joy of devotion or communication with some higher being, cosmic energy or both ("resonates beneath the great sky"). The "prayer-song" is self-referential, a prayer about the

[62] The connection between shaving and religion has a literary precursor in Joyce's *Ulysses*, which starts with Buck Mulligan coming up the stairs of the Martello tower "bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and razor lay crossed […] He held the bowl aloft and intoned: -- *Introibo ad altare Dei.*" (3). With this quasi-liturgical *Introitus*, the Telemachus episode is also the Introitus "to the Bloomsday liturgy", commencing a web of irreverent religious references and liturgical parallels that often lead to the parody of elements of the Catholic Mass (Lang 111, cf. 107-109, 113, 119). However, the references to religion in *Ulysses* have a more clearly satirical edge directed at an idealised image of Catholicism.

[63] In both examples, the mock-ritual context helps to characterise the protagonists engaged in it, such as the dominant Mulligan who acts as the priest and Stephen who serves him while he is shaving as an altar server would at mass (ibid. 115-116).

[64] Bakhle emphasises that it is impossible to separate classical Indian music into religious and secular traditions (3, 15, 259).

experience of prayer. It thus circumvents the orientation at an aim that is inherent in spiritual practice and becomes a circular, aimless act. Its timelessness grounds the experience in an eternal present and delegates the projective (future-oriented) and iterative (past-oriented, habitual) dimension of practice to the background.

However, the listener in the novel, Sandeep, "did not understand a single word of it" and instead *felt* the effect of the song as follows:

> [The] sound of the difficult words communicated with him in an *obscure* way, and he was aware that the *repetitive sound* of the language had mingled with the *sound of the water falling* in the bath, till they became one glimmering sound *without meaning*. […] A cool spell of *remote, waterfall-like music* was *woven and broken* at the same time. (ibid. emphasis added)

The semantics of spirituality here are characterised through a vague sensing instead of knowing. This is achieved through parallels between the song that is being sung and the current situation: the metaphor of water for the endless, a-temporal "stream of joy" as well as its sensory echo ("timeless sound" / "sound of the water") appear both in the prayer-song and in the description of how Sandeep perceives his uncle in the shower. However, the perception constantly switches between the everyday secular, and the special spiritual: instead of glimpses of epiphanic meaning, the sound is to Sandeep "obscure", "without meaning"; the singing is not "unbroken", but "woven and broken at the same time", and the situation is far from eternal, as soon "[t]he bath, the inner temple where he had performed his last sacrosanct ritual […] was […] empty and without music" (*Address* 46). The experience has an ephemeral, elusive quality, which is emphasised by the water imagery. Moreover, words seem to become inadequate, for Sandeep cannot make sense of the experience through the language of the song, but only through sensory impressions, emotions and associations.

The experiences of otium depicted in *A Strange and Sublime Address* are characterised by their transcendental, timeless quality, but at the same time by their sensuous, physical character. These two seemingly contrastive dimensions of experience also serve to question the boundaries between religious and profane contexts; in both, there is a focus on the present. In order to describe

everyday practices, an elusive quality of experience is articulated by means of religious metaphor. Through their difference from normal language expression, the proximity to religious practices mark the described experiences' transcendence of the usual perception of the world (Liebert, "Das Unsagbare" 266-287; "Religionslinguistik" 25). In this sense, spiritual practices can be interpreted here as the representation of everyday experiences of otium through elements of spirituality.

Chaudhuri's technique can be compared to a modernist attentiveness to the everyday, "defamiliarizing" and through that strategy spiritually heightening and enhancing the objects and situations represented in the attempt to capture an elusive reality (cf. Gaonkar 3; Freedman 116; Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 93-95). Brian May suggests that the "more or less immediate apprehension of the thing encountered lies at the core of the modernist poetics of epiphany" (923; cf. Schwarz 4-6, 10).[65] The focus on an elusive immediacy of things and sensuous impressions is commented on by Chaudhuri in his reference to "spiritual urgency" of "verandahs, advertisement hoardings, waiting rooms, pincushions, paperweights" (*Clearing* 93). This elusiveness in modernist writing has a parallel in the experience of otium: just as it is impossible to intentionally seek or create the experience of otium, the narrative voice of *A Strange and Sublime Address* has to resort to spirituality to find the words that can capture the significance of the surface observations pervasive throughout the novel. However, rather than an *actual*, (quasi-)religious vision of transcendence, epiphany of sensuous experience serves in this context "to ground or ballast the subject against transcendence, countering the enveloping and disabling pressures of transcendent words or images" (May 924). Both the experiential quality of otium and the modernist stylistics of the novel thus point to a utopian vision grounded in the described experience in the novel, which, however, cannot be grasped.

In Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics* religion and spirituality are intensely contested issues. The various characters of the novel, especially the narrator

[65] Interestingly, May dwells on modernist epiphany only to analyse how it was changed and made more radical in what he calls an "extravagantly postcolonial aesthetic" (924; cf. 923-927). In Chaudhuri's case, the use of epiphany is quite similar to the modernist concept.

Samar himself, seem to be restlessly drifting through different stages of beliefs and approaches to life. In the end, Samar himself, who feels that times have changed too much for him to adhere to the Brahmin traditions of his family, finds a mode of living with which he is content. It is defined by solitude and physical exertion: he becomes a teacher in the small town Dharamsala and spends his holidays physically exhausting himself in the mountains. It is telling that he only finds peace outside the religiously, politically and, for Samar, emotionally charged atmosphere of Varanasi in which the first part of the novel is set.

Samar's interest in a quasi-religious, hermit-like life is already hinted at early in the novel when he feels deeply impressed by an encounter with a Sadhu priest in the mountains: what he learned about the Sadhu has "briefly reawakened […] the old, almost religious sense of the Himalayas as a refuge from the futility of life elsewhere" (*Romantics* 130-131). Later on he does not live the life of a Sadhu, but it is as if his dangerous and arduous hikes through the mountains are a form of self-castigation and meditation, during which his "skin quickly turned dark", his "lips were chapped" and "tiny spots danced before" his "unshaded eyes" (226). The danger he seeks in the mountains is emphasized both in his manic walking despite the heat and in his unplanned reliance on help from farmers for food and shelter. Yet he "felt renewed, and reaching a small summit after a day of clambering up steep rocky slopes, [he] would be suffused by a sense of well-being [he] had never known before" (227). The described feeling of renewal can be compared with the "rhythm of a new birth" which Reba sings of in *A Sin of Colour*. Samar's threateningly close engagement with nature can be linked to Vijay Mishra's conceptualisation of an Indian sublime in devotional poetry, which he understands as a "sensuous" analogy to the characterisation of Brahma in Hindu mythology, whose un-representable boundlessness can only be identified as "a black hole, an all-pervasive emptiness" (*Poetics* 12, 16, 17-18). He describes this devotional sublime as "[a]ttractive as well as repulsive, pleasurable (in the nirvanic sense) but also painful (in the physical sense)" (ibid. 6). Although he also refers to orientalist descriptions of Hinduism that operate with this category, he strengthens its applicability to Indian traditions of devotional writing (ibid. 28-32).

The meditative character of Samar's walks is underlined by its regularity: "[t]he following summer I travelled to Kinnaur, and every summer for the next seven years I went walking in some part or other of the Himalayas" (*Romantics* 228). Moreover, similarly to the examples from *A Strange and Sublime Address*, though with more serious overtones, Samar describes the calming effect that his surroundings have on him in the context of a religious space: he withdraws to "an ochre-colored monastery […] perched high on a treeless hill" where "the still air quivered with the sound of tinkling bells" (ibid.). Although this passage refers to a religious setting (the monastery perched on a cliff) and to associated symbols (the sounds of bells ringing), for Samar these are only part of the general atmosphere of serenity. Samar does not refer to any exchange with the monks nor does he express any interest in their religious practices. Without reference to a specific religion, a "secluded life" of retreat becomes for Samar, a positive contrast to the "blind striving" involved in most other modes of life (239). While the semantics of a withdrawal from the world echo what is expected of a Hindu in the later stages of life, Samar's decision is not related to any religious belief, but described as the "fantasy" of a "simple life". With its characteristic of "monastic seclusion" and the self-imposed "abstinence […] voluntary poverty [and] a regime of discipline", his retreat to the hills sustains Samar's new outlook on the future and offers him "new ways of being" (Fludernik, "The Simple Life" 218). Because of this transformative, utopian character, his experiences are close to an understanding of otium. Samar's hikes display elements of meditative practice, retreat and withdrawal that are found in religion and elements of a very physical way of relating to the world through intense (and not only pleasurable) sensuous perception.

The personal transformation which these experiences offer him, but also the sense of risk and danger, has significant affinity with the idea of otium releasing a crisis of the self. One can compare Samar's decision to withdraw to the hills and become a teacher there with Deben's disappearance and simple job of mending broken china. Both of them break off all contact to their previous acquaintances and eventually return to Calcutta and Benares in a calmer state of mind.

In these examples from *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *The Romantics*, the basic operation of taking religiously coded language out of its religious context and focusing on the quality of experience it affords is similar, but there are actually two different dimensions of religious practice that one needs to distinguish: the first is the kind of longing for spiritual transcendence that is expressed in devotional singing; the second is part of a discourse of renunciation and asceticism promising calm serenity. The latter dimension provides a perspective on possibilities of the "good" life, on building up a fundamental feeling of calm acceptance; the former is more eruptive, describing a transitory inspired experience in which the characters intermittently glimpse some larger insight. In the novels, these inspirational moments are created by means of a description of practices in terms of spiritual semantics, which serves to enhance the ritualistic importance of the practice and the depth of the experience. All of these examples share how the texts express through spirituality that which is unutterable, beyond words. The described experience transcends the familiar perception of the world (Liebert, "Das Unsagbare" 266-287; "Religionslinguistik" 25). Thus, aspects of spiritual experience almost become a marker for otium; they emphasise when a character enters a different mode of being or experiencing. Just as experiences of otium, an experience of spiritual revelation cannot be produced intentionally and, although it might be highly relevant to the person experiencing it, is not directed at an aim apart from the experience. Moreover, the sense of timelessness and focus on sensory perception, which are integral to otium and through which the experience is set apart from an everyday mode of experiencing, are portrayed in these texts through spirituality.

3.3.2. "The general, dignified uselessness of the whole enterprise" – A Critical Perspective on Religious Practice

In many of the texts that represent spirituality as an intense human experience, spirituality itself has either lost any clear reference to a specific religion, or the texts ostentatiously play with an intermingling of the secular and the religious and emphasise the porousness between religious and non-religious spheres. The protagonists experience in different intensities a spiritual transcendence in the

everyday rather than a clear separation of the phenomenal world on the one hand and the sacred beyond this world on the other (cf. Connolly 131-134; Liebert, “Religionslinguistik” 20-21). Thus, the passages discussed here exemplify the transgressive potential of experiences of otium that can be part of banal, everyday actions and observations, but at the same time transcend these through an experiential mode that is paralleled with the way in which the spiritual transcends the phenomenal world.

In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, a strategy of broken or debunked epiphany emphasises the palpable, concrete side of religion. When observing the prayer-room rituals of his aunt, Sandeep comments on “the general, dignified uselessness of the whole enterprise”, and is fascinated to watch her “surrounded by her gods in that tiny room, like a child in a great doll-house […]; it was a strange sight to watch a grown-up at play. Prayer-time was when adults became children again” (33-34). The semantic field of children playing is here mapped onto the field of religion. In an inversion of roles, the little boy states his practical doubts about the adults’ religious beliefs: “Like most children, he was the opposite of innocent: he was sceptical but tolerant of other creeds” (33). In a similar spirit, when his aunt’s prayer is delayed due to a shopping outing, Sandeep remarks that “[t]he gods were not fussy about punctuality; after all, they had all eternity at their disposal” (39). The association of gods with a “fussy” disposition and concerns such as punctuality moves them closer to the human sphere, even though Sandeep rejects the thought.

The focus is on the materiality and sensuousness of religious practice, on its surface effects. It renders the objects handled during prayer and the human participants in religious ritual equally important. Instead of partaking in a sense of spiritual transcendence, Sandeep enjoys “[t]he smell of sandalwood incense, the low hum of his aunt’s voice, the bell ringing at the end of the ceremony […] the cool taste of the offerings that were distributed after prayer” (ibid.). The sensuous atmosphere becomes almost palpable for the reader when described metonymically by a list of the food offerings: “Oranges, white batashas, cucumbers” (ibid.). The fixation on material observations can enable a stronger identification with the experience in the logic of a modernist poetics of epiphany

described above. At the same time, it also has the effect of distancing, of suggesting scepticism towards traditional religious rituals.[66] The semantic field of spirituality is, I propose, evaded or ignored in the very context of religion where the reader would expect it to dominate. However, Sandeep's playfully inquisitive attitude implies that he enjoys the atmosphere despite his emotional distance.

In *The Romantics*, the traditional Brahmin religious practices of Samar's father, which are mostly memories from Samar's childhood, are contrasted with his attempts at finding a place in life that would make him feel less dependent on a predefined role and give him a sense of agency. At the same time, Samar's insecurity and restlessness is set alongside a number of European characters that search for answers in their ideal of Indian spirituality. In between these two poles, Samar's personal development becomes a critical comment on religion. On the one hand, Samar nostalgically remembers how he observed his father's religious rituals as a child and wistfully thinks of a vague, mythological past during which his "ancestors had wandered" in the Himalayas "after long, fulfilled lives on the plains" (*Romantics* 124). On the other hand, Samar's insecurity implies the impossibility of returning to a traditional understanding of religion for someone who grew up "with cricket, the books of Enid Blyton, and Tintin comics" (ibid.). Moreover, the novel also critiques the 'mere' worldly pleasure and leisure such as rooftop parties, music, travelling and even a random study of the classics of European philosophy: traditional religion holds a nostalgic fascination in its supposedly timeless stability (cf. 5-18).

The traditional life of Samar's ancestors, from which he deviates, used to consist of: "studentship in Benares, adulthood and marriage, late middle-age detachment, and then the final renunciation followed by a retreat to the Himalayas" (68). By contrast, as Samar realises, despite his "great reverence and

[66] The reference to the elusive, indescribable nature of the experience, which escapes representation, becomes itself a form of epiphany. The employment of this strategy in the very context of religion has a literary precedent in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which Leopold Bloom reflects on banal details during Catholic mass, for instance in the *Hades* episode: Here, Bloom does not focus on the funeral rituals, but rather "at the boots he had blacked and polished", or, following the boy who carries the wreath, "at his sleek combed hair and the slender furrowed neck inside his brandnew collar", or he listens to the soft sound of clay falling on the coffin lid (*Ulysses* 91-93, 100). "[T]he idiom of Catholic and Protestant piety alike leaves [Bloom] unmoved" and he focuses on circumstantial observations (Blamires 38).

awe for [the] ancient practices" expressed in his father's religious rituals, his "own life had drifted apart from them; it had attached itself to another constellation of desires and reverences" (69). He admits that the "serenity of the old Brahmin world in which his family had lived for centuries" had become "remote" to him (ibid.). And yet the motif of retreat is part of the practices which he feels he has to engage in. When Samar describes how he observed his father's religious rituals as a child, he confuses mythology and real occurrence in the sense of "unknown times" (124). He nostalgically reflects on his "vague but cherished sense of the past, my memories of Sunday mornings, rooms filled with the fragrant smoke of a sandalwood fire, my father meditating […] before a miniature temple" (ibid.). The religious practices of his ancestors hold a fascination for Samar, and he regrets the distance he feels towards them, of which his nostalgic memories are a symptom.

In the course of the novel, Samar attempts to substitute traditional religion with revered representatives of European thought "[t]he Hindu figures of Krishna and Vishnu […] have been removed and the niches transformed into bookshelves for his European monographs" (Didur 71), which he treats very much as *idols* of Western culture (cf. *Romantics* 6-7). He tries unsuccessfully to connect to a past that would provide identification and help define his place in life, but which he can only grasp vaguely as an "unremembered time" and "unknown" time. The nostalgic vagueness of Samar's initial concepts of Hindu religion implicitly questions the firm "historical continuity" still taken for granted by his father (Didur 81). In contrast to the active practice of otium that Samar eventually engages in, his reading of European philosophy is associated with mental passivity. The novel begins with setting the scene for Samar's situation in Benares, where he: "wanted to read, and do as little as possible besides that" (*Romantics* 6). But Samar is only "trying to read" Schopenhauer and has to "soldier on", although *The World as Will and Idea* is framed as "the kind of big book that idleness made attractive" (*Romantics* 6). His initial time in Benares is, therefore, not characterised by experiences of otium, but by an opposition between idleness and a feeling of obligation towards his family's and his own expectations of his education.

Ultimately, the "fantasy" of a "simple life" of solitude and physical exertion which he finds in the end is more real, meaningful and tangible than his father's talk of "ancestral obligation […] of samskara" and the Hindu concept that "[t]he world is maya, illusion" (*Romantics* 195, 216). Instead of copying a Western notion of individuality, he eventually seems to arrive at a more critical concept of his own identity, yet the complete overcoming of individuality, expected in his ancestral religion, is not an option for him.[67] The simple life he leads in the end is more nuanced than his original attempt at replacing traditional religion with European philosophy, which amounts to little more than the exchange of one cultural authority for another. It is almost ironic that what defines his new life, such as a temporal focus on the present, shares central traits with Hindu and Buddhist meditation (cf. Brück 87, 103-104, 107-110). Thus, Samar is eventually reconciled to aspects of his ancestral religion, for his life in Dharamshala "wasn't very far from the old Brahmin idea of retreat" (40). In this sense, *The Romantics* is a coming-of-age novel in which openness and insecurity are not resolved in the end, but partially accepted. At the end of the novel Samar is closer to religious practice than at the beginning, while at the same time reaching a critical perspective on traditional religion.

Samar's critical view of spirituality not only refers to home-grown traditions, but to a strong romantic idealisation and latent orientalist stereotype about India from a Western perspective. (Said 206-208). In *The Romantics*, a search for spiritual fulfilment is treated both seriously, as has been seen in the comments above, and ironically in comments on Western tourists' search for Indian spirituality. The group of friends with whom Samar spends his time in Benares is more than half made up of Westerners vaguely in search of something, "seekers", as they are called once (*Romantics* 58): "Sarah […] was German and a practicing Buddhist […] and I had wondered about the word 'practicing': it seemed to me superfluous for someone who had gone to the trouble of converting to Buddhism

[67] "[T]he symbolism, iconography, and worship practices associated with the sacred help the devotee to overcome individuality or independence – or, more accurately, the illusions of individuality and independence" (Nadeau 107).

from the faith she was born in" (12).[68] Sarah spends a large amount of time in meditation and "appeared serious enough about her new faith", a characterisation on the part of the narrator that is ironically distanced, as if he could not judge on matters of religion, much less of conversion. The phrase depicts his somewhat puzzled reaction to several such Buddhist-converted European characters.

Another woman from their circle of friends, Debbie, who in turn considers becoming Buddhist, is described as the quintessence of insecurity, all "nervous giggle and inquisitive gaze"; she is also said to admire Samar for being a "real Brahmin" (13). Then there is the American, Mark, who has resolved: "I don't want to be a rolling stone all my life" and is serious in his contemplation of poverty and suffering in India, which has changed him. Yet he lives a life of "various careers" which "brought him little satisfaction in the end" (15, 57). Many of the discussions of this group of Europeans and Americans revolve around the struggle between a life focused on one's love relationships on the one hand, and a life lived for spiritual salvation and ascetic loneliness on the other (cf. 236-238). They all search for solutions to this in India.[69] The homodiegetic narrator, himself confused about the meaning of his life throughout most of the novel, finds these problems strange and bewildering. At the same time, he is sarcastic about some "aging Germans" he encounters "each evening contorted in yoga postures on the smooth green lawn". He talks about "Tibetophiles from the West […] aging hippies with ponytails and beer bellies, European and American dowagers in crimson robes […]; German tourists clutching paperback copies of *Siddharta*" (189, 224).

The Romantics offers an ironic depiction of religion, representing both traditional religious practices and stereotypical orientalist ideals of spirituality critically. Not only is it hard for Samar to identify with traditional religion, but the idealism of the withdrawal of Samar's father in old age to an ashram also

[68] Nadeau describes the "increasing lay interest in Buddhism" as a "self-help" movement "inspired by Western seekers in the 1960s and 1970s "which led to the worldwide popularity of originally monastic exercises such as meditation and retreat" (200-201). Their often "highly romanticized assumptions" and obsession with the self contrasts with Buddhist practices of meditation that are striving to overcome the self (165-166). With the ironic representation of these tendencies, *The Romantics* can also be linked to Gita Mehta's highly satirical *Karma Kola* (1979).

[69] This motif links up with Fludernik's reference to the "entirely mistaken" Western "vision of Indian (Sufi, Buddhist, Jain) asceticism", which "to Western eyes—appears to be the epitome of Muße" ("Nostalgia" 18).

becomes a little doubtful through his pleasant lifestyle and female companionship. Through its satirical approach to religion, the novel, rather than attacking particular groups such as European "seekers" in India or the insecure student in Benares trying to embrace European philosophy, actually calls any limited, fundamentalist ideals of spirituality or tradition into question. What fascinates and repels Samar about the Westerners he meets is their obsession with their individual identity. Instead of copying them he eventually seems to arrive at a more critical concept of his own identity, yet the complete conquest of one's individuality, which is expected in his ancestral religion, is not an option for him.[70] Samar's confusion and the almost meditative practice of hiking in the mountains, which eventually gives him some peace, comment on the noted ambivalences in relation to religious practice. The last sentence of the novel describes him as nostalgic for an irretrievably lost past, but "oddly calm" upon returning to Benares (*Romantics* 277). Samar is torn between a nostalgic longing for traditional religious practices, the necessity to fulfil his family's expectations that he should conform to traditions and his desire to idolize new, Western cultural role models. The meditative practice of retreat, which he can finally relate to, accepts a dimension of spiritual experience that acts as an antidote to his former restlessness. It is again the quality of Samar's experience in the mountains that links this practice with experiences of otium, though of a different kind than in Chaudhuri's novel: meditation is located here on the level of personal development. Samar's perspective towards his life choices changes from the apathy that dominated his existence and half-hearted attempts at studying in Benares to a positive agency.

The two examples of *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *The Romantics* show how, while spirituality is used to describe a special experiential quality, this does not imply an unproblematic acceptance of traditional religion. On the contrary: in Chaudhuri's novel, a modernist use of epiphany is an attempt to capture the immediacy of experience rather than its transcendence. At the same

[70] "[T]he symbolism, iconography, and worship practices associated with the sacred help the devotee to overcome individuality or independence – or, more accurately, the illusions of individuality and independence" (Nadeau 107).

time, the seriousness of religious practice is made fun of, its value found in the material, aesthetic surface aspects of ritual. In Mishra's text, the central spiritual experience in the mountains is developed as a middle ground between, on the one hand, untenable religious ideals both in Samar's own cultural context and in orientalist stereotypes, and, on the other hand, a secular, individualistic Western culture. The experiences of otium that Samar finds in his meditative, physically exhausting hikes are therefore situated somewhere in between a secular, profane and an exalted, spiritual dimension, retaining aspects of religious experience and at the same time a critical distance vis-à-vis religious tradition.

Moreover, the representation of the experience of transcendence in secular contexts and of epiphany in material objects in *A Strange and Sublime Address* can be linked to a preference for mystical, non-institutional forms of religion. This is particularly the case since institutionalised religious practices are presented in these passages as problematic or hard to relate to, so that the positive ideal of spirituality must be based on a different understanding of religion and spirituality. Both the idea of a moment of transcendence and spiritual rebirth are part of mystic contemplations of god, often tied to an appreciation of the beautiful in this world.[71] All the passages analysed above, such as the puzzled sensuousness of Sandeep listening to his uncle as well as Samar's exhaustive, lonely hikes in the hills, share elements of mystic spirituality. Thus, the novels discuss the place of religious tradition in society. In these otiose spiritual practices and their commonalities with mysticism, the separation between a religious and non-religious sphere is made porous; the relevance of these practices for the self is emphasised in favour of the aim of transcending the world. This linguistic blurring of the religious and non-religious spheres has a critical impetus.

The discussed practices are not predominantly about religion, prayer or belief, religious texts, authorities, institutions or rites, but about the temporal structures, atmosphere, as well as the emotional and sensuous aspect of the spiritual.

[71] In the Muslim mystical tradition of Sufism, the experience of ecstasy in relating the beautiful to God is described by Julian Baldick as the "liberation of a divine spark of light in man amid the darkness of matter" or glimpsing a "transformed personality" or "higher soul" that could only exist after death (3, cf. 173). The "contemplation of human beauty" is understood in Sufi practices "as a means to the contemplation of God himself", so that "what is beautiful in this world is a metaphor for the real Beauty of God", inspiring Sufi poetry and music (ibid. 3, 8, 68, 99).

Moreover, they refer to religious singing as a reference point for a deeply human feeling of joy and a spiritual sense of communication or oneness that transforms the secular space. In these examples, the idea of a practice *in otium* becomes clear, since only the quality of experience makes it an experience of otium and neither taking a shower on a Sunday nor being in the presence of someone praying before the gods is per se an experience of otium. By associating the characters' experiences with spiritual renewal, hinting at its boundless, transcendental quality, and suggesting that its epiphanic significance is impossible to describe in mere words, the experience is singled out as intense and significant. Such spiritual practices can enable an experience of otium on the basis of the definition of otium as purposeless, as exceptional with a view to everyday life and as having an alternative, non-linear temporality. As the protagonists themselves struggle with the inexplicability of an experiential quality, the characterisation of their practices as spiritual almost marks the crossing of a threshold upon which they enter a different 'mode'.

3.4. Chapter Summary

With the artistic practices of *A Sin of Colour* and the spiritual practices of *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *The Romantics*, this chapter analysed two connected kinds of practices of otium as they are relevant to novels. The two kinds of practices share characteristics with a view to their significance for experiences of otium as well as its function for character development: first of all, these practices are – in their most obvious forms – engaged in by the protagonists as typical practices of otium. Thus, Reba's musical practice is marked as a special, intense experience outside normal, everyday perception and Samar nostalgically remembers his ancestors' religious traditions as a form of fulfilment unavailable to him. Secondly, these practices of otium play a key role for the protagonists' concept of self and character development. They are, as is the case for Deben Roy as well as for Samar, tied to moments of crisis, and clearly connected to an openness and agency in the sense of a personal freedom to decide on one's actions. Thirdly, the practices that are, in the course of the

novels, of central importance for the protagonists' character development, often turn out *not* to be prototypical artistic or spiritual practices: Deben's mending of broken china is, albeit less obviously artistic than Reba's singing or Niharika's literary works, a highly symbolic creative activity and Samar's lonely hikes in the mountains are secular meditations rather than religious practices. With the examples of spiritual practices this is connected to a criticism or at least a questioning of traditional, institutionalised religious practices.

Consequently, artistic and spiritual practices, *in general*, have a certain quality through which they are predisposed to be experienced and represented as otium. At the same time *particular* examples for these kinds of practices are characterised as being experienced as otium. The protagonists' sense of agency opens up a reflection on the original context in which the practice is embedded or the personal circumstances which led to it so that experiences of otium enable the critical reflection of borders between self and other (compare the negotiation of Western clichés of Indian spirituality in *The Romantics*), the religious and the secular (compare the epiphany of the everyday in *A Strange and Sublime Address*) and inside and outside (compare Deben's nostalgia for traditional Bengali culture when living in Oxford).

In all the above examples, a focus on the pattern, rhythm or temporal structure of practices is in the foreground. Spiritual temporality exists as a parallel and alternative to an everyday perception of time. Both the iterative and projective elements of agency move into the background as the protagonists (Chhotomama in the shower, Sandeep in the prayer room, Samar in the mountains) experience a timeless present. In addition, nostalgia plays a major role in all three novels. In *A Sin of Colour*, a crisis of self is negotiated through nostalgia, so much so that Deben's love for the musically gifted Reba can be interpreted as his longing for, and at the same time his alienation from, his home country and native culture. Both Deben and Samar discover a new sense of agency by re-evaluating the familiar temporal organisation of their lives. Their decision to break out of depressing circumstances and live a more withdrawn life focused on the present is represented as a resistance to unbearable structures in their lives and a rediscovery of agency.

Through its association with nostalgia, otium is in many cases represented as a utopian ideal (Deben's ideal of being with Reba emblematically expressed in his memories of entering her room while she is singing, Sandeep's elusive glimpse of his uncle's singing, Samar's attempt to find a practice for the present that can approximate his ancestral traditions) or a fragmented potentiality. The experiential dimension that the novels try to evoke has a fleeting quality that is emphasised by recurring metaphors such as water imagery, which forms a common element of *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *A Sin of Colour*. The nostalgic mood surrounding the analysed practices paradoxically hinders *and* helps the characters' (striving for) agency and a freedom to act: on the one hand, the past appears in Gupta's and Mishra's novels as an obsession that keeps the protagonists from arriving in the present. On the other hand, experiences of otium often arise from their confrontation with this very past. The function of nostalgia can be compared to how Hell and Schönle interpret the role of ruins in modernity as expressive of both the "loss or endurance of the past", as standing for the irretrievable past, and for the self-reflexivity of the present (6-7).

One common factor of spiritual and artistic contexts is the role of music, which, particularly in Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* and Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*, is used in a decidedly nostalgic context and often as a way of invoking a wider cultural tradition. In the two novels, music is associated with memory and frequently linked to a mystic spirituality. Tagore's songs are an important point of reference in both novels, themselves oscillating between expressions of love and religious devotion.[72] The novels thus allude to the important function music in the classical Hindustani tradition has for the related aspects of nostalgia, spirituality and the role of a cultural modernity. As Janaki

[72] Tagore's ideas on religion were highly syncretic and sceptical of institutionalised religion. They connect to a long-standing tradition of poetry, which is often associated with Persian poetry and Sufism and which uses metaphors of love in religious contexts, aiming at a "transrational", "altered state of consciousness" that would transform the self through an increasing closeness to god (Buehler 11, cf. 14-17, 163-165; Baldick 2-3). In Sufism, music and the beauty of poetic language are supposed to express the closeness and love for God and enhance the experience of religious adoration (cf. Buehler 165; Baldick 3, 8, 68, 99). Tagore's religious philosophy was not only influenced by the Sufi mystic tradition, but also by the Bengali Bauls, a sect of mystic vagrant minstrels, and by Hindu Vaishnavism, a Hindu devotional tradition that emphasises the role of love not only through theoretical understanding, but also in emotional and physical experience (cf. Sen, "Introduction" xix, xxvi-xxvii, lv-lvi; Sarbadhikary 1-29; Lewisohn).

Bakhle describes, “a separation between the secular and the religious is difficult to make in the case of Indian music”, and yet questions of secularism arose in the context of its role in “cultural nationalism” (15, 3-4, cf. 7, 259). The link of classical music with a nostalgic perspective on the past is part of discourses on classical music, since its classicism and unified framing as a national tradition has developed in the context of cultural modernity (3-4, 7). Hence the affective sense of nostalgia, which is evoked in *A Sin of Colour* and *A Strange and Sublime Address* through classical Indian music, alludes to a culture of modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century rather than to “the remnant of an ancient musical form” (7).

Moreover, the connection between music and the creation of a sacrosanct space is a motif which occurs also in other contemporary novels. The *Rabindra Sangeet*, or songs written and composed by Rabindranath Tagore, figure prominently throughout Amit Chaudhuri’s and Sunetra Gupta’s *oeuvre* and they are usually connected with a lyrical prose style and a nostalgia for home or an older culture represented by music (cf. Dasgupta, *Renaissance* 239; Lange 358, 364-370; Fludernik, “Nostalgia” 23). *Memories of Rain* (1992) is a novel modelled on Tagore’s poems and songs, creating a melancholy and nostalgic mood through parallels between autobiographic elements of the author Gupta and the great poet Tagore (cf. Lange 364-366). In Chaudhuri’s novel *Afternoon Raag* (1993), many scenes revolve around Hindustani classical music in the raga tradition. These scenes invariably evoke an epiphanic moment or a special temporality. Thus, the fingers of someone playing the harmonium “make, of her hand, a temple with many doors”, the musical tradition of the *raga* (the “fundamental unit of composition” in Indian classical music, Bakhle 14) is described as a “self-created galaxy of notes” and the human voice as a “hidden universe”, hinting at the potential of music itself to have an inherent transcendental quality (*Raag* 177, 179). Moreover, the raga tradition is associated in the novel with premodern, seasonal time patterns:

> The raags, woven together, are a history, a map, a calendar, of Northern India, they are territorial and temporal, they live and die with men, even though they seem to be timeless […]. Each raag has its time of day, a cluster of hours called ‘prahar’, or its season. (259)

In the *ragas* of Hindustani music "a notion of collective belonging is expressed that can be contained within neither the national nor the domestic", so that they transgress "the boundary between inside and outside", or private and public (*Raag* 259; Wiemann, *Genres* 226-227; see also chapter 5). They are also associated with an intensely sensuous experience of the time of day when they are sung, as when "[m]idday brings the smell of ripening jackfruit, the buzz and gleam of bluebottle flies, the fragrance of mango blossoms, which, Tagore said, opens the doorways to heaven" (*Raag* 259). With reference to time, the narrator contrasts the raga rhythm with the abstract time of modernity, for "[t]he seasons and hours have no absolute existence, but are defined by each other" (ibid.).

Another novel relevant in this context is Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*, in which both transcendence and retreat are presented as desirable experiences which can be reached through religious practice. However, the novel emphasises that although religious practice is a human constant, the institutional religions behind it are almost interchangeable. The essence of traditional music is characterised here as a "response to the beauty of the world", its origin the mythology of creation: through the ragas' "vibration […] born from the expressions on Shiva's face […] the universe was brought into existence" (205, cf. 211). *A River Sutra* is predominantly about religious practices, but it poses questions, through a string of narratives, about different religions and the authority of a single religion. The novels ultimately favour, as is tentatively suggested in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *The Romantics*, open, mystical or syncretistic practices.

Both artistic and spiritual practices can be interpreted as autoexotic representations of Indian cultural practices (cf. Li, Hill; see 2.3.2). The novels use aspects of traditional Indian (or, more regionally specific in some cases, Bengali) culture that are part of orientalist and exotic perspectives on India, such as everyday practices, practices of art like classical music as well as the idea of spiritual, contemplative forms of otium and, despite their partial criticism, portray them as part of an ideal experience (cf. Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 32). Through this positive valuation and the implied criticism of, in Sunetra Gupta's novel, a superficial, exclusive, focus on economic gain and, in *The Romantics*, of both strict traditions and Western, orientalist perspectives, their self-representation

and appropriation of exotic stereotypes has a subversive dimension. What is more, the novels' protagonists, most importantly Deben in his nostalgic love for classical Bengali culture, and Samar in his nostalgia for traditional religion, themselves go through a phase of self-reflexive insecurity and realign their position towards these cultural practices and ideas. *The Romantics*, for instance, both presents its Western characters' obsession with a quest for Indian spiritual enlightenment ironically and at the same time centres on the Indian main protagonist's quasi-spiritual experience of walking in the Himalayas. Samar's fascination with the mountains is, in turn, somewhat occidentalist, for mountaineering as practice of otium has its precedence as a Western ideal of otium.[73] Monika Fludernik comments that positive, idealised representation of Sadhus as "idols of a spiritual life" can be "identified with a latent Orientalism or exoticism based on a long tradition of cultural primitivism" ("Nostalgia" 18). They go back on an "Orientalist construction of the Hindu character" including the "metanarrative of the saint as the renouncer who acquired power through […] excessive austerity" (Mishra, *Poetics* 2). Nevertheless, in connection with nostalgic perspectives on lost aspects of culture, autoexotic practices of otium oscillate between a position of ironic distancing on the one hand, and the appropriation and reformulation of cultural stereotypes on the other.

This chapter focused predominantly on characters' sense of self, development and subjectivity, sometimes captured in the practices through which characters engage with the world. Characters' perspectives on the world were framed unidirectionally as characters setting themselves in relation to the world. Before proceeding to an analysis of the impact of experiences of otium on the surrounding environment in which these experiences are set, the following chapter will analyse how a lack of action, while not necessarily being experienced as otium, is part of a subversive discourse on agency and positive freedom. Inaction can reflect on the possibility of questioning linear, aim-oriented

[73] The quasi-religious experience of exhausting treks in the mountains has been conceptualised in a long tradition of Western alpine models of otium from Petrarch's climbing of Mont Ventoux up until Reinhold Messner's books on mountaineering (Feitscher 154-167).

conceptualisations of time and of refusing the logic of productivity as well as the conditions that produced this logic.

4. Inaction. The Subversive Potential of a Refusal to Act

4.1. Inaction against the Imperative of Progress

Despite the fact that otium is associated, as was shown in the previous chapter, with concrete practices, I argue in addition to the representations of practices of otium that the Indian novels analysed here have a programmatic, structural dimension which is expressed in a *refusal to act*. This lack of action can function as a comment on the normativity of certain practices and their social desirability (cf. Scott; Gimmel). Thus, particularly in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* and Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*, experiences on the plot level such as boredom, eventlessness, everyday banality and repetition are used strategically as contrastive elements against ideals of purposefulness, progress and thrift. Because experiences of otium cannot be produced intentionally, they always carry this potential for critique even in the context of active practices (such as the ones analysed in the previous chapter). The two novels I analyse in this chapter use the subversive refusal to act as a central programmatic strategy. Even though inaction always carries this subversive potential, it is, on a second level, highly informative, whether, and in what contexts, this lack of action can be experienced as otium.

A refusal to act can be interpreted as a socially embedded practice which also contains agency. If we have reason to assume an intention behind a lack of action, it aims at the very expectation to act or to act in a certain way (cf. Gimmel 301). Thus, inaction is marked in relation to an expectation to act and therefore serves as an intentional interruption, resistance or subversion of (implicit) normative rules of action (ibid. 300-302). Brian O'Connor comments on the "official view of the world […] that idleness is a bad, whereas busyness, self-making, usefulness, and productivity are supposedly the very core of what is right for beings like us" (3, sic.).

This belief is based on the development of "key markers of modern life […] [which] are activity, industry, planned self-realization" (ibid. 19, cf. 103). Seen in a larger framework, the predominance of inaction or idleness therefore

challenges an ideology of teleological progress and abstract, homogeneous, linear time (cf. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 76; Wiemann, *Genres* 54-55; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 17-18). These ideas are central to modernity and have their origin in the evolvement of the "progressive interpretation" of the Enlightenment: that humans can and have to "realize themselves individually as autonomous beings and, collectively, as a rational community" (O'Connor 38).The resulting ideology of progress can be summarised as the belief in "a historical process of steady advance and improvement in human material well-being", which implies a "quasi-moral linkage between speed as dynamism and visions of the human good" and a favouring of "[c]hange […] over continuity" (Wajcman 44).[74]

Due to the ideal of a continuous evolutionary perfection, progress directs our attention away from the present (cf. Moslund 2).[75] On the background of this conceptualisation of historical evolution it becomes the exception that an activity is "not geared toward productivity" or the "notion of human progress through restless endeavour" (O'Connor 6, 49, cf. 103). A preference for inaction and idleness becomes "a denial of Enlightenment. It amounts to a refusal to meet the challenge of taking responsibility for oneself and the institutions of the state" (ibid. 38). It is a "knowing indifference" and subversive "resistance [which] would have to be named and discredited if progress is to be maintained" (ibid. 38, 180).[76]

Seen in a global context, "the Western idea of progress remains one of the most powerful single temporal regimes to which other cultures relate, compare, and adjust themselves" (Pernau/Jordheim 13). As delineated in chapter 2, the negative, critical discourse on inaction and idleness has turned into a racist discourse in the context of imperialism. From a European standpoint, the alleged

[74] On the connection between progress, individual self-realisation and social acceleration see also Rosa who describes the perceived necessity to "literally increas[e] one's physical, social, and technological 'share of the world'" (*Resonance* 22).

[75] This idea can also be found in Walter Benjamin's interpretation of Paul Klee's Angelus Novus as history staring, transfixed, backwards at the victims left behind, but the storm of progress "irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward" (258, cf. 260-262). The present becomes eradicated in this vision of history which makes continuous frantic action seem a necessity precisely because of the continuous harm and structural oppression it stands for (cf. Gimmel 313).

[76] As I have analysed in the introduction to this study, idleness has been condemned and discredited in Western societies for this very reason (s. 1.2.2).

incapacity of colonised people to work or be otherwise productively active, was an important way of legitimising colonial regimes. At the same time, the "objectification of nature and human life" in the course of imperialism reinforced the "linear logic of progress and development" (Moslund 6). Stereotypes such as the "lazy native" helped justify the hegemonic status of European civilisation (Alatas; Jordan 123-152). Through them, the colonised could profit from the supposedly superior values of Western civilisation and take part in the resulting conceptualisation of history as a teleological unfolding and improvement of these values (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 4-15, 39; West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 9, 119, 132-133; Pernau/Jordheim). The subversive resistance of the prolonged attention which the novels pay to the complete refusal of productive action has to be read with this background.

In the context of literary interpretation, the expectation of eventfulness, and of a logical sequence, can originate in the expectations of the other characters in a novel, or, in fact, derive from the reader, who might expect a narrative with a certain plot structure and specific character action (cf. Hühn, "Functions" 143). On a structural level, the texts question the possibility and necessity to narrate anything meaningful, the narrative's "tellability", if narration can be understood broadly as "the relation of changes", and it can be suggested, "that events are one of the reasons why stories are narrated" unquote (Hühn, "Event" 1-4). Plot as structuration is defined by Karin Kukkonen in her article in the *Living Handbook of Narratology* as the arrangement of events and the creation of a "meaningful narrative", a "pattern which yields coherence to the narrative" (n. pag.).[77] Such an arrangement becomes difficult without changes in the events of a narrative. While even the novels analysed in this chapter are, of course, not entirely eventless, an "aesthetically oppositional" resistance against an event-based story is made a central part of their narratives, which deliberately disappoint the expectation of a characteristic sequence of "surprise, curiosity and suspense" and are faced with the consistent threat of "non-meaning" and "temporal and affective lack" (Scott 506; Majumdar, *Prose* 5; Kukkonen).

[77] See also Brooks' monograph *Reading for the Plot. Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984), who analyses how a certain aim-oriented desire is at the core of narration.

In their research on literary eventfulness, the Narratology Research Group in Hamburg suggest, referring to the deviation from scripts and schemata, that the evaluation of narrative eventfulness is "context-sensitive and […] culturally as well as […] historically variable" (Hühn, "Functions" 143-144). This context-sensitivity is relevant in the context of postcolonial literature for the connection between narratives and ideologies of progress and linearity (cf. Kabir, *Post-Amnesias* 16-17; Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 25; Noor, "Semantics" n. pag.). If a novel does not "'do' anything at all", it also does not represent a teleologically unfolding narrative (Scott 494). Narratives of inaction thus favour the present moment and contingency, "circularity and eternal recurrence" in opposition to a linear continuity of temporality (Scott 511; cf. Mbembe 8, 15-16; Wiemann, *Genres* 56-60, 63; Ganguly 177). They can be understood to critique an exponentially accelerating dynamic of progress (cf. Benjamin 260-262; Gimmel 313-316). Their narrative structure gives "absolute precedence to the boredom and banality of non-occurrence", comments implicitly on the social desirability of certain practices; particular structures of work, for instance (Scott 494).[78]

In addition to the described relevance of inaction to the discourse about abstract, teleological time, narratives of inaction can, but do not necessarily have to, include practices of otium. Inaction can turn into an experience of otium, particularly because it is a space safe from the pressures of productivity and functionality and can be correlated with a certain openness and equanimity (cf. Gimmel et al. 82). Ultimately, the utopian potential of otium culminates in the *absence* of action or progressive temporality, because this absence "point[s] to the implausible-sounding scenario in which the phenomena of usefulness, competitive social identities, or long-term discipline no longer form the outlines of our experience" (O'Connor 186). I argue that this utopian vision is part of the programmatic layout of these novels both on a plot-based level (descriptions of protagonists doing nothing) and a structural (a refusal of progressive plot structure) one.

[78] For a definition of banality, see Majumdar's *The Prose of the World* in which he shows that the banal is used for "that which pertains to everybody and that which is unoriginal" (18).

In the following readings I analyse not only the protagonists' lack of action and aimlessness, but also how the novels structurally comment on the described expectations of narrative sequence. In *English, August* a young trainee in the Indian Administrative Service feels completely detached from the routine in the district town where he has been sent and develops his own, subversive routine that includes avoiding as much regular work as possible (4.2.1). I argue that the novel's iterative narrative structure emphasises his lack of personal development or exciting experience. While Agastya's life in Madna is subversive with a view to plot expectations as well as our assumptions about work and success, his experiences can rarely be characterised as otium. In a second section (4.2.2), however, I focus on the utopian potential behind Agastya's behaviour and his vision of an ideal life.

A Strange and Sublime Address is full of wistful childhood memories of repetitive practices during a family holiday in Calcutta: the novel emphasises both their invaluable reposeful character and their inconsequential nature (4.3.1). At the same time, the novel's structure is not a successive sequence of events, but a digressive web of impressions and descriptions of everyday scenes. This structural principle (4.3.2), which is even reflected upon in a metanarrative passage, undermines, in similarity to *English, August*, a straightforward, traditional conception of plot. Nothing, it seems, is of any relevance in these novels, while the very lack of action is made into their defining structural feature and their central plot elements revolve around the absence of eventfulness. I argue, however, that exactly this lack and absence, which the novels revolve around, lends itself to reading them as implicitly resistant to expectations of progress and self-realisation.

4.2. Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* as a Critique of Work and Progress

Chatterjee's novel *English, August* is about a trainee in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS),[79] who is unhappy with what this job seems to offer in the first district he is appointed to. The narrative is written in heterodiegetic third-person narration with internal focalisation on the main character Agastya. It switches constantly between descriptions of the routine in the small town Madna and Agastya's cynical or self-pitying observations about Madna, the people he encounters, Indian bureaucracy and life in general. Both his way of adapting to life in Madna and his comments on the job revolve around questions of work/ambition and non-work, the passing of time and how it is used, and the possibility of a life of contentment.

4.2.1. An Eventless Plot: Waiting, Circularity and Inaction

From Agastya's arrival in Madna, his daily life is separated into different more or less official phases. These mostly consist in encounters with officials who give him advice, of waiting time before such encounters and of "interminable meetings" (Scott 494). The work in the district, first introduced by Agastya's encounters with his boss, the District Collector Srivastav, seems obscure, chaotic and built on an insistence on structures of authority and subservience. Agastya cannot imagine "that soon, in a few months, he would be mouthing similar incomprehensibilities and acting appropriately" (*August* 16). In contrast to the vagueness of the job for Agastya, Srivastav has a firm work philosophy, explaining the lack of a book on Madna's history more recent than 1935 with the words: "Either you work, or you write a history. Those fellows never worked", alluding to the English when they still ran the Civil Service (17). When Agastya spends an evening at the Collector's house, he gets to know more about the

[79] With its origins in the British colonial administration, the Indian civil services are organised differently nowadays. Entry into one of its branches is granted only through nationwide exams, which are extremely competitive (s. also 6.3.2). The Indian civil services are divided into different sections, for instance the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS).

latter's life philosophy. Srivastav drops words of advice and shares his experiences. Agastya eventually reflects that "Srivastav had the pride of a self-made man. Agastya had rarely met them. In his own world most people made it because of the people they knew" (66). Srivastav really believes in the importance of their work and emphasises "the virtues of their job" (61).

The instances of official obligations become rare as the novel progresses, since Agastya prefers to shirk official meetings as much as he can, spends long periods in his room smoking marijuana and is glad for the few acquaintances with whom he can meet to drink. Agastya reflects

> […] that he was to lead at least three lives in Madna, the official, with its social concomitance, the unofficial, which included boozing with Shankar and Sathe, and later, with Bhatia, and the secret, in the universe of his room. […] When he was leading one Madna-life, the other two seemed completely unsubstantial. (48-49)

Agastya's feeling of living different, incongruous lives and of inhabiting different, only imperfectly synchronised, temporalities is often also theorised as a general trait of modernity (cf. Rosa, *Acceleration* 40, 44-46). Agastya's "secret life" forms a complete contrast to his social and work-related obligations in Madna, to Srivastav's philosophy of life and to the urban life he has led before.

Instead of the regularity of work officially expected of an IAS candidate, the repetitive circularity of Agastya's existence in his rest house room takes up a large part of the novel. With reference to Genette's narratological category of *frequency*, almost all the scenes from Agastya's "secret life" are instances of *iterative* narration, that is, something that occurred repetitively is summarily narrated only one time (cf. Genette 113-118). There are numerous passages in the novel which describe his pattern of behaviour and the general lack of action in the time he spends in his room at the rest house. The iterative character of Agastya's private life in Madna is underlined by references to what he "would" do at a particular time or in a certain mood: "There *would be* marijuana and nakedness, and soft, hopelessly incongruous music (Tagore or Chopin), and the thoughts that ferment in isolation" (*August* 26, emphasis added). It is extremely ironic that the (non-)actions Agastya choses to engage in to evade the dulling routine of bureaucratic work seem to mirror the administrative drudgery he keeps wanting to escape.

