THE ABROAD AS MUSE: Tradition, Perception, and Motivation in Expatriate Artist Narratives

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ABSTRACT

CHLOEY ACCARDI: The Abroad as Muse: Tradition, Perception, and Motivation in Expatriate Artist Narratives
(Under the direction of Bernard Herman, Elaine Lawless and Katherine Roberts)

This paper explores the tradition of expatriate artist narratives – their themes, structure, presentation, and purpose served for artists and their created communities. Comparing oral narratives of international artists living in 2012 Berlin’s Neukölln neighborhood with artists’ published prose and memoir from pre-war Paris and colonial Tangier, a narrative formula is established. Adapting Charlotte Linde’s coherence system model, narrative elements are understood as belonging to either the broad expatriate artist tradition, or the Neukölln neighborhood’s unique ethos. Characterizing an artist’s native culture, reasons for leaving, and motivations for selecting a specific community abroad, narratives establish difference between the renounced and the desired. Through depictions of a free, creative lifestyle narratives assert a shared set of values, and through constructions of fate and artistic flow, validate and motivate an expatriate’s circumstance abroad. Expatriation symbolizes embracing one’s identity as an artist, while narratives help create and mold that identity.

This thesis contains five video interview clips. Please see supplemental files as noted in text.
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TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

*Italics*  Italics indicate the speaker’s emphasis of a word or phrase.

-  A dash indicates a pause, either dramatic or contemplative.

…  An ellipsis indicates my omission of a section of conversation.
INTRODUCTION

Three and a half years ago I fell in love. So it goes, it’s difficult to say just how. It was the fresh smell of laundry through the windows. No. It was the light bending on old streets. No. It was the paintings, stretched high on buildings for all to see. It was the kiss of calm easing, through a landscape strange. And the drawings in the easeways and the music in the parks and the constant subtle echo saying: something, something is happening here. It was myself there, with possibility. Berlin’s cobblestones dug into me like teeth.

There were others. Artists. Expatriates; and in a way I loved them too. The way they walked so coolly, sat so calmly at cafes, reflecting sun. The way they talked. The way they made art instead of work, and seemed to go days without sleeping. I loved them for their paint stained hands. And their fortitude. And the way they extricated themselves from where they came, hailed a plane, set up in Berlin and called it home. They were in love too, magnets to the city, whose fingers curled softly - come closer, come closer. Trusting, as if all Berlin were an altar. They offered themselves up to it. They offered themselves to be changed. To be made.
In the summer of 2012 I went back to collect their stories. I found Neukölln, in south east Berlin near the Spree, to be the ‘in’ neighborhood – the place where a new expatriate artist would most likely settle. I rented a flat there, and spent seven weeks conducting fieldwork, which is to say I spent seven weeks living there as an artist and a folklorist. My research asked why they were there, what made them stick, how their community related to famed ones of the past. Readily identifying myself as both artist and ethnographer, participant observation was my method. My artist self was a hopeful yet nervous newcomer, and reveled in the atmosphere alongside my consultants. My folklorist self observed and questioned. We both wrote. We both took pictures. We both made art. Oftentimes one fed the other - my creative trials fueled folkloric queries, while ethnographic findings inspired art. Research and art were discussed interchangeably and often together. This dual persona also engendered an intimacy and camaraderie with my
fellow artists, which ultimately proved to be the key to understanding their built community.

I attended gallery openings, exhibitions, music events, fundraisers, art tours, parties, painting trips, abandoned building ventures, open-mic nights, plays, parties and barbeques on Sunday afternoons. I went to the grocery store. I spent 20 Euros on a flea-market ring that turned my finger green. I got lonely. I got inspired. I saw a dog riding in a bicycle basket. I doubted my decision to go there. I read Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin*. I made friends. I spent two hours in the art store trying to find supplies because I mis-translated the word for watercolor. I climbed an abandoned spy tower. I took the wrong train and was three hours late to dinner. I met people who were pretentious and posturing. I met people I loved. I found a pile of old cobblestones and brought three of them home, to remember.

In addition to these city teeth, I left Berlin with an armory of field notes, writings, photographs, videos, recorded conversations, and most importantly, 14 video-recorded interviews of artists’ expatriate stories. These recorded narratives and the field observations surrounding them form the base of this study. I was taken with how formulaic these oral histories were, and their following analysis speaks to folklore’s long-standing exploration of narrative. I began to see expatriation for the sake of creativity as an artistic tradition in itself - not particular to one artistic genre, nationality or community but an ongoing, international artistic practice – the details of which are illuminated and understood through narrative analysis. To explore parallels between the Neukölln expatriate artist community and similar past communities, these recorded histories will be examined alongside those of previous artists.
What follows is a detailed exploration of expatriate artist narratives – their themes, structure, presentation, and the purpose they serve for both individuals and their created communities. This project understands an expatriate narrative as a story that encompasses the expatriate journey’s arc – from native country to adopted home abroad. Speaking to the question “what made you expatriate?”, these narratives characterize an artist’s native culture, their reasons for leaving, and their motivations for selecting a specific expatriate community. This narrative genre concerns itself with difference. Steadily contrasting what was rejected at home with what is embraced abroad, narratives construct a dichotomy between the renounced and the desired. Depicting an artist’s instinctual attraction to a place, narratives articulate circumstance in a fated manner so as to additionally validate an expatriate’s presence abroad. Narratives assert a set of values, articulating a shared understanding of who an artist is and how they should conduct themselves. Expatriates’ stories focus on the search for and definition of an “artistic lifestyle”, and the artist’s dogged pursuit of that lifestyle. For them, expatriation is for the sake of art. Expatriation is synonymous with the pursuit of creative freedom, and synonymous with the embrace of one’s identity as an artist.

This is not to say the path is easy. A plane ticket is suiting for a fight – as expatriation is a battle. A would-be-artist can say home and risk nothing. Or they can leave, forcing themselves to either become the creator they envision or fail. For every inspiration that awaits abroad, there lurks distraction; and expatriating is choosing to navigate this uncertain terrain. An artist’s narrative is continually crafted and revised throughout their journey, and one’s depiction of their world abroad is indicative of their
path towards growth or paralysis. Potential is in the eye of the artist, and much of their success depends on how they characterize and narrate their own journey. Most narratives follow a strict formula, adhering to and sustaining the artistic tradition of both expatriation and its narrative telling. The expatriate artist emerges as an archetypical folk hero (or tragic hero), and awareness of this often amplifies one’s story. Artist’s narratives can have the power to fortify intention, motivate creativity, and solidify community. Often, imbuing one’s own story with the significance of artistic tradition is to become the artist one desires.
In her *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*, Charlotte Linde seeks to understand how meaning and causality in a person’s life, specifically pertaining to an individual’s career trajectory, are expressed and negotiated through narrative. Linde asserts that life stories are best understood through the framework of what she calls a “coherence system:”

A cultural device for structuring experience into socially sharable narrative… that represents a system of beliefs and relations between beliefs; it provides the environment in which one statement may or may not be taken as a cause of another statement.¹

Linde identifies many different types of coherence systems and organizes her consultants’ narratives based upon which system they use. While some systems are used and understood by most people, other systems are reserved for and understood by select groups. Linde therefore lays out a coherence spectrum, with the “common sense system:” “the beliefs that any person in the culture may be assumed to know (if not to share) and that anyone may use” at one end and “expert systems,” such as Freudian psychology, feminism or astrology at the other². Linde’s selection of her base and expert systems is determined by the knowledge of her subject group: middle-class U.S. Americans. Linde contends that contemporary American common sense is essentially the belief system of the American dream, so anyone sharing this cultural and economic background will be

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² Ibid.
familiar with its discourse. Thus the common sense statement “I quit banking because I didn’t like it” is understood by virtually any American (as the pursuit of happiness), while: “I’m good at banking because I’m a Capricorn” invokes an expert system only understood only by those with specified knowledge.

Linde’s framework provides a highly functional means through which to understand life stories, which she defines as: “a temporally discontinuous unit told over many occasions and altered to fit the specific occasions of speaking… and to reflect changes in the speaker’s long-term situation, values, understanding, and (consequently) discursive practices.” Comparably expansive in their incorporation of multiple sub-stories, locations, and periods of time, expatriation narratives lend themselves to Linde’s coherence-system-based-analysis.

Berlin’s expatriate artist community is a decidedly more heterogeneous group than Linde’s. Each consultant speaks from at least two cultures of experience: their native home(s), and their adopted Neukölln. Because of the uniquely diverse nature of the Neukölln community, I propose that in place of Linde’s linear coherence spectrum a dual system model be implemented: where each artist’s narrative utilizes two overlapping and interrelated coherence systems. The first is what I’ll term the “expatriate artist system” – comprised by the expatriate tradition of past and present, this set of narratives, archetypes

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3 Linde contends the ideals of the American dream solidified in the early 19th century: "it derives from religious currents of that time, which attempted to alleviate the rigorous theory of predestination of 18th century Calvanism with a belief in the efficacy of individual will, the willingness of God to cooperate with the desires of the believer, and the infinite abundance of resources available to any individual who believed in such abundance." (222)

and community ideals is embodied by, but not particular to, Neukölln’s community. The narrative elements of this system address the questions “why did you leave home?” and “why Berlin?”, focusing on tangible, rational responses. The second system is the “Neukölln ethos” – a set of perspectives, beliefs, and phrasings that are unique to Neukölln. Predominately speaking to: “why Berlin?”, narrative elements in this system center on emotional, instinctual and ethereal perceptions. The primary functions of expatriate artist narratives are building community and creating a platform for artistic growth, while the ultimate purpose of Neukölln ethos narratives is providing personal artistic motivation and community cohesion. In order to fully articulate their expatriate story, most Neukölln artists invoke both these coherence systems in their narratives.

The international, expatriate artist community of Neukölln is at once a diverse and singular population. These artists hail from a variety cultural, familial, and economic backgrounds. These artists are at different points in their careers, came to Berlin for different reasons, established themselves, and plan to stay for varying amounts of time. They are bonded, however, by one indelible tattoo: they are artists. And being an artist is the cornerstone of their identity. Compounding this: they are expatriate artists. Whatever their motivations and countries of origin, they chose to leave home and relocate to Berlin.

For the purposes of expatriate narrative analysis then, “common sense” can be usefully replaced with “expatriate artist” as this is the base persona from which consultants speak.

In order to best understand Neukölln artists’ stories and the larger tradition of the expatriate artist coherence system, these contemporary narratives will be compared with those of past expatriate artists. Analysis will ground present day narratives within the historic body of expatriate experience, illuminating the details and formula of its
tradition; while showing how expatriate archetypes and ideals - either unconsciously mirrored or consciously invoked – serve as a means to both validate and motivate a contemporary artist’s actions and work.

For the purposes of this study, comparisons will be drawn between Neukölln oral narratives and the written narratives of documented expatriate artist communities - for example, the well-known Paris salons of Gertrude Stein and Richard Wright before the Second World War and Tangier’s expatriate community that thrived between the late 1940s and Moroccan independence in 1956. In lieu of interviews, examinations of memoir, fictional works, personal essay, published diary and private letters will be relied on for analysis of past expatriate experience. As comparison will prove, the same motivations and ideologies inherent to this varied material will be expressed in contemporary expatriate narrative.

While this history provides insight into the Neukölln ethos, the particulars of its community are unique to themselves. Expatriate communities are created – in the case of 2012 Berlin, a group of international artists converge upon the pre-existing Neukölln neighborhood to form their own unique community of sensibility.5 These sensibilities are intimate, private contemplations about Neukölln, and unlike expatriate artist system themes that can be related to past communities, Neukölln ethos sentiments operate on a unique and insular level within contemporary Berlin. Building upon Neukölln’s particular social, spatial and atmospheric conditions, as well as each artist’s personal expatriate

5 David S. Shields’ Civil Tongues & Polite Letters In British America, defines “sensus communis” as: “a form of communal identity brought into being by speech acts or writing” (xviii), and related to the pursuit of shared pleasure. (xxvii).
histories, the Neukölln ethos is built upon personal, ethereal contemplations of contemporary Neukölln.

Linde reminds us that narratives serve many functions, such as establishing elements of causality, comparability and reportability (why certain elements are important) through coherence. Additionally, narratives assert value judgments: “Narratives are also made coherent by the moral comments they offer on the way things are, the way things ought to be, and (most especially) the kind of person the speaker claims to be, as demonstrated by the actions of the protagonist.”  

A speaker’s goal in sharing narrative then, is both the sharing of information and the assertion of their moral position. Building upon Labov’s research (1966), Linde explains that “common sense” is typically synonymous with “good judgment” - proposing therefore that moral assertions are inherent to coherence system invocation. Though common sense explications ostensibly describe the way things are, Linde theorizes that these “facts” actually assert value judgments on the way things ought to be.

A value system underlies each coherence system. Linde links common sense’s moral code to the contemporary American dream that prizes positive thinking, action-oriented living (as opposed to belief in predestination), and a belief in U.S. abundance. Narrations invoking the common sense system are therefore simultaneously asserting the good judgment and American values of the speaker. The speaker is tacitly implying: “this

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6 Linde, Life Stories, 81.

7 Ibid., 193.

8 Ibid., 195.

9 Ibid., 222.
was the right thing to do’ and ‘anyone in my position have acted the same’. This same moral declaration can be seen in expatriate artist narration, though instead of simply being a good person or a good American, speakers relay their narrative action in assertion that they are good *artists*. Good in expatriate artist terms however, should be understood as: doing what is necessary for the sake of art, creativity and personal expression, as opposed to the good which garners positive critical assessment of one’s work.

As will be shown in the exploration of expatriate artist narratives, artists are bonded not only by action and perception but by a shared set of creativity-specific values and ideals. Understanding these morals, which permeate both the expatriate artist and Neukölln ethos systems, will give a more complete picture of who these artists are, what their built community symbolizes, and how this Berlin enclave and the narratives it evokes fit into the broader tradition of artist expatriation.
CHAPTER ONE: LEAVING HOME

Expatriation narratives, of course, begin at home. While there are many factors influencing an artist’s decision to relocate, the distinction must be made that expatriation is a voluntary action, as opposed to those who are politically, socially or physically pushed out of their native lands. In his *American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Moment*, Donald Pizer asserts: “Reduced to its most fundamental level, the expatriate or self-exile state of mind is compounded out of the interrelated conditions of the rejection of a homeland and the desire for and acceptance of an alternative place.”¹⁰ Interrelation is indeed key, as the relation between one’s rejected home and their adopted community abroad is a defining element of narrative structure. Something about home is either displeasing or unfulfilling, and artists seek the antidote to those complaints in their abroad community.

An expatriation narrative is a complete arc – from home, to searching, to establishing a new community abroad. Descriptions of home in memoirs, novels, letters, and in fieldwork and interviews are articulated *after* the artist has settled in his or her new community. This affects narratives in two ways. Most commonly it results in a back-and-forth narration where circumstances at home are immediately compared to those in the adopted community. While an artist’s reasons for leaving home are static, that is, they existed before the artist knew the exact contours of the community awaiting them, negative characteristics of home are usefully juxtaposed in narrative against positive characteristics of the new community. “In Melbourne it is x, and here it is y.” For those artists who had different reasons for leaving home – they either left simply to leave, or

they left specifically to move to a set location – characteristics of their adopted community act as focusing lenses, retrospectively characterizing home in opposition to the new community. “In Neukölln it is x. That would never happen in Copenhagen.” Since artists have chosen their community for specific reasons, these factors comparatively illuminate deficiencies at home, even if these elements were not the cause of expatriation.