While in the beginning of the novel this secret routine is characterised by Agastya as positive and relaxing, and he feels clever in evading his obligations, the activities he does engage in seem coincidental and none of them can arrest his concentration for long, as if none of them really mattered. Inaction is here far removed from a fulfilling experience of otium. In the morning, when he waits for tea from the caretaker, “he would lie in bed, stare at the ceiling through the mosquito net, feel the breeze from the window turn warm” (64). Alternately, he spends his mornings “in a daze” watching trains pass through Madna from the rest house veranda (ibid.). As Scott comments with reference to iterative narration in the novel “to narrate one day is to narrate every day” in an infinite “deferral of meaning” (495, cf. 499-501).

In the afternoons, Agastya tries to find excuses to avoid any work meetings expected of him in order to go back to the rest house room: “His afternoons stretched from his lunch to whenever he asked Vasant for tea. So he could, in a sense, control their duration” (72). Although he spends so much time there due to the unbearable heat outside, he also makes a point of setting off his “secret life” apart from the outside world:

> [There] he could doze a little, watch Tamse’s painting, or the lizards race across the wall to copulate in a corner, listen to the music of Nazrul Islam or Vivaldi, daydream, fantasize, think of his past, reorganize it, try to force out of it a pattern, masturbate without joy, sometimes smoke some marijuana, read a little Marcus Aurelius, or just lie down and think of the sun shrivelling up the world outside. (72-73)

Emphasizing the contrast between this part of his life and the rest, he adds that “[h]e liked the afternoons in his surreal darkened room. He felt safe while, to him, the world burnt” (73). While he does enjoy this separate life at times, Agastya does not seem to experience otium; for that his experiences are represented as far too interchangeable. The only activity he does enjoy regularly is exercising, for instance “jogging by moonlight” when he cannot sleep and the pleasure of that comes from the regularity, the “clockwork movement, the criss-cross of arm and leg, rhythm and balance” (36, 48). Agastya feels he needs to exercise so as not to become lazy or gain weight like many of his superior officers, so that the activity is linked to an aim. While running, he takes pleasure in a feeling of flow rather

than otium, for instance in his portrayal of how "[t]he mind wandered pleasantly, yet not into chaos because the physical strain provided a leash" (36).

Moreover, his general dissatisfaction with the place, his longing for the metropolitan life he was used to, the dull work and the heat keep him from feeling too content, or, for that matter, from having an intense interest in anything. Yet Agastya's "secret life", in which, "for one calendar year and 322 pages" his only actions are to "masturbate, smoke marijuana, and lie in bed", in its inactive randomness is like a protest against the punctuality and bureaucratic reliability that his job would – in theory – demand (Scott 494).[80]

Already during his experiences in Madna, Agastya contemplates the different temporalities in which he lives. One afternoon in his room, while smoking marijuana, he reflects on how time is always in the foreground in Madna:

> He smoked very slowly, till time, and most other things, ceased to matter. In Madna funny things happened to time. Outside the room its passage was wearisome, but in his secret life Agastya was to savour the seconds. No action was automatic: changing clothes, even the brushing of teeth, they were to become sensuous acts. (*August* 27)

The randomness of some events become part of his life in Madna, so that in the morning "guessing when Vasant would bring him his tea became part of the larger game" (64). This lightness of tone, however, soon changes as the pointlessness of his situation makes Agastya more and more restless and unhappy, feeling "that his experience of Madna was wasted time" (135). He wonders "whether he should resign himself to his world, and to the rhythm that […] is imposed upon us" on the basis of "the mere words of an ancient Hindu poem, which held that action was better than inaction" (135-136). The pointlessness of the actions expected of him make the parting words from the head of the English department at the university, that he would be "leaving for a more meaningful context", seem ill-fitting to say the least (24). In the course of the novel, Madna becomes like a miniature version of life in general, which is why Agastya becomes increasingly depressed when he realises that his "secret life" is what everyone would experience in a place like Madna or in a similar situation in life. The realisation destroys "one of his last

[80] Chatterjee makes sure to depict the representatives of the IAS as corrupt, lazy and self-interested, mostly just keeping up appearances.

consoling illusions" of going through a difficult but somehow "profound experience" (76).

The possibility of a different temporal plot structure apart from the circular and iterative is at times implicitly negotiated in the novel. This is the case when Agastya hears about what is almost the only action-oriented "*novelistic*" event (Scott 509). Another officer is attacked and severely injured after having an affair with the tribal woman who cooked for him. However, from this action-loaded sequence "we are offered only a fleeting, anecdotal glimpse" (ibid.). The information about this occurrence is "dispensed with in a mere two or three sentences, leaving us with the distinct impression […] that the novel has inadvertently taken the wrong character as its protagonist, and while we have been following Agastya's trivial activities, something genuinely interesting and significant has been happening just around the corner" (ibid.). In addition to this event, a potential event disrupts the temporal rhythm of inaction: in two passages, Agastya contemplates ending his at times unbearable situation by committing suicide (cf. *August* 77, 135, 159). While the information of an exciting occurrence 'just around the corner' ironically points to the possibility of an eventful plot, the hint at the protagonist's potential suicide points to a definitive end of the novel. If Agastya died, not even his uneventful routine would be left to narrate.

In its lack of progressive action, its emphasis on interminable routines and Agastya's disillusionment about his work situation without a real alternative in sight, *English, August* can be interpreted as an anti-*Bildungsroman*. Scott emphasises how, while being stylistically a realist novel, it is especially the plot conventions of realist narratives which *English, August* breaks by "locat[ing] the 'interesting' in the everyday, the meaningful in the mundane, and to make of that reality something worth narrating" (512-513). The novel keeps dwelling on the fact that Agastya does *not* find "a place for himself in the world" as the hero of the *Bildungsroman* would in time[81] and it refuses to "reconcil[e] the competing imperatives of self and society, autonomy and interdependence" (510). The ending of the novel does not provide closure, nor does it hint at a resolution. The

[81] See my reading of *The Romantics* in section 6.3. Without being a straightforward development, the protagonist Samar nevertheless reaches a changed perspective at the end of the novel.

predominant emotion in the narrative is boredom. Closure is "once more deferred, once more projected into the future" when Agastya goes back to Calcutta in order to take a break and think about and come to a decision about his future (ibid.; cf. *August* 288). The reader cannot know if this is just another cycle in the narrative, since Agastya has taken the same journey and met the same people before without having reached a decision that would have the slightest impact on his life.

I argue that while Agastya's inaction and indecision can be interpreted as a critique of societal (and literary) expectations, he does not find fulfilling experiences of otium in his existences between the circular routine of Madna and the vague hopes associated with Calcutta. Even in Calcutta he is still caught within the system of work which he rebels against. Agastya feels alienated from his work context, and indifferent towards plans for his life.[82] As O'Connor comments, social actors tend to "resist in a way that confirms how deeply they have internalized th[e] norm" of progressive self-realisation (80). This observation is particularly fitting for Agastya, who, when shirking work and his responsibilities, spends as much time worrying about his potential future as he spends getting high or listening to music, and whose very resistance to administrative work takes on the same pattern of meaningless circularity he tries to evade.

4.2.2. The Utopia of an Eternal Present

When Agastya visits his uncle in Delhi, he expresses his frustration and his ideas of life, which are the exact opposite of what is expected of him in Madna, and of what his boss stands for: "I don't want challenges or responsibility or anything, all I want is to be happy" (*August* 148). Although work is often conceptualised in modernity as a component of being happy and content and as a "paradigmatic human relation to the world", Agastya's *alienated* work experience prevents his happiness (Jaeggi 13-14; cf. Khair 4, 23-25; O'Connor 86-99, 157-160).[83] He continues to ruminate on a vision of a future without work and responsibility:

[82] This corresponds with an understanding of alienation as "a mode of relating to the world in which the subject encounters the subjective, objective and/or social world as either *indifferent* or *repulsive*" (Rosa, *Resonance* 178, emphasis original).

[83] Compare definitions of alienation in the Marxist tradition, according to which in alienated relations of labour, the process of externalizing "the world as the product of [a person's] activities"

> He wanted to say, look, I don't want heaven, or any of the other ephemerals, the power or the glory, I just want this, this moment, this sunlight, the car in the garage, that music system in my room. These gross material things, I could make them last for ever. […] This narrow placid world, here and now, is enough, where success means watching the rajnigandhas you planted bloom. […] you will ask me to think of the future, but the decade to come pales before this second, the span of my life is less important than its quality. […] Doesn't anyone understand the absence of ambition, or the simplicity of it? (*August* 148)

On the one hand, his description of an enjoyment of the present, of a focus on sensuous impressions (feeling the sunlight, watching the flowers, listening to music) and of a lack of purposeful action is close to the idea of otium. Agastya's individual longing for a peaceful life of inaction implies, as Fludernik has argued, that "his vision is in fact also nostalgic since he is trying to recuperate his life as a child and student. His nostalgia could be treated as temporal primitivism, a categorization of the simple life as an idyll" ("Nostalgia" 30). He wants to freeze time, and the idea of progress, in order to live a life of unchanging idleness. So far, this regressive, nostalgic ideal of the primitive idyll does not necessarily contradict experiences of otium. As O'Connor reminds us, the association of idleness with primitivism and childhood is based upon the normative status of progress, from which idleness has to be rejected (cf. 38, 180; cf. Jenks).

However, Agastya bases his vision of life on the "gross material things" and wants to "enjoy his freedom only in considerable middle-class comfort – a house, a car and a stereo set are necessary to him" (Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 28). The contrast somewhat discredits his vision with its focus on material comfort, because "neither car nor music system have come his way through his own efforts" and their existence is inextricably tied up with the very idea of progress he wants to negate (ibid.). Still, his notions of temporality are highly relevant in the context of the ideology of progress delineated in the opening section of this chapter, particularly since he himself feels his argument against progress is "an awful thing to say" and his utter lack of ambition contradicts some of the most basic assumptions of society (*August* 148).

Moreover, different lines of work are discredited in *English, August*. The pointlessness of ambition and functional, purposeful action is expressed not only

---

is interrupted and "the product of one's labour is not merely outside of oneself but owned by others […] alien to one's powers and needs" (Khair 4; Jaeggi 14-15).

in Agastya's confession of what he expects from life, but in the whole ironically distanced narration of Madna and the random workings of the Indian Administrative Service bureaucracy. During Agastya's stay in Delhi, the novel also gives glimpses of work in banks or international companies, which are presented as the capitalist alternative to doing well in the state bureaucracy. Agastya's friend Dhrubo, who works at Citibank, questions his choice of job just as Agastya does, because he feels that "it's just not real, it's an imitation of something elsewhere" (153). He feels disconnected and alienated, because working in an international company entails constantly mimicking American accents, behaviour and lifestyle. Ironically, Dhrubo wants to try the Civil Services exam and join the IAS (161, 288). Madan, a mutual friend, who "had recently joined a reputable firm of chartered accountants", makes his opinions about working life quite clear when he comments on their situation in life that "[i]t's sick, I think, having a job, having to work. Your whole day is gone" (172). Even when Agastya ruminates that he envies office-goers for "the concreteness of their worries", taking their place never seems to be a realistic option for him after the privileges he has enjoyed in his life so far (68).

Fludernik argues with reference to Agastya's scepticism of work both in the Administrative Service and in big companies that "[t]he novel […] presents two different versions of work abominated by Agastya which are linked to Western capitalism and globalisation in one case and to the remnants of the colonial civil service adopted by India after Independence in the other" ("Nostalgia", 22). Both kinds of work are, arguably, entangled with the ideals of progress: the civil service carries notions of progress and civilisation for imperialism in its colonial history, as can be noted in the assumptions about rural development in *English, August* (cf. *August* 240-241). At the same time, capitalist economy is itself driven forward by the belief in exponential progress (cf. Skidelsky/Skidelsky; Wajcman 13-18, 33-41). The lack of meaningful alternatives of work exacerbates Agastya's sense of alienation.

The recurring motif is that Agastya feels alienated from the expectations of society, from his surroundings in Madna, from any kind of work that he can imagine can be linked to a recurring argument about a sense of alienation of the

Indian elites from the rest of the population. After independence, and particularly since the opening of Indian economy in the 1990s, the lives of the middle- to upper-classes in India are, it has been argued, removed from a large part of the population, especially because of their Western education and metropolitan lifestyles (Khair ix-xii; Nandi, *M/Other* 17, 31-32, 43-44; "Longing").[84] Throughout the novel, several passages characterise Agastya in a way that supports this connection between class background and the lasting impact of the Raj on the educational system, and suggest that he feels torn partially because of the kind of English education that comes with his class background, between Indian and English culture: in two passages, Agastya's musical taste is characterised by the parallel reference to a classical Bengali / Bangladeshi musician and a typical composer from Western classical music (Tagore and Chopin on page 26, Nazrul Islam and Vivaldi on page 72). Moreover, the novel's title already plays on the centrality of his English education by alluding to the anecdote from his schooldays when friends made fun of Agastya's envy of the Anglo-Indian boys at school by calling him English or August (2). A third passage for this typical cultural tension is the opening sequence playfully referring to the hybrid mixture of cultures in a metropolitan setting by underlining the 'Hinglish' linguistic combination "hazaar fucked" (1). Agastya's comfortable middle-class background is represented in the novel by his dependence on material amenities as well as his distance and lack of, or unsuccessful, communication during encounters with servants and other less privileged people in Madna.

Returning to Agastya's alienation from his two major possibilities for work, what is shared by all the wildly inconsistent, flippant remarks about work life is that the characters feel that in the current society no alternative for meaningful work exists. There is only one example of a meaningful life project in the novel, the Baba Ramanna Rehabilitation Home for Lepers close to Madna. Agastya is impressed by it because of its visionary nature and because it entails an interest in less privileged groups. Thus, his encounter with this project further emphasises his alienation from the social expectations, referring to work and success, and his

[84] See also chapter 6; for a discussion of mimicry and Anglophilia see my reading of practices of otium as a form of distinction in *The Inheritance of Loss* (6.2.1).

cultural alienation from other Indians. Agastya wonders at the “nobility and virtue, at the limitlessness of the potential of human endeavour” as well as the “infinite patience and craft” needed for building such a home (235-236). In that sense, the visit to the lepers’ home is significant in the context of Agastya’s own dissatisfaction and he envies men, like the home’s founder, for their “certitude in knowing what to do with themselves” (238).

At the same time, an achievement like the lepers’ home is always represented as an enormous exception, as “inhuman, almost monstrous”, based on hard work and renunciation – hardly significant components in Agastya’s vision of the good life (235). The home was founded by a single man who was uneasy about his future becoming “a sort of predictable extension of his present” (234). This is an important conjecture from Agastya, because it underlines how far he is incapable of escaping the current social expectations for someone like him, despite all his evasive tactics and little acts of defiance. Agastya himself fears nothing more than the idea that the rest of his life will be spent in government rest houses in different rural posts,[85] but to build his life on the basis of a radically different task is just as inconceivable to him. This dilemma can be linked to political theories of the left which associate a merging of the past, present and future, or a perspective of the future as an extended present, with the experience of life in capitalist societies.[86] The security and comfort that accompanies Agastya’s successful entrance into the Civil Service turns into a deadening lack of alternatives and ideas of what else to do in his life, and the career choice of work in capitalist companies is perceived as empty play-acting.

It is only consistent that the novel ends on a bleak note, implying that none of Agastya’s internal conflicts and dissatisfactions are resolved and the cycle of repetitions will continue. He half-resigns himself to the administrative job, clinging

[85] Agastya’s experience of boredom in the Civil Service resonates with the topos of the boredom of a bureaucratically structured empire and the “iterative banality” of “colonial life” (Majumdar, *Prose* 3-4; cf. Auerbach). This parallelism underlines the colonial origins of the Civil Service.

[86] For the idea of capitalism ‘colonising’, as it were, our expectation of the future and our incapacity to imagine an alternative state of affairs see Fredric Jameson *The Seeds of Time* and Marc Fisher *Capitalism. Is There no Alternative?.* The notion of a *politically* progressive, “reflective” nostalgia can be interpreted in this context (Boym 41-55).

to the idea that “it would not involve him” and that he would bring “only half his mind to his work, while the other half worried him, like a mild headache” and continue to “stare[…] for many night hours at different ceilings in the different Rest Houses” (253, 270). His decision to take a year off before possibly starting his first post in Koltanga only delays the solution of his problem (cf. 284, 287-288).

Experiences of otium are, in this novel, more of a utopian possibility which is hinted at but never really materializes and fails to be sustained. In crucial passages, the novel negotiates concepts of the good or successful life, especially when Agastya expresses a “*desire for leisure*”, which is nostalgically directed at the past (Fludernik “Nostalgia”, 30). The connection between a desire for real experiences of otium and nostalgia becomes apparent in *English, August* where otium is expressed as “an idyllic counterfactual ideal” (ibid.). For Agastya, the present situation inevitably involves restlessness of the mind. The openness and extreme indecision on the part of the protagonist of *English, August* refuses the concept of *Bildung* as a “harmonious expansion of the personality achieved through constant effort” and implicitly suggests that “we might be happy to rest with ourselves as we find ourselves” (O’Connor 54-55; cf. 181). The harshest critique consists in Agastya’s utopian vision, for he can only locate happiness *outside* work. In this way, he underlines his alienation (and, by extension, the modern condition of alienation) from all imaginable options of work and the utter impossibility of even thinking of a more fulfilling work experience (cf. Turner 32, 36; Khair 4, 23-25; Jaeggi 12-15; Dobler 54, 62-63, 68; O’Connor 86-99, 157-160). Through the absence of otium, the novel points at its unattainability in current (alienated) social structures. Hence, the subversive potential of the text lies in the self-reflexive absence of real experiences of otium despite an ongoing refusal of progressive action.

The contrastive experiences of Agastya can be read as a subversive questioning of supposedly self-evident patterns and justifications of temporality and work. Through his resistance and frustration, Agastya opens up questions of what a successful life should look like, or how one should spend and conceptualise time. That his decisions and thoughts are not always likeable, and that he is far from being an idealist, emphasises the complexity of the problem.

Fittingly, the novel moves between irreverent, light banter and deadly serious reflections. Since the former tone is more frequent, the note of resistance against an ideal of life based on industry and thrift is often hidden behind the sarcastic humour of the narrative voice. However, Agastya expresses arguments against the puritan work ethic which is based on Eurocentric concepts of temporality and is part of the colonial heritage. Agastya's case is, in a way, the individual expression of this larger discourse, in which questions of work and non-work and the use of one's time become the predominant aspects.

In addition to this discourse about leisure, work and the possibility of otium, Agastya's circular and iterative existence leads to a "crisis of meaning and disruption of desire that very nearly brings [the narrative] to the point of total collapse" (Scott 494). Ultimately, the "failure of meaning and desire" are the subject of *English, August*, in which a narrative is sustained with an absolute minimum of action and eventfulness (ibid. 514).[87] Non-occurrence and lack of progress on the structural level question our expectations about the necessity of meaning and future orientation of narratives.

4.3. The Elevation of the Useless in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*

In Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*, the experiences of the small boy Sandeep during a visit to relatives in Calcutta are described in relation to a more general sense of the rhythm of the city. The narrative perspective is heterodiegetic with mostly internal focalisation on Sandeep, occasionally interrupted by more general comments by the narrative voice. The novel is made up of a number of everyday practices and experiences, of which some are characterised by their inactivity, focusing almost exclusively on experiences, practices and observations that are not of any obvious use. While the previous chapter (3.3.1) was focused exclusively on moments of epiphany in the novel, in

[87] See also Brooks and his notion of "tenuous readability", which he applies to Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (171).

this chapter I want to stress how the novel focuses on banal everyday action, the observation of purposeless occurrences and the encounter with useless things.

A Strange and Sublime Address is about the purposeless sides of life, about a vision comparable to Agastya's utopia of an existence focused exclusively on the present. This programmatic focus on the purposeless and everyday can be understood as a counter-discourse to globalised economic and social realities (cf. Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 13-14, 23, 31-32). Chaudhuri's associative, fragmented style can, moreover, be interpreted as a modernist principle of writing that poses an alternative to the postmodern, playfulness typical of the contemporary postcolonial canon. Even though digressions and playfulness are also part of Chaudhuri's flâneur-like writing, his narrator focuses on "material surface effects", on surprising sensory impressions, on the private and local as opposed to history or the public sphere (Majumdar, "Dallying" 450, 454).

Thus, the resistance to progress is noticeable in Chaudhuri's novel on the level of plot (4.3.1), which is characterised by the absence of progressive, purposeful action as well as a nostalgia for an older middle-class culture. Moreover, the novel is structured by a non-teleological temporality (4.3.2) through the recurrence of digression and paratactic lists of observations, as well as through metafictional comments of the narrative voice.

4.3.1. Banality and Everyday Occurrences

The plot events of *A Strange and Sublime Address* are mostly banal, everyday actions, observed by the little boy Sandeep. Rather than having a linear plotline, the novel consists of an episodic rhythm of recurring events, seasons and practices predominantly seen through his eyes. Most of the scenes in the novel, by themselves of little interest, derive their relevance from their description as intensely sensuous acts, by which the thing world of an older middle-class culture is narrated and becomes alive (cf. Majumdar, "Dallying" 460; Shetty 57). Instead of a focus on conceptual ideas, the narrative captures a wealth of "spontaneous sensations", which have their origin in "the heterogeneous appearance of things" rather than in "the suprasensory 'realm of ideas and ideals'" (Moslund 3, 24). In the novel, "the invocation of the contingent and particular [becomes] […] a

polemics against the universalist claims of the nation and its allegories", of history at large and an elevated notion of meaningfulness (Wiemann, *Genres* 210). What Majumdar describes as "the fiction's languorous wanderings within the banal details of everyday life" is deeply critical of "Western notions of modernity […] also as such notions were valorized in nineteenth-century Bengal" as well as of the idea of spectacular history ("Dallying" 460). By almost avoiding linear sequence or even causal connections between parts of the plot, the novel presents a nostalgic vision of an eternal present in similarity to Agastya's utopian perspective, which can be read through the choice of focalisation on the child Sandeep as a nostalgia for childhood. From the child's perspective, assumptions about seriousness and rationality are turned upside down: the concerns of the adult world, including work, recede into the background and a leisurely openness takes their place.

Instead of an event-based plot, everyday practices are narrated in *A Strange and Sublime Address* in an additive way. When Sandeep and his cousins are having a bath during his visit to Calcutta, the room and the whole procedure is described in minute detail, including Sandeep's sensuous impressions: "A sharp aura of mustard-oil flowered, giving Sandeep's nostrils a faraway sentient pleasure […] It reminded him of sunlight" (*Address* 8). In the process, the bare bathroom is transformed into a special place, in which "no one seemed to miss what was not there" and even when Sandeep's aunt is washing saris in the same space, the hard work becomes interesting because "the bathroom echoed with a strange rhythm" and the saris turn into "exhausted pythons of cloth" in her hands (8-9). Their house and their room actively "surrounded them, giving them a sense of objects and things that always lived in the present. […] The furniture and the wall-lizard symbolized another […] calm, inviolable existence" (95). By representing objects as possessing their own agency, Sandeep's perception of his surroundings goes against a purely rational view of the world (cf. Shetty 66).[88] In the novel, sensory perception and emotions caused by certain impressions portray a perspective of the world that goes against the "*suppression* of the

[88] See also my reading of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and the role of an alternative to human conceptions of temporality in that novel (6.2.3).

sensing body" and "the control of spontaneous emotions" (Moslund 6; Pernau/Jordheim 8). At the same time, the independence of all that is observed and registered in the text implies an acceptance of a multitude of temporalities (see the furniture's and lizards' "calm, inviolable existence" above).

As Shetty argues, the novel's protagonists derive from their everyday practices a form of well-being despite or exactly *because of* the often scarce and ill-functioning materiality of objects with which they engage (cf. 60, 67-74). The family's leisurely everyday experiences do not depend upon a large number of possessions, but they are part of an interaction with few and decidedly imperfect objects (cf. Fludernik, "The Simple Life"). Among these are a car which barely functions,[89] electric fans that stop working during power cuts and flats that are perpetually dusty (cf. *Address* 11-12, 46-47, 52, 91). The effect is an atmosphere of lassitude as the instrumental use value of things is let go: the "objects, furniture, rooms, the people who inhabit them, and the spatio-temporal rhythms they create" are "[r]eleased to a maximum from narrative function" (Wiemann, *Genres* 212; cf. Moslund 62; Shetty 62). The emphasis on the purposeless, aesthetic side of the smallest everyday occurrence corresponds with a focus on useless materiality typical of modern "middle-class dwelling" (Shetty 57, cf. 60; Wiemann, *Genres* 210-213). Thus, the novel's focus on dysfunctional material objects – on the "dust, rust and decrepitude" of middle-class households – can be read as a nostalgic harkening back to an urban modernity before the opening of the Indian economy in the 1990s (Shetty 57, 62; cf. Majumdar, "Dallying" 460). The "brokenness of things" has the potential to "de-reify[…] materiality" and to "reinstat[e] the temporality of use-less household stuff and 'inefficient' everyday acts nestled in non-teleological dimensions of now-time" (60).

This is the case when objects in the novel are not at all identified with their use-value, but become personified through human attributes: "On Sundays, the streets of Calcutta were vacant and quiet, and the shops and offices closed, looking *mysterious and even a little beautiful* with their doors and windows shut,

[89] Shetty comments on the significance of this being an Ambassador, "the first 'Made in India' automobile", which in its derelict status and resistance to usefulness becomes "the tragicomic signifier of postcolonial bourgeois modernity's primary dotage" on commodities (63-65).

such *shabby*, *reposeful* doors and windows" (*Address* 42, emphasis added). Three elements are combined in this representation of the city's streets on a Sunday: firstly a banal, unexceptional scene is rendered aesthetic and interesting through the way in which it is described ("mysterious and even a little beautiful"). Secondly, its lack of use value – note that the street is described on a Sunday – and the brokenness of the objects ("shabby") is underlined. Thirdly, a sense of relaxation is not only part of the scene, but inherent in the doors and windows, which are "reposeful". This kind of perception is an instance of the way in which, through the experiential mode of otium, intense sensuous impressions seem to make a mode of restful contemplation more likely, and at the same time the open potentiality of the experience enables a *physically*, *palpably* changed, creative engagement with material objects.

At the same time, the openness towards spontaneous affects and impressions is a fundamental trait of experiences of otium. The fabric of everyday life is assembled in the novel by sound, touch and rhythm. The characterisation of everyday experiences by the narrative voice underlines their purposeless and unproductive nature. Through this emphasis, the narrator's comments are often random and faintly humoristic, for instance because of zeugmatic comparisons: "In Bengal, both tamarind and babies are soaked in mustard-oil, and then left upon a mat on the terrace to absorb the morning sun" (8). Other everyday practices include common mealtimes, which are described as sensuous events during which the family members are "caressing the rice and the sauces on their plates with attentive, sensuous fingers, fingers which performed a practiced and graceful ballet on the plate till it was quite empty" (9). The metaphor of the "graceful ballet" endows the dinner situation with an aesthetic quality. Instead of a focus on conceptual meaning, sensory perception and the rhythmic quality of particular experiences is foregrounded. This resonates with Moslund's theory of a postcolonial aesthetics of materiality, in which the text produces a bodily or sensory experience of beauty. This is done, just as in the passage quoted above, "through the invocation of shapes, textures, colors, or olfactory and sonorous intensities" (Moslund 10).

Moreover, it is not only the simple, everyday character of these (inter)actions that is conspicuous, but also how the 'knowing how' of repetitive practices is emphasised as something enjoyable, with the physical, sensuous experience taking centre stage. The particular time or sequence of certain practices is delegated to the background. Even though the time frame of the novel as a whole is clearly defined as the main protagonist Sandeep's holiday at his uncle's place in Calcutta, it is unimportant within this timeframe how much time passes with what action, which action is repeated or which is singular to one day. Thus, in similarity to *English, August*, most scenes and experiences in Chaudhuri's novel stand in for "numerous such occasions" (Fludernik, "Narrating" n. pag.). Practices are thus often repetitive, and the novel draws attention to the potential for otium with the use of their iterative narration (cf. Genette 113-118).

However, in contrast to *English, August*, iterative narration is not associated negatively with boredom. Events are not singled out or given special importance but are rather an example of something that is *always* done on a specific day and time, or they are a way to characterise a space by what is *usually* done in it. While they do not bring the plot forward, they serve to create a larger image of life in the city, as becomes particularly apparent in the following passage:

> There were several ways of spending a Sunday evening. You could drive to Outram Ghat, and then stroll with your family by the River Hooghly, watching balloons floating volitionlessly [sic] in the air […]. You *could* stay at home and listen to plays once the football commentary was over: comedies, melodramas, whodunits. […] the star-crossed lovers *would* frequently cry "Never" and "Forever"; the murderer *would* murder accompanied by drums and cymbals […]. It was like Shakespeare and it was not like Shakespeare. (13, emphasis added)

Fludernik analyses how in this novel "the experience of the young boy Sandeep […] is again and again focused on a typical day, a typical afternoon, a typical visit to relatives or shops" and connects this iterative mode to "the nostalgic atmosphere of the novel [which] rests entirely on the memory of […] repeated experiences" ("Narrating" n. pag.). Whereas iterative narration is not per se unusual, its use as almost the exclusive form of frequency in the plot structure of the novel here creates the impression of a nostalgic longing for an eternal present. Thus, the "now-time" of *A Strange and Sublime Address* is subversive with a view to conventional plot expectations as well as to progressive and

teleological forms of temporality as “change itself is perceived as a dark and indeterminate threat” (Wiemann, *Genres* 215; cf. Shetty 60). At the same time, this eternal present free from future aims is close to the utopian ideal of otium as a purposeless dwelling in the present moment.

The lack of progress is, moreover, emphasised by the often passive and relaxed kinds of experiences that are described. Recurring motifs are naps and afternoon drowsiness due to the heat. Particularly during a power cut, when the fans have ceased to work, the whole family is relaxing in a darkened room: “They had shut all the windows and closed the shutters so that the room was a large box covered by a lid, cool and dark and spacious” (*Address* 26). Comparable to Agastya’s framing of his “secret life”, there is a stark contrast between the outside and the inside as, due to the intense heat, “they were like tiny insects living in the darkness of the box, breathing in the air of the world through invisible perforations” (ibid.). When the children peep through the shutters “[t]hey were momentarily blinded; outside, everything dazzled intolerably; a few people walked on the pavement like survivors, vanquished by the heat” (27). Moreover, their separation from the outside gives them “the dangerous power to unsettle the world outside. […] The heat outside and the coolness inside made them feel inviolable and reckless” (ibid.).

However, the children are the only ones who are still active or who even feel that this situation endows them with particular agency. The others are hardly doing anything, except that “[w]henever there was a power cut, they fanned themselves *meditatively* with newspapers or bamboo fans” (26, emphasis added). The presence of adults and their conversations are, through the children’s perception, a background to their games: “Sandeep’s aunt and mother lay on the bed murmuring to each other, and each time they turned, there was a shy and subtle clink of bangles” (ibid.). To them, the recurring power cuts are “part of a meaningless sequence of experiences whose very lack of significance constitutes their magic charm” (Fludernik, “Narrating” n. pag.). It is not relevant what their conversation is about; instead, it is registered as a steady noise, as if the murmuring and the bangles clinking form a musical background to the scene. The descriptions of languid inaction during power cuts combine central elements

of the novel such as scenes of relaxation, dysfunctional technology and changes in the perception of temporality. The novel is, particularly in these passages, full of lexemes emphasising relaxation, such as “release”, “lethargy”, “peace”, “dozing”, “relaxing” (*Address* 48-50).

The novel’s focus on the purposelessness as well as on communal experiences has parallels to the Bengali social practice of *āḍḍā*, the “practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and unrigorous conversations” (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 181). While *āḍḍās* are not openly described in *A Strange and Sublime Address* due to the novel’s focus on family routines, characteristics of *āḍḍā* have important parallels to both the leisurely poetics of the novel, its sense of time and the focus on social interaction. The “informal talking session” of an *āḍḍā* may be “interspersing intellectual discussion and debate with gossip, rumour and small talk” (Sil 3). The concept of an *āḍḍā* is opposed to “a busy and all-consuming ethic of work”, for it is a practice “that stands above all ideas of need and utility” (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 181-182). An *āḍḍā* is not focused on a particular aim and therefore could, theoretically, be without temporal limitation: “Enjoying an *adda* is to enjoy a sense of time and space that is not subject to the gravitational pull of any explicit purpose” (ibid. 204, cf. 205, 208). While the narrative style of Chaudhuri’s novel is similar to the temporal characteristics of *āḍḍā* and its purposelessness, the endless conversations among family members (often incomprehensible to Sandeep and the other boys) about things either of importance or banal details are private versions of *āḍḍās* in their “connection between orality and a certain kind of aesthetic/communal pleasure”, the “pleasure of company and conversation” (ibid. 206, 208). The passage about the family locked inside to escape the heat, with the adults lounging on the beds and murmuring to each other resonates with this idea, as does its contrast with the frenzy that erupts when Chhotomama needs to leave for work.

Work is perceived by Sandeep (quite similar to Agastya) as a sudden intrusion to their leisurely pace of life. The only scene in which it is treated explicitly is when his uncle’s morning workday routines are described, without a reference to what he does *at* work – which in all probability remains a mystery to

Sandeep. The chapter starts with the words: “Monday morning came like a fever” (*Address* 17). While in the scene described above their spatial surroundings and sensuous perception is in the foreground, now there are frequent references to the passing of time. Chhotomama eats a “rapid meal”, he “rushed to work” and spends “five minutes persuading his feet to enter the shoes, or the shoes to swallow his feet” (ibid.). He is, on the one hand “the ordinary breadwinner in his moment of unlikely glory, transformed into the centre of his universe and his home”, but on the other hand he carries a look of “schoolboyish triumph” (ibid.). The description of the scene is grotesquely exaggerated and loaded with irony, particularly when he is said to cause a panic for the rest of the household, crying “‘I’m late!’ in the classic manner of the man crying ‘Fire!’ or ‘Timber!’ or ‘Eureka!’, while Saraswati and Mamima scuttled around him like frightened birds” (ibid.). Having to earn money is presented as an exception, taking up only little space in the text. Only after Chhotomama has left for work “did *peace* reign once more resignedly over the household” (ibid. emphasis added). The description of Chhotomama’s panic to get to work is “a sly commentary on the cultural value system that has left banality and grandeur to be such overdetermined categories” (Majumdar, *Prose* 161). The peace and lassitude which otherwise pervades the family’s life can only be seen in stark contrast to work that is dictated by a timetable.

Moreover, not only work, but different, serious, purposeful actions of the adult characters of the novel are observed from a distant, slightly ironic perspective, making them seem childish and pointlessly serious at the same time: “He [Sandeep’s uncle] lay back on the small bed, secure as *a soldier in his trench*, with the newspaper in his hands; he folded it several ways and made it crackle *festively*” (*Address* 10, emphasis added; cf. Lange 367). The relevance of informing himself about the daily news is made fun of here as Chhotomama’s serious ritual is exposed as dramatic play-acting. In another passage Sandeep listens to his uncle and a friend deep in conversation, and, again commenting on the serious character of their debates, observes that “[t]he table was used as much for banging (a kind of drum-roll to indicate the significance of what was being said) as it was for eating” (*Address* 23). Both in these passages and in the

description of Chhotomama leaving for work, the child's perspective is presented as wisely superior to that of the adult characters.

It is a central feature of Chaudhuri's novel that a resistant and useless thing-world and the banality of everyday occurrences are narrated from a child's perspective. Internal focalisation, which emphasises a subjective perception of the world rather than an objectively rational, normative and authorial representation transforms the useless and banal elements of the story into magical, exceptional observations and it shifts the evaluation of what is worthy of being told from the seriousness of the adult world to the playfulness of the child's perspective. This nostalgic point of view is aimed at a sense of dwelling in the present in which the experience of otium becomes more likely.

4.3.2. Digression as Resistance to Usefulness

In addition to the plot of *A Strange and Sublime Address* consisting of associative, everyday occurrences and disappointing expectations of eventfulness, this tendency is underlined by a digressive syntax and meta-narrative commentary on the novel's structure. The text's structural features defer a sense of closure as more information is added paratactically and the associative scenes and impressions do not link up to a narrative with any causal logic.

The numerous everyday practices that the novel describes are at one point explained by the narrative voice in a meta-narrative statement, which addresses the readers' supposed expectation of an action-based plot. It describes the narrative to be made up of:

> the irrelevances and digressions that make up lives, […] rather than a good story – till the reader would shout 'Come to the point' – and there would be no point, except […] the house with the small, empty porch that was crowded, paradoxically, with many memories and possibilities. The 'real' story, with its beginning, middle and conclusion, would never be told, because it did not exist. (48-49)

This reflection on the aimless, meandering and decelerated narrative of *A Strange and Sublime Address* comes across as an argument against the very concept of a straightforward narrative, preferring "irrelevances" to any sort of

important “point” and “digressions” to a chronological sequence.[90] The open potentiality of Sandeep’s experiences, the passage suggests, is too fleeting, the very quality of the experience resisting narration.

The passage is a typical instance of Chaudhuri’s digressive technique, which complements the sense of “restfulness and deceleration” on the descriptive level (Fludernik, “Narrating” n. pag.). The metafictional comment is embedded in a metaphorical description of the houses which Sandeep and his uncle pass on a walk and the potential stories and inconsequential scenes happening inside them. The “frame sentence stalled for twenty lines of paratactic depiction of what Sandeep is seeing” mirrors the fact that instead of potential stories, the narrative only offers “scenes of stagnancy or irrelevance”, but, at the same time, of repose and relaxation (ibid.). These comprise “ornate iron gates and a watchman dozing on a stool” or an “old man relaxing in his easy-chair on the verandah” as well as a reference to a wedding party (*Address* 57). Not only does this list of scenes contribute more inconsequential observations, it also suggests that the choice for the narration of Sandeep’s story among a multitude of potential stories is fairly random and does not carry weight because of any significance in its plot.

Chaudhuri’s “rejection of plot in favour of the unstory-like mass of everyday detail” is a typically modernist strategy (Shetty 60).[91] As Fludernik remarks, in European modernism, for instance in the writing of Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf or James Joyce “the focus on the everyday was a revolutionary move against Victorian protocols of significance” (“Narrating” n. pag.; cf. Majumdar, *Prose* 2). It also implied “a serious crisis in the certitudes and principles of Enlightenment modernity” (Majumdar, *Prose* 29). This critical impulse is emphasised in the postcolonial context, because, as I have delineated at the outset of this chapter, the colonialism was based on the Enlightenment values of reason and progress. At the same time, the predominance of banality and inaction questions the stereotype of “the colonial power relation between the metropolis and the periphery” that is apparent in stereotypes of the idle or lazy

[90] For readers’ expectations of a “point” to any narrative compare Hühn “Functions” (143).
[91] See also Amiya Dev’s observation with reference to vernacular Bengali writing that modernism “led to a closer depiction of mundane details” as well as urban life of the middle classes (8-9).

native (Majumdar, *Prose* 34). The novel "might be read as an affirmative movement from the condition of lack and unfulfilled desire" in Eurocentric narratives of history "to a polemic about the representation of postcolonial reality that is of pointed relevance to the present" (ibid. 36). In Chaudhuri's novel, instead of a focus on specific actions of significance, useless observations and purposeless objects have the potential to make up a narrative. It is the "possibilities" inherent in them that are given more importance here than purposeful practices which have an obvious justification for being narrated. Because there is no real plot, temporality here is less of a sequence of events, but shifts to a broader, spatial perception of time: it is beside the point how much time passes with what action, which action is done repetitively or which is singular to one day.

Not only does the spatial perception of time correspond with my understanding of the experience of otium as a dwelling in a present time without fixed duration, but it can also be read as an instance of Joseph Frank's concept of *spatial form*. He argues that although "[l]iterature […] makes use of language, composed of a succession of words proceeding through time" and is therefore tied to "narrative sequence", modernist literature breaks this temporal rule in favour of the "moment of time" (Frank 7, 8, 10). With the help of the simultaneity of spatial structures and the use of scenic descriptions "[t]ime is no longer felt as an objective, causal progression" (ibid. 63). In terms of Genette's narratological category of *duration*, *scene* and *pause* are recurring methods in *A Strange and Sublime Address* (Genette 93-94). Frank analyses how "[f]or the duration of the scene, at least, the time-flow of the narrative is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the immobilized time-area", breaking up "the progress of the narrative" (17). This tendency is increased by a language full of metaphors and associative similes which is, particularly in the passages that want to capture a certain experience in a long description of one moment, almost as dense as the language in poetry. In this way, time seems to be arrested when the family lies in a darkened room to escape the heat or when the children are having their bath. Temporal descriptions such as 'afternoon' or 'Sunday' seem to be of interest to the narrative only insofar as they evoke a certain mood of lassitude.

Another temporal aspect of *A Strange and Sublime Address*, which was already important in the previous chapter, is the allusion to a sense of quasi-spiritual epiphany or revelation. Itself a typical strategy in modernist writing, the representation of the everyday in this way tries to get at immediacy rather than at the transcendence associated with spirituality (cf. May 923-924; Majumdar, *Prose* 4, 11; chapter 3.3.1). In the context of spatial form, this textual strategy is part of a certain perspective on temporality within a narrative. According to Frank's theory, the scene associates "aspects of the past and the present so that both are fused in one comprehensive view" and the sense of revelation stems from the "extratemporal quality" of the scene (63, 23).[92] That Joseph Frank makes his point about the revelatory epiphany of such passages with reference to Proust and his epic novel *In Search of Lost Time* is no coincidence, for Chaudhuri's novel is full of nostalgic memories of a *lost time* (cf. Frank 23-27). The paratactic list of scenes that might be connected to the houses Sandeep and his uncle pass on their walk is a typical example of this technique, in which things that did happen or are happening at that moment are correlated with an exclusive reference to their parallel vision in space: the houses and the verandahs are of importance to the narrative rather than when these things happened, in what order or what causal connection might be construed between them.

A scene on Calcutta's Maidan is described even more closely to the idea of the revelation of an "extratemporal quality": during a power cut, a large number of people are present on this huge public space and there is a sense of "*lethargy* and *even peace* to these *otherwise highly strung* men and women, […] a perceptible *sense of release*, as if time was *oozing by*, and *the world happening elsewhere*" (49, emphasis added). The collective experience on the Maidan is characterised by peacefulness and a changed perception, that is, predominantly a stretching of time ("as if time was oozing by"). At the same time the experience is contrasted with an otherwise stressful ("highly strung") life, the intensity of experience set apart from larger events in the world and from "the sensational

[92] See also Walter Benjamin's notion of the present as "shot through" with bits of past and future. His fragmentary philosophy of modernity posits a heterogeneous temporality oriented at the present against a linear, homogeneous historicism (Benjamin 263).

struggles staged in the grand theatre of the national public sphere and canonized in the headlines of mainstream historiography" (Majumdar, *Prose* 35). Especially the last aspect can be associated with resistance to a concept of progressive history.

A similar sense of temporal exceptionality can be found when Chhotomama's memory is triggered by a meal he eats. In another Proustian moment, "he tasted his childhood" and "[i]t was as if his memory resided in the small, invisible taste-buds in his tongue rather than in his brain" (*Address* 87-88).[93] At this moment of intense sensory impression, "[t]he world happened in slow motion", so that when Chhotomama is transported to the past by the association of his taste buds, his perception of time stretches and, like Frank describes "aspects of the past and present […] are fused in one comprehensive view" (88; Frank 63).

Moreover, the metafictional comment and scenic narration draw attention to a parallel between otium and narration especially in the understanding of literature of the Russian Formalists: just as practical uses of language are partially set aside in literary texts, aims and obligations are set aside during an experience of otium (cf. Klinkert 2-3). If fictional writing is defined by a use of language outside practical, everyday contexts, attention is directed more at the way in which language is formed, that is, in the context of narration, at *discourse* rather than at story (cf. Genette 26-29; Warning; Klinkert 16). In the combination of spatial similes and a densely lyrical language, the novel itself seems to become a space that is entered by the reader and expresses "some essential quality" of life and experience (Majumdar, *Prose* 165; cf. Frank; Klinkert 16). Consequently, the role of otium in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, in which not only experiences of otium as a central part of the plot play an important role, but also openness and non-linear temporality as a structural feature, emphasises an essential dimension of fiction. The individual experience of the protagonist as open, purposeless and

[93] Compare the famous passage in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* when the narrator is transported to his childhood by the taste of a Madeleine cake. He is surprised by the "extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the *vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me*, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory — this new sensation having had the effect […] of filling me with a precious essence" (51-52 emphasis added). In the scene, the experience is contrasted with the usual experience and worries of life.

exceptional is represented in internal focalisation and it is at the same time extended into a general principle for the narrative.

The eventlessness of Chaudhuri's novel draws its agency from the deviancy of a plot with little action that is relevant *because of* its agentic properties. Every iterative practice stands for its "dailyness", the meandering pace of the narrative making it at the same time special in its present experience and irrelevant in its exchangeability (cf. Majumdar, "Dallying"). As Wiemann analyses, in the novel experiences and things "get[…] represented *not* for the sake of some deep-structural function in a plot line nor in order to engage in networked connectivities with other events, entities or characters; instead, everything appears in its own right" (*Genres* 211). The lack of purpose and narrative progress unmasks the expectations of eventfulness as it de-familiarizes the material objects as well as the novel form itself. Along with the narrative structure that resists any sense of progress, the novel thus uses a "dissident […] materiality" to implicitly criticise the "allure of commodity fetishism" (Shetty 58). Things are represented apart from their "meaning-intention" and a sensory relation to materiality is favoured instead of its "suprasensory", abstract and rational objectification (Moslund 3, 6, 9, 62). In this way, the sensuous materiality and the eventless plot complement one another in their resistance to progressive usefulness.

Thus, the novel also questions expectations of temporality from narrative, as well as aim-oriented values of work. While the latter aspect is less prominent than in *English, August*, the nostalgic orientation at an ideal perception during childhood juxtaposes the aim-oriented seriousness of adult life with the open perception of the child. What Shetty calls Chaudhuri's peculiar "poetics of dwelling" with reference to the domestic materiality represented in the novel is at the same time a temporal, nostalgic dwelling in a seemingly eternal moment of childhood (58; cf. 59). At one point, when Sandeep reflects on a threatening atmosphere hanging over the city, he uses a calming comparison for the family house in Calcutta, likening it to a "patient, enduring ark built by the hands of an infinitely wise man, [which] would carry them away over the tide" (*Address* 88). In analogy to the meta-narrative comment in which the novel itself was likened to "the house with the small, empty porch that was crowded […] with many

memories and possibilities", the novel's nostalgia for childhood is captured in this image of a sheltered space (49).[94]

Without wanting to delve too deeply into biographical context, one could point out that Dipesh Chakrabarty's connection of the practice of *āḍḍā* with his own background of having left India is also relevant for Chaudhuri, who spent a long time in Europe and the U.S.: "As a first-generation migrant with my homing instincts permanently damaged, I have no easy way of determining in what proportions the archives of the nostalgia for *adda* […] are mixed with my own desire […] to be at home in a Calcutta of once-upon-a-time" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 182). However, despite this 'diaspora' background in which nostalgia figures as a topos, nostalgia is also made a structural principle in the text. Through meta-narrative comments and reflections on the quality of time and experience, nostalgia for the atmosphere of lingering in the present moment is pervasive throughout the novel rather than being only focused on the child's perspective due to focalisation on Sandeep.

I argue that Chaudhuri's emphasis on the value of the present moment of any practice is an example for the subversive or alternative time regime of *otium* that is opposed to a teleological, progressive temporality. While the novel is about different "subjectivities" and the relevance of certain (albeit contingent, repetitive and aimless) experiences, characters' subjectivities are not foregrounded "in the fashion of *bildungsroman* teleology but through a process […] of cognitive mapping" (Wiemann, *Genres* 212). If otium is understood as an experience that resists being sought intentionally and is not indulged in as a means for some other objective, but can nevertheless become unexpectedly creative and productive, Chaudhuri's novel is a perfect example of this. Not only is the experience of the protagonist frequently portrayed as purposeless yet endowed with surprising beauty or meaning, but it is even linked to a decelerated perception of time that takes on an almost spatial quality and is focused on being

[94] Compare Wiemann's reading of Chaudhuri's oeuvre as revolving around metaphorical and real references to domesticity and nostalgia for modes of dwelling in the "house/home" (*Genres* 210-213). He connects this with "the nineteenth-century cult of the *ghar* in the Bengali renaissance and its nationalist ramifications", in which the home functions as a "rejection of a British-defined universalism" (ibid. 210).

in the present. Finally, both dimensions of purposelessness and of an alternative temporality of dwelling in the moment are mirrored in the novel's structure.

4.4. Chapter Summary

The two novels analysed here are examples for a dimension of otium which comments directly on expectations of usefulness, aim-oriented action and linear temporality. They intentionally disappoint these and debunk their self-evident normativity in a refusal of their protagonists to act and a refusal of their narratives to take on a progressive plot structure. In other novels analysed in this study, such as *A Sin of Colour* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, indecision, openness and an achronological sequence of events can also be seen to undercut ideas of linearity and progression. In the present examples, however, the whole eventless structure of the novels is directed at a continuous "reinscri[ption] [of] non-narrativity" on the levels of plot, syntax and metafictional contextualisation (Fludernik, "Narrating" n. pag.). This strategy almost provokes a crisis of meaning or a standstill of narrative progression. Despite questioning and undermining straightforward eventfulness, these novels' eventfulness can be argued to occur instead on the level of "implied authorial meaning" with far-reaching implications (Hühn, "Functions" 160).