Linde recognizes what she terms a “functioning social self” as a necessarily reflexive self that “function(s) as one self among many similar selves, so that it can be reflected on, or related to as an other.”11 She continues:

> The nature of the process of narration contributes to the creation of this reflexivity, because one can never immediately speak the present in the present. This necessarily creates a distinction between the narrator and the protagonist of the narrative, and interposes a distance between them. Consequently, the narrator can observe, reflect, adjust the amount of distance, and correct the self that is being created. The very act of narrating creates the occasion for self-regard.12

This negotiation between present, narrating self and past, protagonist self is exemplified in Neukölln artist narratives, as the interrelated subjects of home and abroad are continually juxtaposed. In the same narrative space, negative characterizations of home are typically contrasted with positive observations of the abroad, and vice versa. “I left Melbourne because it was X, and here it is Y”, for example. Though one’s reasons for leaving are intertwined with descriptions of their adopted community in narrative, in real time, these reasons independently marked the beginning of the expatriate’s trajectory. These motivations for departure speak to the act of leaving itself, to say nothing yet of the

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12 Ibid.
chosen destination. For the sake of chronology and clarity I will discuss these catalysts of departure independently – as they acted on the minds and motivations of artists – as opposed to how they are told.

There are three main motivations for Neukölln artists’ expatriation: the rejection of theirs native art community and/or national culture, the need for travel and experience living abroad, and the desire to live in a specific abroad community (Berlin). While all three catalysts are represented in the larger expatriate artist tradition (coherence system), few Neukölln artists explicitly acknowledge this connection in their narratives. Though each artist’s (historical and contemporary) circumstances are different, a set of shared artistic ideals quickly emerges through narrative analysis, to be discussed below.

For the majority of Neukölln artists, expatriation begins with unfavorable conditions at home. Looking back to Linde’s model, we are reminded that narratives tell a story both for the story’s sake and assert the moral stance of the teller. Since narration is linked to the speaker’s core artist persona, negative factors at home can be understood to affect adversely the fulfillment of that persona. These daily conditions are somehow at odds with the teller’s presumed artistic aspirations, and what they deem an ideal artistic community and/or atmosphere to be. Asserting one’s goodness equates with doing what is necessary for the sake of one’s art, which here means leaving an environment that somehow hampers creativity.

Painter and 31 year-old performance artist Luiza Mogos, has been in Berlin for one year, was born and spent her childhood in Transylvania.13 From her adolescence

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13 All artist ages and their time-lived-in-Berlin are stated as of July, 2012.
onward she lived in Bucharest, until leaving at the age of 25 to pursue an MA degree at Paris’s Sorbonne. She says of her native Romania:

You have some kind of inertia in the east. I wouldn’t be aware at home, that it’s different from the west (until moving to France and Germany). It’s the mood. We are slow. And we tend to think as victims. As, somehow as an inferi – I hate to say that word! But as inferior. The mood is to put yourself down. To lower yourself towards the west culture. It’s the mood. They won’t say it: ‘we are worse in that field’, they won’t put the words. They have this attitude. They wouldn’t say that it’s lowering - but it’s slouwering you!

They have this complex of inferiority; that probably they are not award of. They won’t even try new things, they won’t even put themselves in new situations because they would feel that they can’t compete. You know what I mean? For me - that’s the east and depression. It’s depression. It’s simply - something, some substance lacks from the blood. From the very blood. Like, trusting yourself.

… I arrived home in Bucharest (after being away for four years) and it was… everything that I hated! The arrogance. The impolite, rude people. It’s really bizarre, this mood. Because they manage to be arrogant and at the same time, loathing themselves. I think that is the most toxic combination. It’s – I don’t know - you hate yourself, that’s for sure. You can feel that. But you hate the others just as much. It’s so difficult to be an artist there. Because there are not many, they would not accept any. So, I have to cut with this mood.¹⁴

Luiza’s narrative introduces one of the most pervasive and most amorphous themes of the expatriate artist tradition – the need for a creative atmosphere. This atmosphere is relatively observable phenomenon and set of external conditions, a cultural ambience and

¹⁴ Mogos, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
lifestyle that is deemed beneficial to creativity. Though this may seem the epitome of subjectivity, an in-depth look at the atmospheres alternatively rejected and embraced by expatriate artists over time show striking similarities. A creative atmosphere is intrinsically tied to the idea of freedom and the ability to work freely as an artist. This of course means many things – freedom from social pressures, prejudices and norms, freedom from government agenda, freedom of creative experimentation, confidence and voice, and so forth. An artist must always feel free to create, and, as the expatriate artist tradition shows, if artistic liberty isn’t felt at home it will be sought elsewhere.

In describing Bucharest the way she does, Luiza portrays a climate of subtle oppression. She speaks of the “depressed,” “slow,” “self-loathing” mood, which acts as an antidote to creative inspiration. “It’s so difficult to be an artist there,” she says, contending that creative expression is not something sought or valued by the culture. Luiza describes a reticent and self-loathing population, a “toxic” group who refuse to try new things. This atmosphere for Luiza is antithetical to creativity. As will be discussed further in Luiza’s portrait of Berlin, Luiza requires self-confidence and an air of openness and experimentation to make art, and Bucharest supplied neither inspiration nor support.

Recognizing how difficult it was to embrace her identity as an artist in Bucharest, Luiza left. Though she had a driving urge to leave home, (which lead her to a three month artist residency in the South of France, her subsequent enrollment at the Sorbonne, a following two-year tenure in Paris, and finally a move to Berlin in 2011), Luiza implies that a clear understanding about why she had to leave came only after doing so. Speaking to her reflexive understanding she says: “I wouldn’t be aware at home that it’s different from the west” - uncommonly aware of her own need for contrasting perspective. Luiza
had to first experience an alternative atmosphere – one not so depressed and stagnant – in order to fully understand and now so adeptly articulate in her narrative the suffocating mood of the east. Luiza always knew however, that for the sake of her art she had to leave.

This notion of seeking artistic freedom is a cornerstone of the expatriate tradition. In *Tropic of Cancer*, a fictional chronicle of Paris in the 1930s, infamous expatriate Henry Miller explains his need to flee from the “imprisoning sterility of American life.”

Whatever specifics he was referring to, Miller’s depiction of his native atmosphere as a prison stands in rhetorical contrast to creative freedom. Famously involved with Miller, Anais Nin is described by Pizer as being “identified with the expatriate experience through her interpretation of her life in Paris during the early 1930s as an escape from a restrictive world to one of freedom and creativity.” As Pizer’s diction asserts, and as Neukölln artist evocation of the coherence system proves, the pursuit of artistic freedom defines the core of the expatriate artist tradition.

Though her concerns are different from Luiza’s, George Ironside, a street artist from Melbourne, Australia, 31, who has lived in Berlin for four years, casts her native atmosphere in a likewise restrictive light. She felt a similar striking need to leave her native home:

Do you want the whole story? It’s a pretty big story. So I was in Australia and I wasn’t happy and I had put on a street art event there with all my friends. I had just gotten into street art a year before, it was like an obsession. So we put on an event - we were bringing awareness to the fact that the government was pushing down street art. They were calling it vandalism and we were calling it tourism.

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Melbourne is all about street art and underground parties and that’s why people come. So we put on this event, did everything by the law, signed all the papers. But the police were still trying to shut us down and every time we tried to do anything we’d hit a brick wall. The event was registered as a protest. They tried to kick us out of our warehouse. Just for one event. When it was finished we did get evicted. It’s a long story but they found a way to kick us out. After that I was so disappointed by the whole system. We did everything by the book and Derryn Hinch (a popular Australian media personality) called us “aerosol assholes” on air.

We did everything by the book. We’re trying to show it’s creative. Yeah there’s vandalism, but there’s vandalism everywhere. People litter. People smash up shops. We’re trying to show that (street art) is creative and it’s a positive thing. So it really pissed me off and I decided to get out for a bit.”

Like Luiza’s, George’s description of home shows an atmosphere hindering creative freedom. Believing that street art represents personal expression, creativity, positivity, and an economic and cultural draw for the city, George and her community organized an event to raise awareness and support. Despite their acting within the law however, they are met with hostility and scorn from the government and media. Instead of being treated as (law-abiding) artists, they are treated as criminals. “I was so disappointed by the whole

17 Ironside, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
system,” George says, finding herself in a restrictive, hypocritical atmosphere. Claudia Maharaj, an 29 year old Australian oil painter and set designer who has lived in Berlin for one year, similarly characterizes the Melbourne government as duplicitous: “they’re trying to clean up (the street art), but they also use it in add campaigns. It’s so stupid.”

George voices other complaints about her life in Australia, describing the Melbourne street art scene as insular and very competitive. She explains the difficulty in building an artistic reputation there, and how street artists and graffiti-ists continually war for wall space. As the opening of her narrative candidly states: “I was in Australia and I wasn’t happy.” Between media and government antagonism and the tensions within her own art community, as echoed by Claudia, George didn’t find Melbourne’s atmosphere free or fulfilling.

Many Neukölln artists cite tension within their former art community as reason to leave home. Tied again to the notion of a creative atmosphere, expatriates commonly complain that their art scenes are superficial, competitive, and difficult-to-penetrate. Originally from Melbourne, Claudia lived and worked in London for two years before permanently relocating to Berlin. She says of the art scene in the United Kingdom: “It’s really cliquey, kind of standoffish. It’s really hard to connect with other artists.”

Here a different sort of restrictive atmosphere, one more traditionally associated with the fine arts, is depicted: the pretentious art world. The full significance of Claudia’s description though lies in her particular circumstances. Working as a color-grader for a prominent film company in London, she also painted in her free time and showed her work at

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18 Maharaj, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

19 Ibid.
multiple galleries around the city. From an outside perspective, Claudia’s professional accomplishments in both the film industry and gallery world suggest her integration with the art community. The art scene might be cliquey, but surely Claudia was on the inside of the clique. Despite her success however, Claudia still describes the city as “cliquey,” “standoffish,” and a place she didn’t want to live. This rejection of London – a city and art scene that accepted her - is on Claudia’s terms: “It wasn’t the right vibe for me,” she explains.

Alex Godwin, a 24-year-old painter and street artist who has been in Berlin for ten months, also happened to have a gallery show in London before moving to Germany. She similarly describes the UK art scene:

> In England, it’s a bit more - cool. It’s a bit like, getting in with people because they’re cool. It’s a bit more bull-shitty; I find anyway. I think in London especially it’s more closed. It’s quite hard to integrate yourself into the ‘art world’ or whatever.”

Alex’s reflexivity is apparent here, as her repeated use of “more” is in direct relation to Berlin. The Neukölln art scene has become Alex’s default community, against which all other art scenes, especially her native one, are compared. She presents Berlin as if it’s the community, the way a community ought to be, and discusses London in direct contrast to this ideal. Like Claudia, Alex is an artist who had, at least modestly, integrated herself

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20 Godwin, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
into her native art community. Yet she too chooses to negatively depict London’s character of superficiality and closed-naturedness.

These women’s criticisms of London are not about lack of personal success, but rather an expression of personal dislike of the social contours of the art scene. Linde’s analysis of common sense – translated to the notion of the expatriate artist coherence system – is particularly relevant here: “the notion of common sense also represents a normative attempt to suggest the way things ought to be... we can see the moral nature of apparently factual statements.”, as Alex and Claudia’s narratives clearly assert their moral standing.\textsuperscript{21} Describing what they believe to be facts of London’s art scene – it is “closed” and “standoffish” – these artists pass moral judgment on those facts. Whether or not they were affected by these characteristics is not important. By not wanting to associate with a negatively characterized artistic culture, Alex and Claudia suggest the way things ought not to be. Claudia explains: “I don’t want to be part of a scene. I really hate that about art.”\textsuperscript{22} In this instance, being a good artist also means the refusal to participate in a system that prizes exclusivity, superficiality and competition. For Alex, Claudia and many other Neukölln artists, art should be about art - about self expression, creativity and experimentation. Cliqueiness and competition detract from art’s essence and good artists wouldn’t concern themselves with such distraction.

Building upon these ideals, Luiza speaks in an exceptionally articulate manner about the Parisian atmosphere:

\textsuperscript{21} Linde, \textit{Life Stories}, 195.

\textsuperscript{22} Maharaj, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
It’s an *elitist* city. So everything goes around your situation and your status. The people you know, the connections you can make. Your *status* and the status you can build. This is you – *this* is the artwork that you can build there. Building yourself as a – as this person. But for me this is disappointing. This is really disappointing. It’s like, ok, more or less you can do nice things (artworks), we all more of less can do nice interesting things, ok, but the real stuff is who you are, (laughs) who you *know* - because who you are is who you know! And - damn. Who should I know? I know people who resemble me, and you don’t like who I am… (laughs heartily).

… if you would stay in Paris and get to feel how much importance they do give to their culture - you would be amazed. You would be *amazed*. It’s *claustrophobic*. You can’t even quote – when we were doing the big bibliography at university I would be like ‘hey, there’s this Romanian or German philosopher’ – ‘yeah but, you know, tend to stick to the classics.’ Meaning French! … that’s how it is in Sorbonne. It’s closed.\textsuperscript{23}

She, too, chooses the adjective “closed” to critique the art scene. For Luiza, Paris’s social fashion show is compounded by its cultural insularity. “All the time I had the feeling that I was totally alien,” she explains, feeling both forced to participate in yet simultaneously excluded from society. Though not characterized by the depression that caused her to leave Bucharest, Paris’s social agenda and cultural uniformity is no improvement. “I stepped backwards.” she says. “It was not me.”

In his *Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition*, Michael K. Walonen cites the comparably insular and monotonous cultural landscape of the early 1950s United States as reason for artist expatriation: “All four writers (Paul Bowles, William Burroughs, Alfred Chester and Brion Gysin) settled in Tangier looking for an alternative to an America of mass conformity, xenophobia, and grim, self-willed optimism, and brought with them a receptiveness to the pulsations and frissons of the changing land they

\textsuperscript{23} Mogos, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
encountered.” Here, a stagnant, superficial atmosphere is rejected in favor of the bustling, cultural kaleidoscope abroad. Social pressures aside, an aesthetic of monotony is deemed both stultifying and alienating, circumstances which Luiza, and many expatriates before her, chose to flee.

Cartoonist Oliver (Ollie) Harrington’s collection *Why I Left America and Other Essays* explains its title. A close friend of Richard Wright, Harrington spent the better part of the 1930s and 1940s in similar company in Paris (which of course was a very different city than the one described by Luiza in 2012). Black artists in America decades before the civil rights movement, Harrington and his contemporaries experienced a discrimination, injustice and alienation simply incomparable to the social trials of most contemporary expatriates. Harrington and his fellow artists sought abroad a semblance of the social freedom that most Neukölln artists, regardless of their nation, are fortunate enough to be born into.

Harrington cites additional catalysts however – akin to those of contemporary Neukölln artists – for leaving home. Like Luiza and Claudia, the shallow snobbery of the art world is a high source of tension in 1930s America. An outspoken critic of the Harlem Renaissance, Harrington describes a climate of high superficiality and fetishization of Black art in America:

Dilettante Carl Van Vechten came to the rescue with his discovery that black is exiting. The bejewled creeps had a ball. They vied with each other to show off the newest captive Black talent, whom they posed against a backdrop of Currier and Ives prints… The Black Renaissance folded when Charlie and miss Anne

\[^{24}\text{Walonen, Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition: Space and Power in Expatriate and North African Literature, 10.}\]
discovered some new playthings. The people of Harlem never noticed the difference.\textsuperscript{25}

Here the New York art world, and specifically its attention to Black art, is depicted as entirely without intellectual or critical substance. According to Harrington, there is no genuine interest in or support for his community’s art and the renaissance is facetiously described as a passing fad. Harrington ardently rejects New York’s artistic climate in favor of the one abroad. Related to the mercenary art world, the American capitalist system and the cut-throat avarice it breeds is likewise critiqued by Harrington:

Americans, no matter what their color or ethnic roots, have been viciously savaged and betrayed by a system which has throttled the decency and democracy which is at the real root of the nation. Anything is permitted in the race for profit. The result is an unprecedented amount of economic hardship, unbelievable corruption and cynicism.\textsuperscript{26}

After living in Paris for many years, Harrington returns to visit family over Labor Day weekend. This excerpt, punctuation and all, is his narrative description of the American system:

At regular intervals along the freeway there were immense billboards proclaiming the sheer impossibility of enjoying life without a Ford, Plymouth, Cadillac, well, you name it. This was nothing less than psychedelic…and on the other side were these billboards saying, “baby, don’t let this scene get you down. ALL YOU NEED is THIS gleaming 200 m.p.h. monster – and a countdown! EASY CREDIT TERMS AVAILABLE.”\textsuperscript{27}

Harrington scornfully mocks the materialism engulfing his native country, and cites it as additional motivation for leaving and staying away. A connection can be drawn between this critique and his depiction of the Harlem Renaissance and New York art world, as

\textsuperscript{25} Harrington, \textit{Why I Left America and Other Essays}, 48.

\textsuperscript{26} Harrington, \textit{Why I Left America and Other Essays}, 22.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 70.
each is dominated by a quest for profit and possession. Whether a painting by a Harlem artist or a Cadillac by GM, objects equate to status that equates to presumed happiness and success. Though Harrington may have been one of the more dynamic speakers on the subject, this rejection of a capitalist, materialistic, superficial success-driven lifestyle is another common theme in both the larger expatriate tradition and the Neukölln artists narratives.

While Neukölln’s contemporary artists certainly agree on the superficial contours of the international art world, they tend to cast their criticism of the capitalist order in a different tone than Harrington. Instead of focusing on the ills of materialism and greed, Neukölln narratives condemn capitalist culture for its non-creative lifestyle. They address the issue of career, and how the more “traditional,” pre-prescribed ways of life associated with western economies affect creativity. For many Neukölln artists, an artistic atmosphere and lifestyle is often at odds with a 9:00-to-5:00 schedule.

Sarah Clement, a 23-year-old illustrator from Vancouver who has been in Berlin for 10 months, left home seeking a different lifestyle and what she deemed to be a more appropriate work-to-life balance. “This is a generalization for North America,” she says, “but we’re very work obsessed.”²⁸ Speaking about her life in Melbourne Claudia expands on this idea: “For most of my twenties I was very caught up in my film career. And my hours in Australia were crazy. Working professionally straight out of Uni(versity); I didn’t have much of a social life.”²⁹ Claudia’s work-life balance in London wasn’t much better. Finally at the age of 29, she decided to leave her film industry job and move to

²⁸ Clement, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

²⁹ Maharaj, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
Berlin. She explains: “I’m at an age where I had a career and I could have had a house and I just quit it.”30 First in Melbourne and later in London, Claudia found herself living and then rejecting a life where working a forty-plus hours-a-week job left her very little time to pursue her own art:

It (moving to Berlin to be an artist) shows a commitment to what you want to do. For me, I had no other option. I couldn’t stand the life that I had in London. I was on the verge of a mental breakdown.

I went back to Australia for six months and it was lovely it was really nice to touch base with my family and friends. But I’m just in a really different place than a lot of my friends there. A lot of people are settling down and buying houses - not that there’s a problem with that – but – it’s not me. I didn’t feel at home there. Whereas in Berlin I have a lot of friends that are around my age that are floating or doing something else. I don’t want to subscribe to this formula that most people seem to follow. Maybe that’s mean to say but - you get a job and then you get a house and then you have a baby and then you get old. And I don’t want to do that. I realized if I keep going like this, that’s what I’m going to get. And - is that it?31

For many, a time and energy demanding career is a means to an end: a path towards settling down, buying property and starting a family. While Claudia is careful to not condemn this “formula,” as she calls it, her narrative clearly states that she wants something more and/or different from this typical trajectory. Articulating these desires,

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.
Claudia juxtaposes the social and economic pressures of home with the (preferable) atmosphere found in Berlin; again adhering to the expatriate narrative custom of establishing difference. In the process, she adds another characteristic to the good artist portrait: one who seeks out an artistic lifestyle. Linde explains: “The most pervasive way in which the self is treated as an other is in the determination of the moral value of the self. Not only must the self be related to others, it must be related properly.”

Drawing a distinction between her own and the decidedly non-artist path, Claudia relates and establishes her artist self to the outside world.

Because artists like Claudia are not interested in pursuing the traditional western career/family arc, this does not mean they don’t value stability or fiscal responsibility. They simply don’t want those things at the expense of a creative lifestyle. Claudia does not want to live a romanticized, bohemian, ‘starving artist’ existence - she clearly states she wants to make a living as a painter:

I have very little money now (in Berlin) and – okay– if I’m serious about this then I need to find a way to make it work. Like - okay! If you want to be a full-time artist, be a full-time artist.

She discusses her (many) plans for earning money, establishing her work, and building a permanent life in Berlin explaining: “In some way I want to settle a little, but not in the traditional way of buying a house.” For Claudia, settling into what she deems a creative lifestyle is very different from settling into the formulated “traditional” norm she describes.

32 Linde, Life Stories, 105.

33 Claudia Maharaj, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

34 Ibid.
Enda Gallery, a 24-year-old singer-songwriter from Ireland who has been in Berlin for two months, similarly abandoned a lucrative career in favor of pursuing his art abroad. While Enda partially left Dublin due to its lack of musical opportunity (“You could be in Ireland your whole life just playing for free and nothing would come of it”), his main motivation was a desire to divorce from his career. Enda wants to be a musician, not a businessman, and considered relocating to Berlin the way to do so. For Enda, leaving home is leaving a former, less-desirable version of himself behind:

I’d spent long enough fighting the norm, I wanted to go somewhere where the moment would be with me a bit more. …I was kind of a different person in Ireland. Or, I had different goals. (Coming to Berlin,) I wanted the freedom to be a different person than the me that studied business and worked in business. That could have been my career. Most people thought it was a stupid move - to leave Ireland at the height of unemployment. So I quit my four-year contract. I got the harshest treatment for a while. I still kind of do. My mom’s still praying I get a proper job. And there’s a baggage associated with that. So again, I didn’t want to have to deal with that shit.

For Enda, like Claudia, embracing his identity as an artist is synonymous with rejecting what he deems a non-artistic, career-driven life. Enda, too, desires to make a living as an artist. Working as an artist, however, is not typically endorsed as an acceptable career.

35 Gallery, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

36 Enda Gallery, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
path in western culture. “My mom’s still praying I get a proper job.” he says, since
musician would never be considered such. Many Neukölln artists grew up in cultures
where art is considered a hobby, not a career. For them, rejecting their native home is a
means of rejecting a culture (or a family) that doesn’t support pursuing a career in the
arts. This is another assertion of the way things ought to be, as these artists continually
reject ways of life that do not help develop their artistry.

The association between a western economic culture and what is considered to be
a non-artistic lifestyle is a cornerstone of the expatriate tradition. Artist’s native cultures
are viewed as formulaic, stagnant and monotonous, and one’s role in them equally so.
This is contrasted to abroad communities that not only offer a choice of varied lifestyles,
but are viewed as being somehow less settled, more dynamic, more exciting. Walonen,
for example, speaks of 1940’s Tangier and the greater Maghreb as a frontier of sorts, a
cauldron-like, international wild west that has yet to be settled. While this perspective has
many exoticizing and colonialist implications irrelevant to the Neukölln community,
Walonen’s basic contrast relates. In terms of an artist’s desire for a particular atmosphere,
Walonen’s use of terms such as “less settled” is comparably contrasted with Claudia and
Enda’s description of home being a “formulaic” land of “proper” jobs. Citing economist
Marilyn Adler Papayanis Walonen explains:

This modern cultural phenomenon of rejecting home in favor of a seemingly less
settled or civilized space marks a “refusal to embrace (one’s) paternal legacy
within a productive domestic and capital economy,” according to Marilyn Adler
Papayanis… In turning their backs on the land of their upbringing to seek out
frontier space, these expatriates sought to flee the restriction and demands of the
patriarchal capitalist order: that one participate “productively” in society,

37 Ibid.
recognize established seats of power and authority, and subscribe behaviorally to the dominant set of prohibitions and prescriptions.\textsuperscript{38}

It is this set of prescriptions that Neukölln artists reject. For them, participating “productively” in society means making a creative contribution – making personal and expressive art - not a (non-creative) economic one; and “frontier space” equates to an atmosphere free from the pressures of the western, career-driven norm. Being a good artist means fighting to simply \textit{be} an artist. It means centering one’s life around creativity, as opposed to fitting art in on the weekends.

Expatriation has thus far been tied to the rejection of various social, cultural and economic restrictions in order to seek a more open, creative atmosphere and lifestyle. The final motivation Neukölln artists cite for going abroad hinges upon the act of leaving itself. For a minority of expatriates, their decision to move was based on the desire for travel and change itself as opposed to the rejection of specific native circumstances. For these artists, a change of atmosphere equates to creative inspiration. No matter what the conditions at home, an abroad community is sought, among other reasons, for its newness. 26-year-old performance and street artist Vanessa Brazeau from Ontario, who has been in Berlin for three months, explains:

I don’t know why exactly I chose Berlin; but you get into a state of, when you’re in a new country you feel the push to do things more than if you’re in your own country. Like, I have to embrace this push while it’s here. While something new is happening.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{38} Walonen, \textit{Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition}, 29.

\textsuperscript{39} Brazeau, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
For artists like Vanessa, expatriation represents a sort of creative jolt and stirring of the artistic faculties. Change in location engenders increased motivation to create. Enda, too, expresses desire for a different landscape: “Berlin is a new place – I never lived away from home. I kind of decided to move here before I’d been here.” By framing his circumstance in this manner, Enda asserts that someone, especially an artist, should live away from home. This urge to travel manifests in his decision to move before even visiting Germany. Sarah Clement experiences this same pull. Her narrative begins:

I had been thinking about going abroad for a few years…. And then as another September was approaching I thought oh man, just to let the itching take over – just to be able to be in one place for a while, experience it. I felt like now is the time.

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40 Gallery, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

41 Clement, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
Sarah speaks of the expatriate experience as an inveterate desire, as something both inevitable, and that must be actively embraced. It is a desire she lets “take over,” implying that if she let another September pass by in her native Vancouver, she would regret it. Jonathan Naman, a 29-year-old photographer from Israel has lived in Berlin for six years. He also thought for many years about leaving his native Tel Aviv before finally doing so. Jonathan’s narrative highlights both the desirability of travel and the benefit it has for his work:

For years I just, I had a German passport and my friends are like what the f*ck what are you still doing here? I have the passport. I have the power. I should travel, come live here. So thought, I’m going to go. …I’m more productive when traveling. (If I have a) limited time somewhere. I’m going to get up, take some photos. That’s a kind of motivation.42

42 Naman, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
These artist’s narratives are all predicated upon the assumption that traveling to a new place is inherently beneficial to one’s art. As Jonathan says, it is a power. It is an urge they share and actively embrace as something both positive and necessary. This desire to leave home for the sake of travel – and therefore for the sake of art and creativity - is well established in the larger expatriate tradition, and another intrinsic element in its narratives.

One of the key tropes explored in Donald Pizer’s analysis of expatriate literature is the concept of movement. While much remains to be said of movement within one’s chosen community abroad, the movement inherent to expatriation itself, as exemplified in the Neukölln narratives above, demands attention. Examining A Moveable Feast, Pizer explains how:

(Hemingway) expressed the equation of mobility with creativity. Movement, in one of the great paradoxes the condition of exile holds for the modern artist, above all stimulates the creative expression of that which was “begun elsewhere” – in this instance Hemingway’s “up in Michigan” youth.43

It is both movement to, and being in, a fresh community abroad that Hemingway (and Vanessa and Jonathan) associates with creative stimulation. Tracing Hemingway’s

43 Pizer, American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Movement, 10.
narrative Pizer asserts: “Hemingway’s walk(ing) is thus a symbolic reenactment of transplantation in the sense both of expatriation and of the freedom of movement possible within Paris itself in order to select the ambience best suited to a particular artistic effort.” Movement is a metaphor for creative flow, and the act of expatriation itself is equated to an artistic endeavor.

This causality between movement, change, and subsequent creativity is another component of the expatriate artist tradition and ideology. Movement can be understood as both a catalyst for creativity, and a symbolic mirror of the various freedoms sought through expatriation. Anais Nin describes her pre-Paris life as a “beautiful prison,” in contrast to the new, emancipated life she embraces in Paris. Pizer notes that in Nin’s *Diary*: “(relocation) represents for Nin the opportunity for freedom symbolized by her journey on the little train from Louveciennes to Paris – an opportunity to escape restrictions her past and present life placed upon her and to discover ways to live more fully and creatively and thus to begin the process of becoming.” The destination and the movement to that destination are intrinsic to the expatriate experience and artistic production.

Narratives of both Neukölln artists and previous expatriates cite the newness of an abroad community as another creative stimulant. Walonen likewise acknowledges the inspiring effects travel and change have on Tangier’s expatriate writers, however, his analysis introduces a different catalytic element to the expatriate trajectory: otherness.

44 Ibid., 11.


Otherness is experienced through being consciously aware of one’s position as an outsider. Finding oneself in a foreign land, the alienation of otherness makes a stranger of oneself inside a strange landscape. Alongside painting the Maghreb as a wild-west-like frontier, Walonen attributes artistic inspiration to a resulting, and sought-after, outsideness experienced in the city. He explains how expatriate writers were:

Drawn to take up residence in Tangier because its spaces afforded a perceived alluring alienness. …their adoption of a self-imposed form of exile was part of the larger modernist trend, described by Caren Kaplan … of taking up expatriate life as a means of acquiring a detached perspective seen as a necessary prerequisite to artistic production.47

It is Walonen’s contention that the creative work of Tangier’s expatriates hinges partially on the experience of being alien and outsider in the abroad community. This alien status is particularly poignant in Capote’s description of Ramadan in Tangier:

It was while we were drinking tea that we saw a curious line of men file past. They wore beautiful robes, and the man in front, old like a piece of ivory, carried a bowl of rose water which, to the accompaniment of bagpipes, he sprinkled from side to side. We got up to follow them, and they took us out of the grove onto the beach. The sand was as cold as the moon, humbled dunes of it drifted towards the water, and flickers of light burst in the dark like fallen stars. At last the priest and his followers went into a temple which it was forbidden us to enter, and so we wandered down across the beach. …Wind whispered on the sand like the sound of the seas; cutthroat figures outlines themselves against the kneeling orange moon, and the beach was as cold as a snowfield, but J. said, ‘Oh, I can’t keep my eyes open any longer.’48

Capote clearly defines ‘us’ and ‘them’ in this passage, and in comparing Tangier’s sand to the moon, solidifies his estrangement in the foreign land. It is exactly this feeling, Walonen contends, that inspires artistic production. While some level of alienness is inherent to all travel and is indeed relevant to artists in 2012 Berlin, alienness for the sake

47 Walonen, Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition, 24.

of creativity is not a prominent theme in Neukölln narratives. Walonen also notes however, that a British / western enclave within colonial Tangier acted as a base upon which many expatriates built their creative community. Therefore, in addition to the foreignness provided by the Maghreb’s frontier artists also, and perhaps more importantly, experienced inclusion and insiderness within their community abroad – a circumstance to be discussed at length below.