In the context of postcolonial fiction, the novels' lack of sensational action or indeed obvious political dimensions questions the popular aesthetics of the postcolonial novel and their representation of the "grand and dramatic narrative of power, domination, and struggle" as well as their focus on "the national narrative of decolonization, independence, and development" (Majumdar, *Prose* 36). In the context of debates about the Indian novel in English, Amit Chaudhuri's "fiction illustrates how the revelatory power of the mundane […] troubles the constructions of spectacular nationhood that shape the narrative model of the national allegory" (ibid. 48). The modernist aesthetic of his writing emphasises its distance from the globally successful postcolonial fiction of the 1980s as it is not in alignment with popular postmodernist textual strategies and ignores the "ethical urgency" of directly addressing the colonial past (ibid. 176). The same

holds true for *English, August*, teasingly subtitled “An Indian Story”. It is, however, not an Indian story in the sense of a national allegory, but rather in the sense of a story that is so banal and exchangeable that it could happen to any (middle class) Indian who begins a career in the Civil Service.

Despite the standstill of narrative progress and the protagonists’ fixation on the past, I propose that the novels have a utopian dimension as they ask the reader to imagine alternatives to progressive, purposeful action, to usefulness as a central value in life or to a meaningless pursuit of job careers. The novels thus question what O’Connor has called “the worthiness myth” or “the remarkable idea that we must build and perfect the self as an autonomous moral entity” and “mak[e] something of ourselves” (28). In its debunking of serious work, *A Strange and Sublime Address* is, just as *English, August* in the passages focusing on Agastya’s utopian imaginations, extremely nostalgic: after all, the narrative is not only focused on impressions of an older middle-class Calcutta, but also mostly focalised on a child, a child during his holidays nonetheless, whose perception of the world is defined as the norm. *A Strange and Sublime Address* (and to an extent *English, August* as well) is therefore also a novel about the wish for the regressive idyll of childhood, in which the experience of otium is made possible by a leisurely pace of life and in which the duties of adult life can be smiled upon. While in the previous chapter the passages from the novels are similar to otium because they emphasise the positive *freedom to act*, in the novels analysed in this chapter a self-conscious *refusal to act* can be seen as an extreme case of positive freedom.

In its attempt to capture the immediacy of experience, Chaudhuri’s novel refers to “revelation” or “epiphany”, but the protagonist’s observations are directed at the surface materiality and “irrelevance” is not, in the end, resolved by a surprising meaning (*Address* 95). In this motif of the epiphanic moment that is not resolved into transcendence, the focus on everyday experience and the link with Joseph Frank’s concept of spatial form, *A Strange and Sublime Address* uses modernist techniques. Because both novels seem to convey in their lack of meaningful resolution the impression that “[t]he ‘point’ of the exercise is to demonstrate that life has no point”, they seem to “reject […] the remainder of

significance that modernist novels" – by which their textual strategies are clearly inspired – "still lent to their protagonists' impressions" (Fludernik, "Narrating" n. pag.; Hühn, "Function" 143). This observation resonates with Majumdar's tendency to characterise banality as "infertile" and directed at the "promise of the exciting fullness" of life that might exist around the corner (*Prose* 2).

I partially disagree with this reading: on the contrary, exactly because banality and everyday occurrences tend to be "aesthetically oppositional" in a novel, the emphasis on the useless always has to be read as part of a critique of purposeful action, future-oriented progress, and linear temporality (Majumdar, *Prose* 5). While both novels imply this sort of critique, *English, August* only hints, in alienated circumstances, at the possibility that things could be otherwise, while Chaudhuri's novel is *about* such an alternative vision. Hence for Chatterjee's novel Majumdar's thesis of a narrative of banality being built upon the tension of boredom as absolute immanence longing for transcendence works (ibid. 11-12). In Chaudhuri's novel, however, the everyday is elevated through its representation, "the deepest wonders of life seem to lie on its very surface, on the quotidian materiality of its daily texture, indeed, in the banality of their aesthetic", as Majumdar writes himself (ibid. 157).

Nostalgia is in both novels utopian rather than elegiac, "it offers a perspective on the past as possibly a necessary, liveable, even pleasurable future" (Shetty 59; cf. 60). A "reflective" rather than "restorative nostalgia" is, in this context, presented as an alternative to "unsustainable dream-futures peddled by growth-and-development discourses in globalization" (Boym 41-55; Shetty 60). The novel represents "beauty […] at a distance from commodity allure" (Shetty 60). It thus comments on alienating late modern economic structures that give preference to purposeful functionality as well as to teleological understandings of history and temporality.

If otium can be seen in these novels as a negative contrastive foil to alienating present circumstances, the relevance of childhood becomes clear upon this background. Childhood is vaguely characterised by the absence of work[95] as well

[95] The possibility of such a nostalgic perspective on childhood can be seen as another marker for the middle-class background of both novels' protagonists. After all, depending on the degree of

as worries about the future and, consequently, by a feeling of being sheltered and a focus on the present moment. Thus, in addition to a regressive wish for childhood being a refusal of the ideals of progress and civilisation (cf. Jenks 4-7, 34-39), this perspective on past childhood is clearly nostalgic. It does not necessarily refer to how childhood was actually experienced, but it projects the dissatisfactions of the present unto an ideal image of childhood, which is close to how I characterise experiences of otium (cf. Jenks 34-48, 106-116).[96] The utopian vision of experiences of otium is therefore informative about the shortcomings of the present, for instance about alienating conditions of work that are measured by abstract notions of time (the year that needs to be endured in Madna; the necessity to work on a certain time on Monday mornings) rather than the necessity or value of certain tasks. The nostalgia for childhood thus also illustrates the impossibility of alternative conceptions of work, that is, the impossibility *to conceptualise experiences of otium in the context of work under alienating conditions*.[97]

In Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*, the possibility of a different, task-oriented pattern of work in a rural area in the hills is hinted at. The novel mostly refers to pastoral work that knows no time schedules. The villagers' daily routine of sending the cows and goats to graze on different meadows is contrasted with the expectations of discipline and narrow-minded bureaucracy of the newly-arrived government official Chauhan: "Throughout his working life, Mr. Chauhan had despaired over the lack of discipline, civic sense and hard work among his fellow citizens, but what he saw around him in the hill country beat everything" (*Earth* 67). Through his different expectation for what counts as "disciplined

poverty, a childhood in an Indian lower-class family would also be defined by necessary work. Wiemann emphasises that servants are often objectified in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, as they are part of and contribute to the general atmosphere of the house in similarity to any of the described objects and pieces of furniture (*Genres* 217-218).

[96] Thus, I disagree with Wiemann's reading of the sequence of Chaudhuri's novels as a development (albeit a non-teleological, non-linear development) from childhood to adulthood (*Genres* 213). The nostalgia for the temporality and experiential mode associated with childhood still runs through the novels that focus on students or middle-aged protagonists.

[97] For the impossibility of experiences of otium during work apart from its external representation compare Munz, "Village Idyll?".

work", the villagers' routine is not even registered as work at all: "It was as if people were on holiday all the time" (ibid.). Although work of the villagers (cow herding, pickling…) is omnipresent in the novel, its rhythm is not registered as work at all by the outsider expecting definite working hours. Although village life is represented in *The Folded Earth* and similar novels in stereotypes of authenticity and timelessness, this representation can still be seen – particularly in contrast to the Madna of *English, August* – as a utopia of a different experience of work (cf. Munz, "Village Idyll").

Although the described strategy of the basic principle of a non-progressive plot that is focused almost entirely on either inaction or iterative action is exceptional in this extreme form in the two novels analysed here, it does occur in passages of other novels. Not only is Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* repeatedly about memory and nostalgia, this nostalgia is frequently intimately associated with the memory of a certain space and pleasurable experience (the time of studying at Oxford, visiting Tintern Abbey, the family home in Calcutta…). In the second half of the novel, which focuses on Niharika, her childhood is nostalgically represented as a carefree time of openness and freedom, which sharply contrasts with the way in which her later life is always tainted with her unhappy love for Daniel Faraday (65). Gupta's style is also characterised by a densely lyric language particularly in passages that evoke an intense experience so that the narrative becomes, as was described in chapter 2, a web of memories.

Another example of the nostalgic representation of an idyllic childhood can be found in Anita Desai's novella "The Artist of Disappearance". In this text, Ravi's childhood is associated with an un-alienated and innocent relation to his natural surroundings that is disturbed through his encounters with other humans. When his parents leave him alone with the servant, as they frequently do, "he could let out the breath he had been holding inside his chest till it swelled into a balloon, tight against his ribs" (*Artist* 100-101). The years of his young adulthood Ravi "did not acknowledge […] as his. […] They belonged to the family in Bombay, to the business office, to his duties there […], and some years at a college studying 'management'" (ibid. 114). Instead of thinking of this time as "a full volume of incident and event", Ravi feels like a "prisoner" to his duties, and only longs to be

able to return to the solitary existence in nature, which he had become accustomed to as a child (ibid. 114-115).

Thus, while nostalgia for childhood is often linked in contemporary Indian fiction with a purposeless mode of existence, with a sheltered space and a non-linear experience of temporality, it is the exception that this dwelling in the present becomes a principle of narration. Amit Chaudhuri, however, makes it a basic rule of his writing and all of his novels are to some extent characterised by this atmosphere and narrative strategy. In *Afternoon Raag*, for example, the narrative meanders between the narrator's memories of his student days at Oxford and his visits to his home in Calcutta. The stretching of time is a recurring motif in the novel, particularly during indolent times of inaction in Oxford.

The resistance to a straightforward, linear narrative and to expectations of usefulness emphasises the heterotopian potential of literary texts, as the receding of temporal sequence moves the spatial surroundings into the focus. The reciprocal relation between the perception of space during experiences of otium and the effect of the experience on our conceptions of space will be the focus of the following chapter. This chapter's analysis of inaction could already show that the novels in the previous readings have the same dynamic as an experience of otium in which the passing of time moves into the background in favour of an almost spatial sense of dwelling. I argue that the analysed novels develop their central meaning out of their described eventlessness, focusing frequently on iterative narration, on the material or sensory perception in banal, everyday occurrences rather than on temporal sequence and events of obvious interest.

5. Environment. Otium as a Space of Potentiality

5.1. Spaces of Otium and Otium as a Spatial Experience

If otium is conceivable in concrete practices that are a manifestation of a positive freedom of the individual subject to act, the experience of protagonists engaged in these practices is entangled with their relationship to space. It is an experience in the context of which the novels emphasise the "life-experience in human-place relations" rather than its portrayal from a distance (Moslund 21). Particularly the reflective tendency of the novels, when protagonists nostalgically remember past experiences, is always connected to their memory of concrete places (cf. Casey 37-39; Stilz 1-2; Sennefelder 139). This place memory frequently goes beyond individual memory of places to suggest a collective imaginary of how we conceive of our spatial environment.

The relationship between experiences of otium and their spatial environment can be defined as threefold: first, otium is always a spatial experience both in a metaphorical and in a very concrete sense. The experiential quality of otium is defined by a changed understanding of time, which is perceived to stretch out and take on the character of duration as opposed to its sequential, linear progression – a perception of time often described with spatial metaphors (see sections 1.2.1; 4.3; Roche 58-60; Casey 12-13; Bergson 60-105; Nowotny 41; Hasebrink/Riedl 3; Figal et al. 1; Sennefelder 106-112, 145-146). Moreover, the focus on *being* or *dwelling* in the moment instead of a progressive succession of moments leads to a more conscious emphasis on sensory perception, through which the actual environment of the protagonist becomes more important (Hasebrink/Riedl 3; Figal 30-31; Figal et al. 1).

An example for this is when the narrator of Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* describes his perception of space while making love to his girlfriend in her hostel room in Oxford: looking outside from the bed, "one had a sense of being surrounded on all sides by space, silence, and greenery" (228). On the football field outside, "unusual birds could be seen running […] especially when it was empty […] and full of its own presence" (ibid.). As the window "created an illusory

and transparent separation between ourselves and the day outside […] [i]t was impossible not to be conscious of nature and sky" (ibid.). Rather than addressing the experience of making love, which is only alluded to in the temporal remark "on that afternoon when Shehnaz lay on her bed and I unbuttoned her shirt", a peculiar experience of space is foregrounded (ibid.).

Second, experiences of otium are associated with specific settings and locations. These sites of otium seem to possess qualities and characteristics that can be seen as conditions for the experience of otium (Fludernik/Nandi 3-4).[98] The natural and urban spaces that provide the settings to the characters' experiences of otium are described with a focus on these qualities. Thus, allegedly wild nature is tied in the novels to the aesthetic appreciation of the sublime and the urban space associated with aimless wandering. In *Afternoon Raag*, the narrator remarks that Calcutta "is the only city I know that is timeless, where change is naturalized by the old flowing patterns, and the anxiety caused by the passing of time is replaced by fatigue and surrender" (243). In this portrayal, it is a quality inherent in the city which enables its inhabitants to let go of an aim-oriented, linear perception of time.

In both the natural and the urban spaces[99] potential experiences of otium question the cultural origins of their representation. The agency of elements of a sublime nature in *The Inheritance of Loss* thus can be read as a critical comment on the origins of the Romantic sublime in an anthropocentric, subject-centred perspective on nature. The assumption that certain kinds of spaces – the natural and the urban, the civilised and the wilderness, the inside and the outside – are separate, or even contrastive spaces, is often undermined or exposed as artificial in the passages central to otium. This could be seen in the example from *Afternoon Raag*, in which the division between the bed inside in the hostel room and the surrounding gardens and parks outside becomes blurred.

---

[98] This can be understood both in very concrete, cultural formations such as the tropes of idyllic arcadian landscapes (cf. Schama 517-538) as well as in a more abstract, metaphorical sense (compare Anna Sennefelder's take on the autobiographic space of narration as a place of retreat or refuge 136-149).

[99] Another spatial environment is the rural space. As I have shown elsewhere, discourses about manual work and the authenticity of the rural population are central to the characterisation of the rural space (Munz, "Village Idyll").

Thirdly, and finally, a character's experience of otium changes their relation and perception of their environment and contributes to a constructivist reading of space in these novels. The openness and potentiality of the positive freedom of otium, even if it is portrayed negatively as an unreachable ideal, changes the possible engagement with a spatial environment. This aspect of the experience has been conceptualised metaphorically as a free *space* of potentiality (cf. Gimmel et al. 7, 65). Thus, the experience can be closely associated with Foucault's notion of *heterotopia* – other or counter spaces – the experience itself becoming a secluded 'space' that changes the way other experiences are evaluated (Foucault, *Heterotopien* 10-11, 19-20; Hasebrink/Riedl 3). Thus, the *relational* concept of heterotopia (cf. Soja 17-18) can be both applied, metaphorically, to otium itself *and* to concrete places. While the individual positioning and self-reflexion of a character, particularly relevant in novels with internal focalisation, is always situated in a specific *place*, this situatedness is transformed into a more abstract notion of *space* produced by intersecting cultural and social influences (see also 6. Society). Thus, Sandeep's perception of Calcutta during family visits is shown to actively shape the urban space in a dynamic comparable to techniques of bricolage. His modes of interacting with *places* are represented as just as real as its concrete materiality and its cultural prefiguration, all three dimensions influencing each other to form the novel's perspective on the urban *space*. The narrative representations of particular places become an engagement with space when binary distinctions such as those between the urban and the rural are questioned.

The relationship between experiences of otium and their spatial environments, both being based on, and impacting on, the perception of space can be linked to constructivist understandings of space in the wake of the spatial turn of the 1970s and 1980s, which criticised the predominance of temporal categories in social and cultural theory (cf. Soja 31-32; Lefebvre; Casey 14; Dengel-Janic 11-12; West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 1-9, 104). The relative unimportance of space could be seen to have its early roots in "the Enlightenment and Cartesian notion of space as an objective homogeneous extension (*res extensa*), distinct from the subject (*res cogitans*)" and in "the Kantian concept of space as an empty

container in which human activities unfold" (Wegner 181). Moreover, nineteenth-century historicism contributed to a perspective that thought of space "as fixed, dead, undialectic; [of] time as richness, life, dialectic" (Soja 11). Therefore, this focus on time was tied to the conception of linear, abstract time in Western modernity (see 2.1.1). Despite the "critical and potentially emancipatory value of the historical imagination" especially in Marxist thought, the focus on time on the basis of historical changeability was criticised by social scientists such as Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja (Soja 13-14). They criticised the two illusion of space, its "opaqueness, superficial materiality, reification" as well as its intuitive "transparency" (ibid. 7). Moreover, they emphasised how space "shapes empirical reality and is simultaneously shaped by it", both going beyond a Kantian category of perception, and reasserting the relevance of space to history and power relations (ibid. 12, 18-19, 25).[100] Consequently, space was conceptualised as produced by human action, perception and representation.

Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* criticises a static 'container model' of space that can be "filled by a content – i.e. matter, or bodies" (170-171; cf. Casey 15-16). Space is subject to historical change and contingent because it is continuously interfered with (Lefebvre 73, cf. 46-48). Lefebvre develops a tripartite model, which reflects the dialectics of this production of space. He divides space into three different moments, differentiating between: physical materiality (*perceived space*); the planning, scientific description or conceptualisations in the realm of discursivity (*conceived space*); and memory, cultural symbols or imaginations (*lived space*) (ibid. 40-41). The dialectics of space mean that, on the one hand, space can be produced "through a diverse range of social processes and human interventions", while, on the other hand, it can be "a *force* that, in turn, influences, directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of human being in the world" (Wegner 181). Consequently, space is always also related to character identity in the sense of physical sensory experience, the perception of a character's surroundings and the performances

[100] Despite being sometimes connected to postmodern thought, they also show in their criticism the problematic nature of postmodern notions of deterritorialisation and the fluidity of space in favour of global communication flows. Compare also the reassertion of locality in Roland Roberston's idea of 'glocalisation' (cf. Robertson; Stilz 5).

and practices with which s/he inhabits a particular space. Depending on the example, any of the three categories can be situated between the poles of materiality and discursivity in a constant negotiation between "spatial realities" and "discursive operations" (West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 2, cf. 3-4).

To tie this back to an analysis of experiences of otium: the spatial context, which might enable or prevent experiences of otium, and the mode of experience mutually influence one another. Moreover, an analysis of literature has to take into account how space is represented and "*brought forth*" in a particularly *literary* way as the "framing" that "permit[s] the narrative to *take place*" (West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 107; Moslund 7).[101] As Dengel-Janic observes: "[L]iterature produces space via its narrative modes of depiction as well as its reliance on discursive and semantic aspects of space" (14). Consequently, space can be interpreted first and foremost through its perception, which is mediated or "filtered" through narrative perspective (cf. West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 5; Dengel-Janic 15). The novels analysed here represent the reciprocal relationship between the subjectivity of protagonists, their environment and its narrative framing. When the texts dwell on lengthy descriptions, non-sequential temporal experience is mirrored stylistically.[102] Moreover, the aesthetic, non-instrumental use of language in literature can attempt to imitate the openness of a preconceptual, sensuous and bodily *being* in a place (cf. Casey 13-14; Mukherjee, *Environments*; Moslund 11, 33, 41).

In earlier chapters I have developed alternative *concepts* of cultural modernity and corresponding ways of experiencing time. These are tied to spatial ways of relating to the world and comment on the idea of a singular modernity that originated in the West. If an abstract, linear time of progress is "the very medium of modernity" it is also "that characteristic by which Europe […] has legitimized its

[101] An analysis of space in literature always needs to be seen in the context of the more obviously relevant dimension of time. Thus, Soja points to the "termporal prisonhouse of language" which "dictates a sequential succession, a linear flow" and West-Pavlov points out how Genette prioritised time in narrative categories (Soja 1-2; cf. West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 107; Genette 215; compare also: Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form*).

[102] As I have shown in the previous chapter, this stretching of *discourse time*, the focus on the moment in a scenic way, is comparable to Joseph Frank's notion of *spatial form* (cf. Frank; Genette 86-112; Moslund 76; compare 4.3.2).

overwhelming subordination of the entire globe for almost five hundred years" (West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 104). Thus, as Mitchell comments with reference to landscape, imperialism "conceives itself […] as an inevitable, progressive development in history, an expansion of 'culture' and 'civilization' into a 'natural' space in a progress that is itself narrated as 'natural'" (17). There is an underlying relationship between the narrative of linear progress and the "elision of the global project of imperialism and colonialism as a patently spatial undertaking" (106; cf. Moslund 4).

If, in the context of imperialism, the conquering of territory has been masked as "civilizing progress", space has literally been translated into time (West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 110-111; cf. Casey 189-191; Moslund 17-18). The "archaic agency" of material objects can be understood as a subversive quality "rarely ascribed to the natural world except when it escapes from human control" (5). Therefore, the subversive element conveyed in some of the practices in, and representations of, space mark them as postcolonial texts writing against the logic of a Western-centred modernity in which they figure as "place[s] without history" (13). There is an underlying postcolonial dimension to the analysis of space and experiences of otium, which lies both in reminders of the historical relevance of space against a "spatial amnesia" and the claim to a space through the (alternative) sensory being-in-the-world by its inhabitants (West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 110; cf. Moslund). These alternative modes of relating to the world appear in the texts sometimes in an elegiac mode as nostalgic utopias of a quality of experience located in the past, but linked to a wish for the possibility of a positive freedom to engage with concrete places (cf. Casey 37-39; West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 173-175).

In Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, this postcolonial relevance becomes most apparent as she endows nature with its own agency, turning natural elements into active protagonists of her novel. They effectively undermine the human objectification of nature and question political ideals that lead to violence and oppression. But they are also, in their contrast to human progress, always associated with decay. Nostalgia plays an even more pronounced role in Amit Chaudhuri's and Navtej Sarna's representations of urban spaces. The flâneuristic perspective on Calcutta in *A Strange and Sublime Address* shows an open,

associative engagement with the city space as opposed to the emphasis of urban planning in its functional use value. Being able to engage with the formerly colonial city on an individual level implies possibilities for its collective re-imagination. Sarna's novel in particular emphasises how such a vision is rendered increasingly elusive as the colonial past is realigned with the impact of globalised capitalism on urban planning.

The first spatial environment that is relevant to experiences of otium is nature perceived as wild and remote, the second, which is seemingly a contrast to the first, is the urban space. However, nature as it is seen from a human perspective is always a cultural construct and even more so when we go into nature in order to escape civilisational malaises (cf. Lovejoy/Boas 103-116; Casey 31-33; Behrendt 233, 235, 244-245). Simon Schama describes the "irreversibly modified word" of natural environments when he emphasises that "landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock" (7). Wild nature is something that only gradually became conceptualised as attractive and pleasurable and it became, ironically, less wild as soon as it was described and pictured by us (cf. Casey 189-191; Mitchell 15-16; Schama 7; Cronon 9, 12; West-Pavlov, *Spaces*, 129-130). Western cultural concepts such as the beautiful and the sublime form influential discourses on the modes of seeing and representing nature, neither of them innocent or detached from cultural and ideological assumptions (cf. Mitchell; Duffy; Giles). Hence, the novels actually refer to a prefigured notion of landscape as it is perceived by a character.

Moreover, the wish to tame, understand or capture nature is part of colonial discourses about the pre-cultural that enabled the "process of European colonial, cultural and economic expansion" (Duffy 11; cf. Mitchell 17). The "myth of the wilderness as 'virgin', uninhabited land" is reproduced by touristic perspectives and linked to stereotypes about the primitivism of indigenous cultures or about their essentialist exotic otherness (Cronon 15; cf. Lovejoy/Boas 287-367; Giles 227; Fludernik, "Sublime" 240-243; Huggan, *Exotic* 9-10, 26-27, 79).[103] Due to

[103] Compare also Urry and Larsen's analysis of the tourist gaze as "alienated leisure" based on an "inversion of the everyday" (11, 13). They see this mechanism of inversion as the basis for a particular mode of seeing which turns every object of this gaze, including local inhabitants, into an abstracted, fetishized sign of itself (ibid. cf. 16-17, 29).

the anthropocentrism of Western thought and the domination of other humans in the colonial endeavour, the language of knowledge and description can have an inherent potential for violence (cf. Huggan/Tiffin 19-20; Clark 13, 55-56).

The relevance of natural spaces to experiences of otium lies in the way in which spaces framed as wild and sublime are presented as spaces of otium or as having particular characteristics of solitude and aesthetic appreciation that are conducive to such experiences (cf. Casey 193). Thus, nature is constructed as a refuge, "an island in the polluted sea of urban-industrial modernity" and an "escape from our own too-muchness" (Cronon 7; cf. Schama 7). However, the experiences of otium framed by wild nature are a comment on particular characteristics of the civilisation characters want to escape from (cf. Schama 9; Cronon 15). Moreover, through the binary distinction nature/civilisation, discourses about wild nature are, ultimately, situated between the two poles of an *alienation from* and a potentially successful *relation to* the natural environment. In *The Romantics*, the narrator and protagonist Samar manages to escape from the aimless, drifting life he leads and his scepticism towards old and new role expectations through experiences of otium in the Himalayas. His personal development is accompanied by a negotiation between a distanced, subject centred perspective on his environment and, later in the novel, his intense, physical engagement with it. In Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, sublime nature also plays an important role, albeit in a very different mode of representation. Although both novels are set in the mountains, Desai's text endows natural elements with their own agency as a counterweight to human realities and concerns.

The second spatial environment in this chapter are urban spaces. Through the figure of the flâneur these have been associated with a kind of perception close to the experience of otium. Flânerie, as it was conceptualised in early modernist European literature, is tightly linked to the development of modern city life, capturing its distractions, movement and visual impressions (cf. Neumeyer 21; Nesci 72; Herbert 203).[104] The flâneur is predominantly found in public

[104] Flânerie was "arguably already a motif in the figures of the *viṭa* and *nāgaraka* of the Sanskrit dramatic genre called *caturbhāṇī* (fifth to sixth century CE)" and also plays a role "in

spaces, and he focuses on the everyday and the ordinary instead of the special and prominent features of urban life. Through "spatial movement", the flâneur aesthetic in a novel can suggest how planned structures of space "can be ignored, defiled, departed from, reinterpreted and used in alternative and subversive ways" (Boehmer and Davies 399; cf. Herbert). The verticality of planning and disciplining is opposed to the city's inhabitants' level perspective from the streets which evades the disciplinary gaze and transforms space through "everyday experience" – as is the case in Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* when citizens transform an empty field into an open air cinema (Herbert 202; *Address* 13).[105]

Movement is central to the flâneur as an interaction with social space. De Certeau's idea of walking as a central practice in and metaphorical concept for the city is instructive: he defines walking as having the same function in the urban system as speaking in the system of a language. In this "perambulatory rhetoric", choices of syntax and figures of speech are "*divergent* from a kind of 'literal' meaning defined by the urban system" (italics original, Buchanan 108; cf. de Certeau 93, 97–105). Through "gaps, lapses, and allusions […] that make some parts of the city disappear and exaggerate others, distorting it, fragmenting it, and diverting from its immobile order", literary tropes enacted in walking function as an "*appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian" (de Certeau 97, 102). Through "wayward loitering" and his slow, unplanned movement "[t]he flâneur […] retards and parodies the idea of 'progress'" (Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 58-59). Experiences and impressions of the urban space are being constantly remodelled and reassembled in textual form; a method which can, as Peter Philipp Riedl has shown, be seen as a form of *Bricolage* (Riedl 107). The openness of the city as text then corresponds with openness and potentiality, characteristics of experiences of otium. Moreover, the technique

contemporary Bangla literature, and in representations of life in Lahore" (Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 18; cf. Harder, "Urbanity" 438, 458-461).

[105] De Certeau contrasts the "writer's" perspective from the street with that of 'reading' it from above (92–96, 106).

suggests that the experience can be transferred to the reader as the walk through the city is translated into the literary text.[106]

Both Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* and Navtej Sarna's *We Weren't Lovers Like That* are about the way in which the urban space is made up of the memories, the actions and the imaginations of its inhabitants. *A Strange and Sublime Address* represents a heterotopic perspective on Calcutta through the eyes of the child Sandeep visiting relatives in the city. The novel is not only full of leisurely experiences of the city space but is based on a flâneuristic narrative that emphasises aimlessness and undermines expectations of a linear plot structure. Both novels have the tendency to question functional structures of (late) modernity as well as binary categories of the urban and the rural space in their respective representations of Calcutta and Delhi. However, they also describe the possibility of a free engagement with places in the city in a profoundly nostalgic and elegiac mode. The following analyses will focus on how experiences of otium are central to an engagement of the novels' protagonists with their environment. Moreover, I am going to show how otium is employed to comment on discourses about these spaces.

5.2. The Himalayas between Tourist Spectacle and Inspiration to Otium

In Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, the mountainous landscape of different parts of the Himalayas plays an important role for the development of the characters and the narrative. What is more, the way in which characters perceive their natural surroundings is closely connected to the possibility of experiencing otium or some form of non-human, non-linear temporality. Despite the two novels commenting on a similar spatial environment, I am going to argue that Mishra's novel, true to its title *The Romantics*, is caught in a traditionally European, extremely subjective and anthropocentric way of representing nature. *The Inheritance of Loss* breaks up this unidirectional,

[106] "Das Buch der Stadt entsteht immer wieder neu im Akt des augenblicklichen Lesens, das im Zustand des freien Verweilens und in einer Haltung der Gelassenheit erfolgt, d.h. mit einer ästhetischen Offenheit für das, was einem ohne aktives Zutun begegnet." Riedl, "Die Muße des Flaneurs", 107-108, cf. 109.

human-centred concept of nature to include natural elements as active protagonists of the novel that undermine human preoccupations and hint at the possibility of a natural temporality apart from and beyond human concerns.

5.2.1. The Sublimity of the Himalayas in Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics*

In Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics*, the perception of nature by the narrator Samar and other protagonists is linked to various characters' search for some kind of redemption or clue to happiness. Nature appears as four different aspects in the novel: as a fascinating, beautiful or sublime object and the romantic backdrop to Samar's short love affair with Catherine, as the landscape of religious myth and legend, and, finally, as the space of withdrawal in which Samar finds peace. All of these aspects are linked to potential practices of otium, although mostly the characters are too much engrossed in restless searching to be able to actually experience otium. Only the narrator's reclusive, almost spiritual time spent in nature is presented as the opportunity to find a more restful existence.

During his first visit to the hills together with Catherine on their trip to Mussoorie, they perceive the Himalayas as a beautiful landscape, as many visitors before them have. This typical view is already hinted at when Miss West, who arranged their trip and then cannot accompany them, calls it "in her old-fashioned way" a trip "'to the hills'" and excitedly expects that "'[t]here'll be snow on the ground'" (103). She adds that "'the views of the Doon valley from the house are absolutely gorgeous'", with which she evokes the framed image of (European) landscape painting (ibid.; cf. Collot 151-155). The novel here emphasises the idea of a natural space as a cultural construct formed by certain aesthetic "canons of perceptions" (Clark 80).[107] Thus, Miss West's words refer to a depiction of

[107] The *picturesque*, often used colloquially to refer to the painting-like pretty composition of a landscape is, as a third category in addition to the sublime and beautiful, historically notoriously difficult to grasp. It has been used in conversation since the late eighteenth century and at the same time there have been different aesthetic theories and practices related to it (cf. Copley and Garside 1; s. also Punter). While it is often important in gardening, parks, literary descriptions and tourism – also in the postcolonial context –, the wild and natural are also indispensable elements in it (Copley and Garside 2-3, 7). Mitchell analyses how the very foundations of a particular *landscape view* in a genre of painting implies an automatic distancing, wild elements of nature being harnessed by the framed (both literally in painting and with reference to narrative framing) yet seemingly 'natural' representation (15-16).

landscape and a certain way of perceiving a surrounding space as a totality, a description not predominantly determined by objective factors or referents in the real world like the shape and assembly of hills and valleys, rivers, buildings etc., but by her subjective view (cf. Collot 154). A central aspect of landscape description is that the view of the landscape is often seen as natural, obscuring the "eye" or the perspective of the "viewer" and the cultural imprint of, for instance, taste (Copley and Garside 8).

The sublime view of the hills is based on their conceptualisations in colonial times and especially by the history of the hill stations during the Raj, one of them having been Mussoorie. The hill stations contribute to how the hills are imagined in India today as well as, very concretely, to their popularity as travel destinations. In the hill imagination, the hills are set apart from the plains, "to isolate their seasonal residents from India's harsher features, to offer them a comforting haven for rest and recreation" (Kennedy 2-3). For the English, they provided an escape from their dealings with Indians and a place to recreate a nostalgic mirror image of European architecture. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the hill stations reached their peak in prestige and popularity, and they also became attractive to the Indian elites. From the turn of the century, they gradually lost their importance to the British and developed into popular holiday resorts for the Indian middle classes. They, too, came to seek recovery from life in the plains as well as the wonders of nature (212-213; 221).

The expectations Miss West first raises are fulfilled during Samar's and Catherine's trip. From the bus, Samar "watched the orange glow of dawn fringe the towering snow-capped green hills of Mussoorie" and the view from their house is as Miss West promised:

> [The house] provided a *panoramic* view of Dehradun quietly smoldering in the wide and deep Shivalik valley–the valley itself was *brilliantly visible*, with enough dry riverbeds and green clumps of forest and hollow depressions to resemble a *gigantic topographic map.* […] On the far left of the valley I could see the Ganges, hurtling past Hardwar on its furious descent from the Himalayas, but *reduced, from such distance*, to a curled silver ribbon on a map. (*Romantics* 106-108, emphasis added)

Although this description is distanced, comparing the landscape twice to a map, the map is still "gigantic", and the Ganges compared poetically to "a curled silver

ribbon". As such, the perspective of Samar is not consistent in this, referring with the descriptions of their environments as much to a mood between him and Catherine as to an actual place. The homodiegetic narrative perspective emphasises the subjectivity of the landscape impression. Samar's first-person impression is filtered, linked to his moods and feelings and intermingled with poetic images (cf. Collot 155-157). The focus on one character's limited view blocks out the social or political aspects of how a landscape is constructed and tries to evoke an immersive effect (ibid. 157).

The panoramic landscape and the impression of sublime nature form, in a way, the fitting stage setting for his short, emotional and ill-fated love affair with Catherine. Consequently, the less awkward and the more intimate their conversations become, the more elaborate the description of their surroundings:

> The light had turned an aquamarine blue […] Snow lay thick on the paths in this densely forested part of the hill, where tall pines and oaks brood over the sad human waste of empire, the graves of very young women and children. Behind the trees glimmered the villages of the valley behind Mussoorie, the low tin-roofed wanly lit huts, which on moonless nights were like sallow gems scattered all across the dark folds of the hills. A sombre silence hung in the air, the silence of aging trees and the dead, and the snow in the dark seemed to glow with a soft inner light. (*Romantics* 114-115)

This passage about their visit to the old British cemetery mirrors Samar's own melancholic mood. The sublime, which is linked to "darkness, obscurity, power", has its source in "terror and fear" as opposed to "light [and] proportionality" of the beautiful or the enlightened "glow of complacent illumination" (Schama 450, cf. 447-477; Fludernik, "Sublime" 238). The choice of setting – which emphasises obscurity and awe – follows "the conventions of the romantic sublime in finding the mountaintop more glorious than the plains, the ancient forest nobler than the grasslands" (Cronon 22).[108]

From Samar's first-person perspective, his own mood, the melancholic atmosphere of the cemetery and the environment they find themselves in become one. The description is enriched by evocative adjectives (*aquamarine* blue, *wanly* lit, *sallow* gems, *somber* silence) and personifications (pines and oaks *brood*,

[108] For definitions of the sublime and sublime landscapes compare Nicolson *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*; Ferguson *Solitude and the Sublime*; Ashfield/de Bolla *The Sublime*.

villages *glimmer*) and heightened by a nostalgic association with childhood memories (cf. 115). Through the choice of language, Samar's view could just as well be in Europe as in India, his experience of the natural environment is both represented as "uniquely [his] own" and "familiar enough to be instantly recognizable to others" (Cronon 8). The next day's visit to Kalpi starts with new descriptions mirroring Samar and Catherine's adventurous disposition, with exuberant tones comparable to travelogues and tourist brochures:

> wide unobstructed vistas opened up all around us: lushly forested foothills wreathed in early-morning blue mists; sharp-edged stripes of sunlight angled against the soft mulchy ground of pine groves; thin columns of smoke rising from the tiny houses with thatch or tin roofs scattered all across the hillsides and deep in the valley – the sallow gems of last night, now dwarfed by the huge immensities of space daylight had revealed, the vast landscape over which the snow-covered mountains to the north, resting on plinths of deep blue air, serenely presided, giant white mountains that often appeared in altered perspective […] but were always solidly, immutably present. (121)

The detailed description almost lists characteristics of the sublime in their view, from "wide […] vistas" and villages "dwarfed by the huge immensities of space daylight", to the "vast landscape" "presided" over "serenely" by "giant white mountains", a description highlighting the sheer inconceivable enormity of what they see and its powerful impression on them. This corresponds with understandings of the sublime as "an aesthetic experience in which the subject encounters an object that appears too vast to be comprehended by the sensory imagination or too powerful to be mastered by human efforts" without being imminently dangerous. The sublime is the aesthetic mode associated with "huge overhanging mountain cliffs, abysses, the vastness of the oceans […] the terrors of impenetrable darkness" and similar natural environments (Giles 225; Fludernik, "Sublime" 239). Samar and Catherine's marvelling seems repetitive, as if they are quoting other, similar visits. The descriptions evoke colonial-era images of the Himalayan mountains and betray Samar and Catherine's tourist's gaze, which is indebted to the same tradition (cf. Pratt; Kennedy 74-75, 213; Kabir, *Territory* 56, 60-65, 71-73; Urry/Larsen 11-17, 29). Thus, the natural environment is at the same time seen as a space enabling a certain experience *and* described in its configuration as landscape in formulations that seem to be quotes from countless similar nature descriptions (cf. Auerbach 44-77). Despite

the narrator's claim that this was a "beauty that could move even those with no aesthetic feeling", the paragraph is more a reference to previous imaginings of this environment, the two visitors sitting passively in the bus looking at an idealised expectation of the view of the "hills" as much as at the mountains themselves (124).

However, the sublime aspect of the hills is given another quality when it is represented as a religious space: the landscape of Hindu myths and legends. In these references, Samar's own nostalgia, which is due to his inability to feel connected to the traditional religious significance of the hills, is mingled with the ancientness of this perspective on the mountains (compare 3.3 and 6.3.1). Samar reflects on the happiness he feels in this environment in the context of memories linked to it: "so much of this landscape was marked for me; the peaks and valleys and rivers held so many associations" (124). In accordance with his nostalgic perspective on his father's religious practices, which he both admires and resents, he casts his mountainous environment in the frame of mythological imagination: "It was the first landscape I had known in my imagination, in the stories from the *Mahabharata* where it was the setting of exile and renunciation" (ibid.). The subjectivity of the perspective is further heightened as the hills become, literally, a landscape of the imagination (cf. Collot 155-157).[109] At the same time, the imagined landscape is linked to nostalgia for a familial past which he cannot share, and for personal childhood memories:

> It was always oddly exalting to think that these secluded mountains and valleys were where in unknown times my own ancestors had wandered after long, fulfilled lives on the plains. They were linked to […] memories of Sunday mornings, […], my father meditating […] before a miniature temple, whose ascending spires, I knew even then, approximated the soaring peaks of the Himalayas. (*Romantics* 124)

With this religious sublimity, spirituality is added to the heightened image of the mountain environment and the narrator's perspective becomes, through the dynamics of memory and nostalgia, more personally complicated than his previous touristic view of the hills. The real presence of the hills, "approximated"

[109] The awe felt before great religious texts or myths and their association with the Himalayas presents another stereotypical form of the colonial sublime (cf. Fludernik, "Sublime" 243; Kabir, *Territory* 90-92).

in the “miniature temple”, and experienced by Samar’s father, could be seen as the opposite of Romantic convention and part of a spiritual sublime in Hindu religion. As Vijay Mishra writes about his take on an “Indian sublime” in devotional writing, the “symbol becomes the thing represented”, the inconceivable Brahma becoming graspable in “a plethora of Gods and Goddesses” (11-16). The “spires” of the “miniature temple” before Samar are not huge nor constructed in his imagination as vast and impressive, but are only tiny imitations of the mountains. Through their spiritual significance, however, they ask the person praying to take a leap of faith and be impressed by the miniature temple representing not only the thing, but *being* the thing itself. This experience of immanence is, despite the short reference to a childhood memory, closer to a spiritual experience of otium than Samar’s prefigured experience of the hills as landscape.

Samar nostalgically remembers representations and the vague symbolic relevance of the hills, which form his idealized perspective of the Himalayas. As I have shown previously (3.3), Samar cannot connect to the religious roots and practices of his father. This disconnectedness is part of his wandering, aimless life, whereas the mythological landscape of the hills functions like a spatial promise of serenity or calmness and peace, reminding him of his spiritual ancestry. He imagines his ancestors going to the hills “after long, fulfilled lives on the plains” and is fascinated by their purposeful existence exactly because of his own lack of contentment (124). In *The Romantics*, fittingly, Romantic aestheticisation of the natural as “a condition of balance, harmony, stability and health” are mingled with the protagonist’s personal memories as well as the cultural-religious inscriptions into the natural environment (Clark 14).

The passage continues with more landscape descriptions on their ride to Kalpi, of a mountain river’s “thick white jets of water pummelling the huge white rocks squatting in its way” and the pastoral impression of “hills [that] were all sheer rock, with young shepherds perched on the serrated slopes, sheep grazing on grassy narrow cornices” (125). The promise of spirituality hinted at earlier is repeated upon their arrival when they encounter a young sadhu priest in Kalpi: the “unexpectedly handsome man” with his “well-muscled torso”, “sharp-featured face” and his language which sounds beautiful to Samar because of his link with

ancient myths ("Hindi with a strong Sanskritic emphasis") is part of the impressive allure of the mountain landscape (128). The sadhu priest, however, can be read as an example of the colonial sublime, an instance of latent Orientalism which links the fascination for a sublime natural environment to the primitive native other (cf. Said 205-208, 222; Cronon 13; Giles 225; Fludernik, "Sublime" 240).[110] With his beauty and ascetic life, the sadhu represents the sublime other in accordance with the rough, mountainous landscape, but in contrast to Samar and Catherine's vague, searching lifestyles. The narrator is impressed by the encounter with the man who had completely renounced his former life. To him, the sadhu's story is a typical example of "the Himalayas as a refuge from the futility of life elsewhere", a quote that emphasises the construction of the hills as a discursive counter-space (130-131; cf. Schama 7; Cronon 7).

This first stay in the hills is described mostly in terms of space as a cultural imagination, because Samar is referring to various pre-determined views of the Himalayas that influence his own perception. The cultural images that are used correspond with the discourse of restlessness and the search for peace and calm that runs through the novel; in this case the tourist tropes standing for restlessness and expectations of an impressive landscape; the spiritual references pointing to deeper nostalgic associations. The Himalayas metonymically represent religiousness and its promise of serenity to which Samar can no longer connect. It is as if Samar and Catherine perform on their journey to the hills a culturally predetermined course of action and mode of referring to

[110] It has often been pointed out how in the postcolonial context, the colonial reverberations of exotic sublime nature, entangled with the wish for domination and problematic stereotypes of primitivism (cf. Lovejoy/Boas 287-367), lives on in the representations of landscapes of English-language novels that are complicit in nostalgically perpetuating orientalist clichés (cf. Huggan, *Exotic* 9-10, 26-27, 79; Fludernik, "Sublime" 242-243; Mukherjee, *Environments*). During colonial times, the hill people already inhabiting the locations of British hill stations have been described by their British seasonal residents in accordance with the idyllic location with the terminology of the noble savage (Kennedy 64-65, 87; Fludernik, "Der 'Edle Wilde'" 157-176) Thus, to set them off from Indian societies of the plains, hill communities in completely different parts of the Himalayas were described with surprisingly similar traits. This identification of people of hill communities with their physical and mental energy, moral innocence and a "rare bond with nature" are a case of Edward Said's latent orientalism, often combining folkloristic interest with the description of a noble attractiveness reminiscent of the beauty of antique statues (Kennedy 64-69; 87; 227; Said, *Orientalism*).

the environment of the hills. If, however, they search a sense of otium as refuge in sublime nature, this expectation is disappointed, because they *intentionally seek* to reproduce cultural models from an entirely subject-focused perspective on nature. Thus, their expectations contradict themselves. As Gianna Behrendt remarks in reference to the role of nature in Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance, even as nature is culturally constructed as a spiritual, quasi-religious reference point, the focus on the experiencing subject makes the pursued experience of resonance impossible, because resonance is understood as a two-sided relation that is inherently inaccessible (cf. Rosa, *Resonance* 38-39, 167-169, 174; Behrendt 234-245, FN 2). To Samar and Catherine, nature remains 'mute'. This fits with the nostalgic perspective of Samar as a homodiegetic narrator, who presents his narrative to the reader as a *bildungsroman*. From this 'biographical' perspective, places are central to the functioning of memory in order to *locate* a past situation and differentiate it from the present narrative situation, thus adding to the sense of maturity, serenity and authentic identity that Samar as the narrative voice in the present wants to convey (cf. Sennefelder 139-146). At the same time, these places are nostalgic recollections filtered through the lens of the emotional phase he is going through at the time.

Samar eventually reaches a way of interacting with the mountains with a focus on the present moment when he returns to the hills to go on lonely hikes. Again, he describes the sublime landscape as he is "trekking through vast landscapes of bleached snow-splattered rock, milky blue lakes, and clear shallow streams" (226). However, his perception is changed and the hills can be interpreted at this point in the narrative as a space of *otium* for the same reasons already foreshadowed in Samar's first visit to the hills, making it both a concrete place surrounding his very physical practice and a mythological, spiritual space (compare 3.3.1).

During his day-long hikes, Samar engages with his environment in a very material way, exposing himself to the threatening elements.[111] His sensory

[111] This arduous experience could also be linked to the topos of mountaineering as an adventure that was already a part of Petrarch's description of climbing Mont Ventoux (Feitscher 156). In his tradition, the difficult project of climbing a mountain is, exactly because of exposure to the

perceptions shape the way nature is represented (cf. 226). By comparison, his previous stay in the hills was defined by a distanced observer's perspective on the landscape. In direct comparison, the repetitive descriptions of nature during his first stay are questioned by this second passage. His solitude and the repetitive physicality of his exhausting, day-long walks change the way Samar perceives the space of the Himalayas. Yet his perception of the Himalayas is still also mingled with the landscape view of cultural imagination. Samar finds solace on his second visit in the illusion of being alone, "the healing wilderness", as Simon Schama writes, being "as much the product of culture's craving and culture's framing as any other imagined garden" (7; cf. Casey 229; Cronon 22). Nevertheless, the landscape was transformed for Samar into an environment with which he engages, in which he wants to roam around and feel his surroundings as much as seeing them (cf. Collot 155). Drawing on Rosa's concept of resonance, Samar's second experience of the mountains can be described as a successful, engaging mode of relating to his environment as opposed to alienated relations (cf. *Resonance* 160-191; Behrendt 243). While this particular experience of otium is only possible in the hills, the space acting as a condition for it, Samar's engagement, and his mode of experiencing, changes his perception of his spatial surroundings.

Moreover, in this phase of his personal development, he is also interested in engaging with knowledge about nature rather than just with its appearance. After going to Dharamshala, he mentions his changed taste of reading, "books on wildlife and the environment; I learned to identify all the trees and birds and flowers in the area" (*Romantics* 224). Interest in the natural has replaced his fascination for great European philosophers or novelists during his time in Benares; a fascination that had previously mirrored his random search for identity. Yet he is aware that if he can find restful peace of mind in nature, that is also part of a culturally predetermined "fantasy". He remembers seeing a boy herding cows in a small village and refers to this memory as an "image with its perfect configuration of solitude, contentment and beauty" being about "a

elements and the threatening parts of nature, represented as the precondition for autobiographic reflection (ibid. 167).

simplified life and world" (218). He reflects that "we live by fantasies" and that "when that chance came […] the fantasy […] filled what appeared to me as the large and ominous void in the future" (ibid.). The fantasy is manifest not only in his practice of roaming the hills, but also in the simplicity of his flat in Dharamshala, which stands "in the middle of a grassy clearing on which the pine trees spread slender interlaced shadows" and was "shyly hiding itself behind baskets streaming with bougainvillea" (221).

In *The Romantics*, the natural environment the narrator seeks is used to represent and reflect his internal development. The novel remains true to its title by emphasising the role of nature as a "reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires" as well as in the protagonist's different ways of trying to relate his subjectivity to his environment (Cronon 7). The sublime landscape of the Himalayas symbolically reflects his nostalgic but impossible yearning for his ancestors' spiritual certainty which is presented as more rooted in an Indian cultural context than Samar's perspective. Nonetheless, the hills are presented like a promise of a calmer, more content life. During the trip with Catherine, their natural environment is described in the stereotypical terms of sublime landscape description, contrasting with Samar's later physical experience of the mountainous landscape. It is as if on his first visit he only saw the picturesque landscape, while on his later visits he stepped through the frame to engage with this environment. His return to various parts of the hills is described as the discovery of a space of otium linked with physical exertion and solitude in the sublime natural environment of the mountains. Yet, even though his natural environment ultimately enables Samar's experience of otium, his experience is still connected to a deeply romantic, subject centred perspective on nature.