It may be more useful then, to think of an artist’s expatriation, and particularly Neukölln artists, as establishing outsiderness in relation to their native culture, as opposed to their adopted one. The abroad communities of Paris and Berlin are depicted in positive terms – “new” – as opposed to Walonen’s negative “alien.” In rejecting home, artists are in a sense making aliens of themselves in judging their native land foreign. Because of their displeasure with its culture, home was not home. However, a new, improved home is sought and embraced abroad. As Neukölln narratives illustrate, inclusion in one’s adopted community – which is expressed in many ways - proves the greatest artistic catalyst.

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CHAPTER TWO: COMMUNITY ABROAD

Chapter One explored the question “why did you leave home?”: this chapter will address “why did you choose your particular location abroad?” Together, these form the whole of the expatriate artist coherence system, with Chapter One built upon narrative analysis and Chapter Two drawing equally from narrative analysis and field research. While inquiry into the unique aspects of Neukölln’s community of sensibility will be discussed in Chapter Three, this examination will show what aspects 2012 Berlin’s expatriate community share with 1950s Tangier and 1910-40s Paris.

Most artists leave home for a specific set of reasons – lack of creative atmosphere and/or lifestyle, oppressive or disagreeable social systems – and consciously seek communities antidotal to these circumstances. Establishing difference has been established as a key to expatriate narratives, as circumstances abroad are often articulated in a reflexive and contrasting manner to home.

One’s adopted community is elected and simultaneously created. While all communities are in essence self-made, they typically evolve over tens of hundreds of years. Contrarily, expatriate enclaves are newly created in a short span of time, by extra-local, often disparate members. This diverse group joins from afar and alights upon a relatively foreign space. Walonen extrapolates on how exactly these foreign, adopted spaces are understood, and how new spatial codes are negotiated by drawing from Henri Lefebvre:

“Space, this socially produced entity, is governed by what Lefebvre refers to as “spatial codes,” which should be understood not simply as ways to interpret space, but also codes that dictate how space is lived in, understood, and produced (47).” Each society produces its own space and those not native to this space must, in the act of trying to make this space intelligible, read and negotiate these spatial codes. When these outsiders choose to re-present this place, they must
draw upon their knowledge of and competence in these spatial code and translate them through the modes of representation available in their cultural tradition, affectively shading them in the process. It is this act which lies at the heart of the encounter with non-native space, and the effort to make sense of it is endemic to the literature of travel and of expatriation. This act often involves translating the alien into the familiar, with the distortion or transformation of original significance attendant on any act of translation. For example, when Robert Luis Stevenson describes his arrival in New York City in *The Amateur Emigrant* (1895), he understand this weather in terms of Liverpool… and the nation’s perceived potential and freshness in terms of a trope dating back to the earliest days of English colonization of the New World: America as Eden (100-104).50

Expatriates, then, interpret their new community in terms of their known native culture and in relation to larger working tropes, such as ‘America as Eden’ or the expatriate artist tradition. A new community is assessed from the point of view of what a good, expatriate artist is understood to desire, and accepted or rejected in terms of these values. Assuming the abroad community is accepted, this reinforces assertions of difference between it and the abandoned community at home. In addition to seeking a particular atmosphere, artists enact their ideals in an effort to create and solidify their desired communities. While Walonen’s transition from alien to familiar is indeed relevant – artists make a foreign place somehow like home – it may be more useful to think of an artist’s negotiation of new space as the translation from the rejected to the desired. Artists want their new community to be like the home they never had, and strive to both find and create it.

The selection and formation process of artist enclaves, as an artist’s reasons for leaving home, is illuminated through narrative. To best understand this social process, the easily articulated, observable traits shared among past and present expatriate communities will be examined first: social openness and diversity, moral and personal freedoms, atmospheric abundance, economic affordability and creative lifestyle, and the

dynamics of community building and interaction. Analysis of how these factors both contribute to and challenge artistic growth will follow, concluded by an exploration of how abroad communities and artists are influenced by, and help contribute to, the expatriate artist tradition. As the Neukölln narratives attest, knowledge of this tradition as tradition plays a large role in the creation and continuation of expatriate life abroad.

**Social Factors**

If artists are going to transplant themselves, they must choose a location that allows them to take root. A key element common to expatriate communities then is openness - artists seek to be welcomed as individuals and seek atmospheres that welcome and promote creativity. Neukölln’s friendliness is the first aspect mentioned by nearly all its artists. Vanessa knew a few of friends of friends, but essentially came on her own:

> I found the community to be very welcoming. Very strong, very collaborative, interested in each other and each other’s ideas. I’ve only been here three months and I’m watching this gallery. That’s a lot of trust to put into somebody to watch a gallery. It’s a big city, but our community itself seems very tight-knit.\(^{51}\)

\(^{51}\) Brazeau, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
Not only did the Neukölln community embrace Vanessa – it did so with striking speed and intimacy. Thus, Berlin acts as a foil to the described cliquey and hard-to-penetrated nature of other cities. Claudia compares Berlin to London and Melbourne: “In the art scene here people are really friendly and open. ‘Oh come to my studio!’ In Melbourne that would never happen. London either.”\textsuperscript{52} In Neukölln, connection is nearly synonymous with arrival. Luiza, too, comments on Berlin’s warmth, attributing it to commonality of experience:

Here, friends of friends reach out. After four years of Paris I am reserved. But they came towards me. And it was so nice, just the fact that we were an artistic community. When I was growing up in Romania at university sure we had that, but then we all went our separate ways. And I realized that it’s probably an illusion - that there could be some sort of solidarity between artists. In Paris there is \textit{proof} that it’s an illusion. But here I had the contrary. Just the fact that I saw

\textsuperscript{52} Maharaj, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
this person at a group show, or at a fellow artist’s home, just because of that, they would be friendly and be more sympathetic towards my condition. Because they also had a hard time knowing the language. And they don’t immediately know all the galleries and they understand, they really are empathetic.

The solidarity Luiza describes is contingent upon shared expatriate circumstance, and the shared desire to find an artistic home abroad. This exemplifies Walonen’s model of non-natives negotiating spatial and social codes, as Luiza’s depiction illuminates a communal crafting of social space. Each expatriate artist is desirous of an open artistic community, and in seeking this they end up working together to create it. They act the golden rule: artists want to be accepted themselves, so they accept others. Vanessa also speaks to Neukölln’s empathetic cohesion, extending it beyond the art community:

I’ve made so many friends that aren’t artists and there’s still that bond. With so many international people – you’re away from home, they’re away from home - you try a lot harder to become communal with someone else because you don’t have that fallback of your family and friends back home. Sometimes you get in a place that’s routine and comfortable you don’t want to reach out. But here there’s so many international people not from Berlin here you want to reach out. And maybe that is in some way a small, not like missing home but it’s a way to give you that feeling of a place that you belong. Which is difficult I think when you’re traveling.

Vanessa asserts that all transplants seek community, resulting in an even broader welcome-net for travelers. This air of inclusion reinforces community. Welcoming a newcomer strengthens the tribe – the more similarly minded expatriates there are, the more secure their adopted communal space.

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53 Mogos, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

54 Brazeau, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
Also implicit in this warm inclusion is a lack of pressure to change. Expatriates are accepted as they are, with their varied backgrounds and expressions, resulting in a continued heterogeneous population. Expatriates do not have to assimilate to a particular culture because their built community exemplifies diversity and acceptance. Harrington describes Paris:

The Monaco (a local café) was something the likes of which had never been seen in the “land of the free.” The word to describe it was “harmony.” There were the regular French patrons and there were les amis. Of these, half were American, about 20 of these were brothers the rest were English, Canadian, Swedish, a few Danes, one Czech, one Nigerian, two Senegalese and on Indian. “All these beautiful s.o.b.’s are here trying to become human beings,” explained the ex-cowboy who sat in the window seat all day making quick sketches of everyone who came in.\(^{55}\)

\(^{55}\) Harrington, *Why I Left America and Other Essays*, 60.
Harrington portrays a disparate group, unified in their mutual search for harmonious community. Alex likewise explains of Neukölln:

There are so many people here, Ema from Argentina, Danny from Peru – lots of different people but they all live here and they’re all getting on with their own things. There are lots of people and they all thrive off that I think.\(^{56}\)

Heterogeneity amplifies the openness and building of community, a camaraderie which in turn, re-invigorates heterogeneity. Establishing difference to strengthen his point, Enda says of his first visit to Berlin: “I remember running around the city thinking - it’s kind of okay to be anything you want here. There’s a nice freedom in that. It’s not like that in Dublin.”\(^{57}\) Sarah echoes: “There’s kind of a niche for anyone.”\(^{58}\)

A walk down nearly any street in east Berlin attests to this. A group of early-20-something punk rockers, with green spiked hair and torn jeans, sit at a café two tables away from two older, hookah-smoking Turkish gentlemen. The Cabaret enthusiasts, the graffitists, the gypsy-chic, the too-cool graying hipsters, the young parents with their children dressed in locally made clothes, are all seen within a range of a few city blocks. Most notably, this diversity exists in the same space, as opposed to a city where neighborhoods are more clearly designated. In Berlin children’s playgrounds, sprayed with street art, are around the block from vintage flea markets and hole-in-the-wall bars. This kaleidoscope brings ease to the city’s residents, as they feel little pressure to change.

As Berlin’s newest ‘in’ neighborhood, Neukölln displays a particularly vibrant, and at times arrestingely diverse aesthetic. Long-since known as one of Berlin’s

\(^{56}\) Godwin, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

\(^{57}\) Gallery, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

\(^{58}\) Clement, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
predominantly Turkish areas, the recent (past five years or so) influx of artists and expatriates has made Neukölln an exemplar of change and gentrification. Along once residential and homogenous streets, art galleries now reside, their 20-something, aesthetic-chatting patrons sharing sidewalk space with children’s football games. With this juxtaposition can also come a heightened assertion of expatriate individuality, posturing even, especially noticeable among the younger (early 20s), less established expatriate artists and travelers. Older, more focused members of the creative class wear their individuality more composedly, seeking to respectfully integrate themselves with the native community. Still, there is a tension in Neukölln no longer existent in other neighborhoods, between the encroaching creative class and the business owners, citizens, and families who established themselves there years before. Neukölln is a neighborhood in transition, and this change is palpable.
This amplified state of flux adds to Neukölln’s allure. The neighborhood is churning, prismatic, open. For expatriates, it is an invitation. Drawing from Truman Capote’s essay “Tangier,” Walonen contrasts diversity with the climate of the United States:

(Capote) writes of the vast idiosyncraticness, noting that the heart of the city “assumes a character so grotesquely individual you cannot fairly compare it with any other place in the world” (88)…At a time when the United States was home to a tremendous pressure to conform and not stand out, in Tangier’s expatriate society, comprised of many individuals exiled from their homelands because of political alignment or ideology or because of the shadow of “scandals” or “unpleasant circumstances,” eccentricity was not only accepted, it was something of “a social asset (Green xi)”59

Individuality is an assertion of both personal character and of the character of community, two like “assets” for expatriates. Walonen expands on the implications of a

welcoming, diverse atmosphere, where social openness leads to and/or is reflected in a certain moral openness:

Thus, given the possibilities of acceptance and/or tolerance opened up by this radical heterogeneity, expatriates could there conceive of and/or live out different ways of being, manifested in different spatial terms, particularly in terms of their sexuality and drug use."660

Embraced individuality feeds social and moral freedoms. These then in turn, reinforce a climate of personal expression. A bohemian, hedonistic atmosphere is popularly associated with the expatriate tradition, and Walonen characterizes Tangier in that vein. Though sexual freedom was not among the conditions sought by the particular Neukölln artists discussed here, it should be noted that this freedom occupies a significant presence in narratives of both Tangierian and Parisian expatriates.61

Likewise identifying Tangier’s liberties, Brian T. Edwards’ *Morocco Bound* extends this freedom to trade and market:

The Tangier Chamber of Commerce frequently ran an ad in the Paris edition of the Herald Tribune with the enticing tag “Tangier knows no restrictions of any kind!” The reference was to the lack of an taxes and the free currency market; the implications extended into the social and sexual.”62

This perceived free-market liberty is also an attraction in Berlin. Vanessa attests Neukölln is praised by the expatriate community for its frequent opening of new art galleries, studio spaces and exhibitions:

There’s just so much going on here. You can see a place for sent and you’re able to just put up a gallery. There’s not a lot of government control or rules enforced

60 Ibid.

61 A thriving LGBYT expatriate community and tradition exists in Berlin, especially prominent in the Schöneberg neighborhood.
on businesses so I think it’s really easy to put things up. If you moved somewhere else that may not work.  

While special availability and openness is praised, free alcohol and drug use feature even more prominently in Neukölln narrative. Especially from a North American or Australian perspective, Berlin is marked with exceeding permissiveness. It’s legal to drink in public. And residents do so with regularity, especially in summer. On any given afternoon, hundreds of feet dangle from the edges of the canal, the city’s youth out in droves, a beer in one hand and cigarette in the other. Nearby groups play bocce ball on one of the many public courts. People play music. They lounge. One wonders if they have jobs. Lest this festivity should end, beer and wine are sold 24hrs a day, and Spatkauf’s (24hr mini markets) can be found on nearly every block. 24 – 48-hour parties proliferate. And while marijuana isn’t technically legal, many well-mannered citizens consume it publicly with impunity. Police have a reputation for being extremely civil, and if smokers aren’t causing trouble they are likely left alone. Enda shares an anecdote:

Here there’s a looseness. I remember seeing the German (football) championship. Germany was winning, a lot of people were smoking big joints. Great thing – the police came. They were by this guy smoking, Germany was ahead 4-1, (the police) could see that everybody was having a good time and they just went on. The opposite does happen, but somehow, you feel a wee bit more like I could just go over and ask the cop to open the beer. You feel more loose in how you can communicate. You feel like you can talk to the other people that you don’t know. I remember going by the atelier where they were playing a Danish song and I said ‘hey how come you’re listening to that’, and got into a conversation without feeling ‘hey you’re interrupting us’. I think this is also the charm. Why you feel at home because you don’t get rejected.  

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63 Brazeau, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

64 Gallery, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
As Enda explains, this feeling of social permissiveness adds again to Berlin’s overall welcoming nature. “You feel at home because you don’t get rejected.” Free consumption, friendliness and openness all equate to acceptance.

This free use of substances, perhaps counter-intuitively, is also met by low incidents of crime and violence. George’s narrative contrasts (again, establishing difference) Berlin’s regulatory practice with Melbourne’s:

They (Berlin’s government and police) give the people in the community so much freedom that there are no fights. At home you have to stop drinking at 11 or 2. And you can’t buy cigarettes and you can’t buy more booze — nothing - and you can’t catch a train home because it stopped so you have to take a taxi or walk. And people are on the street binge drinking, because they have to, and they can’t get a taxi and they can’t get home and they get in a fight. And the next minute it’s “we have a problem with binge drinking” — no - we have a problem that you don’t
trust us to drink at our own rate. And know our own limit. You telling us when we should or shouldn’t drink is making the binge drinking situation. Here… you can slowly adapt to alcohol. And you don’t see young kids on the streets drinking. Like ‘you’re allowed to have a drink’ - ‘yeah, I’m alright.’

If you give someone this (arm span) much rope, they’re going to take as much as they need. If you give them this (finger pinch) much, they’re going to steal as much as they can. That’s what I found the problem in Australia was. And here, (she lifts wine glass, it’s 2pm) I know I can drink any time. And I just choose when. And in a few hours I won’t. If it’s the middle of the night and I want a beer I know I can get one, therefore I might choose not to have one. I just think it’s a much nicer community to run like that. Without aggression and violence.65

In Berlin it’s about choice. According to George and her contemporaries, Neukölln’s lack of limitation results in a heightening of personal regulation, which leads to a safer, more-in-control-of-themselves population. This again, feeds the air of openness and freedom.

65 Ironside, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi
Abundance and Choice

In addition to benefits of minimal regulation, reference to a city’s abundance proliferate expatriate narratives. Abundance of establishments, activities, time in which to do them, diverse people to share them with, available substances to distinguish them - is perennially linked with artistic freedom and production. Abundance demands choice, which ignites personal freedom. “There’s just so much going on here,” Vanessa says. And it’s true – nearly every night is populated with - to say nothing of the bar or club scene - multiple gallery exhibitions, walking tours, book parties, art parties, open mics, casual get-togethers and so on. There is no such thing as a Sunday night in Berlin. Sarah Clement says: “I really like the lifestyle here. There are lots of events to go to. Last night I wanted to do something and found an outdoor movie event by the canal. It’s so nice.” Enda agrees: “In general – things are happening here and people appreciate it. More than at home (Dublin).”

Just as Hemingway links movement with creativity, so he links the choice inherent to that movement with artistic production. Examining A Moveable Feast Pizer notes how Hemingway’s walking is symbolic of:

The freedom of movement possible within Paris itself in order to select the ambience best suited to a particular artistic effort. .Hemingway develops a trope of a world of multiple contexts for the writer and of the writer’s freedom to select

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66 Brazeau, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

67 Clement, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

68 Gallery, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
the ones he desires. …Paris, in other words, is not like the Good Anna’s Baltimore and Krebs’s Oklahoma town with their one-dimensionality, in which the only choice is to accept or reject the dominant social and moral code. It is itself an image of freedom that it harbors – in its quartiers, its residents and its activities – a sufficient range of life to dramatize how freedom of choice, and therefore, as in transplanting, a fuller growth, lie within one’s capacity simply through an act of movement.69

As opposed to a small town or otherwise stifled atmosphere at home, expatriate communities represent carnivals of selection. Choice is empowering. And for the creative community, feeling in control over their daily life heightens feeling in control over their ability to make art. Freedom to choose represents freedom to create.

**Economics and Creative Lifestyle**

Even if an atmosphere is embraced by an artist, abundance in an expensive city (like New York), is not as liberating. Choosing between a $20 museum and a $65 play is somehow less exhilarating than choosing between a free art opening (which serves free drinks, watered down though they may be) and a suggested 5 Euro donation performance.

It goes without saying that economic affordability is a prerequisite for an artistic enclave. Artists, at least when they are young and building their careers, perpetually gravitate to where cost of living is low and expatriate Paris, Tangier and Berlin are no different. (It should be noted however, that 2012 Germany is one of the leading economies in the EU.) Nearly every Neukölln narrative declares the city inexpensive, articulating this fact as either a given statement or an afterthought. “Because it’s cheap to live artists of all types come here” says Robert Benson, a 36-year-old writer from Copenhagen who has been in Berlin three months, moving directly on to a discussion of

atmospheric creativity. According to Berlin’s expatriates, the social implications of economic factors are the real attraction, as they believe inexpensive living equates to creative lifestyle and mentality. George explains:

We’re not just here because ‘it’s cool, it’s cheap rent and ohhh parties.’ A lot of us are here because it’s a better way of life than where we were before. A lot of us are here because we want to be able to be artists and support ourselves without having to work a shit corporate job. Which I was doing at home. And I had no time to paint. Now I’ve got Monday to Friday to paint and I can still make my rent. It’s amazing.

(See video: Supplemental File 1)

“A better way of life.” This is just as important as an open, abundant atmosphere. Artists expatriate so they can make art, and require a lifestyle that aligns with that goal.

Comparing what he considers to be Berlin’s low cost of living and subsequent creative culture Enda explains: “In New York and London and (like) places – it’s success at the expense of lifestyle.” In Berlin there is no expense. In 2012 Neukölln, housing and food prices are substantially less than those in New York, London, Toronto, and so on.

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70 Benson, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

71 Ironside, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

72 Gallery, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
What artists interpret as a relaxed cost-of-living, they also interpret as breeding a relaxed economic attitude. Vanessa says:

Berlin isn’t about making money, it’s not about getting a better job, jumping on top of opportunities they can get, throwing someone under the tracks. I think it’s different than that.73

While expatriates condemn the competition and superficiality of home, they praise Neukölln (and Paris and Tangier) for the opposite. Berlin, for the expatriate artist, is deemed an escape from the capitalist earn-or-perish mentality. Since Neukölln artists don’t have to work forty hours a week to make rent, they feel less competition for jobs, which breeds additional camaraderie. As Ollie Harrington observes, economic freedom feeds the civility and openness of Parisian society:

73 Brazeau, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
There is another quality which made Paris a truly civilized place and that was the fact that it was no disgrace to be poor and unsuccessful, with all of the abominable things that word implies in the rat-race society of the “silent majority.” At least that was Paris when I arrived in 1951.  

Harrington’s diction is key – pitting “civilized” against “rat-race society.” Creative communities prize work-life balance. Sarah says: “I really like the lifestyle here. Not having to work a job job - It’s just different. People just make more time for doing ‘non work’ things. That’s the big thing.” For George, this lifestyle also means embracing an anti-corporate view, which she links to a heightened sense of local community. At first discussing the local food movement she continues:

I’ve never seen so many Subways and McDonalds close down. I really like the people here. This anti-corporate, anti-globalization mentality. I think it’s so special that the people think like that. It’s like a community. I love that.

The expatriate and the local, native community in Berlin are bonded in their enjoyment of a relaxed, open atmosphere. Expatriate communities are global, but their atmosphere retains, and creates, an intimate feel.

Many expatriates, like George, try to promote harmony between the creative and native community. George’s, Ema’s, Claudia’s, Sarah’s, and other narratives all address the importance of respecting the Neukölln culture, and educating new expatriates on how to do so. Learning German, adhering to social codes – for example: not being rowdy or loud in public, and being sure to leave empty glass bottles on benches or stoops (instead of throwing them away) so the homeless may collect them for money - being generally

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74 Harrington, *Why I Left America and Other Essays*, 58.

75 Clement, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

76 Ironside, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
self-aware and respectful, and so forth are all articulated as requisites for being part of the local, integrated community. Also very aware of the issues surrounding Neukölln’s gentrification, George and like community members try to rent living space from local owners instead of corporations in an effort to keep rental prices stable, and they tell other artists to do the same. “Yuppies Raus!” is a common street tag, and by following what are deemed to be respectful assimilation behaviors, Neukölln’s artists hope this criticism doesn’t apply to them. For many expatriate artists, being anti-corporate and anti-greed also means being pro-native community. Viewing their own presence in the community as positive helps artists keep their creative goals on track, and further strengthens creative community bonds.

These narratives about why artists select particular places abroad add dimension to what it means to be a good artist, further defining the value system shared among expatriates. This system demands expatriating for the right reasons – seeking a creative way of life – as opposed to the wrong reasons – because Berlin (or Paris, etc.) is a hip place to be. It means accepting the code of a more “civilized” society where competition and greed are frowned upon. It means being relatively anti-corporate, and respectfully embracing the local community. It means refusal to conform to the norms back home, which allow little time for creativity. It means prizing the time spent not at one’s paycheck-job, leaving more time for artistic work. It means less rush, less push, more time with a beer by the canal. More time creating art.

**Community Building**

The existence of an artistic and supportive community is, for the majority of expatriates, crucial to their success abroad. Thus far, the broader draws of expatriate
havens have been addressed – a welcoming and open atmosphere, liberal culture, viable economics, and a creative, balanced lifestyle. These factors draw artists to, and make them want to stay in Neukölln. But once they’ve arrived, how is their community formed and developed? What are its different expressions? Like the factors explored above, the particulars of community dynamics are illuminated through oral narrative as well as fieldwork. The expatriate community occupies a variety of spheres - from the all-inclusive, semi-frenzied public to the selective, private residential - each of which serves a particular and vital function for the community as a whole. The most salient feature of the social web is of course its outward face - galleries, studios, cafes and bars.

In the case of Neukölln, Boddinstrasse is the main artery of the public art scene. One block of this street houses two art galleries: IdrawAlot and kaleidoskop, Loophole, an
international bar (which often hosts art and music events), and ArtConnect Berlin – a non-profit organization devoted to connecting international artists. ACB rents desk space, offers networking events and art seminars, and regularly hosts book, art and music events. Nearly every other evening something is happening on Boddinstrasse. Clusters of young (mid 20s – mid 30s) artist hipster types spill out of painted doorways. A hand-rolled cigarette in one hand (they’re cheaper), a beer in the other, they talk about that night’s event, last week’s event, tomorrow’s party. Newcomers share the vitals of their histories: where they are from, what sort of art they do, how long and where they are staying in Berlin. They connect.
Each expatriate enclave has its Boddinstrasse. In Harrington’s (and Wright, et al’s) Paris, it was the area surrounding the Monaco. In Miller and Hemingway’s, it was the Latin Quarter. In Tangier, this space was the café and shop-lined Socco Chico, referred to by William Burroughs’ *Interzone* as “the meeting place, the nerve center, the switchboard of Tangier.”77 Truman Capote’s description of the Socco in “Tangier” could just as adeptly describe Boddinstrasse:

> The Soko [sic.] is also something of a fashion center, a proving ground for the latest fads… (once evening falls) some twenty nationalities are rubbing elbows in the tiny square, and the hum of their voices is like the singing of giant mosquitoes.78

Capote’s description is not necessarily positive - likening artists and want-to-be artists to bloodsucking insects’ buzz – but nevertheless evokes the same diverse, hopeful persona chronicled in Harrington’s portrayal of Paris. “All these beautiful s.o.b.’s are here trying to become human beings.”79 Capote chooses the words “hum” and “singing” however to describe the noise, also lending positive connotation to the scene. Whatever its tenor, Walonen quantifies the importance of the Socco and its surrounding social epicenters:

> These locations were sites where social bonds were forged or reaffirmed and information – from ideas, to news, to gossip – were circulated. Cultures are always anchored in the places where they are elaborated and disseminated; the culture of expatriate Tangier was thus interlinked with the Socco Chico, the Parade Bar, Dean’s Bar, and 1001 Nights.80

77 Burroughs, *Interzone*, 49.


79 Harrington, *Why I Left America and Other Essays*, 60.

Like the Socco, Boddinstrasse is the expatriate community’s fuse box - where artists check in, exchange, recharge, make new connections, and go on their ways again. Above all, public gatherings in Neukölln reinforce the cohesion of community. Social events are a reminder that the community is a tangible thing, an iteration of collective sentiments. Allying with other artists equates to feeling at home, accepted, welcome. After days working in isolation, an artist can walk down Boddinstrasse and be reminded that they are part of something.

This feeling of belonging via social connection is reiterated in narrative, and strengthened because of its telling. Sarah cites Boddinstrasse as hugely influential when she first moved to Berlin and was:

Figuring out places to meet people… I went to IDrawAlot gallery, the networking breakfast at ArtConnect Berlin, then I met Karl from IDrawAlot. Oh! Drawing nights on Wednesdays (at IDrawAlot). Out of all the places that gallery has been best place for meeting people. There are always shows. They’re super nice…

81 Clement, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
The more prevalent these galleries and gatherings become in local conversation and artist narrative, the more Boddinstrasse’s magnetic influence grows.

The outer face of expatriate enclaves anchors, introduces and comforts new residents. Private gatherings are equally important, furthering community cohesion and artistic development. While key spaces – galleries, cafes, and so forth – are the operative elements of public gatherings, key artists are the cohesion of the private: magnets around which community members collect.

Charisma accompanies these centralizing figures. The introduction to Harrington’s essays reads: “As Chester Himes described the situation: Ollie was the center of the American community on the Left Bank in Paris, white and black, and he was the greatest Lothario in the history of the whole Latin Quarter. And he was a fabulous raconteur too. He used to keep people spellbound for hours. So they collected
there because of Ollie. Then the rest of us came.” Just as abroad atmospheres have their magnetic power, so specific artists emit their own. Harrington’s essays describe the unifying qualities of Richard Wright. When purchasing a home in Paris:

The Wright’s found that there was plenty or room for a growing family and still space to entertain the people who flocked to the Wright home...This was the apartment to which came the great, the not so great, and those who would never be great. All were welcome.

Self-awareness is central to Wright and similar figures. Wright consciously selected a space that enabled socialization, a key to the expatriate enclave. Without Gertrude Stein and her infamous parlor, the fabric of expatriate Paris begins to unravel in collective memory. As Pizer illuminates, Stein is both a symbol of and unifying agent to the community of sensibility (“the moment” in his terms):

Stein, in her strategic placing and full dramatic representation of the moment, is isolating, in the particularity of her dining room and atelier, what was to her the essential meaning of Paris as a center of the arts and of her own growth as an artist: the sense of community possible in the city, a community that exists above all in shared beliefs about the nature and importance of art but that is also affirmed and symbolized by a social moment, by, in short, the coming-together of like minds at 27 rue de Fleur.

Stein’s atelier (at 27 rue) is the cauldron for expatriate Paris’ creative cause. In addition to her own creative pursuits, Stein played conductor to Paris’s collected artists. Their “shared beliefs about the nature and importance of art” form their communal bond, and Stein’s active role solidified that bond.

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82 Inge, Why I Left America and Other Essays, xxiii.