5.2.2. Non-human Agency as a Form of Alternative Temporality in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

In Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, being set in Kalimpong in Darjeeling, nature is emphasised in three ways: first, nature is shown as an object for the tourist perspective, criticising the negative effect of tourism on the environment. Secondly, the mountainous environment is part of the home of the inhabitants of

Kalimpong, in contrast with Biju's urban experience in New York. In these descriptions, nature appears as a personified, living entity that is more powerful and enduring than any human endeavour. Nature itself becomes active, sometimes as if in a winning battle against the regimes of human civilisation, and human characters have to position themselves in relation to it. Furthermore, because the narrative perspective is heterodiegetic, structural oppositions and rules of the narrative world are part of a discursive mapping of space and only through internal focalisation do readers get to internal, subjective character perspectives.

The tourist perspective first appears in a reference to the original proprietor of the house. It "had been built long ago by a Scotsman, passionate reader of the accounts of that period: *The Indian Alps and How We Crossed Them* by a Lady Pioneer. *Land of the Lama*. *The Phantom Rickshaw*. *My Mercara Home*. *Black Panther of Singrauli*" (*Inheritance* 12). The references point to the origins of the tourist perspective, with the title "*The Indian Alps and How We Crossed Them*" underlining the Eurocentric perspective turning the Himalayas into just another European mountain chain, Kipling's "The Phantom Rickshaw" emphasising the colonial context.[112] From being a reaction by European travellers to foreign and magnificent landscapes, the notion of the mountains as sublime nature was soon to be applied to the incomprehensibility of India as a whole. This is especially evident in travelogues and influences the tourist's perspective even today (cf. Pratt 3-4; Fludernik, "Sublime" 240; Auerbach 44-77). In exaggerated tones creating an ironic distance, the narrator goes on to describe the adventurous spirit of said Scotsman. "His true spirit had called to him, then, informed him that it, too, was wild and brave, and refused to be denied the right to adventure", an adventure ridiculed by details of how others had done the work and paid "the price for such romance" (*Inheritance* 12). This is in accordance with later tourism that indulges in a kind of domesticated adventure in the mountains, often urban elites seeing the wilderness as a "place of recreation" (Cronon 15).[113]

[112] With examples like Rudyard Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* there is a whole literary tradition referring to or commenting on the hill imaginary.

[113] Both the (retired) privileged inhabitants of Kalimpong as well as the tourists see this space in opposition to work, emphasising further how the life of local inhabitants is structured by work.

Moreover, the passage shows the class distinction making the beauties of the landscape less accessible to the poor workers, whose "faces being bent slowly to look always at the ground", carrying building material "up to this site chosen for a view that could raise the human heart to spiritual heights" (*Inheritance* 12). The spatial semantics here are clearly divided into the "heights" associated with sublimity, heaven and spirituality, which belong to the colonial employer, and "the ground" below as the domain of the workers. As Cronon observes, the construction of nature as wilderness shuts out and "devalues productive labour", being based on a problematic ideology centred on an unworked landscape without history (21, cf. 16; Mitchell 15). Tourism in the wilderness is "a form of recreation best enjoyed by those whose class privileges give them the time and resources to leave their jobs behind and 'get away from it all'" (Cronon 21; cf. Urry/Larsen 29, 61-63). Thus, "it mattered who you were […] and it mattered why you were there looking at [the landscape] in the first place" (Duffy 8). During Sai and Gyan's touristic outings – "[b]ecause new love makes sightseers out of couples even in their own town" – the tourists' perspective of the local couple is also indirectly criticised (140). When they take "the toy train and went to the Darjeeling zoo" the narrator juxtaposes "their free, self-righteous, modern love" with the "unfree and ancient bars, behind which lived a red panda, ridiculously solemn for being such a madly beautiful thing" (141).[114] The roots of environmental damage caused by tourism again go back to the British or upper-class Indians' old fascination with the Himalayas. A police inspector jocularly provokes the judge, who is associated with that generation and social class: "Justice Sahib, you shikaris were too good, lions and leopards…Now, if you go

What Urry and Larsen describe in the context of European tourism could be applied to these passages: "Almost any sort of work, even the backbreaking toil of the Welsh miner or the unenviable work of those employed in the Parisian sewer, can be the object of the tourist gaze", so that the return to the workplace of others is part of the "alienated leisure" of the tourist (Urry/Larsen 4, 10-11). Compare also Munz "Village Idyll?".

[114] Compare Sohaila Abdulali's *The Madwoman of Jogare* for a similar juxtaposition of the touristic perspective on rural spaces and the exploitation of nature as well as indigenous inhabitants: "The land is saved now, memsahib, so that the remaining leopards and giant squirrels are safe for you to see them. Your bungalow is where Ganpat and the other men played cards in the shade, and Ganpat is in Bombay begging outside the Taj Mahal hotel […] it is a National Park with Luxury Bungalows, and you must enjoy it, memsahib, but be careful, don't touch these walls, because there is salt red sweat blood in the paint" (148; cf. Munz, "Village Idyll").

into the forest and if you see a chicken that has escaped from somewhere, you are lucky, no?" (225).

When Sai and Gyan visit a monastery, they have a similar perspective to Catherine and Samar, their sublime view only expressible by an abstract comparison: the couple can "see so far and high, the world resembled a map from a divine perspective" (ibid.). In a museum dedicated to the first Everest expeditions, the mountains are part of more complicated reflections on Sai's part: "Should humans conquer the mountain or should they wish for the mountain to possess them? Sherpas went up and down […] without claim of ownership, and there were those who said it was sacred and shouldn't be sullied at all" (155). Her reflections refer to the problematically fetishized appropriation of landscapes, contrasting this possessive aspect of touristic voyeurism with a spiritual understanding which insists that nature should be left alone. These two perspectives on nature correspond with two extremes, that of a religious heightening of nature on the one hand and the wish for its availability and a successful engagement with it on the other.[115]

The touristic view is always in tension with the consumption of, or violence inflicted upon nature, which is ignored in its ecstatic celebration. On Sai and her friends' trip to the library, Noni and Lola critically comment on the landslides caused by a new law allowing an additional storey to be built on houses: "Darjeeling has really gone downhill" (197). Shortly thereafter the continuing allure of Darjeeling's sublime landscape is shown as the reason for the touristic building projects which are a major cause of the landslides mentioned earlier:

> just as Lola was going to make another remark about Darjeeling's demise, suddenly the clouds broke and Kanchenjunga came looming – it was astonishing; it was right there; close enough to lick: 28,168 feet high. In the distance, you could see Mt. Everest, a coy triangle. A tourist began generously to scream as if she had caught sight of a pop star. (ibid.)

Here the sublime effect is ironically broken through the choice of words of a mountain being "close enough to lick", Mt. Everest being "coy"; and of course the

[115] Behrendt writes in the context of resonance of contemporary alienated relations to nature being "primär […] Ergebnis des Zwiespalts zwischen kontemplativer Sehnsucht und instrumenteller Verfügbarmachung" (239, cf. 237).

behaviour of the tourist parallels the marketing in the pop industry with the marketing of Darjeeling's sublime mountainous environment. Despite its detrimental effects on the environment, the people of the area are often dependant on the income from tourism, having to accept hard bargaining and dismissive comments. The manager of the Gymkhana club shows the group a postcard, on which is written: "We're having a great time, but we'll be glad to get home, where, let's be honest […] there is widespread availability of deodorant…". And still he fears that "these are the last of the tourists. We're lucky to have them. This political trouble will drive them away" (201). A police inspector expresses concern about the economy and sums up the Darjeeling district with the "'three *Ts'* […] *'Tea! 'Timber! 'Tourism!*'" (225).

All of these passages point to the absurd dynamics of a consumerist attitude towards nature destroying its beauty by wanting to gaze at, possess or sell it. Thus, they are ecocritical, showing mechanisms of the consumption of nature that could have a self-referential dimension through a choice of writing style that prevents or disturbs a purely aesthetic representation of nature to be consumed by the reader (Clark 23, 39-40). The text itself often undermines a modern ecological viewpoint that is itself influenced by the aesthetic Romantic tradition of organicism, the unity of mind and nature or harmony instead of alienation (cf. Clark 14). Its oscillations between internal focalisation and ironic distance indirectly comment on the exoticism of nature in postcolonial writing, avoiding a seemingly unproblematic representation of nature as lush and exuberant, the "sales factor of exotic otherness" (Fludernik, "Sublime" 243; cf. Huggan, *Exotic* 32-33, 72, 77). In that, the distanced heterodiegetic narrator of *The Inheritance of Loss* is much more critical of the tourist perspective than *The Romantics*, where the focus is more on a discourse of the 'right' life and where the homodiegetic narrator is too engrossed in his own difficulties and subjectivity. Through shifting focalisation, the narrative voice of Kiran Desai's novel can dialogically contrast different discourses on landscape, nature and the environment.

At the same time, the beauty of Kalimpong's surroundings is perceived and described by the people living there. It is presented as part of their sense of being at home. Nature is represented in its changing aspects, being integral to the

space of Kalimpong. It is also introduced as a central aspect and even protagonist of the novel. In that regard, the focus is also not exclusively on landscape anymore, but on individual plants, animals, sounds or shapes of nature. The continuing tension between the natural space and human relations to it is expressed in the representation of nature as all-invading and superior to human civilisation. Already the opening lines introduce the natural environment along with the main characters of the house on the hill:

> All day, the colors had been those of dusk, mist moving like a water creature across the great flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light, a plume of snow blown high by the storms at its summit. […] The trees turned into silhouettes, loomed forth, were submerged again. Gradually the vapor replaced everything with itself, solid objects with shadow, and nothing remained that did not seem molded from or inspired by it. (1-2)

Different elements of nature are being personified, the mist is compared to "a water creature" actively taking over the material space of the hill area. The judge's house itself is depicted as a living organism:

> He had felt he was entering a sensibility rather than a house. […]; the ceiling resembled the rib cage of a whale […]. A fireplace made of silvery river stone sparkled like sand. Lush ferns butted into the windows, stiff seams of foliage felted with spores, curly nubs pelted with bronze fuzz. He knew he could become aware here of depth, width, height, and of a more elusive dimension. Outside, passionately colored birds swooped and whistled, and the Himalayas rose layer upon layer until those gleaming peaks proved a man to be so small that it made sense to give it all up, empty it all out. (28-29)

Through similes taken from the semantic field of nature, the house is represented as part of its natural surroundings, made up of whale bones and sand. Again, "the thing world (as underived from man)" is active, "a sensibility", the ferns "butted into the windows", the Himalayas proving the inconsequential nature of human endeavours (Moslund 6). Contrary to a Romantic notion of nature, in which the subject remains separate from the nature s/he contemplates, this asymmetry towards the human side dissolves here.[116] This representation of nature is highly

[116] Compare Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory, which assumes actions to be formed of an entangled network of actors both human and non-human and connects our often presumed reduction of viable actors to humans with the subject/object division of modernity (cf. Latour 44-52, 71, 75-76; see also Barad). Instead of assuming an *a priori* dichotomy between culture and nature or humans and objects, he emphasises the intransparency of these networks (Latour 44-46, 50-52). He demands that anything that can "modify a state of affairs by making a difference"

informative for the connection between an individual's practices of otium and the relationship to their environment: experiences of otium are not intentionally accessible, because more than a single individual is involved.

The representation of nature in the novels is still linked to descriptions of sublime landscapes, since the effect of the observer's insignificance in the face of nature's greatness should evoke the feeling of fear without actual imminent threat. This use of the sublime in exotic, magic realist descriptions in the novels by Indian authors writing in English has often been criticised for their catering to an international audience and perpetuating orientalist stereotypes (cf. Huggan, *Exotic* 9-10, 26-27, 79; Fludernik, "Sublime" 242-243). However, the self-same stereotypes can be appropriated subversively, changing the appearance or context of the sublime in order to "shock us into new understandings of the radically 'other'" while being fully aware of its prehistory in European "cultural imagination" (Fludernik, "Sublime" 244; Duffy 10; Giles 229). The representation of sublime nature in Desai's novel can be understood to comment on the sublime as a "composite of landscape and cultural value" available to the "white Western male in what he perceives to be an encounter with 'raw' nature, though 'nature' has frequently been conflated with the 'other'" (Giles 227). By giving the natural elements agency, they respond and react in Desai's novel to such inscriptions. Both nature's threatening elements and the interruption of the sublime through ironic statements repeatedly question the classic concept of the Romantic sublime as well as the disinterestedness and autonomy of the human subject experiencing it (cf. Duffy 11). Moreover, at least psychologically, the threat to human identity is real, having the effect to make him (in this case the judge) feel like giving up in front of the greatness of nature.

When being sent to live with her grandfather, Sai's first impression of the area is also put in terms of the sublime, when she "became aware of the enormous space she was entering" (31). For Sai, the river immediately becomes her ally as

---

to an action counts as an actor (71). Gianna Behrendt's criticism of resonance goes in a similar direction, suggesting that the wish for an almost religious or transcendental experience of a 'resonating' nature makes exactly this experience impossible, because it further solidifies the border between an unchangeable, ancient nature on the one hand and a man-made culture on the other (44-45).

the nun's parting words, standing for the convent school Sai hated, were "drowned out by the river roar" (ibid.). Her closeness to nature is, however, not unambiguous. On the dangerous road to the house "Death whispered into Sai's ear, life leaped in her pulse" (ibid.). She realises the powerful presence of nature and the sense of a battle with civilisation during her first night in the house:

> She could sense the swollen presence of the forest, hear the hollow-knuckled knocking of the bamboo, the sound of the jhora that ran deep into the décolleté of the mountain. Batted down by household sounds during the day, it rose at dusk, to sing pure-voiced into the windows. The structure of the house seemed fragile in the balance of this night – just a husk. The tin roof rattled in the wind. […] She had a fearful feeling of having entered a space so big it reached both backward and forward. (34)

There is a temporal, historical dimension of space here, referring to nature's presence in time: "[R]ather than history 'taking place' in space as a mere subordinate background, space becomes the primary and overarching medium of history. Space includes past and present", becoming "the matrix which subsumes history to itself", and therefore questions the colonial assumption that territorial space can be subsumed under the temporal logic of expansion in the name of progress (West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 108). This natural time is shown in its "chronological precedence" as superior to the human-made objects subject to decay, be it the house itself assailed by wind and weather, or the furniture disintegrating to "the sound of microscopic jaws slow-milling the house to saw-dust" (West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 195; *Inheritance* 34).

Furthermore, the agency of natural elements cannot be contained by humans (cf. West-Pavlov, *Spaces* 195-196). The sight of Kanchenjunga is one of stability in the greatest turmoil, showing how nature is remote and detached in relation to human suffering. When the cook returns from the violent escalation of an assembly of the protest movement, he looks up at "Kanchenjunga, solid, extraordinary, a sight that for centuries had delivered men their freedom and thinned clogged human hearts to joy". But he realises how the very human landscape perspective can be spoilt by the human violence he had to bear witness to, so that "he didn't know if the sight of the mountain could ever be the same to him" (277). As Cronon criticises environmentalist discourses that elevate nature to religious heights, he emphasises that only a more integral

understanding of humanity as a part of nature can effectively address social problems (cf. 17-20). Desai's novel often presents binary conflicts between the human and the non-human, but at the same time some of her protagonists suffer from or question this binary distinction.

The connection to otium lies in this *process of negotiation of different time regimes*. "Time might have died in the house that sat on the mountain ledge, its lines grown indistinct with moss, its roof loaded with ferns…" and with the arrival of the monsoon, the natural elements in and around the house take over, being personified like an army laying siege to elements of civilisation and 'normalcy' (*Inheritance* 17): the banana trees, like frightened elephants, "flap their great ears for they were always the first to sound the alarm", bamboo poles "were flung together and rang with the sound of an ancient martial art", "[t]he sky gaped, lit by flame", Mutt the dog behaves like "a soldier at war, finished with caring for silly myths of courage" and the thunder becomes "the sound of civilization crumbling" (105-106). Apart from this first description of the beginning of the monsoon rains, its effect on everyday life is described in temporal terms and the semantics of decay:

> This aqueous season would last three months, four, maybe five, […] Condensation fogged the glass of clocks, and clothes hanging to dry in the attic remained wet for a week. A white scurf sifted down from the beams, and fungus spun a shaggy age over everything. (106)

It is significant that clocks, a symbol of modern time-measurement, are no longer readable, so that one cannot even tell how long the season lasts, and communication technology cannot be used: "all over Kalimpong modernity began to fail. Phones emitted a death rattle, televisions tuned into yet another view of the downpour" (106). Accordingly, Sai's temporal and spatial perception is changed:

> Sai had always been calm and cheerful during these months, the only time when […] she could experience the peace of knowing that communication with anyone was near impossible. She sat on the veranda, riding the moods of the season, thinking how intelligent it was to succumb […] And in this wet diarrheal season floated the feeling, loose and light, of life being a moving, dissipating thing, chilly and solitary – not anything you could grasp. The world vanished, the gate opened onto nothing […] and that terrible feeling of waiting released its stranglehold. (107)

Temporally, Sai's feeling of waiting is suspended and, spatially, her connection to the rest of the world is gone. Nature itself acts as a subversive element and Sai's reaction is the fitting 'practice'. Her 'succumbing' recalls the judge's sense of 'letting it all go' with the important difference being that she derives contentment from this fatalistic perspective. I argue that this is an example of an experience of *otium*, in which the sequence of time is backgrounded in favour of a more emphasised sense of space, in this example of the decaying house, dissolving into its natural surroundings. Especially in the contrastive passages about Biju's experiences in New York, the abstract, linear temporality of modernity is clearly marked as belonging to Western modernity (s. 6.2.2, 6.2.3). It is associated with various forms of neo-colonial structures of violence; be it the experience of the illegal immigrant or the Western tourist's impact on Darjeeling.

The human violence of the novel is paralleled with violence in nature, which at the end attacks even more fiercely than before:

> All night it would rain […] with a savagery matched only by the ferocity with which the earth responded to the onslaught. Uncivilized voluptuous greens would be unleashed; the town would slide down the hill. Slowly, painstakingly, like ants, men would make their paths and civilization and their wars once again, only to have it washed away again. (ibid.)

Despite its violence, the passage gives an almost soothing historic dimension to the individual narratives that make up the novel. It refers to an ongoing cycle of nature, of destruction and repetition that puts the events of the novel in perspective. The sensory perception of the protagonists' environment can, together with the agency of the place itself, become a practice of resilience against the immediate violence of political conflict as much as against the neo-colonial impact of tourism (cf. Moslund 3). The cyclical repetition in the descriptions of nature is reminiscent of Hindu beliefs and non-Western understandings of cyclical temporality, an aspect that can again be linked to the "Indian sublime" (cf. Mishra, *Poetics*; Sarkar; Barua).

The heterodiegetic perspective of *The Inheritance of Loss* with shifting focalisation enables Desai to contrast and parallel different discourses of the natural. A fundamental difference to the representation of nature in *The Romantics* is its depiction as an active and animated presence in the mountains,

not just a panorama to be gazed at. In this qualification of the human by the natural, the novel has an important ecocritical edge, arguing through its structure and nature descriptions against an anthropocentric view, nature being presented as resistant to human plans and endeavours (cf. Casey 199, 188-229; Clark 2, 13, 55-5; Moslund 66). In *The Inheritance of Loss*, nature is a spatial and temporal alternative to human narratives, which in the hopeful passages of the novel has a potential to converge with them. It is these moments of convergence, which open up the potential to experience otium. The potential of such spatial and temporal dynamics is present throughout the text as a critical undermining and questioning of Romantic, anthropocentric concepts of nature.

5.3. Urban Spaces: Of Idlers and Flâneurs

After having focused in the previous section on an allegedly "wild" nature – which, just when it seems a contrast to human civilisation, is actually shaped by it – this part will focus on two novels with distinctly urban settings. However, just as before, human civilisation was less distinct from natural landscapes, the contrast between the urban and the rural space turn out to be less clearly demarcated, particularly when the novels' protagonists experience otium. The urban space is created in the novels through a constant negotiation of the conditions of such experiences.

At first glance, experiences of otium in the urban space in India may seem counterintuitive or even contradictory, due to the large populations between 5 and 16 million and the high population density of the cities of up to 22.000 inhabitants per square kilometre. We may think of the "shocks and surprises of urban life" rather than of calm and relaxation (McNamara 6). Even more so, the growing 'megacities' of Calcutta, Delhi or Mumbai, where the novels treated in this part of the chapter are set, are often referred to as such because common conceptions of size and complexity, as well as the wealth of impressions and distractions, can hardly describe these urban spaces (cf. Otto; Harder, "Urbanity" 435-436).[117] "[I]n

[117] As Paul Webster and Jason Burke comment, "[o]ptimists see a new network of powerful, stable and prosperous city states, […] where the benefits of urban living, the relative ease of delivering

terms of population figures […] among the top 20 cities in the world", the Indian cities presented in the texts discussed in this section are shaped by "infrastructural proliferation", they have been described as "crowded, hyper-accelerated", constantly changing according to the rules of globalisation and capitalism (Harder, "Urbanity" 436; cf. Boehmer and Davies 396, 406). Violence and inequality seem more likely research foci than experiences of otium. Their excess can become threatening to the subject trying to locate and configure itself, as has been discussed with reference to Kristeva's category of the *Abject* (cf. Otto 496-498).

Both in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* and Navtej Sarna's *We Weren't Lovers Like That*, the foreground is the urban space of the two cities of Calcutta and Delhi, and its representation is linked to particular ways of experiencing it. Chaudhuri shows how this space is, despite its masses of people and hectic movement, conducive to a sense of floating or wandering. Moreover, he even makes a flâneuristic perception of mundane, everyday events central to his construction of the city of Calcutta. In contrast, Sarna's representation of Delhi is suffused with nostalgia for a loss of free movement or wandering in the city space. Both novels comment on an increasingly functional logic of these cities through their characters' movements and reflections on their surroundings. Therefore, I argue that the novels imply a critique of capitalist late modernity and usefulness by negotiating the possibility or impossibility of urban otium.

If these novels do not focus on "outsourcing, Americanization, corruption, urban violence and the accumulation of rubbish", to name some of the cities' most contested issues, this is a conscious choice about "the way social and physical space is imagined" (Çinar and Bender xi-xii; Boehmer and Davies 407). Although individual urban experiences can always only be fragmentary, we nevertheless

basic services compared to rural zones and new civic identities combine to raise living standards for billions. Pessimists see the opposite: a dystopic future where huge numbers of people fight over scarce resources in sprawling, divided, anarchic 'non-communities' ravaged by disease and violence. Nowhere is this more evident than in India, where years of underinvestment, chaotic development and rapid population growth have combined with poor governance and outdated financial systems to threaten an urban disaster" (Webster/Burke, "Rise of the Megacity"). Due to these criteria I have alluded to the term here, although Calcutta's population is below the 10 million inhabitants usually seen as the defining mark for the term megacity.

have a mental image of a city in mind, which is the result of (conflicting) processes of collective imagination (xii-xiv). In this context, literary language possesses "transformative possibilities" for "imaginatively unravelling and re-knotting the social fabric" (Boehmer and Davies 398). With the idea of the construction of the urban space I propose to analyse the different "urban imaginaries" of the two novels with an emphasis on the urban space as a space of otium: while the predominant perspective of the narrator in *We Weren't Lovers Like That* is one of nostalgia, remembering, through his personal past, the lost character of Delhi, Chaudhuri's novel celebrates the rhythm of everyday life in Calcutta and the narrator's flâneur perspective of it.

5.3.1. Drifting through Calcutta with *A Strange and Sublime Address*

In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Calcutta is represented as a space which makes experiences of otium likely. This is achieved through a meticulous attention to a leisurely rhythm of life permeating the city and its inhabitants.[118] The everyday practices of the family members that were the focus of the previous chapter are an integral part of this rhythm (4.3). I argue that the associative episodes of the novel form a fabric of the city space, which is represented in a flâneur-like text that stresses the *city's* resistance to usefulness with the help of the *narrative's* resistance to coherent narration.

When Sandeep and the other children observe their neighbourhood, what they see is invariably represented as meaningful, whether it is the girl next door dancing on the balcony, pigeons on the windowsill "created […] with the sole purpose of amusing slothful boys […] on unpleasantly humid afternoons", a sari's *aanchal* being tossed in the air by the wind, or raindrops or plants moving with the wind at the beginning of the monsoons (39, cf. 21, 38-39, 59, 62-63).[119] The

[118] Hans Harder has commented on a similar tendency in the vernaculars "to portray the urban in terms of human relationships. There are rather few detailed descriptions of buildings, streets, or cityscapes, and little involvement with the spatial, infrastructural and architectonic space" ("Urbanity" 463).

[119] These situations of observing remind of the variety of flâneur, for instance in E.T.A. Hoffmann and E.A. Poe, who is positioned by a window and whose view onto a crowd below or people passing by is central (cf. Neumeyer 27-31).

scenes of Calcutta are multisensory rather than predominantly visual and can only be imagined through the firm rooting in a local urban perspective (cf. Hoene). The fabric of everyday life is presented as a bodily experience, assembled by sound, touch and rhythm as the *materiality* of the city space which is part of a certain mood and atmosphere. This kind of perception is an instance of the way in which the experiential mode of otium and the surrounding material space influence one another reciprocally.

Everyday observations and experiences are situated in a dialectic relationship between *communality and anonymity*: experiences of otium in *A Strange and Sublime Address* are found in the company of and through others. One important factor throughout the novel is the family's limited time frame for their visit to Calcutta, which is often reflected on melancholically by Sandeep, who:

> an only child, felt the shared background of brother and brother, and brother and sister, throw upon him a shade as that of the cool, expansive branches of a rooted Banyan tree. He wandered in the shade, *forgetting it was temporary*. (7, emphasis added)

Therefore, it is also very much the context of a large family that enables the experience of a leisurely forgetfulness of the passing of time. Sandeep himself characterises the experience of the family house in Calcutta as intensely sensory:

> Sandeep […] gradually adjusted his senses to Chhotomama's house, to […] the spider-webs in the corners, the tranquil bedsheets on the old beds, the portraits of grandfathers and grandmothers, the fans that swung drunkenly from side to side – all so different from the quiet and perfected apartment he lived in in Bombay. (ibid.)

In contrast to "the big apartment on the twenty-third floor" associated with everyday life, where he felt, being an only child, "too much in the foreground", "he pulsed into life and passed into extinction according to his choice" at his relatives' house in Calcutta (27). So, if the special experiences of life in Calcutta contain moments of otium, these are based on a profoundly social understanding of the experience. Otium in a city like Calcutta can be found with and through others, which is also why busy situations like the chaos and haggling at the market are described with a similar serenity as calmer situations indoors (40-41).

At the same time, "[a]nonymity is […] an enabling condition for urban strollers" (McNamara 13). The novel repeatedly suggests that the dynamics of family life can be understood as a miniature version of the city and its dialectics of detailed focus and complete randomness, individuality and insignificance, thereby undermining the separation between the public and the private, a division which is often associated with both the colonial influence in India and a Western individualistic lifestyle reinforced by the capitalist economy.[120] Despite the "emphasis on the home" in "the nineteenth century cult of the *ghar* in the Bengali renaissance", the inside space of the home also always refers to outside and a larger social space (Wiemann, *Genres* 210; cf. Chaudhuri, "Modernity at Home"). Depending of the rhythm and part of the day, the boundary between inside and outside dissolves, or the space of the home becomes a heterotopia from which the outside is seen. This is the case in the numerous scenes in which the little boys watch the outside world from a balcony, a window or through the shutters (cf. Wiemann, *Genres* 209).

Moreover, in the effortless drifting through various everyday events that evoke in their enumeration Calcutta as a timeless and aimless space, the narrative principle of the novel is flâneur-like. This is the case when Sandeep characterises his enjoyment of a family outing by car with a sense of "*floating*, of letting one's legs *rest* and setting one's body *adrift*", while "he felt *at peace* as *effortless* images of shops and restaurants passed by him as coral and anemones pass by a fish's life" (15, emphasis added). His experience of movement in the city is characterised here by a peaceful sense of letting go ("rest", "at peace") as well as by fluid, aimless movement ("floating", "adrift", "effortless"). Sandeep feels, like all flâneur characters, "'at home' in the crowd" and he "distills the fugitive beauty" of unexpected places (McNamara 12).

In an attempt to describe the "modern experience", literary texts operating with the idea of the flâneur try to capture this experience *in actu*, as Chaudhuri tries to evoke immanence through sensory perception and the importance of

[120] Ray describes in his emotional history of the Bengal Renaissance how in the second half of the nineteenth century the creation of a new *public* through the rise of civil society, the popularity and spread of print culture and "formations of voluntary associations between individuals" necessarily also implied a new understanding of *privacy* and the *private domain* (33-34).

objects (cf. Nesci 74). The emphasis on sensory impressions help the reader to familiarise with the surrounding environment of the city along with Sandeep (cf. Hoene). The focus here lies not predominantly on a movement through the city nor mainly on public spaces, but on a movement of the narrative perspective (cf. Neumeyer 17). Sandeep's mental movement through the city as well as through the period he spends there creates an alternative materiality.

It is no coincidence, then, that the narrative is focalised through a small boy, whose incidental observations are presented to the reader through internal focalisation. The child's perspective is ideal to draw attention to the importance of the useless. As I have argued with reference to inaction, the novel consists of associative observations rather than a linear plot and the heterodiegetic narrator focuses, along with Sandeep, on "the life of a city, rather than [on] a good story" (*Address* 48-49). Impressions are too fleeting, the very quality of the experience resisting narration. Yet, this very resistance, expressed through essayistic passages, digressions and a focus on allegedly random banalities, translates the open potentiality of a movement through the city into the text (cf. Riedl 109). It is also a typical trait of the flâneur that the imagination of "alternative city-spaces, or ways of inhabiting those spaces" is nostalgically inflected (Boehmer and Davies 397).

Moreover, the flâneuristic representation of Calcutta is made up of three different levels of space (compare Lefebvre's categories of *perceived*, *lived* and *conceived* space): firstly, the material space consists of an engagement in practices, actions as well as sensory perception of the surrounding city by the protagonists. Secondly, memory and representations of space are important because Sandeep's experiences during his time in Calcutta are often described, early on, from the perspective of how he will remember them later[121], and because of the emphasis on symbols and rituals. Thirdly, the sphere of planning is in the background and presented as something random, arbitrary and fairly undecipherable: the constant roadworks are, for example, motivated by "some

[121] "He felt the shadowy, secret life of the holidays […] slip out of his grasp. Yet the three of them […] talked and talked, reliving the illusion of togetherness. By […] never ceasing these long, meaningless conversations, Sandeep felt he could buy time and keep the holidays from ending." (*Address* 72)

[…] obscure reason", or in order to "replace a pipe that doesn't work with another pipe that doesn't work" turning Calcutta, in their randomness, into a "work of modern art" (11).[122] The field where films are shown on a screen Sunday evenings is a "*surprising* piece of empty land, which builders and contractors had somehow overlooked" (13, emphasis added). The protagonists interact with the surrounding space and shape it through their actions and representations in a subversive opposition against the "project of progress and city planning" already inherent in the aesthetic of the flâneur (Nesci 74).[123]

The novel's style and narrative perspective has the character of a meandering, aimless tour through supposedly random everyday aspects of life in Calcutta. Fragments of individual experience are part of a fabric of contingent narratives not only about but constituting the city. The "fragmentary city" is one that can only be told from the "limited perspective of a character […] in the streets", "built from, perceptions, emotions, memories" (McNamara 3). The necessarily fragmentary, individual urban experience of "daily practices" can then feed again into the collective imagination of a city (Çinar and Bender xii-xiv). Thus, the narrative itself becomes a leisurely walk through the "memories and possibilities" of the city's fabric (ibid.). As I have shown previously, because plot is less important, the text moves from a sequential to a broader, spatial perception of time. Instead of time, space is foregrounded. It becomes the space in which the narrative 'promenade' is undertaken, being both Calcutta as a whole and Chhotomama's family home, the eponymous "strange and sublime address" which Sandeep finds on Abhi's exercise book: "Abhijit Das / 17 Vivekananda

[122] This can be linked to a typical characteristic of megacities, whose centrality provokes "einen Migrantenstrom, der in die funktionalen Zentren drängt, damit zugleich aber jede urbanistische Planung unmöglich macht und für den immer wieder angeführten Wildwuchs jener Städte sowohl am Rand als auch von innen heraus sorgt" (Otto 496). It is remarkable how Chaudhuri uses this aspect, which is conventionally described as a problem, in a productive and creative way in his text.

[123] It has to be stressed that the flâneur's perspective is a relatively privileged one even if it is used as a poetic principle rather than in reference to a particular narrator figure actually roaming the streets of the city. The drifting, aimless perspective and well-intentioned enjoyment of the illogical character of the city can only be taken on by characters that have time, a relative economical security and a certain cultural capital. In its leisurely poetics it may overlook or aestheticize others who struggle or are ruined by the mechanisms of the modern, capitalist city (see also the following chapter 6. Society).

Road / Calcutta (South) / West Bengal / India / Asia / Earth / The Solar System / The Universe" (72). This peculiarly precise localisation within the cosmos fits with the flâneuristic narrative: something banal as the address to a house is endowed with a superior, sublime significance.[124] Rather than expressing a colonial "longing for the center" from the perspective of the periphery (Majumdar, *Prose* 153), I argue that this is a confident assertion of the relevance of *exactly this* place of their house in Calcutta, just as the described everyday experiences are repeated assertions of the present moment.

So far, this textual strategy is very close to the aesthetics of the flâneur as narrator-protagonist as was developed in the context of a European modernist aesthetic (cf. Neumeyer 18-20). However, the novel's everyday narratives can also be seen in the context of a retrieval of very specific, local subaltern pasts as "supplements" to the official history.[125] In this context, the focus on the private and local in their opposition to history or the public sphere have a political dimension (Majumdar, "Dallying" 450, 454; cf. *Prose* 152, 158; Hoene). In a way, this is also part of many conceptualisations of the flâneur – in Baudelaire, for instance – suggesting alternative histories through the many unknown, nameless protagonists he encounters (cf. Nesci 79). This is especially the case in a formerly colonial city, where "forms of structural violence" and "various power hierarchies and economic inequalities" persist and where the literary texts can "supply means of interacting" with the city space or even "plot resilient conceptual pathways" through it (Boehmer and Davies 396, cf. Herbert). Therefore Chaudhuri's text is also an – albeit humble and quiet – "[effort] […] to work through the historical trauma of colonization and its legacies, and to voice once-silenced viewpoints"

[124] This is again an intertextual reference to James Joyce. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a similar address is written by Stephen Dedalus on the flyleaf of his geography textbook: "Stephen Dedalus / Class of Elements / Clongowes Wood College / Sallins / County Kildare / Ireland / Europe / The World / The Universe" (15-16). Majumdar remarks on this intertextual reference as "a trope that foregrounds the porous borders of the provincial, through which it miraculously blends into the universal" (*Prose* 153).

[125] In *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty emphasises how he has to pay attention to "places and to particular forms of life" in a hermeneutic tradition to supplement his larger project of a new perspective on history "from and for the margins" instead of from a Eurocentric perspective (16, 18). His project is theoretically relevant for Chaudhuri for his alternative narrative focuses on "non-European life-worlds" without necessarily claiming to "represent the life practices of the subaltern classes" (20; cf. Majumdar, *Prose* 158-159).

by making his very banal, everyday collection of moments and impressions of Calcutta middle-class life the history that matters in his novel (McNamara 7).[126]

Chaudhuri's narrative style and choice of topic creates a decelerated literary text that counteracts the accelerated time structure of modernity that manifests itself particularly in the urban space (Rosa, *Acceleration* 72, 92, 103, 120-121). Both Calcutta as well as the smaller unit of the family home come across as shaped by the practices, experiences, imaginations and representations of its inhabitants. Calcutta is presented here as a city of an unruly, unusable temporality, one in which the experience of otium is made more likely through characteristics of this particular urban space even while it impacts the way this space is perceived.

5.3.2. Nostalgic reflections on past leisure in the Delhi of *We Weren't Lovers Like That*

In Navtej Sarna's *We Weren't Lovers Like That*, urban modernity is also criticised, but in an elegiac, mournful way that suggest the impossibility of otium in the present. Particular places are constitutive of the act of remembering, which is the main theme of the novel. The novel's chapters are structured according to place names, beginning with "Delhi" as the city where the main protagonist spent most of his life and ending with "Dehradun" as the town where he was born and where he decides to return to find his love Rohini. The chapters in between carry the

[126] In the dynamics between the novel's urban setting and its leisurely poetics the discourse around *āḍḍā* again comes to mind. The idea of an *āḍḍā* seems to be in its contrast to a strict work ethic as well as capitalist usefulness surprising in the urban space. Yet *āḍḍā* is a fundamentally urban concept linked most often (and often nostalgically) with Calcutta. Both *āḍḍā's* coming into being and its decline are a modern phenomenon, making it a practice of what I described as Indian cultural modernity that is vulnerable to late modern changes in society (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 182). Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests that through its subversive oppositionality to the modern urban space it could be a practice that helps "to feel at home in the context of capital cities" (183, cf. 198-201). Thus, the private, everyday practices described in Chaudhuri's novel resonate again with larger urban communities through the characteristics and rhythms of oral communication (cf. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 207-211). But also the descriptions of certain public spaces particularly prone to be used for *āḍḍās*, like parks, rooftops or teashops (201-202) are important for Chaudhuri's novel, where the appropriation of public spaces also plays a role as in the cinema screen on the open field and the maidan scene during a power outage.

names of train stops on the way from the one location to the other. The homodiegetic narrator's commentary on Delhi is suffused with nostalgia directed at a lost time and love of his youth, but just as much at the changing urban space.

The former character of the city space is constantly contrasted with its sadly changed contemporary form. Wistfully, the narrator remembers how "[t]here was a time when I could saunter through Connaught Place", how this central place of New Delhi was used by various people for relaxed, leisurely practices:

> People came there for a stroll in the evenings, couples came to hold sweaty, nervous hands near the fountain, to eat paan or homemade mango ice cream in green leaves, or have elegant tea with cheese balls in restaurants that smelt of ice cream wafers, listening to juke-boxed music playing fifties' tunes. (24)

However, these positive memories of how the city's inhabitants had appropriated the public space are always juxtaposed with their opposite in the present. The repeated comparisons are introduced by adverbial phrases or other temporal descriptions separating the urban space *as it was* from *as it is now*:

> Now I had to manoeuvre my way through an army of handkerchief sellers, key-chain sellers, banana sellers, past charpoys of fake leather wallets, three-in-one-packet underwear, calendars, diaries, and chaatwalas with boiled potatoes and unpeeled kachalus and tomatoes and lemons already set up at nine in the morning. (ibid.)

While the first description is full of slow, relaxed movement ("saunter", "stroll", "hold…hands"), sensory impressions ("eat", "smelt", "listening") and markers of an authentic innocence in the couples' sweaty hands and the homemade ice cream, the second part expresses the "too much" of the hectic and stressful city rhythm. It does so through a breathless list of wares for sale, further accentuating the contrast syntactically. Moreover, the only practice imaginable in the late modern, capitalist city is buying and selling. The peaceful, calm actions of the first part are also contrasted with a semantics of war, as he "had to *manoeuvre*" his way "through an *army* of…".

The narrator repeatedly characterises in this way an older modernity of Delhi that is valued positively and a newer, late modernity in which Delhi has changed

for the worse.[127] Roadworks are used as a negative symbol of change – an interesting aspect, because in Chaudhuri's novel the same phenomenon is mentioned in a rather positive example for the aesthetic uselessness of Calcutta as a whole. In this direct comparison, the existence or lack of the attitude for a flâneur perspective seem to lead to two different imaginaries of the city. Thus, in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, the notion of a disintegrating city is used as a positive concept, while in *We Weren't Lovers Like That* it stands for the disintegration of positive old values in the face of the new:

> It seemed that the old roads of Delhi were being pounded into dust with each massive drive, the past was being thrust into the remains of the seven cities already buried deep and a new future with swinging, sweeping flyovers complete with bright mercury lights and ice cream vans was being built to solve all our problems. A senseless world of speed and certitude. (*Lovers* 23)

Again, the "old roads" are juxtaposed to the "new future", which actively and violently ("pounded into dust", "massive drive", "thrust", "buried deep") disrupts and destroys the past Delhi. The future is characterised with deep irony as a "bright new future" of speed and light, which, upon closer inspection, turns out to be "senseless" and a world of "certitude". The passage mourns a loss of aspects that are positive markers of urban space in Chaudhuri's novel as well as in the past description of Connaught Place: sensory impressions ("senseless") and purposelessness ("certitude").

Navtej Sarna is not the only author who portrays Delhi as a city of rapid change. In Rana Dasgupta's recent journalistic monograph *Capital. The Eruption of Delhi*, the description of the development of twentieth-century Delhi up until the present is frequently accompanied by a nostalgic tone:

> Change was happening at such a stupefying pace that people of every age were cut off even from their recent existence. They looked at vast shopping malls, malls whose construction had appalled and offended them, and now they could not even remember what had been there before, or why they had objected so strongly. (47-48)

[127] This nostalgic attitude towards leisurely practices in the city space is reminiscent of the practice of *āḍḍā* and "its perceived gradual disappearance from the urban life of Calcutta" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 181).

Dasgupta describes this as "a general condition: no one, not even the young, could revisit the Delhi they had come from because it no longer existed" (*Capital* 48).[128] Sarna's fictional text points to the same urban developments of a capitalist modernity, in which the "senseless", perpetually changing city deprives its inhabitants of a sense of place and belonging and exchanges this with the "certitude" of purposeful economic growth.[129]

Part of the narrative strategy of conveying a sense of loss is the linking of Aftab's personal experiences of loss with external observations. Thus, the death of his great-grandmother when the flyovers were built causes a general impression of decay: "That summer, along with the relentless thudding of the piledrivers [sic] we heard the tortured coughing of my mother's grandmother […] That summer she began to die" (23). It is almost as if the pile drivers and the coughing of his great-grandmother are remembered as one merging, threatening rhythm. The theme is continued when the narrator goes to work and talks to the lift man, who himself is described almost as a relic of former times: "I left Panditji on his stool, a wrinkled hand on one aching knee, the other twirling the end of his moustache, to ruminate for yet another day, over a lost world" (26-27). In their short conversation the nostalgia for a past Delhi is even interlinked with a nostalgia for colonial times:

> "It is the new century, the new millenium. Kalyug. Things are changing all over the world. […] They have not left a single tree. You remember the shade we used to have in these parts? Bungalows and trees. Bungalows made by Englishmen, trees planted by Englishmen. They went away and all that they built has also gone after them." (26)

[128] Compare also the description of the role of car traffic in Delhi: "the road is the place from which people derive their image of the *entire city*. It is a segregated city […] and it has no truly democratic spaces". Dasgupta also describes the role of the large numbers of flyovers being continuously built all over the place, although they "do not feel as if they constitute a system" (*Capital*, 16, 23).

[129] These representations are part of an older (Muslim) tradition of elegiac depictions of Delhi before Independence or before the rebellion of 1857, for instance Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*. See also Dalrymple's non-fictional *City of Djinns*, which is in large parts about such accounts of an older Delhi.

The “new millennium” is paralleled with Kali Yuga, the last of the world’s ages according to the Sanskrit scriptures.[130] While Kali Yuga in Hinduism is believed to bring spiritual degeneration, it is not seen as a recent occurrence, but has supposedly started around 3000 BCE (Sarkar 10-13). It is therefore faintly comical how the liftman complains of how Kali Yuga seems to be lacking in shade, trees and bungalows, so that whatever “old times” came before the take-over of gleaming high-rises and flyovers is evaluated as a better past. Yet the narrator sympathises with the old man and the passage draws attention to how, as McNamara remarks, “structures themselves support, solicit, and curtail modes of individual and collective behaviour, as we realize when we imagine the disparate effects of creating a public park or a private shopping mall in the middle of a city” (5).

From the perspective of the old man even the rule of the British is preferred to a new, capitalist functionality and its ideologies. Old public spaces are associated with a horizontal dimension of the city, with natural elements and open spaces; the new structures with the vertical level, the steel and concrete of the modern high-rise buildings and flyovers (cf. de Certeau 91; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 181; Boehmer and Davies 398). The nostalgia for elements of urban planning of colonial times connects the reckless productivity of the capitalist economy and associated urban changes with independence, even though such economic developments are much more recent (cf. Dasgupta, *Capital*; Shetty). Moreover, the old man’s view overlooks possible neo-colonial continuities between the two regimes due to which he suffers from a feeling of lagging behind.[131]

The negative perspective of loss and the tone of wistful nostalgia is only broken in the urban context when Aftab describes his memories of Bombay, the freedom and excitement he experienced when he first spent time in “that strange, hateful, lovable, awful big city. It blew me off my feet with its richness, its

[130] For the representation of the “modern city as an aspect of the dark kali yuga” compare Harder, “Urbanity” (446).

[131] As Marie Louise Pratt writes about neo-colonialism: “To be modern is to subscribe to the values of the metropole and seek to fulfil them. To be neo-colonial is to be unable to do so, yet unable to exit the system and chart a separate course” (226).

freshness and something that my youthful fancy pinned down to a sense of freedom" (88-89). While he does wonder whether he just mistook a "sense of extreme alienation that allowed people to live as immediate neighbours, in crumbling buildings whose faces were eaten raw by the face of the sea, […] and not feel obliged to know each other" for freedom, he could also feel "light-headed and strangely calm in the clamour of a big city" (89, 92). The lifestyle of camaraderie and playful nonsense in his shared flat is once described as "Life at its most useless, indolent best": "Once inside F-16, the world was shut out, forgotten. Deep conversations, tortured self-analysis, unsuccessful love lives took over" (93-94). Apart from the aimless play with his flatmates, Bombay is significant as the time when the narrator gets to know Rohini. Their shared time consists of endless talking, for instance in a "quiet old-world restaurant where nobody seemed to be in a hurry" (100). Carelessness and a sense of floating are described as central features of their relationship despite a hidden seriousness.[132] Because of Aftab's different memories connected to it, the positive view of Bombay forms an impression contrasted with that of Delhi. However, this experience is clearly represented as part of an irretrievable past.

Despite the overall atmosphere of nostalgia and regret in Sarna's novel, its comment on the city is in effect not so different from that of Chaudhuri's. The character of a lost, leisurely experience of the urban space is expressed, be it positively or negatively, through an emphasis on the practices in, and imaginations of, the city. Moreover, the leisurely rhythm of Calcutta in Chaudhuri's novel (which, after all, was published almost 10 years before *We Weren't Lovers Like That*), can also be interpreted as nostalgic: Sandeep's reflections come across as a rare and uncommon thing, in the logic of the novel something that can be glimpsed only for a limited time, that of his holidays. At the very start of the novel, the limited timeframe of the narrative is closely associated with its drifting temporality: "The holiday mood transported them with its poetry" (6). In the boy's perception, his experience of the visit is repeatedly contrasted with his everyday life in Bombay just as Aftab contrasts the sad present situation with the

[132] The connection of idle dwelling on the nostalgic memory of a beloved has a long tradition in poetry, in the South Asian context especially in Urdu (cf. Noor, "Semantics").

past. The focus on the child narrator at least suggests that Chaudhuri's perspective on Calcutta and on a vanishing rhythm of life is a past idyll of childhood, while Aftab as a narrator is represented as the disillusioned adult ruminating about lost opportunities. Hence, both novels assume an "elegiac tenor" in their reflection of certain cultural forms and modes of experience (West-Pavlov, *Spaces*, 174, cf. 173-175). *We Weren't Lovers Like That*, however, presents these as ultimately irretrievable, the only solution being to escape that space.

5.3.3. Then and now – City and countryside

Both novels have passages in which the borders between the urban and the rural space are being negotiated, or rather, undermined. This is a particularly noteworthy strategy, because they are usually presented as contrasts (cf. Harder, "Urbanity" 448, 463). In *A Strange and Sublime Address* it is several times presented as irrelevant whether the setting is urban or rural: "they could have been anywhere – on a hillside on the Western Ghats or in a cave in Kanheri", as the narrator comments when the family settles down together after initial greetings (6). This is not just because of their intimacy, but because of a certain precarious unlikelihood of the city's existence as a whole:

> Calcutta is a city of dust. If one walks down the street, one sees mounds of dust like sand-dunes on the pavements, on which children and dogs sit doing nothing. […] [T]he buildings are becoming dust, the roads are becoming dust. […] Daily, Calcutta disintegrates, unwhispering, into dust, and daily it rises from dust again. (11)

In this view of Calcutta, it is as if the city disappears regularly, dust replacing the roads and buildings. The "sweating labourers" here seem sadly ineffectual, while the inactive "children and dogs" seem to have a more appropriate attitude in the face of such an unpredictable, amorphous space.

At the same time, the city is characterised by some primeval connection to the surrounding landscape, rooting it firmly in the "pre- and sub-national […] the regional, the decentralised, and the domestic" (Wiemann, *Genres* 228):

> when the fans stopped turning because of a power cut, when the telephone went dead because of a cable-fault, when the tabs became dry because there was no

> power to pump the water, and finally, when the car engine curtly refused to start, it seemed a better idea to return to a primitive, unpretentious means of subsistence – to buy a horse and a plough, to dig a well in one's backyard, to plant one's own trees and grow one's own fruit and vegetables. Calcutta, in spite of its fetid industrialization, was really part of that primitive, terracotta landscape of Bengal […] the Bengal of the bullock-cart and the earthen lamp. It had pretended to be otherwise, but now it had grown old and was returning to that original darkness. (*Address* 31)

This link to previous histories and palimpsestic layers of the urban space follows the flâneur poetics of the novel: the flâneur, who evolved with urbanisation and modernisation, insists on the underlying remains of former histories, now neglected and forgotten (cf. Nesci 70).[133] Chaudhuri here hints at what de Certeau has called a city's "art of growing old by playing on all its pasts" (91). His concept of the "'metaphorical' […] city" highlights the role of memory, since in this perspective the city is made up of "fragmentary […] histories", palimpsests of lost stories and dreams (ibid. 108, 110). Moreover, the passage expresses with the suggested possibility of a "return to an eternal Bengal" a nostalgia "for an imagined 'autonomy' of the home that modernisation had done damage to with its supplies of electricity, municipal water and telecommunication networks" (Wiemann, *Genres* 224; Lange 367).