83 Harrington, Why I Left America and Other Essays, 8.

84 Pizer, American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Movement, 43.
Ema, a 31-year-old street artist from Buenos Aires who has been in Berlin for one year, is Neukölln’s Gertrude Stein. At least once a week he and his wife Ali host artists at their apartment – casual Sunday barbeques (they have a balcony), afternoon get-togethers, Saturday night parties full of music, wine and Berlin creatives from nearly every continent. Invariably, most of the artists I met on Boddinstrasse and subsequently interviewed, I saw again in Ema’s living room. A particularly memorable party included a live drawing competition in Ema’s studio – a huge street-facing room with multiple easels, four-foot drawing pads, and parades of aerosol cans, acrylics, oils and markers. A bottle of wine was spun on the floor to select the “competing” (there was no real winner) painters, who then drew side-by-side for a timed 5 minutes while music, dancing and cheering reveled in the background. “Don’t be shy,” Ema encouraged before the first bout, “we are all artists here.” This sentence encapsulates Ema – his trust and belief in Neukölln’s community. Ema desires to make each artist feel at home, and in turn to make the community stronger:

This is why I’m making these kinds of parties – I’m trying to connect the artists. It’s to connect everybody but also to create a movement, you know? Or different (movements), it doesn’t have to be just one. But to create an energy between the artists, a connection. … Because I think that there are many individual artists that paint alone – but – what’s going to give us a space into the history of art, or into the big scene of art is being together. It’s like being like one. We are a movement. …To make it stronger, and to make it longer. To survive.85

85 Alaniz, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi, August 1, 2012. (As Ema Alaniz is the only consultant who was interviewed twice, dates are included in his citations.)
Ema’s initial move to Berlin was trying and isolated, a circumstance which provides additional motivation for his hospitality and community organizing:

I felt alone in the beginning. And I searched for my own way. That is the bad part and what I am trying to avoid in the future for the new people, you know? To maybe more showing the spaces to create or to help them. Because I think that together we are stronger than separated. And I like to think that this group of people is the best support that you can have for everything you know? If you want to make an important festival or a movement, you need people. You can’t do something alone.\textsuperscript{86}

Knowing how difficult the move abroad can be, Ema attempts to ease the transition for Neukölln’s newcomers. He actively engages them, invites them to events, and gets them involved with other local artists.

\textsuperscript{86} Alaniz, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi, July 9, 2012.
George, alternatively, articulates indebtedness to the Neukölln community that welcomed her from the first day of her arrival four years ago. Now her permanent home, she seeks with everything she does to give back to Neukölln. George is one of the community’s busiest artists. In the spring of 2012 she began her own company, Ironside Tours, (Vanessa is now her business partner), which gives tours of Neukölln art galleries. She and Vanessa also run a weekly exhibition called Turbo Tuesdays, which promotes the work of nascent and emerging Berlin artists. She explains:

Everything we do has to benefit the community. Whatever we do has to support each other. We don’t want to be number one or the best, we want to build a community. And we want to do it together. … Helping out new artists that maybe don’t even have materials and give them a hand.
(On the tours) I’ll take them to my friend’s galleries. And then I meet other people who just moved here. And I’m trying to bring them business as well. … I don’t want to be involved in tourism. I’m trying to make a community.\textsuperscript{87}

George also organizes weekly painting excursions for Neukolln’s street artists, a further attempt to make people feel welcome and supported:

Girls who have never done it before, I really want to help them. Get them involved. Help with their coloring and shopping, explain to them the basics so they feel comfortable enough to begin. I think it can be overwhelming to go out with a bunch of dudes so I try to help them. Haha, like mothering.\textsuperscript{88}

George and Ema are unifying figures, a role which is infectious. Alex says:

I’ve just met a whole ton of people and it’s great. It’s a really cool feeling, to be a part of something. And it makes you want to start organizing things as well. It kind of motivates you. It makes you want to be creative in whatever field you want to do. If you’re writing or drawing or painting, or even music.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{87} Ironside, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{89} Godwin, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
As Alex attests, seeing Ema and George (also artists themselves) bring people together makes other artists want to do the same. More importantly, these social organizers serve to reinforce community bonds and invigorate creativity. As Alex says, “it motivates you.”

An artist’s narrative about their community is often indicative of how well and how quickly they are received in that community. Making these public and private connections can be the key to a successful home-building abroad. “It’s tough to come over and be absolutely on your own,” Enda explains, and the details of this social transition affect one’s overall experience. Furthermore, this orientation experience is typically mirrored in an artist’s perception and depiction of their abroad community. Of William S. Burroughs’ journey to Tangier in January 1954 Edwards explains:

A week after his arrival, Burroughs wrote to Allen Ginsberg: “I like Tangiers less all the time. No writers colony here or they keep themselves hid some place. And don’t ever fall for his inscrutable oriental shit like Bowles puts down (that shameless faker).” …The informal writers’ colony that had been celebrated in the American press did not seem to exist.

It is implied then, that Burroughs expatriated in the hope of finding and participating in Tangier’s writers’ colony, and his inability to do so results in a negative characterization of the city as a whole. However, after Burroughs makes connections and finds a creative foothold, his perception changes:

But things began to improve, and by the middle of 1955, Burroughs had changed his mind about Tangier rather starkly. A November 1955 letter to Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac began this way: “Tangier is the prognostic pulse of the world, like a

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90 Gallery, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

dream extending from past into the future, a frontier between dream and reality.” He urged his friends to join him. … After several false starts, he had kicked his junk habit, befriended Bowles, and had made solid progress on the writing project that would become *Naked Lunch*.

After Burroughs befriends the infamous Bowles, feels more at home and makes progress on his work, his depiction of Tangier becomes positive. Burroughs’ now pleasant, social, creatively fruitful experience is reflected in his description.

The Neukölln narratives included in this study belong to artists who have largely succeeded in making community connections. Because of the ease in which they found a social home, they describe the Neukölln community and general atmosphere positively. Artists feel welcome and secure, so depict Berlin with those same attributes. Their narratives reinforce community bonds, as continued discussion about inclusiveness and warmth breeds the same. Saying “everyone’s really friendly and open” serves as a reminder to be those things themselves. Artists revel in, and help create the atmosphere they desire. As will be shown below, this same, self-fulfilling prophecy can be applied to their artistic progress.

**Artistic Growth and Creative Tension**

An open, abundant atmosphere, affordable living, and a thriving public and private community can all contribute to artistic growth, and most artists’ narratives attest to this creative progress. One of the most influential creative motivators however, is talking and crafting narratives *about* how these factors contribute to creative growth. The noted atmospheric conditions can just as easily deter creativity, and an artist’s personal, narrative motivation often determines their artistic failure or success. An atmosphere’s

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92 Ibid., 159.
positive effects will be first be explored below, followed by the detrimental, with the role narrative plays then summarizing both.

### Openness and Tolerance

An open atmosphere often translates to a creatively tolerant and supportive one, where artistic endeavors and experimentation are promoted. Harrington says of his Parisian experience:

>The art community in Paris is a completely open one. The only criterion is, are you a good artist? Or are you working like hell to become one? Such a criterion induces an atmosphere of camaraderie, a sharing of ideas, techniques, and often soup, all of which seem indispensible in the making of an artist. I never even remotely experienced anything like that at “home”.

In post-WWI Paris, proving yourself committed to the pursuit of artistic discovery is all that’s required for the expatriate community to embrace you. A similar credo of support permeates Neukölln culture. Alex explains:

>Everyone’s really encouraging. It’s cool actually. It’s all subjective, everyone has their opinion about what’s good and bad. But I think people being passionate about what they do in itself makes something good. Whether or not what someone paints is my sort of thing – I still think it’s good.

*Trying* is all that matters. The expatriate community is dedicated to creativity, and values those daring to express themselves, whatever form the work may take. Labels “good” and “bad” are irrelevant, as this openness embraces all but one thing: criticism. Ema is particularly passionate on this stance:

>The base for everything has to be respect. Respect everybody. Respect what they are doing. This journalist came here the other day and he was saying “hey, many

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93 Harrington, *Why I Left America and Other Essays*, 58.

94 Godwin, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
people are painting in the street, not all of them very good” but I say “hey, sorry, but who are you to say who’s who?” I think to say someone is bad is really hard. And it’s horrible. You have the right to say “I don’t like this”, “I don’t get the feeling with that style”, “I don’t get the connection”… and it’s your problem. It’s not the problem of the artist. Because everyone has their own story to say. Everyone has their own background. And something to tell, in the style that they want. That is why the base for everything you do must be respect. Nothing without respect. But not all the people is thinking that. But, I don’t care about all the people. It’s like… C’mon, let me paint. Nothing else, just that.95

Reacting positively or negatively to a piece of art is a natural reflex. Ema and Alex insist however, that an unfavorable response be framed respectfully: “this piece doesn’t speak to me,” instead of: “this is bad.” They put the agency with the viewer, instead of with the art and maker. “It’s your problem,” Ema says. This approach is not denial of personal opinion, but insistence that personal taste be acknowledged politely instead of judgmentally.

An exhibition at Idrawalot Gallery, Boddinstrasse, Neukölln, Berlin

95 Alaniz, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi, July 9, 2012.
Other artists concede the presence of “bad” art in Neukölln, but articulate it in positive terms. Claudia says:

It’s really open, really friendly. There’s a lot of shit art here, but also good art. And the good thing is people just come here and make art. Regardless if they are good or not, and it’s nice.  

Unlike Ema and Alex, Claudia is judgmental in her admission of bad art. However, she acknowledges the presence of lower quality work as a means to assert her and the community’s openness. Yes there is bad art, she says, but that doesn’t matter. Her views align with Harrington: a work’s quality is irrelevant, what matters is an artist’s self-expression and their embracing the freedom to fail.

This air of non-criticism makes artists feel comfortable, which in turns helps them develop. Vanessa extrapolates:

(Berlin) is like a medium step. Like its own school or something. Because there’s a lot of creativity around, a lot of inspiration, you can mediate yourself in a way. Edit yourself. It’s like you have to do something to know you don’t like to do it. Berlin is a good place to discover those things. I don’t think anyone knows what type of artist they are - but this is a good place to discover that. …It’s a nice place too, people aren’t judgmental. The lack of critique - you can just go for something and not feel you need to prove anything to everyone. Just doing it for yourself, -and you need that - it’s important to get better at that. Something about the lack of critique I think helps.

Vanessa frames Neukölln as a good place for artists to figure out who they are, figure out what their art is or wants to be. They have chosen this community for a reason - a positive, criticism-free atmosphere being part of that reason.

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96 Maharaj, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

97 Brazeau, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
Additionally, the familial bond that draws and comforts many Neukölln artists further prohibits judgment. Vanessa explains why warmth hinders critique:

You get to this point where you’re so involved in other people’s lives and the creating of art that it becomes, not in a way your own art – but you’re a part of it. I’ve always believed that you need to be on the outside of something to be able to see it for what it is, see it from a distance. So if you’re involved in these things an the community is so close the line gets shaded and its hard to critique something that you’re a part of. 98

Vanessa speaks of the community as the self. This is an atmosphere of collaboration, not critical workshop. Friendships are built quickly and intensely, and that intimacy disables criticism. “There’s a lot of creativity around, a lot of inspiration,” says Vanessa, a sentiment expanded upon by Alex. Citing the proliferation of other artists and their work as having significant impact on hers Alex says:

I’ve developed a lot here. Being free to paint. …I’ve developed and I get inspired. I’ve met a lot of artists here that are so inspirational and the techniques that they’ve used, I’ve kind of adopted their techniques in a way. You pick up new possibilities about ways to work just by watching other artists paint. 99

Just as abundance – of events, artists, so forth – attracts expatriates to abroad enclaves, so that abundance furthers their art. Artists cannot help but be influenced by one another’s work, and in extremely open and intimate atmospheres, sharing and collaboration become even more influential.

For expatriates like Alex, Neukölln offers an abundance of cerebral measure – a plenty of artists, techniques and ideas – nurturing artistic growth. For artists like Hemingway, inspirational abundance takes a more physical and emotional form. One of A Moveable Feast’s tropes is, as its title intones, feast. Pizer explains:

98 Ibid.

99 Godwin, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
Sustenance results in the capacity for work, which results in hunger, which – once satisfied – again produces the capacity for work. And since Paris bountifully offers up every form of nourishment…the work flows forth fully and finely in a kind of creative alchemy in which, to reverse the biblical formula, the flesh becomes the word.100

Here, notions of fullness are reflected in Paris’s atmosphere, which feeds – literally and figuratively - the act of creativity. This abundance, “there’s just so much going on here,” alongside openness and acceptance, acts for many as an artistic stimulant.101

**Time and the Development of the Self**

In order to take advantage of this ambience and abundance, an artist needs time to do so. The time and focus expatriates can devote to themselves and their work abroad, therefore, is one of the largest factors contributing to growth. Expatriates attribute this circumstance to a community’s low cost of living. When artists don’t have to work a full-time, non-creative job in order to survive, they can put more energy towards their art. Community stimulation, openness, warmth and lack of criticism are important draws, but time to focus is crucial. “It was the first time I’d given myself time to paint all day.” Claudia says, “It was a turning point for me.”102 Ema likewise articulates how his personal and artistic development are dependent on time:

(I spent the first) 6 months just painting, nothing else. I didn’t come to Berlin ready to paint. I was discovering myself also in that moment. I hadn’t defined my style, what I wanted to say in my paintings. That time was to find my style, here. I didn’t work, it was just being at home all the fucking day. Going out just to paint. I didn’t go into bars. Just thinking in the painting, in me as a person. …But I can say now, probably, I am defined. I know who I am. I have my bad faces. I have

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100 Pizer, *American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Movement*, 16.

101 Brazeau, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

102 Maharaj, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
my good faces, but I know what I am. So after 6 months I decide to going out and started contacting the people. I make my own name here. The people start to write me, ‘hey I know who you are’.

Because he had the time to do so, Ema progressed. In Ema’s narrative, a defined self is nearly synonymous with a defined artistic style. This is a central nerve of the expatriate story – the interchangeability of artistry and identity. For these artists, creative expression is the core of identity; therefore a successful expatriation and re-rooting equates to a fruitful blossoming of creative self. Vanessa says: “Berlin is the place you come to figure out what type of artist you want to be.” Which is another way to say, it is the place to come to figure out who you are.

Ideally, the journey begins with desire to be an artist and ends, or at least solidifies, in the full realization of that artist. Hemingway, Wright, Nin, Miller, Stein and so on are cornerstones of the expatriate tradition because of the artistic success experienced in, and subsequently from, their Paris years. “It is in this setting, Hemingway implies, that he comes of age as a writer.” Miller’s Tropic of Cancer describes Paris as an “obstetrical instrument” – poignantly enacting the metaphor of birth. A person, and their artistry alongside them, is born. Pizer similarly qualifies Nin’s journey to Paris as “beginning the process of becoming.” Narratives frame expatriation as a process of intertwined artistic and personal blossoming.

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103 Alaniz, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi, July 9, 2012.

104 Brazeau, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

105 Pizer, American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Movement, 26.

106 Miller, Tropic of Cancer, 10.

107 Pizer, American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Movement, 53.
Focus and Self-Motivation

The self, in whatever state of becoming it may be, is paradoxically instrumental in the solidification of a want-to-be-artist as artist. When saturated with openness, stimulation and free-time, personal drive is key. Narratives attest that expatriates must make active use of the abroad lifestyle, through concentration and hard work, if they are going to reach their creative goals. When Ema and Claudia cite time as a factor in their development, effective use of that time is implicit in their words. Robert explains how he has made immense progress on his book since arriving in Berlin three months ago: “(It is) because I’m writing all day. That is the key if you want to develop as an artist - you have to put in time.” Robert’s diction implies action: “put in” time. Narratives explain that artists must continually push themselves, focus, and utilize the blandishments of a creative lifestyle in order to succeed.

The same principle of self-motivation applies when considering a non-critical atmosphere. If a community is universally approving – “all that matters is that you try!” – it does not help artists improve. It is terribly easy to get a gallery show in Neukölln, a fact that can simultaneously encourage artists and endorse mediocrity. Artists acknowledge that unconditional support goes only so far, and if the community isn’t going to demand growth, artists explain that they must impose their own self-improvement. Artistic development then, for many expatriates, is understood as a product of the successful

108 Benson, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
marriage between self-motivation and atmosphere. Quoting James Grauerholz, Burroughs’s longtime secretary and editor, Edwards explains:

In those four crucial years, 1954-57, Burroughs had been transformed into a writer.’ The agent in Grauerholz’s sentence is not Burroughs, but something outside of him: a context and an environment. Expatriation by definition gives agency to context and environment. Travelers offer themselves up to be changed, and offer themselves to the alchemy of the abroad. As discussed above, the particular combination of time, stimulation and community can be attributed to catalyzing artistic blossoming, if the artist works hard, responds well, and optimizes their surroundings.

**Artistic Failure and Hedonistic Distraction**

These surroundings however, are also expressed in narrative as deterrents to growth. In *A Moveable Feast*’s portrait of Paris: “The city is revealed as swarming with phonies and poseurs and as a setting in which good writers and artists succeed in destroying themselves.”¹⁰ Not only is the city full of people who are there for non-artistic reasons - to quote George: “it’s cool, it’s cheap, and ohhh parties!” – it’s full of once-hopeful, earnest artists now broken.¹¹ Similarly, Pizer frames Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* as a narrative where: “Paris (is) a crucible for the refining of the creative spirit into gold or dross.”¹²

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personal and artistic failure, are synonymous. The journey to defeat however, can be subtler.

Failure is a cool and insidious end, arising often from inaction. Expatriates assert that an artist must maintain direction and collaborate fruitfully with their chosen atmosphere, or else fall prey to its snares of inactivity. Walonen explains:

In Tangier was a prevailing listlessness stemming from the idleness of much of the population. A good proportion of Tangier’s expatriate community did not work, either because they were independently wealthy or because they were not inclined to do so and, the cost of living being exceedingly cheap at the time, they did not have to. A society thus relieved of the need to strive either individually or collectively can easily fall prey to the weight of indolence; this is precisely what occurred in Tangier, and the result was a stultifying ambiance of malaise and ennui.113

In Neukölln, it is the same. While it may inspire art, an open, permissive, cheap and abundant atmosphere just as easily breeds languid afternoons; and expatriate artists articulate the dangers inherent to this lifestyle. Sleeping until noon, a beer by the canal, another beer by the canal, some bocce ball, falafel dinner for 2 Euros, beer, bar, club, repeat – this typical day can be labeled hedonistic as easily as it can be named a “creative lifestyle.” In the simultaneously indolent and thriving atmosphere, not having to work enables sloth and indulgence as sure as it enables creativity.

113 Walonen, Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition, 23.
Many indeed, flock to expatriate enclaves in search of such indulgence and escape.

Capote says of Tangier:

If you are someone escaping the police, or merely someone escaping, then by all means come here… there are magnificent beaches… and if you have a mind for that sort of thing, the nightlife, though neither particularly innocent nor especially varied, is dark to dawn, which, when you consider that most people nap all afternoon, and that very few dine before ten or eleven, is not too unusual.¹¹⁴

Narrative framing is daily existence framing. Crucial to the link between narrative and daily life, an expatriate’s abroad experience is tied to how they characterize that experience in personal narrative. If someone from Capote’s Tangier calls their voyage an ‘escape”, that is likely what it will be. If an expatriate acknowledges the dangerous, laid-back party ambience yet affirms their creative purpose, they are more likely to create art

than lazily indulge. Hedonism can be contagious and vigilant, especially in expatriate community atmospheres, so personal motivation is demanded. Claudia exclaims:

No one has money here! My friend said “Berlin is the cemetery of ambition.” And she’s German. You really have to stay on your game if you want to make it.\textsuperscript{115}

Making a point of her friend’s German identity, Claudia emphasizes the need for constant personal focus. If indolence is ingrained in the native culture, she implies, it must be even more difficult for Neukölln’s bohemian expatriates. Australian musician Robert F. Coleman penned a popular New York Times piece in the fall of 2012 decrying Berlin’s hedonistic malaise:

There were no deadlines to worry about or bosses to enforce them. There were too few limitations, and we’d lost all motivation and willpower to ever say no…We had gone to Berlin because of the lifestyle it offered to artists, yet we were coming unstuck by that exact lifestyle. Berlin was ruining us. …It would be ridiculous to blame a city for lack of creative output. But in a crooked and ironic way, (fellow band-member) Pat summed it up best: “In Berlin, you never have to stop.” In the end, the city’s lifestyle, with all its distractions, outweighed our aspirations and our will to succeed. Three months in the creative mecca taught me an important lesson about creativity: It’s not something you will find in a place.\textsuperscript{116}

Neukölln’s artists, and those preceding them in the expatriate tradition, would disagree with Coleman’s conclusion. They would grant that creativity does come from within, and acknowledge that are real dangers, especially for the artistic temperament, in the creative lifestyle. But these artists have deemed expatriation, and relocation to a specific community necessary, because they believe place can and does elicit creativity. Neukölln’s artists claim to have found the muse in the abroad. Talking about the positive effects of atmosphere instead of the negative, these artists craft their narratives as

\textsuperscript{115} Maharaj, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

\textsuperscript{116} Coleman, “In Berlin, You Never Have to Stop”, \textit{New York Times Magazine}. 
motivations and reminders of their creative goals. They believe that as long as an artist maintains focus (aided by repetition in narrative, conversation and deed), and responds positively to their chosen location, creativity will come. Pizer’s explication of Hemingway’s narrative echoes this idea:

Far more common in A Moveable Feast are figures who in their personal or artistic lives exemplify a failure to respond to what Paris has to offer the artist and thereby serve as negative models for the aspiring artist.\(^{117}\)

Hemingway depicts not a failing of atmosphere, but a failure of artists to respond fruitfully to that atmosphere. As Pizer explains, such dichotomist framing – failing artists versus succeeding Hemingway – helps him maintain focus.

While Neukölln’s artists acknowledge atmospheric tensions, their narratives do not dwell on or speak out against them. Complaining about the negative aspects of Berlin’s lifestyle would be admitting defeat, or at least trial, by them. Instead, narratives focus on the importance of focus. Hedonism and laziness do exist, Neukölln artists say in passing, but our drive and our work triumph over them. This stands in contrast to Coleman, who focuses on the detriments of Berlin’s lifestyle as a means to explain his and his band’s artistic failure. Just as an artist’s description of place often echoes their social reception in that place (exemplified by Burroughs’ changed portrayal of Tangier after making connections), an artist’s creative success, or lack-there-of, is reflected in their depiction of atmosphere. Positive characterization indicates growth, negative, creative disappointment.

These two realities however – artistic accomplishment and paralyzing indulgence and ennui – compliment and feed one another. Of A Moveable Feast Pizer says:

But the opposition also contributes appreciably to the underlying mythic character of the work as a whole, in which life in Paris, for the youthful aspirant to art, is a magical journey through a world populated by good and bad spirits and in which each detail of the landscape addresses the quester’s capacity for hope and despair and for fortitude and weakness.¹¹⁸

These contrasting worlds of fertile and paralyzing spirits always have, and indeed need to, exist at once in expatriate narrative. The key lies in narrative framing: an artist chronicles either their triumph over, or defeat by, negative forces. Becoming an artist is a fight, the expatriate community a battleground. The notion of choice is recalled again, where here the artist recognizes competing realities and must choose between them. Artists either forge their creative path and gain stronger work and persona for it, or succumb to despair. This quest and struggle to prevail is intrinsic to the expatriate experience and tradition.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 25.
The articulation and explication of this quest is, most importantly, part of expatriate artist narratives indelible formula. Artists continually construct, modify and share their expatriation stories while abroad. While narrations can act as mirrors to the health of one’s artistry, they can also be self-fulfilling prophecies. Focusing on and talking about the positive effects of atmosphere serves as creative motivation. If an expatriate repeats, both internally and socially, the assumed benefits of a creative lifestyle, they are more likely to reap those benefits. Likewise, saying “this atmosphere won’t let me get anything done” will likely ensure that. The framing of one’s atmosphere relates directly to their ability to focus within that atmosphere. Staying on your game, as Claudia says, in this manner is intrinsic to the embrace and continuation of the expatriate tradition.

**Tradition and Artistic Motivation**

For many artists, invoking this tradition through narrative is another prime artistic motivator. Artists develop with the right blend atmosphere and personal (narrative) focus, and narratives about the broad expatriate experience both past and present help actualize this growth. In the expatriate artist coherence system artistic motivation is twofold. It is the simultaneous drawing upon and emulation of past successes, a process that is often heightened by feelings of nostalgia and temporality, and it is the creation of a newly framed ethos, which follows in the old expatriate tradition, in the present space.

Looking to past models both inspires creativity and serves as a means of combating an atmosphere’s potentially negative effects. Pizer describes a prime example in Miller:
The figures of Miller’s own Paris – the writers and would-be writers of his own day who are an important side of his Paris world – fail in various ways to tap the rich vein of creative energy that funs through the Paris scene, and they are the object of his contempt. … But he believes that some earlier artists acted courageously in the role of outsider and rebel he envisions for himself, and it is these who serve as his icons of inspiration.  

…he maintains inviolate within himself, with the aide of avatars from the past, a sacred integrity of the spirit. Miller, in a Paris filled with those whose debasing of the expatriate ideal of freedom besmirches a faith almost religious in its essential character, nevertheless maintains through his own active belief in this ideal a form of chivalric, and indeed sacred, quest for its fulfillment.

Surrounded by failures and temptations, Miller conjures his own expatriate artist heroes as fortification. It is “active belief in (their) ideal” which enables and motivates Miller’s own artistic pursuits. Previous artists triumphed over temptation, Miller’s narrative attests, so he can also.

Ever self-aware, Ema articulates a similar train of thought:

I like to think that actually Berlin is an important space for art. And we are comparing Berlin now with Paris in the 20s you know? …I think that street art is the revolution in the classic art. We are making the difference, we are taking back the rebel style of what is art. Artists start like that. I miss that - I read a lot of books about art. I missed this whole movement of crazy people trying to make a difference. And now where is that? People just moving and not worrying about selling their paintings. It’s a feeling that I have. I would like to be in that movement in the 90s, or in the 30s in Paris… my English is really bad I’m sorry. Not enough to talk about complex things.

Aware of past movements, Ema draws upon these examples as fuel for his present mission: the street art revolution. It happened before he says (despite his frustration with English), so it can happen again in the present. A sense of nostalgia too, is inherent in Ema’s invocation of past communities. “I missed this,” Ema laments, regretful he wasn’t

119 Ibid., 126.

120 Ibid., 127.

121 Alaniz, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi, July 9, 2012.
part of it. “I would have liked to be in that movement,” he says, an assertion of a movement’s temporality.

A similar note of nostalgia for the fleeting is pervasive in much of expatriate Paris and Tangier literature. Many expatriate artist stories are known through memoir, a genre nearly nostalgic by definition. Hemingway’s *A Movable Feast*, Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, and Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* all strive to capture the cauldron of creation that was Paris; and in so doing, comment on its ephemeral nature.

Pizer addresses Stein’s memoir:

“The old life was over” (142), Stein notes at the conclusion of the section, counterpoise to the “And so life in Paris began’ of the opening. Our sense is of a fresh and exciting existence – that of the Paris of both a new art arising out of the shared efforts of a community of artists and a rich personal relationship that has its base in freedom – abruptly and definitively interrupted.\(^{122}\)

This transience amplifies the collective understanding of expatriation. The nostalgia inherent to these expatriate narratives fuels their re-telling and recreation. Heard almost as legends, these community histories leave contemporary artists to both celebrate and mourn their passing, and try to recreate them. According to Pizer:

\(^{122}\) Pizer, *American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Movement*, 45.
Stoddard Martin argues that the expatriate scene of interwar Paris served as a model of “a state of mind, a condition of life, that artists, writers and others of succeeding generations have tried to imitate” in a variety of locales (7-8).123

This model, however, only exists because of its telling. By drawing upon perceived past successes (exemplified in Miller), and solidifying their own community as part of the expatriate tradition, Paris’s artists helped popularize the myth of the expatriate community. Inflected by the critical notion of nostalgia, “myth’s” use here is most accurately linked to Susan Stewart’s contemplation of the term in On Longing:

Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack. …longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality.124

In contending this ideological past only exists as narrative, Stewart’s definition highlights another function of the expatriate story: the mythologizing of its communities and ideals. The narrative works so far discussed both contribute to the myth of the expatriate community and push the tradition of artist expatriation forward. A prime example of this continuation can be found in Tangier. Walonen attests:

By the time of WWII the economic advantages for Americans of living in Paris had long since faded… Some of the next generation of expatriate artists, who had tasted the last days of expatriate Paris in their early adulthood, ended up settling in Tangier. Among them, leading the way, was Paul Bowles. Gertrude Stein, who as a social figure and a diffuser of aesthetic ideas was arguably the most central figure of the Paris expatriate scene, famously first suggested to a young Bowles that he and the composer Aaron Copeland visit Tangier in 1931, other sites on the

123 Ibid., 14.

124 Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection, 23.
Mediterranean being over-frequented and passé (Bowles, Without Stopping 123).125

As Stein articulated the passing of the Paris moment, so she is recorded in urging the creation of the next important community. Artists like Stein are consciously aware that they both follow in and propagate the tradition of creative communities abroad. Each new enclave has its unique aspects, but carries on in the vein of like, or similarly different, communities. As exemplified in Stein, Miller and Ema’s contemporary story, knowledge of this artistic tradition and its mythology serves to strengthen the artist’s cause in their present space.

Nin’s Diary both draws upon past Parisian successes (she journeyed there well after Stein and her contemporaries had established themselves) and imbues her present Paris with like creative power. Pizer explains how in Nin’s narrative:

(The Parisian) world of discovery and change, not only is physically that of Paris but also symbolically reflects the expatriate myth of Paris as a center of freedom and creativity.126

In an effort to keep artistic flow active, Nin’s narrative of 1930s Paris reflects stories of the Parisian past, while simultaneously romanticizing her own present. And today, Nin’s telling is ingested too as past, part of the ever-growing tradition. It is a widening spiral, feeding off of itself. Just as artists are influenced and inspired by previous art works, so are they influenced and inspired by previous artistic communities.

The second element to a narrative’s creative motivation is the creation of a new expatriate tradition and sensibility in one’s present community. While the specifics of

125 Walonen, Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition, 14.

126 Pizer, American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Movement, 52.
that sensibility change depending on place and time-period, the existence of its creation is constant. Through narrative, artists seek to imbue their chosen community with more ethereal, ideological qualities than the tangible atmospheric elements discussed above. In terms of the artist’s language, it is helpful to think of these qualities as belonging to the muse. Speaking of Wright’s literary pursuits, Harrington subtly imbues Paris with a creatively inspirational, magical element:

Back in Paris, Wright plunged into his work and into the turbulent, stimulating life which only the French capital offers…the rare luminosity which filters through the tiny streets of Paris.\footnote{Harrington, \textit{Why I Left America and Other Essays}, 11.}

It hadn’t started to rain yet and the street glowed in that exhilarating luminosity which exists only in Paris.\footnote{Ibid., 65.}

While the romance of Parisian lights are well-known, Harrington’s narrative makes that romance his own. Paris for him and his contemporaries offers a mystical, personally inspiring atmosphere, made all the more inspiring by its telling. This telling is also helps keep ennui and self-destruction at bay. The lights! The cafés! How they inspire! How could we not focus and create art? Akin to concentrating on the positive elements of lifestyle, this imbuing the present artistic community with ethereal, and at times utopian qualities is a great motivator of creativity.\footnote{Stewart’s \textit{On Longing} reads: “The nostalgic’s utopia is prelapsarian, a genesis where lived and mediated experience are one, where authenticity and transcendence are both present and everywhere.” (23)}

Ema says:

I’m really sure. Something is happening here. A lot of people I’m meeting, maybe myself – we’re going to be famous in the future! Joke. But there is something

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\footnote{Harrington, \textit{Why I Left America and Other Essays}, 11.}
\footnote{Ibid., 65.}
\footnote{Stewart’s \textit{On Longing} reads: “The nostalgic’s utopia is prelapsarian, a genesis where lived and mediated experience are one, where authenticity and transcendence are both present and everywhere.” (23)}
\end{flushleft}
happening. The network is getting closer and closer. I love it. I feel part of something, being here. Maybe it’s the city. Maybe it’s being in a place.