During Chhotomama's bathroom ritual on a Sunday, Sandeep listens to his uncle singing "old, half-remembered compositions" and asks for the meaning of the word "godhuli" (45). As Sandeep listens to his explanations about "the hour of cow dust", a rural scene seems to materialise in the urban household "like a film being shown on a projector – the slow moving, indolent cows, their nostrils and their shining eyes, the faint white outline of the cowherd, the sense of the expectant village […] and the dust […] blurring everything" (45-46). Moreover, the transformation is not only a potential hypothesis, as this rural Bengal also intrudes in the city so that it is impossible to draw a clear boundary where the city begins and ends.

[133] The "primitive […] landscape" can also be linked to the positively evaluated primitivism in the cycle of yugas from ancient Indian literature (Dumont). From this perspective, modern urbanisation is associated here, just as it is by the liftman in *We Weren's Lovers Like That*, with the dark age of *Kali yuga*.

On their way to visit relatives, “they moved forward in space and backward in time simultaneously. Calcutta grew remote and unrecognizable; the city was no longer clearly demarcated from the folk-tale Bengal that surrounded it so thickly” (53). In the part of Calcutta they visit, there are few electric street lamps and in a tank “buffaloes and children bathed” (ibid.). By driving to these outskirts, they cross an economic boundary into poorer areas, which is also underlined with the description of the small and bleak home of their relatives. These references to the rural work with a self-consciously clichéd imaginary of the village.[134] Beyond the idea of the village being of “some timeless essence” (“backward in time”) and less civilised (“primitive”, “darkness”), realistic aspects of the rural are blended with more fantastic “folk-tale” ones. The area on the outskirts of Calcutta is linked with “[m]yths and ghosts and Bengal tigers” that “roamed beyond an unclear boundary” (ibid.). Calcutta becomes an anarchic city, “a city caught between the opposing forces of the metropolitan and the provincial”, “a palimpsest of different temporalities” as well as locations (Majumdar, *Prose* 152; Wiemann, “Cities” 68).

All of this is, I would argue, part of the strategy of blurring a clearly demarcated concept of the modern urban space; a strategy that makes a leisurely state of being or experiences of otium more likely. If the village can be seen as the “defining contrast foil” or “counter-imagination” for the city’s profile, this division is undermined in *A Strange and Sublime Address* (Çinar and Bender xviii; Wiemann, “Cities” 61, 67). Even the blurring of the public and private spheres in scenes such as the film screening and the maidan gathering is part of this strategy if one thinks of the city as standing for “metropolitan anonymity and freedom”, the village for “social integration and obligation” (Wiemann, “Cities” 67). In a “dialectic […] relationship […] the public and the private, the ordinary and the

[134] For the discourse of the idealised rural space in India compare Jodhka, “Nation and Village”; Thakur, *Indian Village;* Sethi, *Myths of the nation* and Munz, "Village Idyll?”. The village ideal in India has developed both in the context of colonial rule and its nationalist counter-movement for Indian Independence. A nostalgic notion of authentic native village society, which continues to have an impact on cultural representations of the rural space, was used, both from the colonisers’ perspective and the leaders of the national movement (especially by Gandhi), to construct an essentialised, timeless view of India as “a land of villages” (Jodhka 3343). The rural space is in this perspective constructed as authentic (in contrast to the metropolis) and timeless (outside modernisation) (cf. Munz, “Village Idyll”).

grand, the near and the distant, curiously become the most distinct at the very moment they seem to merge into one another" (Majumdar, *Prose* 156).

Moreover, Calcutta's cultural rootedness in rural Bengal is an idea that can also be read as a critical comment on the city's history as the colonial capital of the British in India. The fluid oscillation between different forms of urbanity that are more or less urban or rural is part of the subversive potential of Chaudhuri's novel: a Calcutta that is firmly rooted in an older, rural landscape eludes the modern time regimes of speed and progress and instead evokes a palimpsestic site of underlying "ghosts" of an alternative, forgotten Calcutta (cf. Buchanan). Urban modernity has to be transformed into something else, stolen from its original purpose, if the ideals of an urban modernity are still defined elsewhere. However, it is noteworthy that Chaudhuri's novel does not contrast an idealised image of the village with a negative urban setting influenced by colonial history, Western individualism and globalised capitalist economic structures. Rather, the potential for individual characters' experiences of otium and, along with it, the critical potential of the novel lies in the blurring of these very boundaries. The resulting subversive alternative "map" of Calcutta is often conveyed through changes between internal focalisation centred on Sandeep and his mode of experiencing and more philosophical observations of the narrative voice that undermine conceptual divisions. The urban experience of the protagonists is presented as rooted in the surrounding rural landscape, and the novel gains its subversive potential partially from the transgression of its spatial (busy urban scenarios suddenly recalling an underlying rural dimension) and temporal (continuous hints at an older, precolonial Bengali culture interrupting the present) context based on the experiential mode of otium.

The rural space as a palimpsest underlying the urban space can also be found in *We Weren't Lovers Like That*. However, as before, the change in the relationship is stressed here as well as a taking over of the rural by the urban space. On an outing to Tughlaqabad with his ex-wife and son, Aftab tells his son about his own schooldays: "How this place changed, I told them" (172). On their ride to the outskirts he reflects on a past when the same area was still significantly more rural, but has since been overtaken by the growth of Delhi:

> ‘There was nothing here those days, after these houses […] None of these roads and flyovers and buildings. Just cycle tracks in the bushes and fields. And over there were fields of cauliflower and cabbage and radish. One never thought all of that would vanish. (173)

Again, the rapid urban development is presented negatively, natural or less formed elements being taken over by concrete planning.[135] The nostalgia and feeling of loss associated with his son, from whom Aftab fears he is becoming increasingly estranged, is, again, merged with the general sense of loss of his more carefree and relaxed schooldays and of the existence of “empty space” on the outskirts of Delhi (*Lovers* 174). The question of the possibility of emptiness in a continuously growing city like Delhi forms a parallel to the possibility of uselessness in Chaudhuri’s text. In this context, Aftab’s memories pose, in their palimpsestic blending of different versions of one space, an alternative “map” to the supposedly unambiguous and real map that would represent this part of the city (cf. Buchanan 115; Çinar and Bender xv).

Highly significant for Aftab’s partiality for decadence and decline is the destination of their outing, which is a mediaeval ruin, the remains of Tughlaqabad Fort. The Fort is one of the seven medieval city foundations of Delhi, which had all eventually failed: “The deserted ruins of a once great city surrounded us with its haunting emptiness. The walls were crumbling, the huge stones were being taken away…”(175). If ruins can be understood as pointing to

> vacuity and loss as underlying constituents of the modern identity […] the ruin is invoked in a critique of the spatial organization of the modern world and of its single-minded commitment to a progress that throws too many individuals and spaces into the trash. (Hell/Schönle 6-8; cf. Shetty 57)

Ruins refer ambivalently to a lost past and to the possibility of the survival of traces and characteristics from this past (Hell/Schönle 5).

Inspired by his environment, the narrator summarises the sense of loss to his son: “Nothing is as good as when it is […] because things vanish or change and decay” (175-176). In this aspect of nostalgia and regret for an underlying, lost

[135] Compare de Certeau’s description of how “[the city’s] present invents itself […] in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments” (91). Rana Dasgupta describes very similarly how his father tried to revisit his old family home and was extremely upset to find a huge shopping area where there “used to be a *bagh* […] a *garden*. I used to ride my bike on these streets. What happened?” (*Capital* 48).

city, the narrator of Sarna's novel also shares a central aspect of the flâneur, who tries to evoke what lies beneath the "devastation brought about by the modern project of technological progress and rational urban planning" through "unfulfilled desires and nostalgia" in both the narrator-protagonist and, mirrored, in the reader (Nesci 74-75, cf. 77). While Chaudhuri can still posit an "incompletely modernised Calcutta […] against a normative modernity defined elsewhere", the changes for the worse in Sarna's novel are final and though the past is consulted and remembered to criticise the present, it remains irretrievable (Wiemann, *Genres* 224).[136] Thus, the example of the trip to Tughlaqabad remains an isolated exception in this novel where the discourse on nostalgia clearly separates the rural from the urban and the past from the present space: after all, Aftab eventually returns to his childhood town Dehradun with the wish to go up into the hills beyond in order to escape his urban existence as much as his personal failings.

Although Sarna's novel accentuates the changing character of the city, the *absent* and desirable character of the city is linked to leisure, calm and purposelessness. The difference between Chaudhuri's and Sarna's novel is not so much the different character of Calcutta and Delhi, but simply a divergent kind of urban image. Bombay is, in comparison, imagined positively in Sarna's novel and as a negative contrast to Calcutta in Chaudhuri's.[137] Both texts as "forms of human intervention" show how they "can explore and negotiate, and at times disrupt" the "constantly shifting relationship between urban planning, the organization of public space" and human practices in their representation of the urban space (Boehmer and Davies 395). Through their focus on experiences of leisure or otium, they conceptualise alternative ways of imagining the city. The nostalgia of *We Weren't Lovers Like That* implies a critique of capitalist modernity and its effects on the city's material space and, consequently, the practices

[136] I visited Tughlaqabad myself during a journey to Delhi in 2019. It seems almost a logical consequence of the developments described by Aftab that by now what used to be one archaeological site has been divided into the ruins of the fort and that of the Mughal tomb, because a new three-lane road was built between them.

[137] Compare the representation of Delhi through various flâneur perspectives in Sarnath Banerjee's graphic novel *Corridor* (2004) (see also Herbert 211-212).

possible in it. The nostalgic narrative perspective points to an almost dystopian present, in which the city becomes an increasingly hostile environment and the experiential quality of otium an impossibility – and with it the flâneur's transgressive experience of inner calm even in the greatest turbulence. The aimlessly wandering narrative of *A Strange and Sublime Address* focuses with the help of a flâneur-like drifting through city life, on an atmosphere that can develop into experiences of otium. Through both the poetics of everyday practices and a symbolical merging of the city with the surrounding countryside, this perspective implicitly forms a subversive contrast to understandings of urban (late) modernity as inextricably linked with progress and functionality.

The experience of otium can enable subversive practices that change dominant ways of perceiving the urban space. This is the case in both novels discussed here – albeit in Sarna's novel only through the absence or exceptionality of such experiences – because of the unproductivity of practices of otium, a drifting, spatial temporality and a focus on sensory perception. Ultimately, the specifically urban experience of otium comes into being through a *transgression* of the urban environment from the present to past layers of time, from the urban to the natural space beyond and from the banal, everyday to the special. Whereas, in Sarna's novel, these experiences are not possible anymore, because the city's structures have become so inhibiting that such a transgression cannot even be imagined in the city space. Although the narrative of *A Strange and Sublime Address* is tied to a possibly idyllic childhood perspective, it exposes the city's inhabitants' freedom and agency to shape the urban space through their way of inhabiting it. What is more: the novel itself, as a form of representation of the city, is part of the practices that might enable or reinforce subversive practices of uselessness, empty space and flânerie that imagine an urban space less determined by functional structures and productive practices.

5.4. Chapter Summary

In the previous readings I have focused on certain kinds of spaces as typical sites of otium, on the analysis of experiences as instances of otium on the basis of a

spatialized, broadened sense of time, and I have shown how experiences of otium shape and are shaped by their spatial environment. Not only is otium analysed as a spatial experience, because time takes on the character of duration as opposed to its sequential progression, but this tendency of the novels makes them relevant to discourses of modernity and (post-)colonialism. Due to the sensory description and foregrounding of spatial perception (rather than the passing of time), the texts question to different extents Eurocentric narratives of modernity as well as exclusively anthropocentric ways of perceiving our spatial surroundings.

Moreover, the connection of otium to certain locations emphasises the cultural construction of our images of those places. In the human-centred perspective of *The Romantics*, nature is an inspiration and a mirror for the protagonist's experience, while in *The Inheritance of Loss* I investigate how in the medium of the novel temporal structures of otium can be located in non-human actors, thus changing the way the natural space is represented. There exists a remainder of otherness in the physical, violent encounter with the Himalayas in both novels that cannot be captured by the (European) aesthetic category of the Romantic sublime, which always risks falling into exotic stereotypes. The wildness of the described places (the threatening aspects of Samar's hikes, the storms and rains over Kalimpong) can be linked to the pre-conceptual, sensuous representation of how this otherness can only be experienced (cf. Casey 188-229; Moslund 12, 35-36).

In Anita Desai's novella "The Artist of Disappearance", the young boy Ravi's perception of nature when he is left alone by his parents is important for experiences of otium. Ravi prefers to be in a natural environment than to be with fellow humans and his exuberance when he is allowed to roam around outside is expressed in an anaphoric list over several pages:

> Outdoors was freedom. Outdoors was the life to which he chose to belong – the life of the crickets springing out of the grass, the birds wheeling hundreds of feet below in the valley or soaring upwards above the mountains, and the animals invisible in the undergrowth […], plants following their own green compulsions and purposes […]. One had only to be silent, aware, observe and perceive […]. (102)

These description is focused on Ravi's sensory impressions and on his sense of "freedom" but purposeful action is transposed to the plant and animal world; the focus moved away from human aims. Ravi's time spent in nature can become an experience of otium due to its openness, for "[o]utdoors […] there was always the unexpected" and he is interested "in the variations and mutations of the living, their innumerable possibilities" (ibid. 103). The passage can be interpreted as an un-alienated experience of nature, but in the context of the novella, it is also an expression of Ravi's alienation from humans. Ravi's engagement with his natural surroundings is, moreover, directly juxtaposed to the sensationalist consumption of nature that is the aim of the film crew from the city, who come to the mountains for a documentary on "environmental degradation in the Himalayas" (ibid. 128).

Another, slightly older, example for the radical otherness of a non-Western experience of nature is Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971). The novel describes the increasingly obsessive fascination of Billy Biswas, a wealthy and successful Indian from Delhi, with indigenous people (Adivasis) in the sparsely populated areas of the central Indian region Chattisgarh. He goes on several expeditions of, at first, anthropological interest. Upon his return, he is still caught in the impressions of the wilderness that he comes from, and he increasingly questions urban life as revolving around profit and consumption. Biswas becomes drawn to the indigenous rituals he observes and, in an attempt to find meaning beyond urban, capitalist civilisation, he eventually leaves his old life to live with the Adivasis. While the remoteness of the area is construed as a stark contrast to the civilisation he is used to, Billy's experiences with the Adivasis, as well as the meaning he seeks among them and his role in their village, remain inaccessible to the reader as the events surrounding Billy's disappearance are narrated from the perspective of a frame narrator. When his family wants to find Billy's location, he is killed when trying to escape from the police. Human-made civilisation has too strong a claim on the natural space, so that Billy, like Ravi in Anita Desai's novella, is not left in peace after he disappears.

The focus on otium in the urban environment in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *We Weren't Lovers Like That* formulates a critique of the effects of capitalist modernity on urban planning and imagines alternative perspectives on

the cities that the novels are set in. As in the previous chapter, nostalgic remembering is an important factor in the representation of the city: Navtej Sarna's narrator reflects on the changing character of the city making otium less and less likely, so that upon his arrival in Dehradun the space of the small town and its surrounding nature turns out to be more meaningful and conducive to an experience of *otium* than the urban space. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, however, the randomness and wandering narrative style is opposed to notions of a contrast to the natural and a focus on speed and progress conventionally associated with the urban space (cf. Williams). In Chaudhuri's flâneuristic poetics, the novel's text itself seems to mirror and transform the fabric of the city in a web of places and associations. While *A Strange and Sublime Address* seems to point to the subversive possibilities of a leisurely being in the city, *We Weren't Lovers Like That* mourns for this state of being as something irretrievably lost through the changing character of the cityscape.

Nostalgia is a common motif throughout the novels analysed in this chapter. In theories about space, the "characteristically modern malaise" is tied to the "uniformity" of our modern conceptions of time (as abstract and linear as well as apart from space) and space (and its eradication through the focus on time) (Casey 38). Especially in the urban context, the novels express a nostalgia for a place that is no longer accessible or cannot be experienced in a leisurely way. The nostalgia for an unreachable mode of experience was already connected with home in the context of certain practices. In my reading of *A Sin of Colour*, longing for home is a longing for a concrete place (Bangladesh, Calcutta, Reba's father's house) as much as for the experiences and practices associated with it (compare 3.2). In this chapter's emphasis on space, it becomes apparent how the temporal nostalgia for experiences of otium can always also be directed at a longing for *a space in which experiences of otium might be possible*.

The most important commonality in different spatial environments is an acknowledgement of the reciprocal relationship between space and experiences of otium: otium is only possible in certain environments; at the same time this mode of experiencing (or even its mere possibility) has an effect on how the environment is perceived. While at a first glance the location of experiences of

otium in a certain space seems to underline the notion of space as a cultural construct and Simon Schama's dictum of landscape as a "work of the mind" (7), the experiences of otium repeatedly enable the transgression of received conceptions of the spaces in which they occur. By evoking the sensuous experience of a place rather than its mere linguistic description, experiences of otium in the novels are associated with a pre-discursive grasp on "things and places" that is not centred on human perception and that accepts ambivalences and silences in the text (Moslund 28; cf. 73). This is the case in the *Inheritance of Loss* when a human-centred view is criticised in favour of the agency of natural elements. It is also the case in my readings on the urban space, in which the possibility to experience otium entails a transgression and blurring of the supposedly defining boundaries between the urban and the rural space.

This transgressive potential is possible in both cases through a changed perception and representation of temporality. A non-linear focus on the present (on the physical exertion of Samar's hikes in *Romantics*, on nature existing apart from human modernity in *Inheritance*, on drifting through the urban space in *Address*) is connected to the character of the particular space, but lies just as much in the quality of experience with which the space is perceived. Moreover, the texts' positioning towards a collective imaginary of space predominantly takes place in the *form* of representation. Through the way in which characters' experience of space is stylistically represented, certain experiences are singled out as being close to otium. At the same time, the recurring representation of moments of otium, of dwelling in the present, of drifting and openness makes these novels themselves more spatial, as the scenic focus on the present is favoured over the causal progression of plot events.

6. Society. Otium as Distinction and Transgression

6.1. Social Distinction and the Potential for Subversion

Gregor Dobler and Peter Philipp Riedl have pointed out that ideals and conceptualisations of otium are tightly connected with, and highly informative about, social structures (2). They can have political relevance in relation to our economic systems by offering a critical perspective on the way we work (Skidelsky/Skidelsky; Rosa, *Acceleration* 162-176; Fludernik/Nandi 2-3; Wajcman 6, 37-43). Consequently, the experiential quality of practices of otium cannot be analysed without taking the social framework in which they are embedded into account. In this context one needs to ask: Who is allowed to experience otium or even have free time? How are related categories like idleness, leisure and laziness morally evaluated (cf. Fludernik/Nandi 6; Wajcman 34)? Certain comments on idleness or laziness reinforce gender dichotomies and stereotypes as well as power relations between the global North and the global South (ibid. 6-7). This chapter addresses these dimensions by questioning how the protagonists' social position has an effect on which sphere of action is available to them and how this sphere of action determines their access to otium. At the same time, it will analyse instances in which the experience of otium can also put the social and economic structure in which the characters find themselves under temporary erasure and serve to question their legitimacy. It follows that experiences of otium have two seemingly contradictory dimensions for the characters: they reinforce social dynamics of domination and exclusion and at the same time open up the potential of questioning and undermining these very structures. This theoretical introduction explains the nexus between **practices of otium as practices of distinction**. It goes on to delineate the **transgressive potential of experiences of otium** from subaltern positions, which gains particular significance in a **postcolonial context**. Finally, I explain the structure of the chapter which is based on the **three dimensions of class, caste and gender**.

On the one hand, otium as an ideal frequently functions as a form of cultural capital that reinforces social differences, because not every social actor enjoys the time, financial security and basic necessities to engage in the practices associated with otium.[138] In his study on *Distinction*, Bourdieu argues that "educational capital", or at least the social origin that forms the basis of cultural distinction, are hidden (11-12). Moreover, he maintains that the acquisition of cultural capital is tied to "a sort of withdrawal from economic necessity" so that the two forms of capital are inextricably linked (53, cf. 55, 266-267). The access to cultural capital, or the lack thereof, further determines an actor's social position: "The different forms of capital, the possession of which defines class membership […] are simultaneously instruments of power and stakes in the struggle for power" (315). This holds true for any of the practices of otium that were discussed in chapter 3. Moreover, Hartmut Rosa remarks with reference to resonance "that the *capacity for resonance* is not simply a consequence, but also a cause for the ability to accumulate social, economic, cultural, and bodily capital" (*Resonance* 29). Despite both authors' focus on a European context, the basic notion of **social distinction** is equally helpful for the context of Indian fiction.

One example for this connection between economic, educational and, one could say, *temporal* capital is Agastya's time management in *English, August*. As I have described in my reading of the novel in chapter 4, Agastya spends long stretches of time idling in his room. While he may not feel happy about his situation and does not experience these afternoons as otium, the way in which he spends his time is certainly distinctive: with his English education, his metropolitan origin and his humour reminiscent of the English public school boy, his reading interest in Marcus Aurelius and his CD collection, which includes classical Western composers, he feels superior to others. He even ridicules less privileged people such as the rest house caretaker Vasant and his large number

[138] In addition to economic capital, Bourdieu introduces cultural capital on the basis that taste is a major factor for distinction (Bourdieu cf. 1-2, 11, 56). He observes with a view to potentially otiose, bourgeois leisure activities "that all cultural practices (museum-visits, concert-going, reading etc.) […] are closely linked to educational level […] and secondarily to social origin" (1-2, cf. 179). Instead of a direct connection to social origin and education, these choices of taste are contained in social actors' habitus, which he defines as "the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements" (170).

of children, “their liveliness transcending their malnourishment” (62, cf. 6, 65, 67, 97, 178).

In any society there is an uneven distribution of leisure time and access to spaces of leisure (cf. Dobler/Riedl 6). Leisure can be seen as a marker of distinction or an argument by elite groups for their social privileges. It can even come to serve as an instrument of self-representation (cf. ibid. 8, 9; Fludernik, “Idling”; “The Performativity”). Hence, it is highly informative which practices or experiences are defined as leisure, idleness, boredom or laziness in any period or setting. For instance, the nineteenth-century English gentleman was defined by his duties and his leisure, never his work, and he was keen on distinguishing himself from the busyness of the merchant class. ‘True idleness’ was not something just anyone could indulge in (O’Connor 7).[139] Being able to or wanting to engage in practices of otium can therefore become a factor of social distinction – always keeping in mind that this refers to the ideal of otium rather than its actual experience.

Conversely, the mere in/ability to spend time on certain things plays an important role for the im/possibility to experience otium. Besides spending a large amount of time on work to earn a living, in a situation of un- or underemployment, the worries about not being able to provide for one’s self or one’s family hinders a relaxed, open attitude (cf. Levine 259, 268-270; Fludernik, “Distinktion” 166). The rich can insist on the cliché of having earned their leisure through hard work supposedly visible in their wealth, while “[l]aziness (‘idleness’) is a common label attached to the excluded other” (Fludernik/Nandi 6; cf. Fludernik, “The Performativity”).

Experiences of otium are of importance for the protagonists’ position in society due to their radical openness and inaccessibility. An experience of otium can be a subversive change within the “re-enactment or reproduction” of social roles (Rouse 106-107, cf. Butler 12-15, Weedon 126). Because of a focus on the

[139] As Bourdieu argues, members of the higher classes enjoy “an enchanted experience of culture”, “which implies forgetting the acquisition” of taste necessary for this appreciation (2-3). No aim-oriented effort should go into the appraisal of a work of art. Leisure and at least potential experiences of otium are part of their self-view. Interestingly, this perspective is always one of reception or consumption and it ignores the fact that a *work* of art is quite obviously connected to work from the perspective of the artist (Fludernik, “Distinktion” 166).

individual characters' perception vis-à-vis their social situation, the **transgressive and subversive potential of otium** in the novels I analyse has the character of small, individual moments rather than that of an overarching and potentially unrealistic ideal (cf. Dobler/Riedl 5). As defined in the first part of this book, experiences of otium are characterised by a perceived freedom from obligations and (social) restrictions as well as from mechanisms of productivity. They also enable a positive 'freedom *to*', which is frequently expressed through a sense of openness and potentiality, since it remains undefined how this freedom should be filled (cf. Dobler/Riedl 3).[140] The social relevance of otium is therefore always tied to negotiations about how much freedom humans need and how much freedom society will allow them (ibid. 7). In this sense, this chapter addresses the modern problem of "freedom and self-determination and the failure to realise them" with a focus on the role of social positions that prevent their realisation (Jaeggi 6).[141]

From a socially subaltern[142] position, overcoming worries about one's means of existence is part of the experience of otium and can lead to a newly found

[140] Even the openness and potentiality of experiences of otium is not entirely free from social distinctions as Bourdieu defines them. Instead, disinterestedness itself is part of bourgeois culture, which "tends to use stylized forms to deny function", derides the "ethical" and "functional" basis of traditions of working-class art and characterises taste as "sublimated, refined, *disinterested*, gratuitous" (Bourdieu 5-7, emphasis added).

[141] As Jaeggi and Rosa argue, an incapacity to appropriate the (social) world or identify with it results in a lack of freedom, while its successful appropriation leads to a sense of self-determined mastery over one's actions (Jaeggi 23; Rosa, *Resonance* 158-164; 174-191). However, poststructuralist thinkers like Foucault question the possibility of the individual existing in an un-alienated manner, because the domination of "networks of power and knowledge" preclude such an original state (Peggs/Smart 63, cf. 61-63; Rouse 102-110; Weedon 126; Jaeggi 27, 30).

[142] The term *subaltern* is particularly helpful in this context because of its relational usage. The notion of subalternity, which goes back to Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, has become central to South Asian historiography in the 1980s through the Subaltern Studies collective of scholars who wanted to write history from "below" and against the bourgeois-nationalist elitism that, as they claimed, dominated the field since Indian Independence (cf. Gramsci 52-55; Beverley 6; Chaturvedi VII-VIII; Guha, "Colonial India" 1; Nandi, *M/Other* 101). The term is "extended to refer to subordination in terms of caste, gender, race, language, and culture, as well as class" (Bhambra 27). While Arnold admits that subalternity "can be regarded as little more than a convenient shorthand for a variety of subordinate classes" he also points out that "[i]t emphasizes the central importance of the relationship of power between social groups: they are not just peasants and landlords but subordinates and superordinates, conscious of the implications and consequences of their respective positions though not necessarily in terms that signify a developed class consciousness" (32-33, cf. Beverley 12; Bhambra 27). This relationality also means that who is considered to belong to a subaltern class depends on the context and someone in a privileged position in one context might be in a subaltern position in another,

sense of agency.[143] Thus, experiencing otium can, albeit temporarily, make us forget our fear of death and the necessity to care for our existence (cf. Klinkert 10). However, because of the impossibility of intentionally creating a frame of mind or seeking an otiose mode of perception, the experience remains ultimately *inaccessible* and contingent.

I am arguing that thanks to the opposition between otium and aim-oriented action, experiences of otium present an alternative to mechanisms of social acceleration and linear concepts of temporality, i.e. the structures that have been described to dominate (late) modern, capitalist societies. It can therefore enable a transgression of dominant temporality, even though otium is embedded in this social context. Experiences of otium can therefore offer alternative modes of existence in social contexts that are dominated by functional relations and by feelings of alienation or a sense of "relationlessness with respect to oneself and to a world experienced as indifferent" (Jaeggi 3). This transgressive potential of otium already played a role in the previous chapter on environments, in which otium was conceptualised as a literal and metaphorical heterotopia (cf. Foucault, *Heterotopien*). Otium is linked to an experience of temporality in a specific social

---

particularly when focusing on different factors such as class, caste and gender (cf. Guha, "Colonial India" 7, Khair xiii). Compare also Mohanty, who writes in the context of feminism of the "idea of multiple, fluid structures of domination which intersect to locate women differently at particular historical conjunctures" ("Introduction" 12-13).

[142] In her much debated essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak does not deny the possibility of a deconstructive analysis of the mechanisms that silence the subaltern voice as well as a digging up of acts (rather than statements) of subversive resistance. However, the representation of the subaltern for a privileged, metropolitan audience does not allow much room for these (cf. 289, 308; Spivak, *A Critique* 198-311). With a Foucauldian take on the nexus between power and knowledge, Beverley emphasises the impossibility to represent the subaltern "adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that actively *produces* subalternity […] in the act of representing it" (1, emphases original; cf. Rouse 99-103). The argument common to these critical voices is that each act of representation by others results in a silencing and taking away of agency from subaltern groups (cf. George, "Feminists" 218-219).

[143] Compare Victor Turner's understanding of leisure and play, which is linked to a "*freedom to* transcend social structural limitations, freedom to play…with ideas, with fantasies, with words […] with paint […] and with social relationships" (37). With Bourdieu one could add that it is a form of distinction to be able to "maintain for a long time […] a child's relation to the world" in adulthood (54). Turner points to the contradiction that although "no one is committed to a true leisure activity by material needs or by moral or legal obligations", "the cultural reality of leisure is obviously influenced by the domain of work from which it has been split by the wedge of industrial organization" (37, cf. Dumazedier).

setting which allows a changed vantage point on the current norms of temporality and social structure. It follows that the positive freedom gained in the experience of otium does not in and by itself change a character's social position. Instead, its critical and emancipatory potential lies in the very contrast of this experience to the way things usually are.

As we have seen, a hegemonic, elitist self-perception is often based on the discursive evaluation of such concepts as leisure, idleness and otium.[144] As I have delineated in chapter 2, laziness during the colonial period was associated both with ideals of idyllic pastoral scenes about the idleness of the primitive native and with derogation of the "lazy native" (cf. Alatas; Fludernik, "The Performativity"). In colonial India, discourses about class, gender and race overlap and the values exposed in these discourses, whether celebratory or condemnatory, are telling with reference to the ambivalence of British morals. Deserved leisure is associated with the colonialists, whereas idleness is particularly attributed to the lower classes and servants among the natives (cf. Fludernik, "The Performativity"). Thus, both the distinctive and subversive potential of otium is frequently entangled with **colonial history and postcolonial perspectives**.

While the condemnation of idleness belongs to what Edward Said conceptualises as *manifest orientalism*, his concept of *latent orientalism* underlines the problematic nature of exotic representations of gender (cf. 206-208). On the one hand, colonisers characterise Indians with the manifest, negative stereotype of a typically Indian male "despotism" (Jordan 140-141), due to which they are said to keep "women […] in a state of domestic slavery" (Konishi 103).[145] On the other hand, latent orientalist stereotypes about traditional forms

[144] This dimension is underlined by the history of some of the terminology. Although I have given a particular definition in the context of this book, otium has, as a Latin term and with its associations with art and learning, decidedly bourgeois connotations. This is even more the case in the German discourse about "Muße", which is a term more currently used in German than otium in English but is seen as old-fashioned (Dobler/Riedl 3). However, in favour of these terms with their problematic history, it can be argued that they have, as analytical categories, a distancing effect that helps to critically assess their position with reference to social relations and hierarchical structures (ibid. 3-4).

[145] This is not to say that traditional Indian social role models are not culpable of a kind of forced leisure for the woman having to stay at home. Some contemporary novels try to deconstruct the double pressure of traditional and orientalist gender clichés by focusing on intentionally

of singing, dancing and dress focus on women as objects of desire. Another instance of latent orientalism can be the praise of concepts similar to otium, which are supposed to be part of the good life (cf. Dobler/Riedl 3). In the context of colonialism, seemingly contradictory tendencies are especially pronounced, with a desire for exoticist attributes on the one hand, and their condemnation on the other. As Margrit Pernau remarks, "those left behind in the race towards the future […] [are] reduced to powerlessness but at the same time envied, often by the same people" ("Nostalgia" 89). The Western desire for Eastern relaxation, calm and inner peace starkly contrasts with the fact that "due to globalization people in former colonies are working harder and longer hours, particularly if they belong to the lower classes" (Fludernik/Nandi 7; cf. Nowotny 132).

An example of this paradox is Sohaila Abdulali's *The Madwoman of Jogare*, in which a recreation centre is being planned in a valley in Maharashtra, which is dominated by agricultural landscapes. The construction company's junior boss only sees the financial potential of building cottages for holidaymakers, idealising the idyllic rural surroundings as part of his sales strategy (cf. *Madwoman* 26, 53). The villagers, who are employed in the process of building a road, are poorly paid, risk injury and may lose their houses. With bitter sarcasm, the narrator associates the future "Taj Mahal hotel […] [and] National Park with Luxury Bungalows" with the "sweat" and "blood" spilt in building them (147-148).

In this chapter, latent orientalism plays a role in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, in which Biju, the son of a cook from Darjeeling, travels to New York to work there illegally. The novel shows in striking manner how any relaxation or calm is taken from him through his doubly precarious situation of being poor and illegal. At the same time, the work of 'illegal' immigrants in restaurant kitchens enables New Yorkers – who can also enjoy relaxing mountain tours in Darjeeling – to leisurely dine out at affordable prices.

Despite this example of the disenfranchised migrant in Desai's novel, I do not focus extensively on discussions about the (im-)possibility to represent subaltern individuals belonging to maginalised and poor groups. Miriam Nandi draws a

---

untraditional forms of female leisure (cf. Dengel-Janic 2-3, 6-7, 33-35; Fludernik, "Distinktion" 168).

connection between the privileged status of Indian writing in English and a persistent focus in literary criticism on the elite discourses of diaspora identity politics and postcolonialism, which are in themselves discussed as subaltern discourses (cf. *M/Other* 26, 37, 48). Thus, depending on the context, the (social, financial and cultural) elites can themselves be seen and represented as subaltern.[146] While it can hardly be claimed that *all* authors writing in English represent elite discourses, one reason for a lack of subaltern representations is the fear of a reproduction of Western stereotypes about Indian poverty or essentialist constructs of identity such as the "third world woman" (cf. Mohanty, "Introduction" 4-7; "Under Western Eyes" 51-55, 71-74; Weedon 130; George, "Feminists" 211, 220). This absence also holds true in the context of the novels relevant for a study of experiences of otium.[147] With the exception of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, none of the novels that are discussed in this chapter focus on marginalised groups. Although I work with an analytical approach that can address both the experience made from a certain social position within India and India's relation to the West from a postcolonial perspective, I agree with Nandi that the two dimensions should not be confused, for postcolonial literature is not in and of itself subversive of its social context (cf. *M/Other* 35-36).

---

[146] Miriam Nandi's central thesis is that the privileged, English-speaking elite became alienated from their own cultural context due to their mimicry of the colonizers' culture and the middle-class orientation towards Western capitalist culture (*M/Other* 17, 31-32). Where literature in English represents subaltern groups that were less influenced by British colonial culture, this elite group projects both their fears and their fantasies onto them (ibid. 18, 31-32, 43-44). In similarity, Tabish Khair demands a questioning of "the hegemonic narration of an undifferentiated postcolonialism […] without succumbing to a post-modern multiplication of differences that is blind to commonalities of socio-economic exploitation and discursive appropriation" (xiv).

[147] In her much debated essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak does not deny the possibility of a deconstructive analysis of the mechanisms that silence the subaltern voice as well as a digging up of acts (rather than statements) of subversive resistance. However, the representation of the subaltern for a privileged, metropolitan audience does not allow much room for these (cf. Spivak, *A Critique* 198-311; "Subaltern" 289, 308). With a Foucauldian take on the nexus between power and knowledge, Beverley emphasises the impossibility to represent the subaltern "adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that actively *produces* subalternity […] in the act of representing it" (1, emphases original; cf. Rouse 99-103). The argument common to these critical voices is that each act of representation by others results in a silencing and taking away of agency from subaltern groups (cf. George, "Feminists" 218-219).

The concrete social situation of the novels' protagonists can, however, be set in relation to the discourse on temporalities and the epistemological hegemony of the West without necessarily claiming a marginalised status for the novels or their authors. Thus, the *individual* experience of otium through its exceptional time structure proposes an *interruption of the norm* of linear time of progress, a norm that played an important role in the justification of colonialism (the progress of European civilisation as it supposedly becomes manifest in British culture). While such negotiations of temporality can be interpreted as a comment on the colonial past, the hegemonic time of functional, progressive linearity can also be seen as operative in the capitalist system based on productivity and expansion. The possibility of individual experiences of alternative temporalities can have a subversive function with reference to hegemonic structures of thought that are ideologically based on a history of colonial domination and economic inequalities and cultural influence.[148]

In the example passages in this chapter, there always remains a tension between otium as an outwardly elitist form of distinction on the one hand, and its subversive potential for transgression on the other. Despite the inherent inaccessibility of otium, access to certain spaces as well as to the means of engaging in particular practices is not irrelevant, but can make these experiences more likely. Thus, inaccessibility does not imply that the concept of otium can be altogether separated from the individual conditions in which humans live.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Sai's response to the changes triggered by the monsoon season, namely her feeling relaxed and fallen out of time because modern technology is breaking down all around her, is contingent and cannot be

[148] In the context of subaltern studies, *hegemony* is another term taken from Antonio Gramsci, who distinguishes between "the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and […] that of 'direct domination' or command" (Gramsci 12). According to Arnold, hegemony is a concept that helped Gramsci explain "why peasants […] seemed to consent to their own subordination", which "was not just externally imposed […] but was internalized by the peasants themselves as part of their culture and their consciousness" (34, 46). In similarity, Guha understands it as a "particular condition of D[ominance]" with an emphasis on "P[ersuasion]" and hence a dynamic concept […] open to Resistance" (*Dominance* 23, cf. xii-xiii). In this context, subaltern studies are inspired by a Foucauldian concept of disciplinary (bio)power that "produces the subjects it controls" by increasing their "usefulness and docility" as well as their "integration into systems of efficient and economic controls" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 139; Butler 22; cf. Rouse 92-95).

intentionally brought about by her. Her grandfather Jemubhai hates the season for the same reasons that free her from a number of constraints and necessities. However, Sai's *otiose* experience in her grandfather's colonial mansion is hardly accessible to the beggar woman; to her, the monsoon does not offer respite from everyday structures of temporality, but provides her with an opportunity for earning her livelihood in helping to rebuild the roads that are crumbling because of landslides.

In the wake of Dobler and Riedl's remark on otium as the *socially specific* as well as the "culturally and temporarily specific" experience of women or men, of academics or workers, of the rich or the poor, in the following section I address **three intersecting dimensions: class relations, caste and gender** (cf. 7; Cowman/Jackson 41). The first are **class relations** in the novels, particularly in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. For class distinctions, the contrast and debates about work and leisure play an important role, particularly the concept of – from a Marxist perspective – alienated, "heteronomous" work relations (Jaeggi 12, cf. 4-6; Hennessy; Dobler/Riedl 9). The social divisions in the context of globalised inequalities are linked to the history of colonial domination as well as gender roles.

The second dimension is **caste**. Though caste is, as a social category, less pronounced in the novels relevant here, it does play an important role in Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics*. In that novel, role expectations as well as prejudices about lower castes are attached to the protagonist's Brahmin background. As is typical of English-language novels intended for a readership throughout India, as well as a potential international readership, most of the novels relevant here do not comment on caste. Instead they are set, due to a tendency for "the universal and the pan-Indian", in an upper-caste milieu that is partially taken for granted (Khair 20, 136). As Khair argues, writers of English fiction have become geographically "removed […] from spheres of active caste-based prejudices, let alone conflicts", because they live either in "cosmopolitan centres in India" or in "metropolitan centres abroad" (141). Hence, this relatively privileged group has become "non-caste" in their own self-perception, even as they form a largely homogeneous upper-caste group (145, cf. 135). Thus, Mishra's *The Romantics*

is exceptional in that the central problem of the text is tied to the upper-caste identity of the narrator-protagonist.

The third dimension is **gender**, which I will analyse in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*. Gender roles, if they are understood as an "enforced system of endless performances", a repetition of socially learned norms, can be more pronounced through the norms and values associated with otium (Butler 1-3, cf. 12-15; Rouse 106-107; Weedon 126; Dengel-Janic 8-9). At the same time, they can be questioned due to the transgressive potential of the experience itself (cf. Dengel-Janic 10; Dobler/Riedl 16). Through the divide between the public and the private, certain tasks are expected of women, while others are less accepted, so that questions of work and gender frequently overlap (Dengel-Janic 5-8; Fludernik/Nandi 6-7). Moreover, as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan points out, gender images impact on women's material reality (cf. 9, 11). Contrasts and conflicts between 'tradition' and 'modernity' often play into these dynamics, such as an "anti-colonial indigenism" that is directed against a privileged, urban culture influenced by Western role models (ibid. 6-7). At the same time, Western, Eurocentric traditions of feminism have been criticised where they express a view of essentialised "Third World women" that "victimizes them and denies them agency" (Weedon 130; cf. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" 71-74; Spivak, *A Critique* 114; George, "Feminists" 211, 220).[149] Hence, particularly in the context of their representation in the literary text, gender roles should not be seen as "eternally fixed and unchanging", but as shaped by "the specific socio-historical as well as local context" (Dengel-Janic 7). As described above with more general reference to subalternity, this means that certain gendered practices and experiences of otium can become restricting forms of social expectation, but also that the openness of experiences of otium can enable their transgression (cf. Cheauré/Stoganova; Cheauré, "Gender").

The separate listing of these categories should by no means suggest that they are distinct, unconnected aspects. Here, the particular relevance of the

[149] See Mohanty's criticism of "the production of the 'third world woman' as a singular monolithic subject" based on an ahistorical notion of patriarchy and binary differences "assumed prior to their entry into the arena of social relations" ("Under Western Eyes" 51, 59-60, cf. 54; "Introduction"4-7).

concept of subalternity becomes apparent, which can be used "to think about the relation of the nation, national culture, gender, race, class, power, and literature" as well as the relation between the social sphere and its cultural representation in the novel form (Beverley 11, 13).[150] Different "forms of oppression, as of resistance or change, may not only overlap but may also differ or even conflict" (Young 5). Hence, it will not be possible to focus on one category with reference to one novel, and there are examples in which several categories intersect and influence each other in their impact on a character's identity.

6.2. Identity and Social Position in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

Desai's novel focuses on a number of characters whose subjectivity is influenced or mediated (cf. Mohanty, "Introduction" 33) through different dimensions of social identity such as class and gender. Their different experiential realities in the social fabric of the novel are developed by contrasting them with each other, with the help of a heterodiegetic narrative and variable internal focalisation. I argue that social status is, in the course of the novel, negotiated, firstly, through the kind of otium-related practices the characters are drawn to (6.2.1). On a second level (6.2.2), I turn to the characters' access to leisure and the (im)possibility of experiencing otium, analysing gender inequality and the social injustice of globalised realities of work. All characters of the novel have to face emotional and material loss, but it is the lack of experiences of otium due to social conditions that is represented as a consequence of the precariousness of their respective situations, at worst resulting in a loss of identity. Finally, I summarise how Desai suggests hope in an alternative temporality beyond human influence (6.2.3).

The novel is predominantly set in the town of Kalimpong in the hills of Darjeeling and describes the life of a group of Indian and Anglo-Indian characters. It is set at the time of the Gorkhaland movement, a separatist uprising "claiming

[150] It is thus not a rigid, oppositional understanding of power that plays a role here, but the intersection of aspects of social identity such as class and gender in socialist feminism and race and gender in the context of a questioning of European female subjectivity (cf. Mohanty, "Introduction" 3, 12-13; Butler 18; Weedon 114-115, 130; Hennessy 59). Compare also Bhabha's idea of "domains of difference" (*The Location of Culture* 1).

a new independent state for an enclave comprising parts of Nepal, Bhutan, West Bengal" that led to violent clashes in the 1980s (Monaco 12, cf. 16; Banerjee/Stöber).The movement is linked to the colonial past, since the Gorkhas "were brought to the region in large numbers as labourers in tea and cinchona plantations" (Banerjee/Stöber 5). The movement also reacted to the redrawing of borders between West Bengal and Bangladesh in 1971, after which "Bengali-speaking refugees and immigrants from Bangladesh settled here in high numbers" (ibid.). In the relationships between the characters of the novel, conflicts and differences, which had existed all along, erupt in the context of the escalating political movement. In addition, the novel has a number of chapters that are set in New York. Biju, the son of the cook who used to work for Judge Jemubhai, works illegally in New York and tries to survive under precarious circumstances. Desai's novel thus questions the promises of national identity politics and of a globalised world.

6.2.1. Practices of Otium as Distinction

On an economical level, the most privileged group among the protagonists consists of Judge Jemubhai and his orphaned granddaughter Sai as well as the Anglo-Indian sisters Lola and Noni. Jemubhai went to England to study and has worked in the Indian Civil Service all his life, acquiring the mansion Cho Oyu in the hills of Kalimpong (cf. *Inheritance* 117-118). He is characterised as a cruel and bitter man who makes others suffer for his own weaknesses. On account of his loneliness and the failure of his attempts at mimicry of the British, he has become incapable of feeling "love for a human being that wasn't adulterated by another, contradictory emotion" (37, cf. 34-40, 112-113, 119; cf. Bhabha 85-92). His "[a]nglophilia is so rampant that he functions as a cultural metaphor in the book" (Ashcroft, "Re-Writing" 39). Being obsessed with appearances, such as the proper way to eat with cutlery and quoting the right kind of English poetry (cf. *Inheritance* 38, 109), his favourite pastime is also one signalling social distinction: he is often described "sitting poised like a heron over his chessboard", but never

really seems to enjoy the game (88).[151] Jemubhai's insistence on appearances is partially explained by his own lower-caste origin, which he never talks about and tries to forget (56-57). The chessboard becomes a metaphor for his fixation on the past when his next choice on the board "seemed like an old move in an old game" (*Inheritance* 89; cf. Schäfer 119). Despite his cruelty, he is portrayed as a pitiful man.[152]

In a telling passage towards the end of the novel, he ignores a poor woman who comes to beg at his house after the police have arrested and tortured her husband. Because the husband was blinded and the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) has blocked the roads, the poor couple is unable to work on rebuilding roads after landslides as they used to do. Not only are they deprived of their means of subsistence, but she also looks "raped and beaten" (263). In response to her despair, "[t]he judge […] set his mouth in a mask, would look neither left nor right, went back to his game of chess" (264). He justifies his decision to himself because of his negative experiences and a veritable list of prejudices about the poor: "Give these people a bit and one could find oneself supporting the whole family forever after, a constantly multiplying family" (264). Eventually, in their despair, the couple steals Jemubhai's dog Mutt, the only living being he cares for. As a consequence, the judge pities himself more than he could ever sympathise with their poverty (283-284). However, even his pain about this loss does not soften him but is again transformed into anger and aggression toward his cook (308, 322-323). In his joyless rigidity, bitterness and cynicism, Jemubhai is presented as a character utterly devoid of the ability to accept the openness that is a precondition for otium. Still he practices some distinctive activities associated with otium to fulfil his role of aloof superiority. He engages in certain practices 'as if' he were experiencing otium simply because the social position he has acquired and his obsession with mimicking English cultural

[151] For chess as a practice of otium compare Premchand's *The Chess Players* as well as Satyajit Ray's famous film version of the short story (see Varma).

[152] Bhabha's notion of mimicry as "the sign of the inappropriate" and a "threat to 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" is only fitting in this context for the satirical *representation* of the judge's attempts at mimicry in Desai's novel (86). His own *experience* does not, by itself, possess the character of subversive rebellion.

behaviour demand it of him. At the same time, these performances of otium only further reinforce his alienation from his own cultural background, which he despises.

Sai, a convent-educated, orphaned girl in her teens who lives with the judge, finds moments of otium in her experience of first love with Gyan, her maths tutor. They lose themselves in the playful discovery of their bodies, forgetting the passing of time: "they played the game of courtship, reaching, retreating, teasing, fleeing"; and it is "miraculous how it could *eat up the hours*" (125, emphasis added). In the time they spend together "[t]hey linked word, object, and affection in a recovery of childhood, a confirmation of *wholeness*" (126, emphasis added). While wholeness here refers to their exact measurement of each other's physique through touching and kissing, it can also be seen as referring to their emotional experience. They immerse themselves completely in their newly found love and everything else stops being of significance: "When they would finally attempt to rise from those *indolent* afternoons they spent together, Gyan and Sai would have melted into each other like pats of butter" (129, emphasis added). The word "indolent" suggests a careless, luxurious ease with which they discover one another and the reference to childhood emphasises their open, playful behaviour. However, the search for a wholeness in love is interrupted by the Gorkha movement. Since this is a liberation movement which questions identity narratives of both the colonial and the national past, it suddenly highlights Sai's and Gyan's unbridgeable social differences (cf. Schäfer 118).

Gyan, who is himself part of the Nepali minority, starts to sympathise with the movement and becomes increasingly impatient with Sai's sheltered background. While, at first, their "*romance* was flourishing and the political trouble continued to remain in the background", small differences in their behaviour are gradually pointed out by the narrator: when eating out, Gyan "used his hands without a thought and Sai ate with the only implement on the table – a tablespoon […]. Noticing this difference, they had become embarrassed and put the observation aside" (140, emphasis original). When Gyan becomes involved in the GNLF, he realises "why he had no money and no real job had come his way, why he couldn't fly to college in America, why he was ashamed to let anyone see his home",

finding the cause for social inequalities in the lack of political representation of his minority (160).[153] In his fury, cultivating "old hatreds [that] are endlessly retrievable", his entanglement with Sai seems effeminate. In their conflict, two gendered spheres are juxtaposed: the "masculine atmosphere" and sense of history Gyan identifies with in the GNLF, and the "small warm space they inhabited together, the nursery talk" which "seemed against the requirements of his adulthood" (161). Just as their social difference becomes apparent, their playful experience of love, which has some characteristics of otium, becomes tinged with the contrast between masculinity and femininity. Gyan accuses Sai of her pro-Western (colonial) leanings because she clings to traditions such as Christmas. He blames her and others like her for acting "like slaves […] running after the West" (163). Gyan starts treating Sai and her class as culpable for his perceived injustices. He becomes increasingly aware of her different upbringing and status, but also notes how it limits her, since she "could speak no language but English and pidgin Hindi" and "could not converse with anyone outside her tiny social stratum" or "eat with her hands; could not squat down on the ground on her haunches to wait for a bus" (176). Despite his anger, he indirectly brags about his acquaintance with her and tells his comrades about guns and supplies that could be found at the judge's house where he tutors Sai in mathematics (cf. 177).

The tense situation reaches a climax when Sai goes looking for Gyan at his home "two hours downhill […] in a poor part of Kalimpong quite foreign to her" (254). There, she encounters a part of Gyan previously unknown to her, an area where "once the day failed […] you wouldn't be able to ignore the poverty, and it would become obvious that in these homes it was cramped and wet, the smoke thick enough to choke you, the inhabitants eating meagrely in the candlelight too dim to see by" (255). "Sai felt a moment of shock" when she arrives at his home, a house "common to those who had struggled to the far edge of the middle class

[153] The story lines connected to the Gorkhaland movement are exemplary of a dynamic in which the contingency of the nation state, which was seen as the solution by the nationalism around Independence, becomes problematic (cf. Gikandi 637). The drawing of borders based on colonial history is criticised, but at the same time global culture becomes a new point of reference beyond the nation.

[…] holding on desperately" (256). The man with whom she had shared such precious intimacy could only be the way he was, she understands, because the family put everything into "produc[ing] a boy, combed, educated, their best bet in the big world" (256). The shame he feels upon her sudden appearance turns into anger and they fight, the suddenly visible differences between them making them treat each other as mere representatives of their class: "Sai becomes the enemy, a member of the westernized Bengali elite in the Himalayas who cling to their privileges and continue to deprive the Nepalese of rights and land" (Poon 554).

Nevertheless, their helpless insults also make them aware of "[e]very contradiction they were heir to" and of their wish for "purity and a lack of contradiction" (*Inheritance* 259). Hence, they come to recognise the structures and history behind their positions, without being able to avoid taking these positions in their fight. Gyan refuses to make amends due to his gendered self-concept, because he "needed to be a man […] stand tall and be rough" and uses the rejection of their happiness to define his own role (260). Sai reacts in kind, noticing as well that her "role" – that of the outraged convent-educated, upper middle-class girl full of prejudices about the lower classes – "was more powerful than herself" (261). In the end, she feels ashamed, for her role as a woman in this situation also implies a kind of humiliation at Gyan's hands. As "the desperate girl who had walked all this way for unrequited love", Gyan can treat her as a conquest (262). Sai might have hoped that confronting him and speaking her mind would have given her a sense of empowerment, but she does not manage to escape the double image of her high social status and inferior gender position. It is some kind of comic relief when, after this scene, the proud and masculine Gyan is ordered by his grandmother to stay indoors and starts to reflect about the "smaller location" of happiness and contentment (272-273). However, it is apparently not possible for them to come to a reconciliation and find "wholeness" (126), for, despite all their regrets, they do not meet again within the pages of the novel.

The group of Anglo-Indian, as well as European, inhabitants of Kalimpong, whom Sai meets frequently, are described as strange, elderly people, each of them with their own history that brought them to Darjeeling. Nonetheless, all of

them are quite wealthy in relation to the other inhabitants of the town and can afford to spend their time in leisure. Lola and Noni, the Anglo-Indian sisters living at the cottage Mon Ami, not only have the financial means to live in a comfortable house with a vegetable patch and a guard for the night, but they also voice decidedly bourgeois, and racist, opinions on civilisation and the behaviour of poorer groups: “And then, *baba*, the way these Neps multiply”, Lola comments in a discussion about the border issues (129). At the same time, openly proclaimed prejudices make her uneasy in her liberal self-view: “This complaining about Muslim birth rates was vulgar and incorrect among the class that reads Jane Austen” (130). Like relics from the *Raj*, the sisters seem to define their whole existence by their Britishness. Hence, they “had always looked down on Mrs. Sen”, their friend with the prejudices about Muslims, “as a low-caliber person” (131). They are referred to as belonging to “the few rich” to whom it was “natural they would incite envy”. Their years are filled almost purely with leisure activities; with “Trollope, BBC, a burst of hilarity at Christmas” (241-242). When the Gorkha movement starts, their easy-going, trifling and sometimes ridiculous pleasures suddenly stand out from the large group of the poor Nepali minority:

> It *did* matter, buying tinned ham roll in a rice and dal country; it *did* matter to live in a big house and sit beside a heater in the evening […]; it *did* matter to fly to London and return with chocolates filled with kirsch; it did matter that others could not. (242, emphasis original)

The sisters define their lives through these choices of lifestyle and the way they spend their leisure time drinking tea, cultivating vegetables and reading.

When the GNLF occupies their garden and their leader makes fun of Lola’s complaints, he clearly enjoys spoiling the “rich woman[‘s]” privileges: “[h]ouse – garden – servants” (244). Together with father Booty from Switzerland and Uncle Potty, Sai and the sisters often go to Darjeeling to visit the *Gymkhana*, the colonial-era club, and borrow books. As the political situation becomes increasingly tense, they are stopped by guards at a bridge on the way back to Kalimpong and their library books are taken from them – the objects representing their bourgeois and, at least in most of their literary choices, decidedly Eurocentric ways of spending leisure time (cf. 217-218). The books include Trollope, *Asterix*,

Agatha Christie and *Wuthering Heights*. Eventually, the Gorkhas take over the club, making it into a sort of headquarters for their plans for further insurgency:

> [they] camped out in the ballroom and the skating rink, ridiculing […] whatever pretensions the club might still harbour […]. Men with guns rested in the ladies' powder room, enjoyed the spacious plumbing […]. The dining room was filled with men in khaki. (211)

It is deeply ironic that the gymkhana, an exclusive space for colonial leisure, is taken over by the separatist movement. Since Independence, the club might have been open to all Indians, but with the sort of leisure activities associated with it, it still stands for a space of privileged leisure.[154]

In similarity to the judge's obsession with his chess game, the Anglo-Indian sisters, Father Booty and Uncle Potty are characterised, and define themselves, through their leisurely lifestyles. Often owning the properties on which they live, they do not have to do any regular work. It only becomes clear during the Gorkhaland movement how much their choices and actions are forms of distinction. While it is significant that they engage in practices associated with otium, these do not seem to actually offer them experiences of otium.[155] Instead, they expect these practices of themselves as people of a certain class and cultural background. As delineated in the theoretical introduction, they represent the idea of otium that is tied to certain practices. The experience remains inaccessible, because in all three examples of privileged lives in Kalimpong, the possibility to experience something like otium is hindered, interrupted or stopped through the awareness and clash of social differences. It therefore becomes either a mere potential spoiled by the burden of social differences, past

[154] Monika Fludernik points out how often certain higher-class activities entail a conscious spatial separation from the "hoi polloi" of lower classes, particularly in clubs with restricted membership that are leftovers from the Raj ("Distinktion" 165). Compare also Nayantara Sahgal's representation of distinctive leisure at the club in *A Time to Be Happy* (204-218). Although it is opened for Indians in the political atmosphere shortly before Independence, only certain classes have club membership. The narrator characterises the typical class of people he encounters as "the cultured gentleman of leisure, the prominent and influential citizen, or the debonair man about town" (217). In his view, club leisure consists of dances, cocktail parties and small talk between "light-hearted play-actors" (218).

[155] In her words of advice to Sai, it becomes clear that for Noni the way she spent her time was characterised by boredom and idle diversion rather than otium: "'Time should move,' Noni had told her. 'Don't go in for a life where time doesn't pass, the way I did.'" (93).

experiences and the impossibility to communicate and empathise with the social other, or it is already precluded by the idea of social distinction.

6.2.2. Emotional Precariousness

For two characters in the novel, a sense of personal precariousness is tied to an absence or impossibility of experiencing something like otium. While the more privileged characters also struggle with the "longing for stability" and turn to the past to find a sense of "belonging and home", two of the novel's characters lack the basic emotional necessity of stable relationships with friends or family, which evokes in them feelings of a dissolving identity and a profound unease with the temporal structures in which they find themselves (Schäfer 112, 122).

The first of the two is a minor character in the novel, Nimi, formerly married to Jemubhai. The judge uses her as a release for his shame and frustration at himself. His insecurity for not being able to *mimic* the British and be accepted among them makes him despise himself as well as his fellow countrymen. In the shy wife that awaits him upon his return from England he sees a reflection of his own Indianness that disgusts him. As a result, he punishes her when she does not sit properly on the toilet or know the English words for the food she eats (cf. 171-173). Paradoxically, this behaviour mirrors Gyan's attitude towards Sai when he is angry at her incapacity of behaving in an "Indian" way. Moreover, Jemubhai seems scared by Nimi's femininity, which he can conceptualise only in terms of his own potential failure as a man (cf. *Inheritance* 91-92). The reason for his first attack on Nimi is his anger at her having stolen his powder puff, "that overdetermined symbol of his desire for whiteness, which his extended Indian family […] fails to see as anything else but evidence of his effeminacy" (Poon 551). Giving rein to his rage, he beats and rapes her until she falls completely silent and, eventually, he sends her back to her family – a huge insult in the context of a traditional marriage.

Even before Nimi is sent away, she is mostly alone when her husband is on tour. To her, time stretches endlessly: "three weeks out of four, she paced the house, the garden" (*Inheritance* 171). The time on her hands seems only a sign of her worthlessness and desolation; "[s]he was uncared for, her freedom

useless, her husband disregarded his duty" (ibid.). In a long passage describing how she contemplates her surroundings in silence, we learn that she cannot experience time in a fulfilling way, broken as she has been by the expectations of her role as a woman and Jemubhai's cruelty. Her freedom is "useless" because it is the absence of expected duties. It does not turn into a positive freedom to engage in anything else. The sight of Mughal ruins "of history passing and continuing, touched Nimi in a desolate way. She had fallen out of life altogether" (172). This contextualisation of Nimi's oppression by patriarchal social standards can be associated with women's "invisibility in the historical record", for she becomes the victim of "'experiences' of exploitation and colonization" that have affected her husband's view of her as well as of himself (Cowman/Jackson 35, 40). Her empty contemplations and her silence are emblematic of her loss of identity, she is "made of nothing", because "speech is identified as self-expression, and silence as self-extinction" and both are "tied into the project of subject-constitution" (*Inheritance* 172; Sunder 84). Without the capability to express herself or assert her opinion, Jemubhai is the sole master of their narrative and he "turned her into the embodiment of their humiliation" (*Inheritance* 308).

Her eventual death is described in a dry telegram about another domestic tragedy: "A woman had caught fire over a stove" (*Inheritance* 307). This phrasing suggests that her death can be associated with any number of "dowry deaths" (Sunder 83).[156] With Jemubhai's decision "to believe it was an accident", her non-existence is made permanent (*Inheritance* 307). Nimi's is an "invisible narrative of destruction that colonial globalization sets in motion, but which both colonial and Indian structures of gender discrimination conspire to elide" (Poon 552). The only time the reader is presented with Nimi's perspective on events, her experience of oppression on account of her gender and her Indianness is

[156] The "dowry deaths", which have increased in India since the 1980s, are founded upon a patriarchal belief in "husband-worship (*pativrata*)" that silences the wife (Sunder 83, cf. 93). The term refers to cases in which "the Hindu wife is killed or driven to suicide by her husband and his family" and it is "almost always a death by burning that is made to resemble a domestic accident" (83). Although Nimi's tragedy is not linked to the wish for financial gain, her fate and her irrelevance to both her family and her husband, which deprive her of her sense of self, are linked to the phenomenon.

characterised in terms of a lack of positive freedom that alienates her from the time she has on her hands.

However, the novel makes it clear that Jemubhai himself is a victim of his Anglicisation and his subsequent alienation from his own culture. One of the first descriptions of his early marriage is in stark contrast to its later terrible development; at the time, the text suggests, things could still have developed differently. This effect is achieved by an emphasis on the impression Nimi left on Jemubhai and by the use of the third-person plural to include both of them. In his memory, Jemubhai convinces her to ride on his bike with him: "oh, no man had eyes like these or looked out on the world this way […] as they flew down the incline, their hearts were left behind for an instant, levitating amid green leaves, blue sky" (92). Between this intensely joyful experience and Nimi's later becoming entirely lost in time lie the weight of her gender role of the dutiful wife and that of Jemubhai's cruelties, caused by his disappointments and humiliations. I understand the novel's title as the inheritance of *loss* in this sense, for Jemubhai's and Nimi's are just two cases in which "the characters negotiate with a state of non-identity" and suffer from loss and emotional deprivation due to the weight of colonial history, tradition and their social position (Monaco 16; see also Schäfer). Nimi's loss of identity is captured in the images of time standing still and of herself being outside the movement of time altogether.

Another character who is faced with a situation that threatens his concept of identity is Biju, the cook's son. He goes to New York in order to earn enough money to send some to his father and to return at some point. However, when he manages to get to America, he gradually realises that his precarious status as a so-called illegal immigrant will always be defined by a frantic rhythm of life, radical insecurity, the difficulty of meeting basic needs like a place to sleep, extensive exploitation by his quickly alternating bosses. His experience as a migrant is associated with a fragmenting of the self and life "under conditions of scarcity, insecurity, and restricted choice" (Pratt 242). Biju falls victim to the global "fragmentation of traditional relations of labour […] in terms of working conditions" and to "a global civil society devoted to entrepreneurship and consumption" (Hennessy 55). His insecurity is contrasted with the distinctive leisure of the

customers at various restaurants where Biju finds work, such as “a restaurant all of mirrors so the diners might observe exactly how enviable they were as they ate” (*Inheritance* 133). As Miriam Nandi argues, “idleness is […] part of a discourse that sustains, perpetuates and even produces the unequal distribution of wealth and power internationally” (“Idle Poor” n. pag.). At restaurants like the fittingly named “Le Colonial”, neo-colonial as well as neo-liberal “patterns of exploitation” are portrayed in a “spatial metonymy” of upstairs and downstairs (ibid.; cf. Poon 552): “on top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native” (*Inheritance* 21). It is in his manner that the novel comments on the dynamics of globalisation. However, it positions “a counter economy of affect to the material circulation and flow of goods and people” (Poon 548). Instead of “connection and cultural plenitude” (ibid.), the globalised economy is associated with a loss of emotional necessities as much as of material goods.

At his last job, Biju lives in the rat-infested basement kitchen so that his employer can “cut the pay to a quarter of the minimum wage, reclaim the tips for the establishment, keep an eye on the workers, and drive them to fifteen-, sixteen, seventeen-hour donkey days” (146). After a serious accident, Biju notices the “emptiness” of his life. His physical injury is symbolic of his overall situation and it derides the advantages of the supposedly weightless “transnational disembodiment” of a globalised flow of goods and human labour (cf. Pratt 240-242; Poon 553). His injured leg makes him realise that he and his father back in Kalimpong “were no longer relevant to each other’s lives except for the hope that they *would be* relevant”, their affection turning into “just the façade” without there being anything in his life in New York to take its place (*Inheritance* 232-233).

His injury is, in a concrete sense, the nadir of his lack of agency, but even before this, his self-concept is being questioned and attacked by his precarious social position: between himself and other, better situated immigrants, his notion of masculinity is continuously under attack, for instance by the aggressively masculine attitude of the Punjabi taxi drivers whom Biju encounters:

> […] a man is not a caged thing, a man is wild *wild* and he must drive as such, in a buckling yodeling taxi. They harassed Biju with such blows from their horns as could split the world into whey and solids. (*Inheritance* 49)

When Biju has to deliver food to upper-class female Indian students, he is ashamed, faced with their "intermingling of languages and cultures", their "supreme cultural confidence" and wealth (Allington 127). Their "friendliness" only makes him awkward "in this meeting between Indians abroad of different classes and languages, rich and poor, north and south, top caste bottom caste", and they make him feel "hunger, respect, loathing" (*Inheritance* 50). His hunger is not just a physical hunger due to malnutrition, but a hunger for social contacts and the opportunity of sociable leisure. In this contrast between Biju and the more privileged Indian girls, Desai shows how different dimensions of Biju's marginality overlap. Even though he meets numerous other immigrants stalled in a similar situation to his, their precarious situations keep them from forming lasting friendships.

Moreover, the exploited workers suffer from an extreme acceleration of their lives and from the impossibility of leisure and rest. This dimension of Biju's life becomes most apparent in the first description of his work at a delivery restaurant:

> Szechuan wings and French fries, just $3.00. Fried rice $1.35 and $1.00 for pan-fried dumplings fat and tight as babies […]. In this country poor people eat like kings! General Tso's chicken, emperor's pork, and Biju on a bicycle with the delivery bag on his handlebars, a tremulous figure between heaving buses, regurgitating taxis – what growls, what sounds of flatulence came from this traffic. Biju pounded at the pedals, heckled by taxi drivers direct from Punjab. (*Inheritance* 49)

Biju's work rhythm is "speeded up in the most gruesome manner" as the passage captures a "pervasive sense of rush, speed, and flurry of activity. The tone is breathless and the sentences are elliptic" (Nandi, "Idle Poor" n. pag.). The wealth of cheap products on offer are not there for Biju's consumption, who is merely the one delivering them. The descriptions from Biju's life in New York blur in their negative similarity. Nimi and Biju suffer from different extremes of temporal privation in that they lack their own time or being able to control their time: Nimi is forced into a temporal limbo and has too much time on her hands that she cannot fill with anything meaningful and Biju is forced into continuous frantic activity. In both cases, the passing of time loses its meaning in relation to events and experiences in it. Bill Ashcroft comments that *The Inheritance of Loss* "circulates around […] those discarded by History, those out of time and place"

(Ashcroft, “Re-Writing” 35). Loss of identity and the oppression suffered by socially inferior characters are associated in the novel with a loss of the capacity to feel at home in the present. The marginalised characters either cease to feel a part of meaningful time, or they experience time as unbearably accelerated.

Miriam Nandi analyses Biju’s experience of acceleration in the framework of Hartmut Rosa’s sociological theory. She argues that “we can observe a global dialectics in which the leisured […] lifestyle of the upper and middle classes all over the world […] is made possible by the acceleration of the working classes of the majority world” (“Idle Poor” n. pag.). In this argumentation, theories of acceleration have to address a global framework so as not to fall into the binary stereotypes of positing a modernity exclusively located in the West. Otherwise, they are in danger of perpetuating “the colonial stereotype of the lazy native” if it implicitly associates “the Global South […] with non-industrialized production on the technological level, slower patterns of social change and a more decelerated ‘pace of life’” (“Idle Poor” n. pag.). I partially disagree with Nandi’s criticism of Rosa; within the boundaries of his discipline, he does not claim to formulate a *global* theory of acceleration. Her comment, however, is relevant to an interpretation of *The Inheritance of Loss*, in which, on a theoretical level, Biju’s experiences of precariousness in New York, and even the postcolonial situation as such, can be described as an extreme case of acceleration in Rosa’s understanding of the “*increase of the rate of decay of action-orienting experiences and expectations*” (*Acceleration* 76). In the spirit of the idea of entangled histories of modernity, one can point to Biju as an exemplar of the poor immigrant from a formerly colonised country who is disenfranchised, his identity and his self-respect threatened by a precariousness that manifests itself on multiple levels. The *temporal* dimension of Biju’s experience is ironically juxtaposed to the still and unmoved inflatable globe that Sai is fascinated by early on in the novel and which, to her, seems to stand for a beautiful sense of promise (cf. *Inheritance* 18).

How the pace of life in Kalimpong is contrasted with Biju’s extreme experiences of acceleration could be read as a kind of strategic exoticism (cf. Huggan, *Exotic* XIII, 32-33, 72, 77; Li 393-394; Hill 406). In relation to the New

York scenes, Kalimpong is granted a slower rhythm and “a certain right to temporal backwardness” (Nowotny 34). It is, however, not always the case that “poverty in Kalimpong is pictured as less devastating” than in New York (ibid.). For instance, there is the bent and beaten woman whose husband was tortured and blinded and who has no other choice but to beg at the judge’s house and be turned away yet again. Nonetheless, in terms of the pace of life this observation still holds true. Biju’s own experience of exploitation makes him remember the rhythm of village life with a sense of nostalgia: “How good the roti tastes here! It is because the *atta* is ground by hand, not by machine…and because it is made on a *choolah*, better than anything cooked on a gas or kerosene stove” (103). The illegal immigrant perceives the accelerated modernity of New York as a negative contrast to the slower, or even seemingly timeless, space of his home village. In contrast to Biju’s memories of India, the pace with which time passes is dictated rather than organised by his own choice and agency.

Despite political unrest and hardship, several scenes emphasise the leisurely ‘timelessness’ of Kalimpong, such as descriptions of communal leisure in the time Sai spends with her friends. On the last evening she spends with Uncle Potty and Father Booty before the latter has to leave for Switzerland, “each of them separately remembered how many evenings they’d spent like this… […] Here Sai had learned how music, alcohol and friendship together could create a grand civilization” (223). As they listen to Abida Parveen and watch how “a mongoose loped like water over the grass, […], the fresh-smelling darkness expanding”, Father Booty wonders if in Europe the visitors to the grandest opera houses could “feel as they did here? Hanging over the mountain, hearts half empty – half full, longing for beauty, for innocence that now knows” (223). The communal experience of otium is connected here to the practice of listening to music (s. 3. Practice). Sometimes, the cook spends time with Sai or people come together at the bars or markets (cf. *Inheritance* 83-86, 88). The cook is represented as a poor, but content character, his broken watch standing for an almost romantic distance to the accelerated temporality in which his son finds himself chained.

The way in which Desai represents life in Kalimpong may resonate with (latent) Orientalist stereotypes, but these are used here strategically to highlight

the global dynamics of social inequalities. Especially with a view to the social instability and police brutality in the context of the Gorkha movement, the picture of the Indian setting is a highly ambivalent one despite its romanticising tendencies that are, at any rate, continuously under threat by human tragedy and loss.

6.2.3. Summary: an Alternative Temporality of the Natural

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, individual temporal structures that could be interpreted as an alternative to the accelerated time of globalised capitalism are only portrayed in fragile glimpses. As an alternative to human temporality, the novel represents the motif of a natural temporality. That motif, invading and reclaiming the human sphere as either a threatening or hopeful perspective on the future, runs through the novel, for instance in the repeated images of decay as in the quiet yet "monumental [sound]" of "microscopic jaws slow-milling the house to sawdust" (34).[157] The general sense of decay during monsoon times makes the judge furious, the storms sounding "like civilization crumbling", "[c]ondensation fogg[ing] the glass of clocks, and clothes hanging to dry in the attic remain[ing] wet for weeks" (106). "It made a mockery of him, of his ideals […] as the house crumbled about him" (110). This mood of mould and decay is the opposite of the Judge's anglophile superiority as well as of modern productivity, which is entangled both in the exploitation of immigrants in New York and the struggle of the Nepali minority in Darjeeling. There was, as Sai reflects, a "peace [in] knowing that communication with anyone was near impossible" and it was only "intelligent […] to succumb as all over Kalimpong modernity began to fail […] the world vanished, the gate opened unto nothing" (*Inheritance* 106). When Biju returns

[157] Compare the ecofeminist "rethinking of 'nature' as a set of dynamic interrelations [that] suits both feminist and ecological aims" and which also plays a role in other recent Indian novels such as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), or, less well known, Sohaila Abdulali's *The Madwoman of Jogare* (1998) (Butler 4; cf. Barad). The emphasis here is not on feminist concerns, but just as much on patriarchal forms of domination that impact on and are mirrored in human as well as ecological contexts. The described critical juxtaposition of natural temporality and human temporality resonates with a repeated "sense of giving oneself up to forces that are larger and stronger than human expectations", which could also be interpreted as an instance of écriture feminine (see also Nandi, "Idle Poor" n. pag.).

from New York he is “feeling patient in the way one feels before the greatness of nature” (315). This sense of the futility of human endeavours is repeated at the end of the novel: “Slowly, painstakingly, like ants, men would make their paths and civilization and their wars once again, only to have it washed away again…” (323).

Thus, the novel presents a “significant break with the optimism of the post-Rushdie school of writing” (Allington 128). As discussed in chapter 5, hope, and with it the potential of experiencing otium, is only possible in a decentring of human actors and a questioning of human categories and values based on dualistic thought (cf. 5.2.2; cf. Latour 44-52, 71-76). As Karen Barad proposes in her theory of ‘posthumanist performativity’, “[h]olding the category of ‘human’ fixed excludes an entire range of possibilities in advance, eliding important dimensions of the workings of power” (826). Nevertheless, the final image of this entirely non-human sphere is a soothing one: “The five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent” (*Inheritance* 324). The image is ironically hopeful, both coming across like “the stock happy ending of many a literary and filmic narrative” and as a serious address to the reader, as Angelia Poon claims (555). However, I differ from Poon’s analysis in that I see the sense of hope at the end of the narrative as not necessarily focused on the human protagonists, who have, with the exception of Sai, not changed in the course of the narrative, but rather on a potential for hope *beyond* the human (cf. 555). Alternative temporality is here part of the agency of natural elements, which form interventions against the human focus on progress and functionality (compare 4.3.2).

The structural juxtaposition of different social groups in the novel might seem schematic, but Kiran Desai actually portrays a varied picture of different groups that are defined not only by their economic situation, but also their history in relation to the Raj, their cultural pretensions, their origins, their religious affiliations and their relation to the Indian nation state. The distance from subaltern characters and the novel’s frequent focalisation on Sai and her grandfather is qualified by irony. In this sense, *The Inheritance of Loss* is a dialogic novel: the rather distanced narrative voice does not comment directly,

but the idiosyncrasies in any of these social groups are ridiculed and implicitly criticised for the tendency of concentrating on the otherness of (rather than solidarity with) fellow humans.[158] As Sai reflects in the end: "Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this narrative belonged only to herself" (323). Through this realisation, she acknowledges that her own actions cannot be seen without their connection to, and effects on, others; at the same time, she accepts her own insignificance. Both the human, sociable forms of otium that are possible in Kalimpong and the more radical difference of a natural cycle of decay and destruction are alternative temporalities[159] opposed to the hegemonic temporality of globalised capitalist acceleration described in the scenes in New York.

6.3. Alienation in Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics*

The Romantics, a novel which was already important in the context of religious practices as well as the representation of nature, is about the main protagonist Samar's aimless search for identity. His insecurity is partially caused by a discomfort with traditional religious practices, but in large part also by his failure to identify with a position in society that is associated with his Brahmin caste background. The social fabric in which Samar, the protagonist of *The Romantics*, tries to situate himself serves as an undercurrent both in his encounter with more privileged European and American characters and in his experiences at the

[158] As Monika Fludernik comments with reference to the role of ideology in narratology: "if all points of view are placed one beside the other with no attempt to coordinate them, a 'polyphoic narration' emerges" ("Ideology" 195). The concept of the novel as an inherently *dialogic* genre goes back to Mikhail Bakhtin (45-49, 76, 262-263, 272-3, 284, 295, 314-315, 364-366, 426-427). With the help of these techniques, Desai mirrors and critiques, arguably, her own privileged and diasporic position, for example through the judge's Anglophilia and the fragmentary representation of characters her class cannot claim to represent (cf. Allington 126, 134). I would argue that both Kiran Desai and Sunetra Gupta critically reflect the situation which Spivak has captured in the phrase "the diasporic stands in for the native informant" (*A Critique* 169).

[159] See also Gikandi: With their critical stance towards globalised culture and temporality, these alternative modes of experiencing time are at one end of the spectrum firmly localised, or, at the other end opposed to human temporality. Gikandi does refer to the necessity "to take notice of unfamiliar, but equally powerful, local scenes of being and belonging", but sees this as part of a globalised time, while the individual narratives of loss in Kiran Desai's novel actually criticise and undermine the promises of a globalised time (639).

universities of Allahabad and Benares. I am going to argue in this section (6.3.1) that the novel's main predicament is the incapacity of the narrator to identify with his own caste as well as the seeming impossibility of other means of identification. Moreover, (6.3.2) in addition to his alienation from his own socio-religious group he is confused and emotionally distanced in his interactions with poorer, lower caste groups. The incidences of protest by politically radical student groups he witnesses make him feel ill at ease and eventually provoke him to question social relations (of both class and caste) previously taken for granted. On the basis of these two observations, I will comment on the blurring of caste and class from Samar's perspective of what could be framed as his socially privileged alienation. However, (6.3.3) I argue that the main protagonist of Mishra's *Bildungsroman* finally overcomes his feelings of alienation regarding the social framework surrounding him as he develops towards a calm, disinterested state of mind. Initially, in similarity to some of the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*, the pressures of the role expected of him and the difficulty of escaping them make it hard for him to experience and enjoy moments of leisure, let alone otium. It is, then, ultimately an experience of otium that marks his breaking free from "ancestral obligations" (8). In this chapter, the central question is in what ways this mode of experience, which has been described in the previous references to the novel, contributes to a new evaluation of Samar's social circumstances.

6.3.1. Nostalgia and Decadence: The Representation of Brahmins

From the beginning of the novel, Samar introduces himself as a Brahmin, but also alludes to his lack of identification with this caste group. Following Tabish Khair, caste is understood in the analysis of this chapter "as a system of social stratification growing out of the […] early Aryan classes (*varna*)" (134; cf. Habib 161-162).[160] Conventionally, the groups developed from this are *Brahmins* (priest

[160] The "relatively late consolidation of these early classes into endogamous *jâtis*" can be partially linked to "Brahmin-centred Sanskritization" (Khair 134). The role and position of Brahmins in caste hierarchies in particular were strongly influenced by an emphasis on Hindu texts through which it was perpetuated, also reinforced by Brahmins' exchange with European Indologists (Gupta 2, 54, 116). Some historians even question whether caste existed before and independently from colonialism, arguing that "the idea of an 'Indian culture' occurred in the

caste), *Kshatriyas* (rulers and warriors), *Vaishyas* (artisans, merchants) and *Shudras* (peasants) (cf. Bayly). Furthermore, it is "a form of differentiation […] on the basis of putative biological differences" (Gupta 141). These relational differences are reinforced "by the ritualization of multiple social practices" such as specific occupations and notions of essence, purity and pollution (ibid.; cf. Chatterjee, *The Nation* 166, 174-176; Habib 161-169).[161] By being a member of the religious Brahmin elite, Samar is tied to traditions of caste division that are "rarely ever questioned", such as his initial choice of Allahabad as university (*Romantics* 8; cf. 6). Brahmins are associated in *The Romantics* with nostalgia for a revered, mythical past. At the same time, they are linked to decadence and decay. These two tendencies are at work in the history of Benares as well as in Samar's personal family history.

The first chapters of the novel are situated in Benares, where Samar is sent to continue his studies and eventually enrol for the Civil Service Examination. In the first chapter, the general atmosphere of idleness and decay with which Benares is described, "[t]his holiest of the pilgrimage sites that Hindus for millennia have visited in order to attain liberation from the cycle of rebirths", resonates with a certain decadence surrounding Brahmin identity (3). The city itself "has grown into a noisy little commercial town", a development that "one can't feel too sad about", for "regret and nostalgia seem equally futile" (3). Benares is described as a "brooding city" with "looming cupolas and minarets [and] decaying palaces", the ruin and decay associated with the "slow leisurely life of old Benares" (5, 276). In this town, Samar's room is situated in a "crumbling riverside house" (3). Samar's landlord Panditji, "a courteous old musician" who "spent his days in a haze of opium" and survives by offering Sitar classes to Western tourists, is at first the only other Brahmin whom Samar meets regularly

colonial era through the combined efforts of western indologists and Indian nationalists" (Poduval 5; see also Metcalf 113-159; Bayly 97-143; Metcalf/Metcalf 24).

[161] Subaltern studies theorists such as Chatterjee emphasise the "equally systematic nature of the rejection of the supposedly 'shared' values by groups that are inferior in caste ranking", thus making the caste system a site of "continuing struggle" within the "totality of power relations" (*The Nation* 166). They attack in particular the notion of harmony and national unity behind the distinctness of castes that assumes "that [the caste system] represents a way of reconciling differences within a harmonious unity of the social order" (ibid. 174).

(4). It is he who identifies Samar early on in the text “as a fellow Brahmin who had fallen on hard times” (4). Later in the novel, Samar describes how his own family’s status as “wealthy landowners” was “unraveled with bewildering speed” in the “ruthless go-getting world of independent India” (68 sic.). His father’s past and memories were “very far away” from his own childhood so as to seem almost mythical (69). In contrast to the recurring emphasis on his Brahmin family background, the narrator is sceptical about the implications of his caste for his life in modern Indian society.

Samar lives an idle life in Benares because he can neither fully identify with the idea of studying in order to live up to the expectations his father has of him, nor can he find a purpose that could replace these. Through his situation, the novel outlines the problems arising from the expectations attached to religious traditions. In a changing society the economic hardship and social unrest that Samar, albeit heir to the religious Brahmin elite, encounters, make him question his role in society. Although he would like to return to a life of certainty and to belong or feel at home, he cannot do that anymore (cf. Didur 68-69). His “uncertainty and disillusionment concerning his future [are] a result of the perception that [his] elite Hindu identity and privilege has been eroded in the postcolonial context” (Didur 75, sic). Because of this situation, both Benares as an ancient Hindu town and Samar’s personal background are narrated with a nostalgia for lost greatness.

Samar’s restlessness is further accentuated by his interest in Western role models and acquaintances. He is confronted, in addition to his sense of alienation from his own cultural background, with a circle of friends of both Indian and American or European background, in which awkwardness and social differences are highlighted by their differences in status, financial privilege and personal freedom. Although, superficially, Samar, for whom “old certainties had disappeared, with no purpose to replace them” (156), is in a similar situation like these acquaintances from the West, their aimless quest for identity and belonging in Indian spirituality is ironically presented as a personal luxury that he cannot understand (cf. 12-13, 57-58). Nonetheless, Samar’s own idleness and lack of occupation in Benares are also described as a state of limbo the more he learns

about other people's aims in life. More and more he becomes alienated from the ancestral expectations of his role and, consequently, unable to focus on "the […] undistracted, single-minded pursuit of knowledge in which [he] had spent so many hours in the library" (156). Although he reflects that, on the surface, his time in Benares was initially one "of serenity and quiet fulfilment", it was also "precarious, always under threat from the chaos that was the rule in the university in those days" (77). Samar wonders about "a larger continuing failure and drift" in life, "existing […] so very far from the richness of the world as I imagined it, with no means of getting closer" (134). His "idle, bookish life" (76) is increasingly characterised by a lack of freedom as he is torn, as a Brahmin, between the irreconcilable aims of feeling the need to study, wanting to impress the group of acquaintances from the West and having to position himself in relation to violent student protests he witnesses.

6.3.2. Social Alienation and the Blurring of Caste and Class

In addition to the cultural distance from his own caste background, Samar feels alienated, even while he himself is struggling, from fellow Indians of lower caste or class background. In his interactions with others, Samar himself is often passive and does not seem to have a strong opinion about other peoples' decisions or social roles. However, there is a recurring unease attached to the way in which his upper caste identity relies on the distinction from other, lower castes.

Already in his memories of Allahabad, Samar recalls a state of "[a]narchy" at university due to caste riots (9). In his reflection on similar conflicts and dangers in Benares, he points to the "sectarian, caste- or religion-based politics […] the constant skullduggery and intrigue" at their heart, the student groups being split into communist or Hindu nationalist groups (23, sic.; cf. 82; 87). Representatives of the student union are portrayed as helping and protecting the students that belong to their own religious and caste community. The Brahmin Vijay anxiously secures university and hostel admission for other Brahmins and frames all others as "low-caste 'lumpens' and 'antisocial elements'" (23). Samar's encounter with the fellow Brahmin student Rajesh, with Rajesh's "romanticized, timeless view of

Brahmin identity" and his mother's insistence on "being marked and set above other people", even while being poor, is important in this context (*Romantics* 170; Didur 77, cf. 80). Rajesh becomes a criminal, because "[a]ll the government jobs these days were going to low-caste people" and "[h]e also had too much self-respect to work for low-caste shopkeepers and businessmen" (170). Vijay and Rajesh, whose expectations of life have not been fulfilled either, turn to their caste identity as a basis of certainty. Their "sense of injustice" in the face of quotas for the lower castes is absent from Samar's opinions, who cannot identify with lost Brahmin privileges or the notion of Hindutva that equates the religious identity of being a Hindu with the "essence" of India (Didur 80; cf. Nadeau 136).[162] He is shocked but does not express a particular opinion when he witnesses some of the brutality between Hindus and Muslims in the Babri Masjid conflict (cf. 217).[163]

The goal of most students Samar encounters, including his own, is to take the Civil Service Examinations,[164] which are associated with fierce competition, "offering the quickest route to affluence and power" as well as "a way out of the hopelessness and desperation many of the students from nearby villages and towns knew awaited them at home" (29).[165] Significantly, Samar distances himself from the majority of poor students desperate to pass the exams by calling them "these students", reflecting about the ones who, upon repeatedly failing the test, "age fast, with gray hair, crow's feet, and faltering eyesight" (29-30).

---

[162] Didur points out, however, that Mishra's earlier, autobiographical essay "Wilson in Benares" still includes indignant comments that "reveal[…] a somewhat unexamined sympathy for this sense of a loss of caste privilege" (80).

[163] The Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh was attacked on 6 December 1992 after a political rally organised by Hindu nationalist organisations turned violent. The mosque was demolished, because its location was regarded as the birthplace of the Hindu god Rama. The demolition sparked months of riots between Hindu and Muslim communities in various cities throughout India, "raising in its wake […] the issue of the upper caste and Hindu norming of national culture" (Poduval 8).

[164] With its origins in the British colonial administration, the Indian civil services are organised differently nowadays (see also 4.2.1). Entry into one of its branches is granted only through the nationwide Civil Services Examination, also called UPSC (Union Public Service Commission, see https://www.upsc.gov.in/) exams, which have the reputation of being among the most difficult exams in India. Even though preparation for the exams takes years, an attempt at a career in the civil services is still popular among young Indians.

[165] Mishra thus represents, in similarity to Upamanyu Chatterjee in *English, August*, an administrative career as an empty and pointless ambition that nevertheless many are blindly striving for.

In Samar's culturally mixed group of friends, dividing lines of caste and class play a role in the ways in which his friends from Western countries interact with lower-caste Indians. Samar is puzzled by the tellingly named Miss West and her "un-Indian naturalness" in her conversation with a boatman: "Although I spoke the same language as Ramchand and lived in the same country, the scope for conversation between us was limited. Countless inhibitions of caste and class stood in our way; the only common vocabulary between us was the service he offered" (38). In similarity, Samar often reflects about the strains, which social and cultural differences put on the relationship between the French Catherine, who appears to him as "a rich European woman", and with whom he himself later has an affair, and her Indian lover Anand, "who with his thin face and tormented looks would always be associated with the warren of dark, slumbering alleys around us" (18, 64). Anand develops an "almost complete financial dependence upon [Catherine]" and their relationship "would have set him apart from the people he knew […] most of whom lived improvised lives in the poorer quarters of the city" (46, 64). It becomes increasingly clear how being part of these "improvised lives" in India, which is the only option Anand has, is to Catherine something she wants to indulge in by choice, scornfully refusing her mother's suggestion of buying a house in Benares "something for which people [Anand] knew saved and scrounged all their lives" (48). Despite his vague feeling of unease at their relationship, Samar only gradually understands their entirely different social standing through other people's comments. Anand belongs to a large social group of people who, as Miss West describes it, are "simply trying hard not to sink into the misery and wretchedness they are born into" (273).

As Samar describes his insecurity in the face of the upheavals on campus, it is important to note that his individual struggle with his religious family background and the national struggle with religious identity are narrated as parallel developments. For instance, Samar sees his current insecurity reflected in the history of Benares Hindu University, whose "early years of idealism" in the spirit of the national fervour of independence "belonged to an unremembered time" from the perspective of present-day violent political unrest (*Romantics* 79, cf. 8-9, 77-78). Just as Samar's own insecurity about how to behave as a Brahmin

leads to a nostalgic view of his family history, the riots spark a similarly nostalgic perspective on the history of Benares.

Samar's alienation is based on two experiences: first, his uneasy view of his Brahmin identity in modern society. Second, his confusion at being confronted with social unrest, violence and poverty. Both can be linked to an argument made by Tabish Khair and Miriam Nandi about a sense of alienation of the Indian elite from the lower classes. Through an increasingly Western education – after all, Samar tries at first to emulate his European and American acquaintances, to replace his cultural background with classics of European philosophy and falls in love with a French woman – Indian elite groups are, since Independence and economic liberalisation, even further removed from the reality of a large part of the population (Khair ix-xii; Nandi, *M/Other* 17, 31-32, 43-44). This observation, however, does not entirely fit Samar's role, for he and his family do not profit from the economic changes after Independence. Therefore, his experiences cannot be discussed under the labels of hybridity or diaspora that mark the identity politics of elite groups. Yet the novel's focus on the difficulty of negotiating traditional and Western cultural influences can be read in this way. Instead of "independent lower-caste characters in Indian English fiction" with "their own motivations", characters in a subaltern position appear at best with a focus on a profound "lack of communication" between distinct caste groups (Khair 139). As becomes clear in Samar's somewhat shocked, albeit not unsympathetic, view of the pitiful situation of the protesters, he can "accommodate [their] alterity only negatively as deviance, backwardness, irrational violence or stasis" instead of "positive and active subversion" (ibid.). However, Samar is shocked both by the poverty of fellow Brahmins and by the distinctive barriers of communication between him and representatives of lower castes; as they both remind him of his own lack of prospects.

Samar's confused perspective on the connections between caste and class is emphasised when he accompanies Rajesh on a visit to his village. With his own urban background, he is shocked by the poverty of Rajesh's Brahmin family. He finds "unsettling […] the half-naked screaming children outside and the bareness of the room" (169). Despite Rajesh and his family's poverty, they insist

on his self-respect and caste privilege. Hence, Rajesh prefers to be unemployed to having “to work for low-caste shopkeepers and businessmen” (170). Samar recognizes Rajesh and his mother’s “exalted sense of being Brahmin, of being marked and set above other people from other castes”, with which he does not seem to agree (ibid.).

In this manner, caste and class are not clearly distinguished in these encounters and their effect on Samar. Although the two categories often overlap, the link between caste and class should never be seen as a one-to-one equation. Irfan Habib argues from a Marxist perspective that there is a material economic basis on which the caste system developed historically and that it is inextricably linked to “the division of labour” (169; cf. 162-172). Resulting from this connection, he sees the caste system as “not a fabric of imagined purity […], but a system of class exploitation as rigorous as any other” which is obscured by its religious explanation (172, cf. 176-178). Nevertheless, class is not as much tied to notions of religion and purity and it often remains unconscious. Nor is class rigidly hereditary, but more changeable through occupation (cf. Khair 134; Gupta, *Interrogating* 58-59, 139). Samar’s distance from the protesters and the conflicts at university despite his own lack of a regular income, shows the necessary differentiation between caste and class, which are blurred if social difference is indiscriminately paralleled with class (cf. Khair xiii, 134; Nandi, *M/Other* 87). Nevertheless, class remains an important category, because in the Indian context class differences are at times aggravates by either “strong caste hierarchies” or the strong “rural-urban cultural divide” (Khair 13). In the scenes in Rajesh’s village, the existence of rural poverty apart from caste hierarchies is emphasised.

To further emphasise Samar’s insecurity and changing relation to his societal surroundings, Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* is alluded to repeatedly throughout the novel. This intertext suggests a parallel between Samar’s and the main protagonist Frédéric Moreau’s perception of society: Samar’s idle studies in Benares mirror Moreau’s attempts at different occupations in Paris. After at first trying to study, Moreau realises that the “delights he had promised himself did not materialize” and he “lapsed into a bottomless pit of lethargy”, in which “idleness increased his melancholy” (*Education* 20, 60). Samar’s insecurity at Miss West’s

rooftop party, where he gets to know the Indian and European friends important to his time in Benares, is similar to the first dinner parties Moreau gets invited to (cf. 42-46). The romantic and ultimately false ideals of the "self-serving" nineteenth-century European bourgeoisie in Flaubert's novel are parallelised with the romantic ideals of a Brahmin in Mishra's twenty-first century India (cf. Didur 77). Samar explicitly feels that "Moreau […] seemed to mirror my own self-image with his large, passionate, but imprecise longings, his indecisiveness, his aimlessness, his self-contempt" (155). Moreover, upon reading the novel, he believes that "[s]omething of Hindu fatalism seemed to come off its pages, a sense of life as […] futility and illusion" (ibid.).

In his later exchange with Rajesh over the novel, Samar eventually interprets its relevance to his own struggles in his observation of people moving "away from their provincial origins in order to realize their dreams of success in the bourgeois world" only to see "their ambitions dwindle away over the years in successive disappointments"; they get to know "a world where self-deception, falsehood, sycophancy, and bribery were the rule" (250). In this context, the title *The Romantics* takes on a deeply ironic meaning and the social dimensions that on a first reading seem to be in the background in favour of plot elements such as the affair with Catherine, are emphasised. Both novels follow their protagonists' personal development in the tradition of a *Bildungsroman* and in both cases the protagonist reaches, at the end of the text, a position from which he has both a more disillusioned *and* a more critical perspective. In Samar's case, his critical perspective is partially inspired by reading the nineteenth-century French novel as well as by his meditative experience in the mountains.

In the course of the novel, Samar develops an increasing tendency to critically reflect on his own role as a Brahmin and the social positions of others as the second half of the novel unfolds. In stark contrast to Flaubert's protagonist Moreau, Samar feels more restful and content by the time he has become a teacher in Dharamshala and all but cut off his old contacts. Both Flaubert's and Mishra's protagonists travel extensively to escape the confusing emotions tied to a certain place (Benares in Samar's case). Moreau "went travelling. He knew the melancholy of the steamboat, cold mornings waking under canvas, the tedium of

landscapes and ruins, the bitterness of interrupted friendships" (*Education* 386). In a very similar passage in *The Romantics*, Samar is described to travel "around the country for several weeks", arriving "everywhere and nowhere", because he decides on his itinerary "by whim and chance" (*Romantics* 215-216). However, while Moreau "endured the inertia of his intelligence and the dulling of his heart" and his aimless journeys only lead him back, with disappointed hopes, to Paris, Samar eventually reaches a new outlook (*Education* 386). While Moreau at the end of the nineteenth-century-novel nostalgically remembers a past childhood, Samar eventually arrives in the present and stops dwelling on the past (ibid. 393).

As noted in the preceding chapters (3.3.1, 5.2.1), Samar finds moments of otium on his lonely hikes in the Himalayas. Moreover, when he returns to some of his earlier memories, he can assess his own and the social backgrounds and experiences of others, which have influenced their decisions and actions, more clearly and feels "oddly calm" at the end of the novel (*Romantics* 277; cf. 214-277). It is noteworthy, however, that ultimately Samar's later calm assessment of his experiences and his social relations in no way convey a sense of agency or change. From this perspective one could interpret Samar's experience of otium as escapist and somewhat solipsistic. In his time in Dharamshala, he intentionally turns away from human preoccupations, finding interest only in "books on wildlife and the environment" and "all the latest advances in science and astronomy", cherishing the "peace and seclusion" of his new home, knowing "neither ambition nor love" (225). He himself is aware that "[t]his placid life I had in Dharamshala was severely judged by many people" and, on seeing the brutality unleashed in the Babri Masjid riots, his reaction is to tell himself that "this isn't my world, I'll soon be out of it" (239, 217). His calm life and experience of otium on his trips to the mountains are presented as a withdrawal into privacy. In his isolated, calmer serenity he avoids confrontation with both the intercultural contact and the religious traditions that first confused him.

6.4. The Subversion of Gender Norms in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*

In Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*, Reba is the most important character to experience a temporality which has, through its exceptional character, the potential to comment on normative expectations of temporality. This *gendered* temporality does not necessarily find its fulfilment in experiences of otium, but I argue that it is evoked by setting the conditions for such an experiential mode, although the possibility of otium continues to remain precarious. Reba's experience and use of temporality (as well as its function in the novel) unfold on three levels, which enable her to escape the limited gender role with which she is originally introduced. First (6.4.1), her use of time with reference to her obsessive relation to her music becomes, through its excessive character, a form of self-assertion for Reba. Second (6.4.2), Reba and her music are described in the novel with the terminology of the sublime. Her characterisation can be explained with Barbara Freeman's theory of the feminine sublime, through which Reba can be seen as not just the object of fascination for Deben's male gaze, but radically independent and ultimately threatening. On a third and final level (6.4.3), Reba does not only figure in the text as a female protagonist, but with her musical practice and family background metonymically stands for classical Bengali culture.

Reba transgresses, both with reference to her character and her sphere of action, narrow gender roles. Her character resonates with the idea that female writers, even while, on a superficial level, they may write domestic narratives, "simultaneously re-think the allegedly more significant topics of national history and the (re-)construction of cultural identity in a postcolonial context" (Dengel-Janic 1, cf. Dutta). If the female characters are associated with home and the private sphere, this space is far from "non-political" or "a-historical" (Dengel-Janic 17).[166] The female characters' behaviour and experiences undercut the

[166] Instead we have to think of "home as social, and thus gendered, space", which has, for instance, figured as a "central symbol for the nation's sense of identity and authenticity" (Dengel-Janic 3, 17; cf. Silva 21-31). This was particularly the case with the symbolism of "mother India" and the connected associations of femininity with purity and authenticity (cf. Silva 21; Dengel-Janic 19). While gender and familial hierarchies are frequently used for the justification of a

association of women with an ahistorical, private and unofficial task-time apart from official, linear temporality and history (cf. Cowman/Jackson 48). In this vein, Reba's role in the novel is linked, even as she transgresses the domestic virtues expected of her, with a nostalgic image of classical Indian culture.

Reba is both part of a privileged group in terms of her upper-caste/class background and cultured, *bhadralok*[167] family background and at the same time she is, as a woman, dependent on male family members (cf. *Colour* 17; Sunder 9). As Ellen Dengel-Janic comments with reference to novels by Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai: "an interpretation of their novels as representations of subaltern women's voices fails to recognise these writers' privileged status as a middle-class, English-speaking elite", an elite to which not only the author Sunetra Gupta, but also most of her Bengali protagonists self-evidently belong (5; cf. Khair xiii-xiv, 141-145, 176-196; Nandi, *M/Other* 17, 26).[168] As Mohanty warns, just as the interests and situations of South Asian and European women should not be homogenised in the name of a common feminism, so differences

---

political ideal, the family and the domestic sphere are, paradoxically, supposed to be "voided of" or "beyond history" (McClintock, "Family Feuds" 63, 67; cf. Silva 31).

[167] The latter term only works because the novel is set in a Bengali context: "The term bhadralok […] is derived from the word bhadrata, meaning 'gentility'. […] The Bengali bhadralok community was initially composed of the high-caste, respectable, educated Bengali-Hindu gentry of the upper and middle classes, but later came to include the respectable, educated gentry of the Bengali-Muslim community as well", being closely associated with the cultural movement of the Bengal Renaissance (Sil 10, FN 9; 36, FN 83; cf. Ray 7-8, Chatterji 7-9; Chaudhuri, "Modernity at Home" 133).

[168] Tabish Khair points out how the focus on the private sphere of the family "obscures the presence of the [social] other" (336). He refers to Amit Chaudhuri's domestic scenes of Calcutta, in which "the author does not even once take us into the quarters of the urban poor (servants) in India, who merely appear as cleaners of the family-flat and users of the next-door toilet" (ibid.). Wiemann agrees that in Chaudhuri's fiction servants are objectified and treated as part of the house in similarity to furniture (*Genres* 217-218). According to him, servants in Chaudhuri's fiction "inhabit another, retarded time", a positive aspect in the logic of his oeuvre but nonetheless objectifying (ibid. 223). In *A Sin of Colour*, the only servant is the trustworthy gatekeeper who helps Deben upon his return, the only perspective on the poor is through Doctor Rahul's patients (cf. 129-134, 140-143). The gatekeeper has an almost metaphorical role since he accompanied the family through several generations, not only watching over the family mansion, but somehow also over their fates. Still, the reader gets his perspective only once. He remembers Deben's mother growing into a young woman when he himself was "still the illiterate servant boy, and the gulf between [them] screaming wide like a wounded animal from which they could only avert their eyes" (142). The perspective on experiences of otium and, in Chaudhuri's case, the uselessness on the everyday, are portrayed through the eyes of middle-class protagonists; servants only appear to comment on the incommensurability of the gap that divides them.

of class need to be taken into consideration (cf. “Introduction” 6-7; “Under Western Eyes” 52; Spivak, *A Critique* 116, 119, 148).

Tabish Khair emphasises how in “separate but overlapping discourses” of subalternity, women’s Indian-English fiction “is shaped by class and (at times) caste thresholds and the discourses which […] enable the narration to take place” (xiii, 196). He describes a tension that is constitutive of women’s fiction in English, a tension between the impulse of writing and wanting to speak up as “members of a displaced gender community” and the actual achievement of speech, which relies on their membership of a privileged class (177, 196).[169] Not only does the upper-caste and middle-class background of these writers give them the “advantage of education”, but they can also “indulge in the possession of the *time* to write” (Joseph 11, emphasis original). Thus, I place the way in which Reba reinterprets her gender role (in her case it is the time to play music that is central to her self-image) in the context of what has been framed by others as an elite feminist discourse. This discourse comments on the supposedly self-evident binary spheres of “the ‘private’ realm in opposition to the male ‘public’” sphere and questions the meaning of the category ‘woman’ (George, “Feminists” 221; cf. Weedon 113; Dengel-Janic 8).

6.4.1. A Time of One’s Own: Reba’s Modification of Her Gender Role

Reba stoically accepts her marriage into the wealthy Roy family, who made their fortune in the teak trade, as a necessity, coming “herself […] from a family of moderate means” (*Colour* 39, cf. 37). She is first introduced as the epitome of female accomplishment to Deben’s brothers and his father: “Here was a woman […] who was engaged with the world, in her own small ways, as a woman should be, here was a woman who radiated grace” (14). Reba is characterised in this manner from the perspective of the male members of Deben’s family. They employ adjectives like “small”; her part of the house, which is, significantly, the kitchen, is “always kept so prettily”; and she is endowed with “beauty” and “grace” (14). The text’s description of her foregrounds her meekness and underlines that

[169] The same dynamic is discussed between the privileged status of English writing and the subaltern status in postcolonial discourse (cf. Spivak, *A Critique* 310; Khair xiii, 20, 196).

she conforms to the “regulatory norms” that “materialize ‘sex’” as a category of difference (Butler 2). She is regarded as the epitome of the beautiful and virtuous bride: “[Reba] hardly ever spoke in the presence of her father-in-law, kept her head covered and her eyes lowered as befitted a young bride” (*Colour* 18).

Moreover, in her role in the family she is contrasted with her mother-in-law, Srimati, who as a young woman failed in her attempt to move beyond the role as housewife expected of her, wanting to go to college. After this dream has been cut short by her marriage to a wealthy man, Srimati develops a “voluptuous indifference to her role as mistress of his splendid home, as the mother of his five children, as his beloved wife” (10-11). She seems “withdrawn […] into the unfathomable depths of her own [world]” (ibid.). Srimati is described as beautiful, but weak, distracted and frail, spending her time in idle inaction (cf. 11-12). While her lassitude is associated with an idyllic picturesque beauty, her thoughts and feelings remain inaccessible to the reader. Her passivity is emphasised by the fact that her name is mentioned only once when her husband proposes to name a girls’ primary school after her and the “sudden shock of her new name caused her to tremble” (10). The gift implies an exchange of her potential for agency with a mere gesture. In her portrayal from her son, Deben’s, point of view her inactivity is not associated with agency:

> how was it, he thought, that she, who had shown such interest in the […] fate of their people […] was now so indifferent to the workings of the world without […], that she should be content to sit and sew all afternoon under the shade of the fig trees, her children frolicking about her or fallen asleep on the grass, a heavenly tableau. (13-14)

Despite her prior “indifferen[ce] to all household affairs”, Reba’s arrival and ability to fulfil the role in Deben’s family that his mother never could makes her “seek […] to master those precious talents by which Reba had put her stamp upon the set of rooms allotted to her and her husband” (7). Reba is eventually presented as the reason for her mother-in-law’s “swift madness” and death “[l]ike a moth that had hit the ceiling fan and fallen upon the pillow” (8).

However, this first rather fateful introduction of Reba to Deben and his family is soon qualified with reference to her musical talent and practice. Since the reader gets most of the information about Reba from Deben, the significance of

her music is represented as the discovery of an altogether new side of her. Although her playing of classical ragas forms part of her feminine accomplishments, her *excessive* playing questions the image of the meek, docile and beautiful wife. Her music comes to take up most of her time. At first she is said to "practise […] religiously upon her musical instruments every morning"; later she "seemed to be permanently occupied with her music"; and eventually "this passion […] had risen to consume her" so much so that she neglects her children (18, 51, cf. 54). It is exactly the orderly, family-centred aspects of her life such as baking cakes and playing with her children that she neglects in proportion to the more time-consuming and increasingly successful exercise of her music.

Reba's initial conforming to her gender role is modified through her musical practice:[170] while Reba's ability to play classical Indian music might initially be part of the accomplishments by which she is characterised as an eligible wife to Deben's brother, her playing becomes, instead of just an ornamental quality, a time and experience entirely her own. As she decides to emphasise the relevance of this practice, it becomes more than just the performative citation of her role and it renders precarious her role as an accomplished housewife.[171] The two aspects that make her practice of playing something special are; first, its relevance to her as a (leisure) practice that is entirely her own, and, second, its contribution to her (economic and symbolic) independence from male family members as she is presumably paid for her public performances.

The novel, which is internally focalised on other characters, does not allow an unambiguous interpretation of Reba's playing as otium. From Deben's and Niharika's perspectives, her playing is represented as an obsession that threatens to "consume her" (51). Nevertheless, her music is not only highly

[170] As Judith Butler suggests, "it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization […] that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law" (2, cf. 12-15; Rouse 106-107; Weedon 126-127).

[171] Compare the discourse on needlework and gender in nineteenth-century Russian literature. The practices of needlework associated with the female gender is, on the one hand, expected as a social convention and demand on how women should spend their free time. On the other hand, in the repetitive practice itself a free space for reflection can evolve which has a subversive potential with a view to the social conventions that expect the practice in the first place (compare Cheauré/Stroganova 128; Cheauré, "Gender" 402-404, 408-410; Blum 179).

significant as a leisure practice; it also seems to be a form of agency in a family context that she apparently finds alienating and unfulfilling. If her music is interpreted as otium, it is a self-assertion as a free choice to engage with this practice. Even without this interpretation, however, both music and acting in the theatre give her the chance to be recognized in a public sphere beyond the confines of her family home as well as in the cultural and intellectual environment which she misses in her new domicile. Ultimately, her experience is thus an instance of the overlap between work and experiences of otium.[172] Reba's "work" of playing in public performances can be discussed in the context of arguments about what is considered to be "serious work" and what instead belongs to the realm of "pleasure and sophistication" (Noor, "Love and Leisure" 21). Ultimately, it is part of her freedom to choose her actions and to carve out a "meaningful" existence; she makes a profession out of her leisure practice (ibid.).

6.4.2. The Woman as Metaphor for Classical Indian Culture

Moreover, as was pointed out in chapter 3, Deben's longing for Reba can be seen as a nostalgia for home while he is in Oxford. Reba symbolises aspects of classical Bengali culture (cf. Kuortti). It is significant that this emblematic ideal of India becomes relevant from the perspective of the male character who has left India to pursue his academic career. In Oxford, Deben muses at the beginning of the novel:

> Perhaps his family would fall upon hard times and he would never be able to afford his passage home, spend the rest of his life slaving as a schoolmaster in some obscure corner of Britain, while she, his brother's wife, started giving private tuition in Music and English to make ends meet. (3)

In this passage he not only imagines the impossibility of returning home, which implies that he would not see Reba again, but also an attack on the "purity" of her cultured Indian upbringing – both in imagining her having to earn a living, rather than occupying herself with art as an end in itself, and in choosing English as a second subject when she and her revered father are sceptical of anything English

[172] Compare Gregor Dobler "Muße und Arbeit" for the way in which otium is a concept that can at times transgress the boundaries between leisure and work.

or, indeed, European (3-4, 39). Deben's longing is characterised as nostalgia precisely because traditional Indian culture, from which he is alienated through his English academic education and place of residence, is unattainable to him (cf. Khair xii-xiii; 3-6). His desire is directed both at a place and a time, for all the traits of Reba and her family's cultural standing are clearly associated with the older Indian culture of modernity and its prototypical formation in the Bengal Renaissance.[173]

It is noteworthy that a woman stands for a modern cultural movement that was dominated by male protagonists (cf. Nandi, *M/Other* 41; George, "Feminists" 217). With reference to the symbolic role of women in the nationalist movement, Reba's own nostalgic attachment to classical Bengali culture is ambivalent in relation to the ideal of women as the "showpiece of a newly independent nation" (George, "Feminists" 223). Nostalgia can be a "negotiation", as Farha Noor phrases it with reference to autobiographical narratives in Urdu, of women's role in history, "informing the readers of their presence and participation in the history that could not make space for them" ("Negotiating" n. pag.).

Bakhle has commented on how, historically, the raga musical tradition, which has been framed as "classical" in the context of Indian modernity and nationalism, is tied to questions of "gendered respectability", being a "key participant in the gendered transformation of the cultural public sphere" (7, 14, cf. 258-259).[174] She notes that, with the Hindu sacralisation of musical traditions, "the conditions under which women, albeit only middle-class ones, could enter a public cultural sphere" were created (11, cf. 256, 258-259). Bakhle identifies two aims of the educational reforms that incorporated musical education for middle-class women: to prepare them for "the responsibility for achieving the ideal of companionate marriage" and to "link women with both purity and antiquity, on the one hand, and nationalism,

[173] This part of the plot, which focuses on the two, is set in the 1960s. Reba's parents were presumably in their youth around the turn of the century and could still partake in the later phase of this important cultural phase (compare Ray 29-30).

[174] She shows in her monograph how the image of female musicians changed from the nineteenth century, when "women musicians were known as *baijis* – a euphemism for women of ill repute", to the educational programmes for "upper-caste, middle-class women", which were part of a changing public sphere in which women, "by the mid- and late twentieth century, […] could even envision he possibility of a career in music" (50, 52).

on the other" (62, cf. 95). At the same time, "once the 'woman question' had entered the discourse, women were able to use it to their advantage to enter a new domain of public performance" (258). Thus, in the context of the role of women in the culture of modernity in South Asia it is significant that it is a female character who metaphorically comes to stand for Indian classical culture.

Her non-conformity to stereotypical conservative notions of femininity is moreover demonstrated by the novel's use of metaphors to describe her. These are violent, threatening images rather than pure or beautiful ones. The role of music for her *individually* mirrors a development for women in the public sphere *in general*. Even while her playing of music in the classical tradition offers Reba a sphere independent from the private family context, it harkens back to an older culture that links up with the post-Independence moment in which the relevant parts of the plot are set. Thus, in her practice and experience of otium, she combines nostalgia for traditional culture with a resistance to her traditional family role.

As I have pointed out earlier, Reba's music is most often delineated not from her own, but from Deben's perspective. In these references, her playing is not described so much as beautiful, but as sublime: Deben's fascination for Reba is based on its sublime incomprehensibility that he gradually discovers in her music. He marvels at the "sublime expanse of her loneliness" and imagines "within her […] a vast empty space, sacred and untouchable" (*Colour* 18-19). When she sings, "the sky and the sea seemed not to meet in a clean line within her, but in a relentless scrambling of gull song and brackenwind" (66, sic.). The sea during a storm is another classic metaphor of sublimity, which refers to the exceptional, inaccessible beauty of Reba and her musical practice.

These characteristics form a contrast to the way in which Deben's male family members had seen her in her small gendered sphere in the comfortable and ordered privacy of their home. They also clash with traditional ideals of female musicians "as frail, pure, delicate, celestial" (Bakhle 72). They emphasise Reba's mysteriousness and inaccessibility, because the sublime is an experience that is often associated with the unknown and with unexplored territory. As the sublime is usually a category for the description of landscapes, it is appropriate that Reba

should be described with spatial metaphors: Deben feels that “he had trespassed upon these solemn territories” of her inner self and immense loneliness (*Colour* 19; cf. Duffy). In an analogue to the deserts of the Romantic poets, Reba’s description hints at “the link between vastness, solitude, and mental and physical privation” (Duffy 20, cf. 135-173). Deben’s perspective on her expresses his wish for possession of her or for taming her incomprehensibility. Yet, at one point Deben reflects that “the truth was that she could never be any man’s property, neither his burden nor his reward” (*Colour* 25).

One could therefore argue that Reba’s sublimity, which is closely associated with her musical practice, can be interpreted with Barbara Freeman’s concept of the “Feminine Sublime”. Freeman defines this theory of the sublime as a “domain of experience that resists categorization”, questions the “construction and destruction of borders” and “contests any notion of essence, feminine or otherwise” (2, 6). The feminine sublime is characterised as a “radical alterity”, a “crisis in relation to language and representation” (2, 11). For Freeman, the concept does not have to refer to the “sexual identity” of “woman” (2, cf. 9). Moreover, Freeman also links her concept with the way in which the sublime has frequently been understood: she positions “the sublime as an allegory of the patriarchal subject, a self that maintains its borders by subordinating difference and by appropriating rather than identifying with that which presents itself as other” (4). In contrast to this idea, the feminine sublime is understood as a “resistance to the patriarchal order” in that it “does not attempt to master its objects of rapture” (3, 10). Reba’s characterisation through her art is very close to this idea particularly as seen through Deben’s eyes, who cannot ‘tame’ her. Reba’s unattainable sublimity challenges a “[p]atriarchal reason [which] denies feminine otherness, reconstituting it as male-defined” (Weedon 123). Hence it is actually Deben who undergoes the subject crisis. As has been illustrated in section 3.2, he sees his own identity questioned when he realises Reba’s “radical alterity”. He is fascinated by her self-absorption in her music, but Reba herself remains ultimately out of reach.

For Reba, her musical practice is indicative of her own possession of time and displays a side of her character opposed to the clichés of femininity in which

the Roy family try to conceive her. The potentially transgressive otiose musical practice is a possibility for independence and, on another level, implies a questioning of her role as a woman inside the family through a radically open new concept of self, which is perceived by Deben as sublime. However, Reba's situation can be compared to the way in which, in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The Romantics*, the constraints of social identities ultimately keep the characters from experiencing otium: although her experience when playing the *esraj* or singing (which remains ultimately inaccessible to the reader) is presented from an outside perspective, in such a way as to resemble a practice of otium, it seems to eventually turn into a harmful obsession. While at first her musical practice underlines her agency apart from her role in the Roy household and stands for a nostalgic, unproductive perspective on time entirely her own, in the later parts of the novel, the older Reba is characterised by her daughter as even more withdrawn, as somewhat unhappy, rigid and inflexible (cf. 51-52, 54). During the only time Reba visits Oxford, Niharika at one point realises how little her mother fits into the public and everyday scene but seems both displaced and "insulated by her dignity", both regally imposing and pitiful (102-103).

The sad, melancholy and often tragic role of the female protagonists in Gupta's novel can be seen as based on a tension between a subaltern gender role and a privileged class position. Tabish Khair describes this tension as a "superior degree of refinement/sensitivity and a feeling of dissatisfaction with life" as well as, consequently, feelings of "confusion, ennui, dissatisfaction at times, lack of commitment and action" (180, 189). It is characteristic of women's fiction in English and its precarious position between these poles of cultural refinement and dissatisfaction. Reba's music might offer moments of protest of her social role, especially when she engages in it as an end in itself. Yet neither can the practice of music guarantee this experiential dimension of otium, nor can it in the long term become a solution to her marriage, if only because otium is usually experienced in a limited frame of time and rests on practices tied to her superior class position. As in many of the previous examples, the transgressive potential of experiences of otium remains an unreachable ideal that only emerges in small, fragmentary moments.

6.5. Chapter Summary

If we maintain, as developed in chapter 3, that the social fabric is made of actions and practices, this means that, ultimately, social structures can only change or be modified through a change in action as well as in the way in which the social fabric is imagined through actors' experiences. The focus in this chapter was on the representation of social space through fictional experiences in novels. These novels' "capacity for variation and experiment" opens up a potential for reflecting critically on the social and cultural contexts of these experiences (Turner 28-29, cf. 30-33, 40-46).

In my discussion of *The Inheritance of Loss*, *The Romantics* and *A Sin of Colour* I have illustrated from different angles in which ways the social fabric surrounding the novels' characters is influenced by, as well as actively influences, their possibilities and ways of experiencing otium. As I have outlined in the introductory section, it is often impossible to separate the intersecting aspects of social identity. The kinds of experiences of otium that become relevant in a novel as well as their social function are shaped by characters' economic and class positions, by the role expected of them on the basis of gender, by the present reverberations of the history of both colonial domination and anti-colonial resistance, by their positions in terms of integration within supposedly unchangeable caste groups as well as by more fluid cultural and community affiliations. At the same time, the novels show instances in which the unexpected (because inaccessible) experience of otium can modify how protagonists perceive their social identity.

Practices of otium can result in an emphasis on social dependences, when they are used as forms of cultural capital that can be flagged in order to fulfil a particular role. Yet, when Jemubhai, the judge, insists on his game of chess or when Samar reads books and studies to please his father, the narrative perspective represents these instances of distinction with a clearly ironic distance that suggests that the characters engage in a mere performance which they cannot really enjoy. Without the negative freedom from social expectations, their experiences cannot take on the openness characteristic of otium, but they remain mere *performances of otium*.

Notwithstanding this highlighting of social differences on the level of certain distinctive practices, I have been arguing that actual experiences of otium carry the potential to subvert, question and critically assess the social relations in which they are embedded. In these moments in the novels, functional, alienated social relations and the feeling of being out-of-oneself move into the background. As soon as they become detached from social rules and norms, these experiences can develop a characteristic openness: this includes **the potential for an alternative to hierarchies and dependences** (the non-human elements in *The Inheritance of Loss*); **the potential for a critical distance towards the characters' sense of social alienation** (Samar's attempt to distance himself from both his traditional background *and* the new cultural role models from the West in *The Romantics*); and, finally, **the potential for an undermining of the social roles expected of the protagonists** (Reba's transgressive musical practice in opposition to the neatness and tidiness of her household in *A Sin of Colour*). In the novels analysed here, however, *The Inheritance of Loss* is the only example in which the perspective of lower-class or poor characters plays a larger role, while in novels such as *A Sin of Colour* or in *English, August* the impossibility to represent the experience of, for instance, the subaltern woman gets reinforced because experiences of otium are represented only in the middle-class characters' experience (cf. Shandilya).

In several of the example passages I analysed, social inhibitions are marked by a particular temporality forced onto characters that is juxtaposed to a more open perception of time and how it is perceived and used. Experiences of otium are perceived as breaks from or interruptions of the normative notion of temporality. On one level, the relationship between a dominant, ideologically influenced concept of time and its subversive negation in individual experience plays a role in different aspects of social relations and power structures: concepts of temporality are often gendered and "feminine generativity […] reduced to the fertile womb and […] the domestic realm" (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 101; cf. Wajcman 34, 129). Thus, in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* it is the timeless feminine sublimity of Reba's music in which Deben loses himself as he falls in love with her. The analysis of experiences of otium, however, offers a point of

view from which a frequently negatively portrayed timelessness, which is problematically linked with femininity, can be evaluated in an entirely different manner that transcends clear binaries. On a second level, in the context of colonialism, cultures outside Europe were seen as primitive or without history. Thus, the simultaneous presence of different temporalities on an individual level can suggest an alternative to the Eurocentric norm and question a narrative in which these alternatives are merely marginal supplements to European history. On a third level, the temporality of individual experience can enable subversive resistance against the abstract concept of time that is associated with work discipline and it can argue against a reified understanding of time as just another commodity (cf. West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 122, 124-125, 128).

The kind of temporality that functions as a negative contrast foil and is associated with alienated, hierarchical relations is far from uniform. It may range from the acceleration current in a global capitalist economy (in Biju's case) to linear notions of progress and history (from which, in different ways, Nimi and Samar feel excluded) or simply to the (im)possibility of occupying a time that is entirely one's own (something which both Samar and Reba eventually achieve). This last aspect especially shows how the relevance of otium in the context of social dimensions is based on the way in which both these fields are enmeshed with questions of identity: where social restriction leads the characters to a crisis of identity, to a vague insecurity or dissatisfaction with their role, experiences of otium are shown to sometimes enable them to experience alternative ways of positioning themselves and of relating to the world.

All three novels have moments of individual and communal alternative temporalities both within the range of human experience and outside it. Yet these experiences always remain precarious. Because of the inherent inaccessibility of experiences of otium, social hierarchies, alienated relations and networks of power are often shown to be omnipresent. Experiences of otium, it could be argued, offer temporary ways of positioning oneself differently within these relations (as Samar does in *The Romantics*) or of modifying these structures (as Reba manages to do in *A Sin of Colour*). Moreover, it is especially in the context of the literary text that these moments and experiences take on this relevance.

They do so in two ways: either through an emphasis on key experiences of the protagonist(s) of a novel (which is more the case in *The Romantics* and *A Sin of Colour*), or through the narrative voice and the way in which the text is structured (which is more the case in *The Inheritance of Loss*, where nonhuman elements represent an alternative temporality juxtaposed to the hierarchically structured social sphere of the human protagonists).

However, even more than in previous chapters, the alternative temporality of otium can only be analysed as a fragile experience in the present or a future possibility. Thus, the critical, subversive potential of otium is represented in the novels as an ideal or a societal utopian vision, but one which can be glimpsed only in fragments of individual experience.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyse the relevance and function of unproductive leisurely experiences in contemporary Indian novels. While there is a substantial number of texts in which such experiences play a significant role, an important result of my research is that these texts tend to not belong to the genre of globally visible, postmodernist novels from India. Instead, they are shaped by discourses about cultural modernity, both in terms of content and of stylistic choices. The experiences of otium that are at stake here relate to this Indian modernity in a specific way. They appear as instances of alternative temporalities, which are remembered nostalgically from a present moment of alienation and loss. A central result of my research is that while the motif of nostalgia and structures of alternative temporalities are pervasive throughout the novels, experiences of otium figure as part of an inaccessible, fragile and utopian ideal. They derive their significance from the very diagnosis of their present impossibility. In what follows, I want to address recurring elements of my readings in the preceding chapters. In the analysed novels, the experiential mode of otium is important on the level of plot and character experiences (7.1.1), on the level of structural and stylistic features of the text (7.1.2) and in connection with nostalgic memory and longing (7.1.3). In the second half of this chapter (7.2), I contextualise these insights with a view to the discourses about alternative temporalities and cultural modernity in India.

7.1. Narratives of Otium

7.1.1. Plot and Character Experience

In this first section, I focus on the relevance of otium in my readings for the novel's plot structures, the representation of their characters and their spatial surroundings.

With a view to plot, experiences of otium are not necessarily, or in all the novels, pervasive throughout characters' experiences. The only novels which can

be interpreted as consisting of an atmosphere of otium are the novels of Amit Chaudhuri, particularly *A Strange and Sublime Address*. However, in those novels in which experiences of otium figure rarely, they nevertheless have a central function in the development of the novel's characters, or they crucially shift the direction of the plot. Particularly in *A Sin of Colour* and *The Romantics*, the possibility to experience otium is tightly connected to moments of crisis in the protagonists' psychological development. Potential experiences of otium offer, if not solutions, then at least possible escapes and alternatives to unbearable situations. I read Deben's disappearance, Samar's withdrawal to the mountains and Sai's experience of the monsoon rains as such turning points in the respective narratives.

These moments of crisis signal changes in the protagonists' ways of relating to the world, their physical surroundings or, in a more abstract sense, to social space. It is in this context that the protagonists nostalgically harken back to memories of a lost, idyllic experience of the world, for instance during childhood: *A Strange and Sublime Address* is a novel entirely about memories of childhood, Agastya in *English, August* longs for an idyllic idleness of existence in the face of the emptiness of his work life and Samar mourns for the serenity that Brahmin traditions still represented in his childhood. In spite of this seemingly escapist tendency and its connection to theories of primitivism (cf. Lovejoy/Boas), the experiences, moments and places formulate a critique of modernity, deriving agency from the subversive reference of the protagonists' memories to the norms of linear progress and purposefulness.

Moreover, I have analysed otium as a fundamentally spatial experience, because during such experiences, time is experienced as duration as opposed to its sequential, linear progression. This aspect is particularly blatant in the constant foregrounding of the sensory perception of the protagonist (rather than the passing of time). The experience of otium is associated with this immediate, sensory engagement with the protagonists' surroundings, which is in turn contrasted with a cold and functional way of relating to the world. In this context, I have referred throughout this study to Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance, which in this respect bears resemblance to the concept of otium (cf. *Resonance*

26-31; 38-39, 167-169, 174). However, I want to emphasise the transgressive potential of otium in the novels of my corpus, the effect of the experience transcending the Romantic longing for an original, essentialist or even natural relationship of humans to the world (cf. *Resonance* 174-175, 320-356; Peters/Schulz 12-19; Taylor).

Based on the relevance of agency and the freedom to act, my research indicates that the experience of otium opens up a space for reflection on the context in which the practice of otium is embedded. Thus, experiences of otium enable the critical reflection of borders between self and other, the religious and the secular, natural and urban spaces, inside and outside, and the public and the private. This inherent potential for *transgression* of personal (chapters 3 and 4), spatial (chapter 5) and social contexts (chapter 6) perceived as alienating (see 7.1.3) is, I argue, the very reason for the crucial role of experiences of otium for the novels' plot structures. The potential for transgression is *also* the reason for the recurrence of motifs of sublimity and awe (for instance in *A Sin of Colour*, *The Romantics* and *The Inheritance of Loss*) in the context of a changed perception of time.

In my readings of the novels, otium has emerged as a utopian ideal, which is often impossible to realise in present circumstances, so that protagonists desire an unreachable sense of home, fulfilling choices of action and "temporal sovereignty" (Nowotny 18). Moreover, because of this elusive precariousness of experiences of otium, they are linked to the epiphany of a spiritual experience and it is impossible to demarcate when characters enter this subjective mode of experiencing. What I have analysed instead was the possibility of otium in certain experiences and the role of different forms of temporality which open up that potential. What characters experience while doing nothing, lazing idly or minutely observing small everyday occurrences is not necessarily in every instance an experience of otium, but it might emphasise the present impossibility of otium under the pressures and expectations of purposeful activity.

7.1.2. Structural and Stylistic Aspects: An Otiose Writing Style?

Whenever otium is thematised on the level of plot and character experience, the motif is linked to more general *structural features of the novels*. In contemporary Indian novels I have repeatedly come across narrative features that favour the representation of otium in the text.[175] The central motif of otium on the content level is mirrored, so to speak, on the structural level in an episodic, associative mode of writing that goes against a chronological sense of time. Instead of a successive sequence of events, long passages are devoted to descriptions, so that in some cases any expectation of a straightforward, traditional plot recedes entirely into the background. This means that novels that have otium not only as a central part of their plot (*story*), but also as a structural feature (*discourse*), emphasise an essential characteristic of fiction (Genette 26-29). Russell West-Pavlov writes in his monograph on *Temporalities*: "It is the dynamism of narratives, their content and structure […] which makes up one of the many intertwined strands of the multiple temporalities we call time" (84). In the context of narratives of otium, this dynamic is located between the alternative temporalities of experiences of otium on the plot level and stylistic choices in the *form* of the novel. I briefly summarise the stylistic devices that have become important to my readings and which can be separated into **imagery**; **particularities in sentence structure**; **the temporal structure of the novels** and **narratological choices** such as focalisation.

In both *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *A Sin of Colour*, the experiential dimension that the novels evoke has a fleeting quality that is emphasised by recurring water **imagery**. The rain, the sea, rivers and waterfalls are used as metaphors for the acoustic quality of music as well as the state of mind of the singer/listener. At the same time, the water imagery is connected with a nostalgia for feeling at home (either while being abroad or, in *Address*, with reference to a place and the time of childhood, see also 7.1.3). The different strands of narrative and the temporal layers are tied together through the imagery of singing and water, which is repeated throughout the novel. The recurring imagery of running

[175] See also Monika Fludernik's paper "Narrating Otium".

water in particular, of rain and the stormy sea, acts as a metaphor for the nostalgia for home in Bengal or a childhood in Bangladesh as “a land of rivers” (*Colour* 27). Additionally, in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, references to dysfunctional appliances such as lights during the notorious power cut and the car that does not start underline an aesthetic of uselessness in modern everyday life (see also Shetty). The broken or dysfunctional tools of everyday existence implicitly criticise capitalist consumerism and they express, like ruins, an “ambivalent sense of time” between a modern break with the past and its lingering traces – for instance when the car needs to be pushed, newspaper need to be used instead of fans and candles for light (Hell/Schönle).

On the level of **sentence structure**, long descriptions and digressive passages characteristically occur in all the novels in the context of experiences of otium. These descriptive passages typically use, as Fludernik has shown, “a multitude of attributes and especially predicative enchainments”, which “extend the main clause in a seemingly illimitable manner” (“Nostalgia” 28). In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, to draw on just one example, the observation of everyday events is often interrupted by general, almost philosophic meditations about life in Calcutta.

Such associative digressions already affect the **temporal structure of the novel** and undermine the coherence of the plot. As I argued in chapter 4, *English, August* and *A Strange and Sublime Address* are extreme cases of novels whose structures undermine the expectations readers have of consistent narratives. The novels are both characterised by a distinctive absence of eventfulness and (in terms of Genette’s subcategory of *frequency*) use of iterative narration (Genette 113-119). Thereby, they refuse to take on a progressive plot structure and thus implicitly (through their aimlessness and plotlessness) and explicitly (through meta-fictional comments) criticise ideas of linear and progressive temporality.

Generally, digression has an impact on what Genette calls *duration*, leading to a stretching and slowing down of discourse time, that is, how a narrative is told, in relation to story time, that is the events of a narrative (cf. Genette 86-112). A narrative style that extensively dwells on scenic description underlines the experience of the present moment (ibid. 93-94). Many scenes of otium are

therefore instances of what Joseph Frank has analysed as *spatial form* in modernist literature. In his theory, scenes "break up […] the time-flow of the narrative" and they dwell on moments in time which represent "pattern[s] of relationships" and "allusions" rather than causal sequences (Frank 18, 21). This is again most obviously the case in passages from *English, August* as well as *A Strange and Sublime Address*. Instead of a breathless, action-loaded narrative, the novels are characterised by "the growing importance of very long scenes covering a very short time of story", which characterise the protagonists' experience and situation in the narrative (Genette 93).

A similar effect can be observed in narratives with many temporal layers, for example in *A Sin of Colour* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, in which the discourse time of present events is stretched through memories and reflections of the characters and the narrative *order* is changed (cf. Genette 33-85). Experiences of otium can be situated both in the nostalgic reflection of past events and in the cherished memories themselves. In *A Sin of Colour* more than half of the narrative consists of flashbacks and memories. The narrative is structured *achronologically*, constantly shifting between the storyline in the present and flashbacks as well as embedded vignettes of earlier times. The change from one level of narration to the next is frequently very smooth without even a break in paragraph.

Prolepsis or flash forward devices can occur in the middle of a sentence. Hence the description of the protagonist's state of mind as a "widemeshed" web with "memories" falling through it "like pieces of tarnished cutlery" can be applied to the temporal structure of the narrative itself (*Colour* 36). The structure of the novel has holes through which memories or the expectations of future events are continuously inserted. In this novel, the blurred distinctions between what is part of the present plot, what is memory and what is only a potential event, lead to a sense of disorientation and draw the readers' focus to boundaries and layers of meaning. Moreover, as I have shown in chapter 3, obsession with the past is tied at least in Gupta's novel to the reflection of a personal crisis from a calm distance – a reflection that is only possible through the experience of otium. Even more importantly, I maintain that in *A Sin of Colour* and *The Inheritance of Loss* the

achronological narrative structure itself is an instance of alternative temporality. My argument is based on the assumption that, as West-Pavlov formulates, "narrative achronism assumes a basic linearity of events which it in fact constantly disturbs" (*Temporalities* 54). Rather than having a temporal sequence that could be compared to a straight line, the text becomes, through its temporal structure, a tightly wound web of places and moments (cf. Klinkert 16). Plot as the pattern "which yields coherence to the narrative" is constantly disturbed in these novels through the use of digression, achronological narration and iterative narration (Kukkonen).

Among the **narratological choices** typical for these novels, internal focalisation is a recurring common denominator, so much so that internally focalised narratives, which favour reflection, memory and nostalgia, can be interpreted as a basic condition for otium. An omniscient heterodiegetic narrator seems to be incompatible with otium as a major theme in a novel, implying an objective place outside the narrative as well as an already managed and ordered temporal unfolding of events (cf. West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 38). As Fludernik argues, "the registering of events in external focalisation […] seem to block the necessary subjectivity that goes with the thematization of otium" ("Narrating" n. pag.). *A Sin of Colour* and *The Inheritance of Loss* are structured by shifting internal focalisation, which turns these novels into webs of individual memories and experiences – an effect of their achronological structure. *English, August* (Agastya), *A Strange and Sublime Address* (Sandeep), *The Romantics* (Samar) and *We Weren't Lovers Like That* (Aftab), are internally focalised on one character. Internal focalisation is central in both types of texts to the characterisation of experiences of otium. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, for instance, a sense of floating is evoked through metaphors and similes which are associated with the openly creative imagination of children. In *The Romantics* and *We Weren't Lovers Like That*, the personal experience of crisis and loss, but also the chance to overcome it, is expressed through a constant evaluation of memories. To a certain extent all of these texts feature unreliable narrators, because their representation of events becomes heavily subjective through a filter of nostalgia.

These strategies arguably slow down narrative progression by stretching discourse time, blending past and present events and avoiding chronological storytelling (cf. Moslund 76). Even though these are different strategies, they all make understanding the plot more difficult. The text thus relies more on a spatial structure (cf. Frank): a reader consumes the novel not merely to understand the plot and grasp its temporally unfolding meaning, but is asked to pay attention to how it is constructed, a perspective which decelerates the narrative (cf. Klinkert 16).[176] While this phenomenon lies, arguably, at the core of many definitions of modern literature, texts that have otium as their main focus additionally emphasise these aspects. Just as practical language use is less relevant to literary texts, aim-oriented action and linear temporality are set aside during an experience of otium (cf. Klinkert 2-3, 16). Thus, contemporary Indian novels with a focus on otium rely on the modern "shift from 'telling' (in the sense of 'discoursing') to 'showing'" (Reinfandt 289).

The described structural phenomena are, even though most of these novels do not explicitly reference the European modernists, strikingly similar to modernist techniques. The novels' stylistic features focus with otium on aspects of everyday life, they favour spatial representation to temporal linearity in the tradition of Joseph Frank's *spatial form* and they often underline the immediacy of the sensory experience of the moment in almost epiphanic way. At the same time, just as the epiphanic moment leads back to immediacy and immanence (cf. Schwarz 4-6, 10; Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 93-94; May 923-924), the centrality of the experiential quality of otium in these texts redirects the emphasis on stylistic form to the nature of experience: the novels' spatialised chronology does not draw attention to questions of what literature is, but to how we experience temporality and to how this impacts on our conceptualisation of ourselves, the surrounding

[176] Both in the interpretation chapters and in this conclusion, I refer only to stylistic features of the texts and their auto-referential, performative dimensions, without addressing the question of whether a certain kind of reception, i.e. "the inducing of a leisurely reading experience" or a "meditative or reflective" approach to the text is at all likely or intended (Fludernik, "Narrating" n. pag.). After all, this question ultimately depends on whether devices such as achrony or a stretching of discourse time are at all perceived by readers as more immersive and pleasurable than an action-loaded plot.

space and of society.[177] The novels' style thus enhances their focus on otium and the affinity of contemporary Indian novels to modernist techniques seems to be based on "a worldview in which our *perception* of reality […] is more important than authorial and authoritative presentations of it" (Fludernik, "Narrating" n. pag.).

However, rather than becoming escapist, subject-centred and losing the "remainder of significance" that the modernists gave their texts through mythic structures (Fludernik, "Narrating" n. pag.; cf. Frank 62-63), their textual strategies subversively comment on temporal structures in late modern societies[178] and refuse to be part of a dominant, postmodernist trend in contemporary Indian fiction (cf. Freedman; Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 13, 118-119; Lazarus, *Unconscious* 30). Instead, the novels seem to contribute to the discourse on alternative modernities as they recover valuable aspects of an older Indian modernity such as heterogeneous forms of temporality. Thus, my central argument here is that contemporary Indian novels in English with a focus on otium situate themselves self-consciously in a tradition of modernist writing that constantly resists usefulness, progress and temporal linearity.

7.1.3. Otium and Nostalgia

In all of the novels, nostalgic memory is intimately connected to experiences of otium. The novels express a longing for an unreachable or unrecoverable ideal, which is contrasted to the present moment characterised by precariousness and identity struggles. In *A Sin of Colour* (3.2), nostalgia is expressed in a longing for home and the emotion is part of fulfilling artistic practice, such as playing classical Indian music – a highly evocative activity in the novel, which is linked with cultural

[177] Compare the notion of literature as heterotopic. In literary texts focusing on otium, this tendency of the literary text as a heterotopia, changing the way other spaces are seen and evaluated, is strengthened in novels focusing on otium as it is both part of protagonists' experiences and the narrative as a whole (cf. Warning 20-25).

[178] With "late modernity" I refer, as I have delineated in chapter 2, in analogy to modernity to the present moment of cultural and societal development rather than to a literary movement (*late modernism*). Late modernity is characterised as a continuation and intensification of modernity, particularly with a view to capitalist globalisation and social acceleration (cf. 2.2.1; Soja 27-28; Giddens 52, 63).

ideals and memories of home. In addition, ruins, art objects and memorabilia stand for memories of unrecoverable calm and restful moments in happy relationships. The recurrence of ruins in this novel links up with the dysfunctional appliances of modern life in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and the sense of decay in *The Inheritance of Loss*. I read the nostalgia evident in *A Sin of Colour* as a temporal metaphor for a crisis of self, Deben's longing for Reba standing for his longing for and, at the same time, his alienation from his home and native culture. The main characters are perpetually in danger of losing their hold on a stable identity, so that they need to turn to situations in which they felt at home. Otium is entangled with this pervasive nostalgia, for Deben spends a lot of time in reflecting on past moments wherein he saw Reba, which are invariably potential moments of otium, such as "scenes of cultured leisure, of music and intellectual exchange" (Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 27).

In similarity, *A Strange and Sublime Address* creates a nostalgic atmosphere centred on an older middle-class life in Calcutta. In its association with nostalgia, otium is represented as a fragmented potentiality. The novel is extremely nostalgic for both an older urban life and, through its child protagonist, for an idyllic, open-minded and purposeless perception of the world during childhood. A particularly mournful and elegiac perspective on the perception of urban space is represented in *We Weren't Lovers Like That*: in this novel, memories of love and of a leisurely experience of Delhi now lost to capitalist consumerism and functionality, connect with a more pervasive sense of loss and failure.

In *English, August*, expectations of professional success in the IAS are experienced as pointless. They are contrasted with a lazy boredom that is shot through with moments of longing for a more idyllic idleness without expectation. I conclude in chapter 4 that the novel has a hesitant utopian dimension as it asks the reader to imagine alternatives to purposeful action, to usefulness and a focus on job careers as central values in life. Almost all the characters in *The Romantics* lead an aimless life in search of a functioning place in society. Nostalgia here is directed at the stability of a traditional religious order and its associated practices and symbols which promise spiritual serenity. Finally, *The Inheritance of Loss* carries the experience of loss in its title, which invariably shapes the novel's

characters. From their present experience of (emotional and economic) deprivation and alienation (which the novel frames as an inheritance of historical acts of violence), each character longs for a more intact moment in the past. The transgressive agency of natural elements even speaks of a wish to eradicate the harm done by humans and thus return to some pre-civilisational status.

From a present perspective of accelerated late modernity, nostalgia is directed at experiences of otium (cf. Rosa, *Acceleration* 39-51). When speed and progress become dominant maxims in modern societies, the "nostalgia for a lost world" can have a subversive potential "associated with those left behind in the race towards the future" (Pernau, "Nostalgia" 89). In the form of the possibility to play music or to meditate (3), to be in the present moment without any necessity of purposeful action (4), to experience the urban space in a certain way (5) and to experience equal relationships of sociality (6), otium becomes a nostalgic ideal from a perspective of alienation. This longing for a different sense of time and experiential quality is linked to a dissatisfaction with the present in modernity (cf. Shaw/Chase 6). Moreover, the connection between otium and nostalgia is not only noticeable in contemporary Anglophone texts, but can also be found in older "literary representations of otium in South Asia" both in Urdu and Bengali, which frequently refer to such experiences "in a nostalgic manner, entailing the absence of such possibilities of otium" or a "sense of tranquil timelessness that will never return" (Noor, "Semantics" n. pag.).

Since nostalgia is usually understood as referring to an idealised past, nostalgia as a strategy in cultural theory and as a motif in literary texts re-opens perspectives on "alternate histories" (Noor, "Negotiating" n. pag.). By intentionally avoiding a focus on official history, narratives that work with the logic of such a re-evaluation of an older culture can question the location and recognition of "witnesses and actors in history" (ibid. n. pag.). In this way, nostalgia "can and should open up a negotiation between the past and how it has shaped the present" (Walder 9; cf. Pernau, "Nostalgia"). It is in this context in which I have repeatedly stressed the nostalgic reference to different facets of an older cultural modernity: to descriptions of music in the Hindustandi classical tradition (*A Sin of Colour*), in the experiences of an older everyday life of the middle classes (*A*

Strange and Sublime Address) and an open way in which the urban space is structured (*We Weren's Lovers Like That*).

In all these examples, small moments of alternative temporal experience promise a transgression of present circumstances. They are nostalgic for "being in time and being at home with a difference from what is posited as entrenched modernity" (Wiemann, *Genres* 291-292). Ultimately, the emotion of nostalgia is based on a linear understanding of time and history which suggests that "[t]he past cannot be recovered" (Pernau, "Nostalgia" 103). Thus, based on the discourses of alternative temporalities, I understand the role of nostalgia for cultural modernity as a utopian impulse.

7.2. Otium as an Instance of Alternative Temporality

The recurring connection between experiences of otium and related temporal structures and a sense of longing and nostalgia is crucial for a contextualisation of the novels within contemporary Indian fiction. My argument about the novels' repeated reference to an alternative modernity is based on an understanding of otium as a more particular instance of what has been previously discussed as alternative or heterogeneous temporalities (Spivak, *A Critique* 38-39; Gaonkar; Kaviraj; Wiemann, *Genres* 60-64; Mbembe 8-10; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities*). Experiences of otium become relevant whenever characters' experiences are represented and described as non-linear and purposeless and the "narrated time" of the novel is shaped into a plurality of temporalities (West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 10). The argument about temporalities is linked to both the colonial past and to discourses about alternative modernities that question hegemonic, Eurocentric understandings of modernity. As Wiemann argues:

> [p]ostcolonial heterotemporality […] raises issues that are crucial to […] transcultural conditions […]: insisting on the collective element inscribed into temporal diversity, it allows for the realignment of the singular and the common beyond the normativity of both old-style Western universalism and modernist/postmodern 'placeless' individualism. (*Genres* 299)

Thus, experiences of otium can be portrayed on the basis of my interpretations as belonging to a nostalgic "re-figuring of the present" with a view to older experiences of modernity (Wiemann, *Genres* 7). In addition to the observation

that nostalgia is a recurring motif in texts accompanied by a modernist writing style, there is a fundamental connection between the auto-referential dimension of otium and the modern genre of the novel. I interpret the role of otium in contemporary Indian novels as an experiential mode at times nostalgically focused on the *past*, but only in terms of its relevance for *present* emotions and experiences associated with the modern.

In the examples throughout this book, the nostalgia for a lost quality of experience bears an inherent utopian potential that links it to postcolonial concerns (cf. Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 105; Ashcroft, "Utopia"; "Re-Writing" 30; Shetty 59; Rosa, *Resonance*). It is in this context that otium becomes relevant for the postcolonial background of the novels: even when they are not classified as postcolonial texts, nostalgia is directed at forms of temporal experience that have been lost in the course of colonial domination and the globalisation of capitalism (Soja 32-33; Giddens 22; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 5-7, 35, 120-121). Nostalgia has a utopian dimension originating in the experience of modernity (Smith 505-507, 517; Chaudhuri, "The Flute" 25-28; 36-38; 49-53). This utopian nostalgia can even be framed as "a symptom of the age" of modernity, because nostalgic remembering is inspired by feelings of temporal displacement and the assumption of linear temporality that "the past becomes irretrievable" (Walder 9-10; Pernau, "Nostalgia" 78, cf. 103; Shaw/Chase 6-7). Due to the way in which otium is represented in the novels, they criticise understandings of temporality that have been shaped by the colonial past (linear, homogeneous time) and global experiences of acceleration (Sarkar 10-11; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* 17-18, 163; Rosa, *Acceleration* 39-51). Otium, which is often mourned as inaccessible in the present context, is imagined as a possible alternative to these experiences of time. By imagining otium in a fictional context, the experience is projected into a possible future (cf. Walder 18). Through nostalgia, the past "becomes a source of group identity for the present and a way to imagine the future" (Pernau, "Nostalgia" 79; cf. 103). The novels "take positive recourse to that which was silenced and cannot be spoken within the folds of the dominant" culture, which is what I characterised as the culture of (late) modernity (Wiemann, *Genres* 6). Thus, nostalgia is utopian/politically progressive in my use of the

concept (rather than predominantly conservative, see also Smith; Khanna), because it marks a return to discourses of temporality and asks for the potential of a shift in the evaluation of time regimes.

As I noted, concerning practices of otium, certain experiences of "indigenous leisure" may be "showcased nostalgically […] as the assumption, or adoption, of a Western (positive) heterostereotype about India by Indians themselves" (Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 32). This is particularly the case with meditative religious practices, but it is not a hypothesis that can be applied to the whole of the corpus analysed here. Since the experience and narrative structures of otium both explicitly and implicitly negotiate problems of modernity as diverse as religious traditions, artistic traditions, structures and rhythms of work, social and communal forms of exchange, urbanity and social inequalities, their relevance in the texts cannot "simply be motivated by the loss of indigenous traditions and their recuperation on the basis of the only available material, which happens to be that produced by Western scholars or cultural ambassadors" (ibid. 33-34). While I agree with Fludernik that autoexoticist strategies and "the conversion of a cliché of latent Orientalism" may play a role in certain descriptions of otium, particularly when they can be related to "exotic (courtly) leisure", this is not the dominant trend in the representations of otium analysed in this book (ibid. 32; cf. Huggan, *Exotic*; Li). Nevertheless, it is particularly in Indian novels in English that the wish for a "recuperation of a lost way of life […] may be linked to class privilege" ("Nostalgia" 15, cf. 31-34). These novels' references to aspects of an Indian culture of modernity (for instance to Indian classical music and forms of sociality) are at times intentionally stereotypical in order to criticise Western, accelerated modernity and neo-colonial power relations.

However, my argument is that such representations negotiate the cultural location of the stereotypes they portray. It is exactly because modern formations such as the Bengal Renaissance may be characterised as "hybrid constellation of Western (colonial) opportunities (social, political, financial) married to indigenous privilege", that the nostalgic evocation of this cultural entanglement can be perceived as enabling and subversive (Fludernik, "Nostalgia" 32). Recently, debates about alternative modernities have highlighted the

transcultural potential of modern histories in “the dialectic of Europe and its others” (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* 45; cf. Freedman; Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 31-32). Thus, Amit Chaudhuri underlines the cultural openness of modernity, “our resistance to the colonizer on the one hand; our openness to the colonizer’s culture on the other”, which can be more helpful than concepts of “identity [or] authenticity”, in “shifting the focus, […] remapping a history” (*Clearing* 13, 34). He asks for an engagement with the “implications and radical achievements” of a modernity that cannot ever be linked with cultural purity (ibid. 105). If “‘modernity’ remains so resolutely European” – an observation also at the heart of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe* –, it is all the more necessary to return to it as “a means of locating and subjecting to interrogation some of the fundamental notions by which we define ourselves (Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 66; cf. Soja 33; Giddens 48; Gikandi; Bhambra 5, 73). If modernity is always a form of critique and rewriting (Jameson, *Modernity* 34-35), the location of otium in an older cultural modernity in South Asia is part of a *reworking of hegemonic (European) conceptions of modernity* as well as of a *critical impulse inherent in modernity itself (both European and global)*.[179]

The connections between alternative temporalities, purposeless in the modern literary texts and a recent interest in modernity in India, is brought forward in particular by Amit Chaudhuri’s essay collection *Clearing a Space*. In his collection, Chaudhuri argues for a re-evaluation of the modern in conjunction with the uneventful and the useless. Instead of a focus on history and the nation, which are obvious topics in the postcolonial context, he advocates the need for revisiting an older modernity (pre-Independence or at least before the economic liberation of India, see also Shetty) with a focus on useless, everyday cultural practices (*Clearing* 14, 25, 31-32). With reference to Rabindranath Tagore Chaudhuri proposes that this implies an understanding of literature as open to “allow for the ‘flow’ of consciousness” (Noor, “Semantics” 36-37; cf. Chaudhuri, *Clearing* 23-26). Chaudhuri’s theory can be connected to the narrative strategies common to the novels of my corpus, because usefulness is associated with holistic narratives

[179] See also Kalliney, *Modernism in a Global Context* and Hayot and Walkowitz’ “Introduction” to *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism*.

that are clearly directed at the aim of bringing across a plot, which is done most conventionally by making use of a chronological sequence of events. According to Klinkert the literary, and especially the novelistic, text lends itself to a study of otium. Since positive freedom is a prerequisite for forming a narrative, the examples discussed here suggest that certain novels do more than that: by means of indecision or openness, they try to undercut ideas of linearity and progression. In *Clearing a Space*, Chaudhuri identifies this modern writing as a counter-discourse to globalised economic and social realities of (late) modernity (cf. 13-14, 23, 31-34). Since the literary strategies under discussion are not particular to contemporary literature, but have a longer tradition, the Indian novels analysed here can be read in this counter-discursive tradition: they are examples of how experiences of otium on the level of event/story are interwoven with narrative strategies that create a sense of openness and opportunity (Noor, "Semantics" n. pag.). What is more, contemporary novels are reminders of how the novel can open up a space – both on the part of the author and the implied reader – for different temporal structures, for a resistance to being useful or, for that matter, for experiences of otium.

Moreover, the novel as an inherently dialogic genre that, "produced by and productive of modernity", is particularly suited to including alternative modes of experience and to discussing the premises upon which our notions of modernity are built (Bakhtin; Wiemann, *Genres* 48). This dialogic openness enables a discursive entanglement of otium on the level of plot *and* of narrative structures in order to comment with an often subversive impetus not only on the shifting understandings of time and relations to the world perceived as alienated, but also on connected topics such as the shifting roles of public and private spaces. Hence, otium is especially relevant to modern literature (cf. Krause). The double role of otium in the plot and structure of a text can be viewed in the context of the inherent ambiguity of the novel. If the modern text is founded upon "the insuperable difference between language and the world" as opposed to the Enlightenment "idea(l) that language can or should be used as if it were a transparent medium", I argue that otium inevitably draws attention to this ambiguity (Reinfandt 279). Because the experience of otium is a potential answer

to the “crack between world and experience” and the novels portray the search for alternatives to alienated relations to the world, the novels’ themselves are “performance[s]” of ambiguity, highlighting the literariness of the texts and transcending “mere depiction” (ibid. 279-280, 282, 287). While both the concept of otium and the novel as a modern genre are of Western origin, I argue that in the corpus of this study the inherently subversive potential of otium and the novel’s emphasis on ambiguity and openness combine to critique and qualify linear notions of temporality and hegemonic, Eurocentric interpretations of modernity.

Through the character of unproductivity and openness, relying on otium as a central concept for my analysis has made it possible to touch on the question of how temporality is negotiated and represented structurally in contemporary Indian novels in English. It was also necessary to analyse how the texts refer to older cultural practices and how these are linked to discourses of modernity in India. Finally, my focus on otium has revealed a subversive potential not *exclusively*, but *also* from a postcolonial perspective, because the temporal experience of lingering in the present moment comments on the abstract, linear time of progress and productivity. The present study contributes to the discourse on plural temporalities in the postcolonial context by analysing the relevance of a nostalgic perspective in contemporary Indian fiction through the focus on otium as a *particular* form of alternative temporal experience. Nostalgia for experiences of otium always has a utopian quality because it is a comment on present, alienated circumstances and a critique of a temporality that has historically spread and become naturalised through colonial expansion and global capitalism. I argue that whenever the topic of otium has an impact on the structure of the novels, their modernist aesthetic and at times their metafictional commentary sets them apart from other contemporary Indian fiction in English and questions the role of the novel as a genre. Only by approaching the novels through the prism of open and purposeless experiences of otium, could these connected discourses of modernity, temporality and nostalgia come into focus.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Abdulali, Sohaila. *The madwoman of Jogare*. New Delhi: Harpercollins 1998.

Ali, Ahmed. *Twilight in Delhi. A Novel*. Karachi [et al.]: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1984.

Banerjee, Sarnath. *Corridor. A Graphic Novel.* Delhi [et al.]: Penguin India, 2004.

Chatterjee, Upamanyu. *English, August. An Indian Story*. Calcutta: Rupa & Co, 1989.

Chaudhuri, Amit. "Afternoon Raag." *Three Novels: A Strange and Sublime Address, Afternoon Raag, Freedom Song*. Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2001. 175–278.

---. "A Strange and Sublime Address." *Three Novels*. 1-174.

Desai, Anita. *The Artist of Disappearance. Three Novellas*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2011.

Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. London and New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

Flaubert, Gustave. *Sentimental Education*. Trans. Helen Constantine. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2016.

Gupta, Sunetra. *A Sin of Colour*. London: Phoenix House, 1999.

---. *Memories of Rain*. New York: Grove Press, 1993.

Hosain, Attia. *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. London: Virago, 1988.

Joshi, Arun. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Delhi [et al.]: Orient Paperbacks, 2008.

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. London: Wordsworth Classics, 2010.

---. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Viking Pr., 1976.

Mehta, Gita. *A River Sutra*. London: Heinemann, 1993.

---. *Karma Cola. Marketing the Mystic East*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

Mishra, Pankaj. *The Romantics. A Novel*. New York: Random House, 2000.

Proust, Marcel. *In Search of Lost Time. Vol. I: Swann's Way.* Transl. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin. London: Vintage Books 2005, 51-52.

Ray, Satyajit. *Shatranj Ke Khilari / The Chess Players*. 1977. Film.

Roy, Anuradha. *The Folded Earth*. London: MacLehose Pr., 2011.

Sahgal, Nayantara. *A Time to Be Happy*. London: Victor Collancz Ltd., 1958.

Sarna, Navtej. *We Weren't Lovers like That*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2003.

Tagore, Rabindranath. "Broken Nest." *Broken Nest and Other Stories*. Trans. Sharmistha Mohanty. Chennai et al.: Tranquebar Pr., 2009. 1–92.

---. "Natir Puja." *Three Plays*. Trans. Marjorie Sykes. Madras [et al.]: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1983. 88–140.

Varma, Virena. *The Great Stories of Munshi Premchand: A Collection of Best Writings by the Writer of the Masses*. New Delhi: Manoj Publ., 2007.

Secondary Sources

Adelman, Richard. *Idleness, Contemplation and the Aesthetic, 1750 - 1830*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2011.

Alatas, Syed Hussein. *The Myth of the Lazy Native : A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism.* London: Cass, 1977.

Allington, Daniel. "Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss and the Troubled Symbolic Production of a Man Booker Prizewinner." *Indian Writing in English and the Global Literary Market*. Ed. Om Prakash Dwivedi and Lisa Lau. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 119-139.

Anjaria, Ulka. “Literary Pasts, Presents, and Futures.” *A History of the Indian Novel in English.* Ed. Ulka Anjaria. New York: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2015. 1-30.

Arnold, David. “Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity in India.” *Mapping Subaltern Studies*. Ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi. London and New York: Verso, 2000. 24–49.

Ashcroft, Bill. “Re-Writing India.” *Writing India Anew : Indian-English Fiction 2000 - 2010*. Ed. Krishna Sen. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Pr., 2013. 29–46.

---. “Introduction: Spaces of Utopia.” *Spaces of Utopia. An Electronic Journal* 1.2 (2012): 1–17.

---. “Alternative Modernities: Globalization and the Post-Colonial.” *ARIEL* 40.1 (2009): 81–105.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back : Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures.* London [et al.]: Routledge, 2010.

Ashfield, Andrew and Peter de Bolla (Ed.). *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-century Aesthetic Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1996.

Auerbach, Jeffrey A. *Imperial Boredom. Monotony and the British Empire*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2018.

Bakhtin, Michail M. *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson. Austin: Univ. of Texas Pr., 1996.

Bakhle, Janaki. *Two Men and Music. Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2005.

Baldick, Julian. *Mystical Islam. An Introduction to Sufism*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1992.

Banerjee, Basabi Khan and Georg Stöber. “Gorkhaland Movement in India : A Case of Indigeneity and/or a Struggle over Space?” *Aktuelle Forschungsbeiträge zu Südasien. Geographien Südasiens* 1 (2013): 5–9.

Barad, Karen. “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.” *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.3 (2003): 801–832.

Barrett, Cyril. “The Concept of Leisure: Idea and Ideal.” *The Philosophy of Leisure*. Ed. Tom Winnifrith and Cyril Barrett. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989. 9–19.

Barua, Ankur. “Metaphors of Temporality: Revisiting the ‘Timeless Hinduism’ versus ‘Historical Christianity’ Antithesis.” *The Harvard Theological Review* 104.2 (2011): 147–169.

Bayly, Susan. *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age.* Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2001.

Behrendt, Gianna. “Die ‘wahre’ Natur des Vertikalen Resonanzversprechens.” *Resonanzen und Dissonanzen. Hartmut Rosas Kritische Theorie in der Diskussion*. Ed. Christian Helge Peters and Peter Schulz. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017. 233–248.

Benjamin, Walter. “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zorn. New York: Schocken Books, 2007. 253–264.

Bergson, Henri. *Zeit und Freiheit*. Hamburg: Europ. Verl.-Anst., 1994.

Berlin, Isaiah. *Four Essays on Liberty*. London [et al.]: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1975.

Beverley, John. *Subalternity and Representation Arguments in Cultural Theory*. Durham, NC [et al.]: Duke Univ. Pr., 1999.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 2004.

Bhambra, Gurminder K. *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Bhattacharya, Kumkum. “Non-Western Traditions: Leisure in India.” *A Handbook of Leisure Studies*. Ed. Chris Rojek et al. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 75–89.

Blamires, Harry. *The New Bloomsday Book. A Guide through Ulysses*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

Blum, Bianca Edith. “Räume weiblicher Muße in der russischen Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts.” *Muße-Diskurse : Russland im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Elisabeth Cheauré. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017. 169–194.

Bödeker, Hans Erich. “Concept - Meaning - Discourse. Begriffsgeschichte Reconsidered.” *History of Concepts. Comparative Perspectives*. Ed. Ian Hampsher-Monk et al. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Pr., 1998. 51–64.

Boehmer, Elleke and Dominic Davies. “Literature, Planning and Infrastructure: Investigating the Southern City through Postcolonial Texts.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 51.4 (2015): 395–409.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. London [et al.]: Routledge, 1984.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic books, 2001.

Brennan, Timothy. “From Development to Globalization: Postcolonial Studies and Globalization Theory.” *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Ed. Neil Lazarus. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2004. 120–138. Cambridge Companions to Literature (CCtL).

Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot. Design and Intention in Narrative*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1996.

Brück, Michael von. *Ewiges Leben und Wiedergeburt. Sterben, Tod und Jenseitshoffnung in Europäischen und Asiatischen Kulturen*. Freiburg [et al.]: Herder, 2012.

Buchanan, Ian. “Other People: Ethnography and Social Practice.” *The Certeau Reader*. Ed. Ward Graham. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2000. 95–150.

Buehler, Arthur F. *Recognizing Sufism. Contemplation in the Islamic Tradition*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016.

Burke, Peter. “The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe.” *Past & Present* 146 (1995): 136–150.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York [et al.]: Routledge, 1993.

Capwell, Charles. *Sailing on the Sea of Love. The Music of the Bauls of India*. Calcutta [et al.]: Seagull Books, 2011.

Casey, Edward S. *Getting Back into Place. Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*. Bloomington, Ind. [et al.]: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1993.

Certeau, Michel de, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley, Calif. [et al.]: Univ. of California Pr., 2011.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Muddle of Modernity." *The American Historical Review* 116.3 (2011): 663–675.

---. *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ [et al.]: Princeton Univ. Pr., 2008.

Chatterjee, Partha. *The Politics of the Governed. Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York [et al.]: Columbia Univ. Pr., 2006. Leonard Hastings Schoff Lectures.

---. *The Nation and Its Fragments Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Pr., 1993.

Chatterji, Joya. *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2007.

Chaturvedi, Vinayak. "Introduction." *Mapping Subaltern Studies*. Ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi. London and New York: Verso, 2000. VII–XIX.

Chaudhuri, Amit. "The Flute of Modernity." *On Tagore: Reading the Poet Today*. Penguin Books India, 2012. 15-60.

---. *Clearing a Space. Reflections on India, Literature, and Culture*. Oxford [et al.]: Lang, 2008.

---. *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*. London: Picador, 2001.

Chaudhuri, Rosinka. "Modernity at Home: A Possible Genealogy of the Indian Drawing Room." *Freedom and Beef Steaks: Colonial Calcutta Culture*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012. 120–155.

Cheauré, Elisabeth. “Muße *à la russe*. Lexikalische und Semantische Probleme (*prazdnost’* und *dosug*).” *Muße-Diskurse. Russland im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Cheauré. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017. 1-35.

---. “Muße, Gender - und ein Selbstmord: zur Funktion von Handarbeiten in L. N. Tolstojs ‘Anna Karenina’.” *Muße und Gesellschaft*. Ed. Gregor Dobler and Peter Philipp Riedl. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017. 401–418.

Cheauré, Elisabeth and Evgenija N. Stroganova. “Zwischen Langeweile, Kreativität und glücklichem Leben : Muße in der russischen Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts.” *Muße-Diskurse. Russland im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*. 83–168.

Chick, Garry. “Leisure and Culture. Issues for an Anthropology of Leisure.” *Leisure Sciences* 20 (1998): 111–133.

Çinar, Alev and Thomas Bender. “Introduction. The City: Experience, Imagination, and Place.” *Urban Imaginaries. Locating the Modern City*. Minneapolis, London: Univ. of Minnesota Pr., 2007. xi–xxvi.

Clark, Timothy. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2011.

Collot, Michel. “Landschaft.” *Handbuch Literatur und Raum*. Ed. Jörg Dünne and Andreas Mahler. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2015. 151–159. Handbücher Zur Kulturwissenschaftlichen Philologie 3.

Connolly, William E. “Belief, Spirituality, and Time.” *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*. Ed. Michael Warner et al. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard Univ. Pr., 2010. 126–144.

Conrad, Sebastian and Shalini Randeria. “Geteilte Geschichten - Europa in Einer Postkolonialen Welt.” *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*. Ed. Sebastian Conrad. Frankfurt/M. [et al.]: Campus-Verl., 2002. 9–49.

Copley, Stephen and Peter Garside. “Introduction.” *The Politics of the Picturesque. Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770*. Ed. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1994. 1–12.

Costelloe, Timothy M. *The Sublime from Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2012.

Cowman, Krista and Louise A. Jackson. “Time.” *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*. Malden, Mass. [et al.]: Blackwell, 2003. 32-52.

Cronon, William. “The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.” *Environmental History* 1.1 (1996): 7–28.

Dalrymple, William. *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi*. New Delhi [et al.]: Penguin Books, 2003.

Dames, Nicholas. *Amnesiac Selves. Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction 1810-1870.* Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2001.

Daniel, Anna. “Resonanz in der Praxis - Eine Praxistheoretische Betrachtung.” *Resonanzen und Dissonanzen. Hartmut Rosas Kritische Theorie in der Diskussion*. Ed. Christian Helge Peters and Peter Schulz. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017. 87–103.

Dasgupta, Rana. *Capital. The Eruption of Delhi*. New York: Penguin Pr., 2014.

Dasgupta, Subrata. *The Bengal Renaissance: Identity and Creativity from Rammohun Roy to Rabindranath Tagore*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007.

Dear, M. J.. “Postmodern Urbanism.” *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 17. Ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, Amsterdam [et al.]: Elsevier, 2001. 11856-11860.

Dengel-Janic, Ellen. *“Home Fiction”: Narrating Gendered Space in Anita Desai‘s and Shashi Deshpande’s Novels*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011.

Desai, Gaurav. “Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia.” *Representations* 1.85 (2004): 125–148.

Dev, Amiya. “A Note on Modern Bengali Writing.” *Modernism in Indian Writing*. Ed. U. R. Anantha Murthy et al. Bangalore: Panther Publishers, 1992. 7–13.

Dharwadker, Vinay. “The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature.” *Literary Cultures in History. Reconstructions from South Asia*. Ed. Sheldon Pollock. Berkeley: Univ. of California Pr., 2003. 199–267.

Didur, Jill. “‘An Unremembered Time’: Secular Criticism in Pankaj Mishra’s *The Romantics*.” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 44.2 (2009): 65–85.

Dobler, Gregor. “Muße und Arbeit.” *Muße Im Kulturellen Wandel: Semantisierungen, Ähnlichkeiten, Umbesetzungen*. Ed. Burkhard Hasebrink and Peter Philipp Riedl. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014. 54–68.

Dobler, Gregor and Peter Philipp Riedl. “Einleitung.” *Muße und Gesellschaft.* Ed. Gregor Dobler and Peter Philipp Riedl. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017. 1-20.

Dube, Saurabh. *Stitches on Time. Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles*. Durham, NC [et al.]: Duke Univ. Pr., 2004.

Duffy, Cian. *The Landscapes of the Sublime, 1700-1830. Classic Ground*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Dumazedier, Joffre. “Leisure.” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.* Ed. David L. Sills. New York: Macmillan, 1968. 248–254.

Dumont, P.-E. “Primitivism in Indian Literature.” *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*. Ed. Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Pr., 1935. 433–447. A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas.

Dutta, Nandana. “Indian English Women’s Fiction and the Fascination of the Everyday.” *Writing India Anew. Indian-English Fiction 2000 - 2010*. Ed. Krishna Sen and Rituparna Roy. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Pr., 2013. 145–160.

Eckstein, Lars. “Introduction.” *English Literatures across the Globe : A Companion*. Ed. Lars Eckstein. Paderborn: Fink, 2007. 13–19.

Ehret, Sonja et al. “A Grounded Theory on the Relation of Time Awareness and Perceived Valence.” *Timing and Time Perception*. Leiden: Brill, [Forthcoming].

Eickhoff, Franziska C. *Muße und Rekursivität in der Antiken Briefliteratur. Mit Einem Ausblick in Andere Gattungen*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016.

Emirbayer, Mustafa and Ann Mische. “What Is Agency?” *American Journal of Sociology* 103.4 (1998): 962–1023.

Feitscher, Georg. *Kontemplation und Konfrontation. Die Topik Autobiographischer Erzählungen der Gegenwart*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.

Feitscher, Georg and Anna Sennefelder. “Oisiveté.” *Dictionnaire de la fatigue*. Ed. Philippe Zawieja. Genf: Droz, 2016. 605– 616.

Ferguson, Frances. *Solitude and the Sublime*: *Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

Figal, Günter. “Die Räumlichkeit der Muße.” *Muße Im Kulturellen Wandel*. 26–33.

Figal, Günter et al. “Einleitung.” *Die Raumzeitlichkeit der Muße*. Ed. Günter Figal et al. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016. 1–6.

Figal, Günter and Tobias Keiling. “Das Raumtheoretische Dreieck. Zu Differenzierungen Eines Phänomenologischen Raumbegriffs.” *Die Raumzeitlichkeit der Muße*. 9–28.

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism. Is There No Alternative?* Winchester et al.: Zero Books, 2009.

Fludernik, Monika and Miriam Nandi. “Introduction.” *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*. Ed. Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 1-16.

Fludernik, Monika. “Narrating Otium – A Narratology of Leisure?.” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 51.2 (2021). [Forthcoming].

---. “Nostalgia for Otiose Leisure. Laying Claim to an Indian Tradition of Otium.” *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 7.1 (2019/2020), 14-34.

---. “The Simple Life: How Utopian Leisure Depends on Abstinence and Renunciation.” *Simplify! Simplify! Brevity, Plainness and Their Complications in American Literature and Culture. Festschrift for Bernd Engler on the*

Occasion of His 65th Birthday. Ed. Isabell Klaiber et al. Paderborn: Schöningh, 2019. 71–81.

---. “Ideology, Dissidence, Subversion: A Narratological Perspective.” *Narratology and Ideology. Negotiating Context, Form, and Theory in Postcolonial Narratives*. Ed. Divya Dwivedi et al. Columbus, OH: Ohio State Univ. Pr., 2018. 193–212.

---. “Spectators, Ramblers and Idlers: The Conflicted Nature of Indolence and the 18th-Century Tradition of Idling.” *Anglistik. International Journal of English Studies* 28.1 (2017): 133–154.

---. “Muße als soziale Distinktion.” *Muße und Gesellschaft*. Ed. Gregor Dobler and Peter Philipp Riedl. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017. 163–178.

---. “The Performativity of Idleness: Representations and Stagings of Idleness in the Context of Colonialism.” *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*. 129-153.

---. *An Introduction to Narratology*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 2009.

--- . “Is There a Postcolonial Sublime?” *Anglistentag 2006 Halle Proceedings*. Ed. Sabine Volk-Birke and Julia Lippert. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier (WVT), 2007. 237–247.

---. “Der ‘Edle Wilde’ Als Kehrseite des Kulturprogressivismus.” *Der Alteritätsdiskurs des Edlen Wilden*. Ed. Monika Fludernik. Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2002. 157–176. Identitäten und Alteritäten.

---. “Introduction.” *Hybridity and Postcolonialism : Twentieth-Century Indian Literature*. Ed. Monika Fludernik. Tübingen: Stauffenburg-Verl., 1998. 9-18.

Frank, Joseph. *The Idea of Spatial Form*. New Brunswick [et al.]: Rutgers Univ. Pr., 1991.

Freedman, Ariela. “6: On the Ganges Side of Modernism. Raghubir Singh, Amitav Ghosh and the Postcolonial Modern.” *Geomodernisms : Race, Modernism, Modernity*. Ed. Laura A. Doyle and Laura Winkiel. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Pr., 2005. 114–32.

Foucault, Michel. *Die Heterotopien. Der Utopische Körper: Zwei Radiovorträge*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 2013.

---. *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Gamper, Michael and Helmut Hühn. “Einleitung.” *Zeit der Darstellung: Ästhetische Eigenzeiten in Kunst, Literatur und Wissenschaft.* Ed. Michael Gamper and Helmut Hühn. Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2014. 7–23. Ästhetische Eigenzeiten Vol. 1.

Ganguly, Keya. “Temporality and Postcolonial Critique.” *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. 162–79.

Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar. “On Alternative Modernities.” *Alternative Modernities*. Ed. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Pr., 2001. 1–18.

George, Rosemary Marangoly. *Indian English and the Fiction of National Literature*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2013.

---. “Feminists Theorize Colonial/Postcolonial.” *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*. Ed. Ellen Rooney. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2006. 211–231.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Pr., 1980.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Pr., 1990.

Gikandi, Simon. “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 627–658.

Giles, Jana Maria. “Can the Sublime Be Postcolonial? Aesthetics, Politics, and Environment in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*.” *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1.2 (2014): 223–242.

Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 2005.

Gimmel, Jochen. “Zum Begriff des Nicht/Handelns und der Hoffnung, Geschichte zum Stillstand Bringen zu Können.” *Zwischen Handeln und Nichthandeln.*

Unterlassungspraktiken in der Europäischen Moderne. Ed. Theo Jung. Frankfurt/M. and New York: Campus Verlag, 2019. 293–319.

Gimmel, Jochen et al. *Konzepte der Muße*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, eds. and trans. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Guha, Ranajit. "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India." *Mapping Subaltern Studies*. Ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi. London and New York: Verso, 2000. 1–7.

---. *Dominance without Hegemony. History and Power in Colonial India*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1997.

Gupta, Dipankar. *Interrogating Caste. Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000.

Habib, Irfan. *Essays in Indian History. Towards a Marxist Perception*. London: Anthem, 2002.

Harder, Hans. "Nostalgia and Autobiographies - Reading Rabindranath Tagore's Jiban'smṛti (1912) and Chelebelā (1937)." *HerStory - Historical Scholarship between South Asia and Europe: Festschrift in Honour of Gita Dharampal-Frick*. Ed. Manju Ludwig and Rafael Klöber. Heidelberg, Berlin: CrossAsia-eBooks, 2018. 189–209.

---. "Urbanity in the Vernacular. Narrating the City in Modern South Asian Literatures." *Asiatische Studien - Études Asiatiques* 70.2 (2016): 435–466.

---. "Indian Literature in English and the Problem of Naturalisation." *Literature and Nationalist Ideology. Writing Histories of Modern Indian Languages*. New Delhi: Social Science Pr., 2010. 323–352.

Hasebrink, Burkhard and Peter Philipp Riedl. "Einleitung." *Muße Im Kulturellen Wandel*. 1–11.

Hayot, Eric and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. "Introduction." *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism*. New York [et al.]: Columbia Univ. Pr., 2016. 1–10.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Vorlesungen Über Die Philosophie der Geschichte*. Ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Vol. 12. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1989.

Hell, Julia and Andreas Schönle. “Introduction.” *Ruins of Modernity*. Ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle. Durham, NC [et al.]: Duke Univ. Pr., 2010. 1–14.

Hennessy, Rosemary. “Class.” *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*. 53–72.

Herbert, Caroline. “Postcolonial Cities.” *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*. Ed. Kevin McNamara. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2014. 200–215.

Hill, Peter. “Arguing with Europe: Eastern Civilization versus Orientalist Exoticism.” *PMLA* 132.2 (2017): 405–412.

Hoene, Christin. “The Sounding City. Soundscapes and Urban Modernity in Amit Chaudhuri’s Fiction.” *Re-Inventing the Postcolonial (in the) Metropolis*. Ed. Cecile Sandten and Annika Bauer. Leiden: Brill, 2016. 363–378.

Hühn, Peter. “Event and Eventfulness.” *Handbook of Narratology*. Ed. Peter Hühn, John Pier et al. Hamburg: De Gruyter, 2014. 159-178.

---. “Functions and Forms of Eventfulness in Narrative Fiction.” *Theorizing Narrativity*. Ed. J. Pier & J. Á. García Landa. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008. 141–63.

Huggan, Graham and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism : Literature, Animals, Environment*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 2010.

Huggan, Graham. “Derailing the ‘Trans’? Postcolonial Studies and the Negative Effects of Speed.” *Inter- und Transkulturelle Studien. Theoretische Grundlagen und Interdisziplinäre Praxis*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2006. 55–61.

---. *The Postcolonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 2001.

Jaeggi, Rahel. *Alienation*. Trans. Frederick Neuhouser. New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 2014.

James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 1. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1981.

Jameson, Fredric. *A Singular Modernity. Essay on the Ontology of the Present*. London [et al.]: Verso, 2002.

---. *The Seeds of Time*. New York [et al.]: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1994.

James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 1. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1981.

Jenks, Chris. *Childhood*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 2005.

Jodhka, Surinder S. “Nation and Village: Images of Rural India in Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 37.32 (2002): 3343–3353.

Jordan, Sarah. *The Anxieties of Idleness. Idleness in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture*. Lewisburg, Pa. [et al.]: Bucknell Univ. Pr., 2003.

Joseph, Margaret Paul. *Jasmine on a String. A Survey of Women Writing English Fiction in India*. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2014.

Kabir, Ananya Jahanara. *Partition’s Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013.

---. *Territory of Desire: Representing the Valley of Kashmir*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Pr., 2009.

Kalliney, Peter J. *Modernism in a Global Context*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Kaviraj, Sudipta. “An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity.” *European Journal of Sociology* 46.3 (2005): 497–526.

Kennedy, Dane Keith. *The Magic Mountains : Hill Stations and the British Raj*. Berkely, Calif. [et al.]: Univ. of California Pr., 1996.

Khair, Tabish. *Babu Fictions. Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels*. New Delhi [et al.]: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2001.

Khanna, Ranjana. “Post-Palliative: Coloniality’s Affective Dissonance.” *Postcolonial Text* 2.1 (2006): n. pag. *www.postcolonial.org*. Web. 15 May 2020.

Klinkert, Thomas. *Muße und Erzählen: Ein Poetologischer Zusammenhang : Vom “Roman de La Rose” Bis Zu Jorge Semprún*. Tübingen. Mohr Siebeck, 2016.

Kluwick, Ursula. *Exploring Magic Realism in Salman Rushdie’s Fiction*. New York [et al.]: Routledge, 2011.

Konishi, Shino. “Idle Men: The Eighteenth-Century Roots of the Indigeneous Indolence Myth.” *Passionate Histories: Myth, Memory and Indigeneous Australia*. Ed. Frances Peters-Little et al. ANU E Pr., 2010. 99-122.

Koselleck, Reinhart. “Does History Accelerate?” *Sediments of Time. On Possible Histories*. Trans. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann and Sean Franzel. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Pr., 2018. 79–99.

---. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 2004.

Krause, Robert. “Muße und Moderne. Zur Einführung.” *Muße und Moderne*. Ed. Tobias Keiling et al. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018. 1–6.

Kukkonen, Karin. “Plot.” *The Living Handbook of Narratology.* 25 Jan. 2014. Web. 11 Dec. 2018. http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/plot

Kuortti, Joel. “In Between Tagore and Brecht: Leaving and Returning in Sunetra Gupta’s *A Sin of Colour*.” *British Asian Fiction. Framing the Contemporary*. Ed. Neil Murphy and Wai-chew Sim. Amherst and New York: Cambria Pr., 2008. 183–195.

Laner, Iris. “Muße, Kontemplation, Wissen. Maurice Merleau-Ponty Über Die Möglichkeit Ästhetischen Wissens.” *Die Raumzeitlichkeit der Muße*. Ed. Günter Figal et al. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016. 29–59.

Lange, Bernd-Peter. “Tagore in the Diaspora: Presence, Ritual, Nostalgia.” *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik: A Quarterly of Language, Literature and Culture* 63.4 (2015): 357–371.

Lang, Frederick K., Ulysses *and the Irish God*. London and Toronto: Associated Univ. Pr.s, 1993.

Larsen, Neil. “DetermiNation: Postcolonialism, Poststructuralism and the Problem of Ideology.” *Dispositio* 20.47 (1995): 1–16.

Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford [et al.]: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2005.

Lazarus, Neil. “Introducing Postcolonial Studies.” *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. 1-15.

---. *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2011.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991.

Levine, Andrew. “Fairness to Idleness Is There A Right Not to Work?” *Economics and Philosophy* 11 (1995): 255–274.

Lewisohn, Leonard. “Rabindranath Tagore’s Syncretistic Philosophy and the Persian Sufi Tradition.” *International Journal of Persian Literature* 2.1 (2017): 2–41.

Li, Xiaofan Amy. “Introduction: From the Exotic to the Autoexotic.” *PMLA* 132.2 (2017): 392–396.

Liebert, Wolf-Andreas. “Das Unsagbare.” *Handbuch Sprache und Religion*. Ed. Alexander Lasch and Wolf-Andreas Liebert. Vol. 18. Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2017. 266–287.

---. “Religionslinguistik.” *Handbuch Sprache und Religion*. 7–36.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. and George Boas. *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Pr., 1935. A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas.

Luhmann, Niklas. *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*. Vol. 1 and 2. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1997.

Majumdar, Saikat. *Prose of the World. Modernism and the Banality of Empire*. New York, NY [et al.]: Columbia Univ. Pr., 2013.

---. “Far from the Nation, Closer to Home. Privacy, Domesticity, and Regionalism in Indian Fiction in English.” *A History of the Indian Novel in English.* 207-220.

---. “Dallying with Dailiness: Amit Chaudhuri’s Flaneur Fictions.” *Studies in the Novel* 39.4 (2007): 448–464.

Martin, N. “Muße.” *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* Ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer. Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 1984. 257–260.

May, Brian. “Extravagant Postcolonialism: Ethics and Individualism in Anglophonic, Anglocentric Postcolonial Fiction; or, ‘What Was (This) Postcolonialism?’” *ELH* 75.4 (2008): 899–937.

Mbembe, Joseph-Achille. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley, Calif. [et al.]: Univ. of California Pr., 2010.

McClintock, Anne. “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism.’” *Third World and Post-Colonial Issues.* Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Pr., 1992. 84–98.

---. “Family Feuds. Gender, Nationalism and the Family.” *Feminist Review* 44 (1993): 61–88.

McNamara, Kevin. “Introduction.” *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*. Ed. Kevin McNamara. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2014. 1–16.

Mee, Jon. “After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s.” *A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*. Ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 358–377.

Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna. “Introduction.” *A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*. 1-33.

Metcalf, Barbara and Thomas Metcalf. *A Concise History of Modern India.* Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2012.

Metcalf, Thomas. *Ideologies of the Raj.* New Delhi: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1998.

Mishra, Vijay. *Devotional Poetics and the Indian Sublime*. New York: State Univ. of New York Pr., 1998.

Mitchell, W. J. Thomas. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago [et al.]: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1994.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. “Introduction. Cartographies of Struggle.” *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Ed. Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1991. 1–50.

-- . “Under Western Eyes. Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.” *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. 51–80.

Monaco, Angelo. “Territorial Conflicts in the Contemporary Indian Novel in English.” *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 39.1 (2016): 11–21.

Moslund, Sten Pultz. *Literature’s Sensuous Geographies: Postcolonial Matters of Place*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi. “The Beginnings of the Indian Novel.” *A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*. 105-116.

---. *The Perishable Empire. Essays on Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi; Oxford [et al.]: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2000.

---. *Realism and Reality. The Novel and Society in India*. Delhi [et al.]: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1985.

Mukherjee, Upamanyu Pablo. *Postcolonial Environments : Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Munz, Melina. “Leisurely Being in the City as a Critique of the Functionalist Modern City Space in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* and Navtej Sarna's *We Weren't Lovers Like That*”. *Urbane Mußе. Materialitäten,*

Praktiken, Repräsentationen. Ed. Peter Philipp Riedl et al. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. [Forthcoming].

---. “Village Idyll? The Blending of Work and Otium in Contemporary Indian Fiction on Rural Life.” *Produktive Unproduktivität*. Ed. Gregor Dobler et al. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. [Forthcoming].

Nadeau, Randall L. *Asian Religions. A Cultural Perspective*. Malden, Mass. [et al.]: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.

Nandi, Miriam. “‘Idle Poor and Lazy Natives?’ - Re-Writing Stereotypes about the Global Poor.” *Representing Poverty in the Anglophone Postcolonial World*. Ed. Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp and Verena Jain-Warden. [Forthcoming]

---. “Longing for the Lost (M)Other: Postcolonial Ambivalences in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 46.2 (2010): 175–186.

---. *M/Other Indias: Zur Literarischen Verarbeitung von Armuts- und Kastenproblematik in Ausgewählten Texten der Indisch-Englischen und Muttersprachlichen Indischen Literatur Seit 1935.* Heidelberg: Winter, 2007.

Narayan, Shyamala A. and Jon Mee. “Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s.” *A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*. 247–260.

Nesci, Catherine. “Memory, Desire, Lyric: The Flâneur.” *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*. Ed. Kevin McNamara. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2014. 69–84.

Neumeyer, Harald. *Der Flâneur. Konzeption der Moderne*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999.

Nicolson, Marjorie Hope. *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite.* Seattle: Univ. of Washington Pr., 1997.

Noor, Farha. “Negotiating Nostalgia: Progressive Women’s Memoirs in Urdu.” *South Asian History and Culture.* [Forthcoming].

---. “The Sensory Semantics of Otium in South Asia: Asymmetries, Entanglements and the Affective.” *Semantiken der Muße Aus*

Interdisziplinärer Perspektive. Ed. Monika Fludernik and Thomas Jürgasch. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. [Forthcoming].

---. “Leisurely Feelings: Conceptualising Emotional Manifestations of Otium in South Asia” [PhD thesis University of Heidelberg, in progress].

---. “Love and Leisure: At Discomfort with Modernity in the films of Satyajit Ray.” *Muße. Ein Magazin*, 4.1 (2019). 18-22. Web. 24 Aug. 2020. http://mussemagazin.de/2019/04/love-and-leisure-at-discomfort-with-modernity-in-the-films-of-satyajit-ray/ 24.08.2020

Nowotny, Helga. *Time: Modern and Postmodern Experience*. Trans. Neville Plaice. Cambridge, UK Malden, MA: Polity Pr., 1996.

O’Connor, Brian. *Idleness. A Philosophical Essay*. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton Univ. Pr., 2018.

Olsen, Niklas. *History in the Plural. An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012.

Osborne, Peter. *The Politics of Time. Modernity and Avant-Garde*. London, New York: Verso, 1995.

Otto, André. “Megastadt: Kinematographisches Mumbai und das Rhizom des Abjekten.” *Handbuch Literatur und Raum*. Ed. Jörg Dünne and Andreas Mahler. Vol. 3. Berlin ; Boston: De Gruyter, 2015. 494–504.

Parry, Benita. “The Institutionalization of Postcolonial Studies.” *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. 66–80.

Peggs, Kay and Barry Smart. “Foucault’s Biopower.” *After Foucault Culture, Theory, and Criticism in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Lisa Downing. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2018. 61–76.

Pernau, Margrit. “Nostalgia: Tears of Blood for a Lost World.” *South Asia Graduate Research Journal (SAGAR)* 23 (2015): 74–109.

---. “Whither Conceptual History? From National to Entangled Histories.” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7.1 (2012): 1-11.

Pernau, Margrit and Helge Jordheim. “Introduction.” *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2015. 1–24. Emotions in History.

Peters, Christian Helge and Peter Schulz, “Einleitung: Entwicklungslinien des Resonanzbegriffs im Werk von Hartmut Rosa.” *Resonanzen und Dissonanzen. Hartmut Rosas Kritische Theorie in der Diskussion*. Ed. Christian Helge Peters and Peter Schulz. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017. 9-28.

Poduval, Satish. “Re-Figuring Culture: Introduction.” *Re-Figuring Culture: History, Theory, and the Aesthetic in Contemporary India*. Ed. Satish Poduval. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2005. 1–16.

Poon, Angelia. “(In)Visible Scripts, Hidden Costs: Narrating the Postcolonial Globe in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 50.5 (2014): 547–558.

Postone, Moishe. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination a Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1993.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 1992.

Punter, David. “The Picturesque and the Sublime: Two Worldscapes.” *The Politics of the Picturesque. Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770*. Ed. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1994. 220–239.

Ray, Rajat Kanta. *Exploring Emotional History Gender, Mentality and Literature in the Indian Awakening*. New Delhi [et al.]: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2001.

Reckwitz, Andreas. “Toward a Theory of Social Practices. A Development in Culturalist Theorizing.” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5.2 (2002): 243–263.

Reinfandt, Christoph. “The Romantic Paradigm: Ambiguity, Then and Now.” *Romantic Ambiguities. Abodes of the Modern*. Ed. Sebastian Domsch et al. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier (WVT), 2017. 279–294.

Riedl, Peter Philipp. “Die Muße des Flaneurs. Raum und Zeit in Franz Hessels *Spazieren in Berlin* (1929).” *Muße und Moderne.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018. 99–119.

Robertson, Roland. “Glocalization. Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity.” *Global Modernities*. Ed. Mike Featherstone et al. London [et al.]: Sage Publ., 1995. 25–44.

Roche, Maurice. “Lived Time, Leisure and Retirement.” *The Philosophy of Leisure*. Ed. Tom Winnifrith and Cyril Barrett. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989. 54–79.

Rojek, Chris et al. “Introduction.” *A Handbook of Leisure Studies*. 1–21.

Rosa, Hartmut. *Resonance. A Sociology of the Relationship to the World*. Trans. James C. Wagner. Cambridge and Medford, MA: Polity, 2019.

---. *Unverfügbarkeit*. Wien and Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2018.

---. *Social Acceleration. A New Theory of Modernity*. New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 2013.

Rouse, Joseph. “Power/Knowledge.” *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1994. 92–114.

Rushdie, Salman. “Damme, This Is the Oriental Scene for You!” *The New Yorker* 23 June 1997: 50.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

Šarar, ʿAbd-al-Ḥalīm and E. S. Harcourt. *Lucknow. The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*. Delhi [et al.]: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1989.

Sarbadhikary, Sukanya. *The Place of Devotion - Siting and Experiencing Divinity in Bengal-Vaishnavism*. Oakland: Univ. of California Pr., 2015.

Sarkar, Sumit, “Colonial Times. Clocks and Kali-Yuga”, in: Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Relocating Postmodernism, Hindutva, History*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004. 10-37.

Schäfer, Stefanie. “‘Looking Back, You Do Not Find What You Left Behind’: Postcolonial Subjectivity and the Role of Memory in White Teeth and The

Inheritance of Loss." *"Hello, I Say, It's Me." Contemporary Reconstructions of Self and Subjectivity*. Ed. Jan D. Kucharzewski et al. Trier: Wiss. Verlag Trier, 2009. 107–127.

Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. London: HarperCollins, 1995.

Schulze-Engler, Frank. "Theoretical Perspectives: From Postcolonialism to Transcultural World Literature." *English Literatures across the Globe*. 20–32.

Schwartz, Sanford. *The Matrix of Modernism. Pound, Eliot, and Early Twentieth-Century Thought*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Pr., 1985.

Schwinn, Thomas. "Multiple Modernities: Konkurrierende Thesen und Offene Fragen. Ein Literaturbericht in Konstruktiver Absicht." *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 38.6 (2009): 454–476.

Scott, Bede. "Reading the Uninteresting: Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August: An Indian Story*." *Contemporary Literature* 53.3 (2012): 493–516.

Sen, Amiya P. "Introduction." *Religion and Rabindranath Tagore. Select Discourses, Addresses, and Letters in Translation*. Ed. Amiya P. Sen. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2014. xv–lxiii.

Senft, Christoph. *Contemporary Indian Writing in English between Global Fiction and Transmodern Historiography*. Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016.

Sennefelder, Anna. *Rückzugsorte des Erzählens. Muße als Modus Autobiographischer Selbstreflexion*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.

Seshadri-Crooks, Kalpana. "At the Margins of Postcolonial Studies." *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies*. Ed. Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Pr., 2000. 3–23.

Sethi, Rumina. *Myths of the Nation: National Identity and Literary Representation*. Oxford [et al.]: Clarendon Pr., 1999.

Shandilya, Krupa. "Writing/Reading the Subaltern Woman: Narrative Voice and Subaltern Agency in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August*." *Postcolonial Text* 9.3 (2014): 1–16.

Sharify-Funk, Meena et al. *Contemporary Sufism Piety, Politics, and Popular Culture*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 2018.

Shaw, Christopher and Malcolm Chase. “The Dimensions of Nostalgia.” *The Imagined Past. History and Nostalgia*. Ed. Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase. Manchester [et al.]: Manchester Univ. Pr., 1989. 1–17.

Shetty, Sandhya. “Spartan Luxury: A Poetics of Finitude and Fullness in *A Strange and Sublime Address*.” *Uncommon Wealths in Postcolonial Fiction*. Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2018. 57–75. Cross/Cultures 201.

Shingavi, Snehal. “The Mahatma as Proof. The Nationalist Origins of the Historiography of Indian Writing in English.” *Literature and Nationalist Ideology: Writing Histories of Modern Indian Languages*. New Delhi: Social Science Pr., 2010. 353–75.

Sil, Esha. “Representing Adda: Radical Capitalism, Bengaliness and Post-Partition Melancholia.” phd. Univ. of Leeds, 2013. *etheses.whiterose.ac.uk*. Web. 29 Apr. 2019.

Silva, Neluka. *The Gendered Nation. Contemporary Writings from South Asia*. New Delhi [et al.]: SAGE Publ., 2004.

Simpson, John A. and E. S. C. Weiner. “Leisure.” *The Oxford English dictionary* 1989: 815–816.

---, “Otiose, Otium.” *The Oxford English dictionary*. 985–986.

Skidelsky, Robert Jacob Alexander and Edward Skidelsky. *How Much Is Enough? The Love of Money and the Case for the Good Life*. London [et al.]: Allen Lane, 2012.

Smith, Kimberly K. “Mere Nostalgia: Notes on a Progressive Paratheory.” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 3.4 (2000): 505–527.

Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London [et al.]: Verso, 1989.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Pr., 1988. 271–313.

---. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, Mass. [et al.]: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1999.

Stilz, Gerhard. “Introduction.” *Territorial Terrors. Contested Spaces in Colonial and Postcolonial Writing*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007. 1-21.

Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari. *Real and Imagined Women Gender, Culture, and Postcolonialism*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 1993.

Sweeny, Kate. “On the Experience of Awaiting Uncertain News.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 27.4 (2018): 281–285.

Taylor, Charles. “Resonanz und die Romantik.” *Resonanzen und Dissonanzen. Hartmut Rosas Kritische Theorie in der Diskussion*. Ed. Christian Helge Peters and Peter Schulz. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017. 249-270.

Thakur, Manish. *Indian Village: A Conceptual History*. Jaipur et al.: Rawat Publications, 2014.

Tripathi, Kamalesh Datta. “Rasa.” *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*. Ed. Ananda Lal. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2004. 389–390.

Trivedi, Harish. *Colonial Transactions English Literature and India*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1993.

Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publ., 1982.

Urry, John and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. 3. ed. Los Angeles [et al.]: SAGE, 2011.

Wajcman, Judy. *Pressed for Time. The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism*. Chicago [et al.]: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 2015.

Walder, Dennis. *Postcolonial Nostalgias : Writing, Representation, and Memory*. New York [et al.]: Routledge, 2012.

Warning, Rainer. *Heterotopien als Räume Ästhetischer Erfahrung*. München and Paderborn: Fink, 2009.

Weedon, Chris. “Subjects.” *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*. 111–132.

Webster, Paul and Jason Burke. “How the Rise of the Megacity Is Changing the Way We Live.” *The Guardian* 21 Jan. 2012. Web. 11 Feb. 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/jan/21/rise-megacity-live

Wegner, Phillip E. “Spatial Criticism: Critical Geography, Space, Place and Textuality.” *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*. Ed. Julian Wolfreys. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Pr., 2002. 179–201.

West-Pavlov, Russell. *Temporalities*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 2013.

---. *Spaces of Fiction, Fictions of Space Postcolonial Place and Literary DeiXis*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Wiemann, Dirk. “Cities of the Mind - Villages of the Mind: Imagining Urbanity in Contemporary India.” 61.1 (2013): 59–72.

---. *Genres of Modernity. Contemporary Indian Novels in English*. Amsterdam [et al.]: Rodopi, 2008.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1973.

Young, Robert. *White Mythologies : Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990.