…I like to think that all the artists that I meet here in Berlin, maybe including me, we’re going to be famous. Or somehow… so I like to think that we are creating history.  

Creating history demands more than sitting by the canal drinking beer. If artists want to contribute to and be part of the expatriate tradition, their own narratives demand action in order to do so. And this act of oration - talking about “creating history” – additionally motivates Ema and others to do so.

Throughout the tradition of expatriate communities, artists are inspired to craft narratives in the name of the muse, and portray their community through eyes captivated by that muse. Most importantly, this retelling keeps the teller captivated. One of the reasons this sensibility is effective is its highly personal nature. These perceptions may be shared, but they also speak directly to each artist’s experience. Instilling atmosphere with

130 Alaniz, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi, July 9, 2012.
ethereal, inspirational qualities speaks to personal response. The cafés! The artists! The city’s captivation! A sincere romanticizing of place accompanies many expatriate narratives. Personal and subjective, these characterizations are akin to describing a lover.

Capote’s *Tangier* introduces this idea with expatriate Jonny Winner:

> She is very young, very American. She has lived here two years, been across Morocco and to the Sahara alone. Why Jonny Winner wants to spend the rest of her life in Tangier is of course her own business; obviously she is in love: “But don’t you love it, too? To wake up and know that you’re here, and know that you can always be yourself, never be anyone that isn’t you? And always to have flowers, and to look out your window and see the hills getting dark and the lights in the harbor? Don’t you love it, too?”

Personal perception is key. The delicate chemistry between city and artist is illuminated, and reinforced, through the act of description. Personal responses are inspired by, and inspire, other personal responses. The community of sensibility feeds the individual feeds the community back.

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CHAPTER THREE: THE NEUKÖLLN ETHOS

It is this describing the more ethereal, muse-like aspects of atmosphere, and an artist’s personal response to and interpretation of that atmosphere, which is at the heart of the Neukölln Ethos. The expatriate circumstances discussed thus far – reasons for leaving home, reasons for choosing a community abroad, growth, tensions and narrative framing as a means to creativity – compose the expatriate artist coherence system. They are the tangible motivations, beliefs and circumstances that nearly all artists and communities share to some extent. These narratives are easily quantifiable – they concern social and cultural factors relatively discernable from the outside.

The Neukölln ethos however, centers on an artist’s personal, emotional interpretation of that discernable atmosphere. It exists predominantly in the mind. This ethos, or “expert system” in Linde’s terms, comprises a series of themes, beliefs and circumstances unique to Neukölln’s expatriates, as these perceptions are intrinsically tied to Neukölln itself.132 These are private, intimate contemplations typically only shared with other members of the Neukölln community. Though each expatriate community has its own expert ethos, there exists little basis for comparison as these themes are not often featured in public narrative. And there is little need for comparison – each community follows in the larger expatriate tradition, and embraces an ethos unique to itself.

The creation and telling of this ethos imbues each community with continued artistic motivation and power, and has significant implication for the expatriate artist coherence system and tradition as a whole. The Neukölln ethos is best understood in two

132 Linde, Life Stories, 163.
parts – circumstances and stories about the individual, and circumstances and stories about the place. Solidified through narrative, these perceptions serve a variety of important purposes for both the individual artist and their community, to be discussed in tandem below. Taken together, these two groups of sub-narratives create the Neukölln ethos’ tradition, and present-day reality, of the Neukölln moment (to borrow Pizer’s term).

The Individual

For the individual, Neukölln ethos narratives validate an artist’s presence Neukölln. They are the pulse of their expatriation. Elements of narrative that express the Neukölln ethos are crafted in a way that prove the artist had to come to Berlin. Artists imbue their circumstance with significance and reason – explaining their presence as a matter of fate, not chance. This reassurance that they are supposed to be in Berlin helps keep their creative goals on track. These articulations of circumstance are repeated in internal narrative, and shared with community members as a reminder and reinforcement of their truth.

The most salient of these personal Neukölln narrative elements is the explanation of why and how the artist first decided to come to Berlin. The majority of consultants visited Berlin briefly – traveling through, seeing friends, and so forth - and subsequently decided to move there. Some, like George, simply stayed in the city. Others took months or even years to relocate. In all cases however, this realization is of epiphanic proportion. It exemplifies a deep need to live in Berlin – visceral, instinctual, certain. This revelatory

133 Pizer, American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Movement, 1.
moment brings the more rational reasons for moving discussed above into focus. 30-year-old video artist and electronic musician Gabriel Shalom from The United States’ Maryland, who has lived in Berlin for four years, shares his story: after completing a study abroad program in Southern Germany, Gabriel spent the last summer of his undergraduate degree (a BA from Bard College in New York State) traveling Europe. He says:

I went to lots of cities, Prague, Vienna, Berlin. I remember this record-hot summer of 2003. I bought bag of cherries (in Berlin) and was walking down Karl Marx Alley thinking - I have to move to this city. This city is so weird, so inspiring, so different from everything I’ve seen – this is where I need to be.\(^{134}\)

Gabriel’s description of the exact time, place and circumstance (a bag full of cherries), speaks to the immediacy and potency of the moment. There are many additional reasons why Gabriel ultimately chose Berlin, but his articulation of the realization however, speaks to its instantaneous, guttural resonance.

\(^{134}\) Shalom, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
The decision to relocate is easily rationalized and supported. But at its core, for many artists the decision is simply based on instinct and feeling. Ema explains:

I’m really happy here. (My wife and I) came for one month to visit south Germany where she’s living and we visited Berlin. I was two days here, and saw a lot in two days and I told her ‘I want to live here.’ … it was just a feeling. Just a feeling. I saw the streets, I saw the people, and I just got a strong feeling that this is my place. I have to live here. I don’t know how to explain it. But this is the place that I want to live. You feel it or you don’t feel it. We can talk hours about how - but it’s just bullshit. It’s something that you feel or you don’t. But, I feel it!135

This fast, intuitive response is key to the Neukölln ethos. Here, Ema expresses a feeling mirrored by many artists – the reaction to the inarticulatable ‘something’ about Neukölln. They feel it, they say. Artists express deep intimacy and connection with Berlin, often after only a few days inside its borders. Like Capote’s young woman in Tangier, the artist’s response to the city - to the muse - is impossible to fully quantify. It is based on instinct and emotion rather than rationality. It is akin to being in love.

Likewise struggling to pinpoint an exact “why,” Luiza addresses the difficulty of articulation and offers instead evidence of how Berlin makes her feel:

135 Alaniz, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi, July 9, 2012.
Well people would always tell me (about Berlin) and I’d be like yahhhh, okay -- And I knew a little bit from my childhood. But then I went. And I couldn’t say it was this or this or this. But I felt - OK. Released. Relaxed. For the first time since I left home I don’t have to - care about being someone else. (I could stay in Paris where) I know the galleries, I have some contacts – Or, the other. I could go to Berlin. Where I can’t even say why I feel good, but I feel so good. For the first time since I left home, I feel home not being home. Which is brilliant – because I don’t want to feel home being home! But I don’t know the language, and I can’t even say that I have friends there. But I can’t do otherwise from my instinct.136

Luiza’s repetition is telling – “I couldn’t say it was this or this or this,” “I can’t even say why I feel good” – as she is aware that her experience is impossible to describe. Her’s is a quick, emotional, irrational, and as she says, instinctual reaction. She feels it. And like Ema, she recognizes that this feeling can’t be quantified or explained. While Luiza’s feeling at home is certainly related to the community and atmospheric circumstances explored above, it is also rooted in pure emotion.

136 Mogos, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
Artists speak of Berlin in terms of personal fate. “This is my place,” Ema says. He continues:

There is a reason why I am here, there is a reason why you are here. I am trying to find this reason all the time when I meet someone, when I’m painting - I’m trying to find that. And I’m looking. And it’s there.  

Articulating his circumstance in this fated manner, Ema gives his trajectory meaning. His past, his decision to come to Berlin and his future in the city are all imbued with significance. There is a reason. For Ema, that reason is both personal and creative, in his community organizing and in his own street art.

Robert articulates fate in an even more pointed way. In addition to his instant attraction to the city, Robert finds significance in the relation between Berlin and his current book:

I just fell in love w the city immediately. I felt had to move here. …(Three years ago) I stayed near Rosenthalerplaz. I had read– I’m not that much into philosophy but I read some Max Sterner. He’s not an anarchist but he’s like the grandfather of anarchism, he wrote The Ego and its Own. He was buried on Bergstrasse. And I thought okay, what’s the chance of that? The one philosopher who actually said something to me and he’s buried five minutes from where I’m staying right now. And I just thought that was really funny. Already I’m writing this book, and this philosopher’s ideas are some of its foundations. So it was like okay, I have to write this book in Berlin.  

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137 Alaniz, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi, July 9, 2012.

138 Benson, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
What is the chance of that? Some would say very small, and call it a coincidence. Robert says very small, and interprets it as fate. In addition to falling in love with the city, he assigns project-specific significance to his relocation.

Whether simply fated to be in Neukölln or destined to complete a particular project there, these narratives motivate their tellers. Artists tell themselves they are meant to be in Berlin, and their creativity will blossom as a result. It is this belief that helps push work forward. These contemplations of fate also strengthen the bonds of community – if each artist is ordained to be there, the community they create is also pre-destined, and, destined to do significant things. As Ema says: “I like to think we are creating history.”

What has significance for the individual also has significance for the community they are part of.

Despite the difficult-to-articulate nature of an artist’s decision to move to Berlin, and the likewise challenging-to-express constructions of fate, perceptions surrounding an expatriate’s presence in Neukölln generate a shared language among community members.

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139 Alaniz, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi, August 1, 2012.
members. The expert system demands another expert in order to be understood – and this system of personal perception is precisely that. Phases such as “it just felt like home,” “this is where I have to be,” and so forth may seem vague to an outsider, but to a member of the Neukölln expatriate community, they are all that needs to be said. The understanding of this expert system comes through personal experience and knowledge.

Finally, narratives and conversations about these individual experiences help imbue Neukölln with personal and artistic significance as a place ruled by feelings of intimacy, intuition and fate. “You can just feel the energy here,” Claudia says.¹⁴⁰ And this ethos, again, supports community cohesion and creative motivation. Just as artists feed off past expatriate narratives and traditions, so they feed of the unique ones they create in their present space.

**The Place**

The second group of narrative elements which comprise the Neukölln ethos are those concerning the city as a whole - specific characteristics and tellings both practical and ethereal. These elements explicate how the Berlin atmosphere is perceived to affect the artist’s day-to-day life, as opposed to the artist’s personal, emotional reaction to that atmosphere. Narratives concerning the individual feature the artist as the active agent. Here, the city and atmosphere takes the place of active party. These tellings likewise serve as personal artistic motivation and cohesive agents for the expatriate community.

One of the most pervasive perceptions and beliefs about Berlin’s atmosphere is what will here be referred to as “flow” – a kind of creative, kinetic energy that is said to

¹⁴⁰ Maharaj, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
provide the artist with inspiration and more importantly, opportunity. Slightly related to notions of abundance, flow is articulated by artists as the benevolent, muse-like spirit of the city. Robert explains:

You don’t need to go searching for the things because they come to you. You go out on the street and something happens. I was with a friend who was visiting and we were just going down the street and suddenly we were at this exhibition, this coincidence. This happens all the time. Things spontaneously come to you. … I am actually getting really inspired. There is some kind of creative forces.\footnote{Benson, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.}

Talking about flow is akin to asserting the belief that the city will provide for an artist. Flow is something more than a profusion of events – it is the extraordinary, spontaneous alignment of those events in the artist’s favor. Enda says:

I think Berlin is a city that would appreciate – I’m looking for the right word – I’m trying to say that if you have something really good, and you throw it out there, (Berlin) will take it and give you opportunities. As opposed to Dublin.\footnote{Gallery, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.}

Here, Enda implies action on the part of the city – Berlin will “give you” opportunities. Opposed to a place that is simply rich with options, artists describe Neukölln as a place that will actively present those options, personally interacting with its inhabitants. Enda continues with an anecdote, explaining an instance where one gig sparked another, which led to him meeting some new people, who he later met at a party and subsequently booked another gig. His explication of this series of events however, is key to his perception of the city:

You don’t even ask for that to happen here. It just happens. People are nice, but I think it’s kind of like, the karma system works here or something. You do throw out stuff in places. Play on the streets supposedly for free and people will come up
to you if you’re good and say do you want to do this? Do you want to do this? You should do this. Do you know about this? Here’s some money. So it’s good.¹⁴³

(See video: Supplemental File 5)

“The karma system works here,” Enda says, a clear expression of a belief held by many Neukölln artists. Taking the notion of flow a step further, Enda suggests that flow will only be with an artist if they act in a certain way. This idea both makes an active entity out of the city, and instigates personal motivation on the part of the artist. As Enda explains, Berlin won’t provide for just anyone - it will provide for those who “put something good” out there. In Neukölln, belief in karmic flow amounts to having faith that if an artist tries, good things will happen for them and their art. Like other aspects of the Neukölln ethos, this belief, too, guards against artistic mediocrity and the hedonistic malaise. The ethos asserts and reassures: “you just have to keep trying, and the city will take care of the rest.”

Echoing this notion that the city will provide, Vanessa introduces another important shared perception of the community – the contemplation of space. After two

¹⁴³ Ibid.
months in business together, she and George want to open a gallery - a meeting place for their tours, an exhibition space for Turbo Tuesdays, and a place for community gathering. She explains:

This area (Neukölln) is popping so quickly up. I’ll look on the way home to see if there’s a (gallery) space, I’m really excited for the opening. And that was never something I would think to do before I came here. It’s almost like, it’s there. It’s Berlin. And it’s giving you this opportunity, more than anywhere else, so why wouldn’t I do it now?  

Opportunity also equates to physical space in which to develop an artist’s creative pursuits. The active agent in Vanessa’s narrative is again the city itself: “It’s Berlin. And it’s giving you this opportunity.” There is a personification of architectural space – space is not just available, it is part of the city’s flow and makes itself available. According to Vanessa, an artist must be doing something right for the city to provide, so it is that artist’s duty to then take and make something of the opportunity. Living spaces, gallery spaces and studio spaces are indeed all relatively easy to come by and affordable by Neukölln standards, and artists make a point of saying so. George references a popular statistic, quoted in multiple Neukölln narratives: “The city was built for nine million; and there’s four million maybe now? A third of the city is unoccupied.”

144 Brazeau, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.

145 Ironside, Personal conversation with Chloey Accardi.
The reiteration of Berlin’s available space however, serves a higher purpose than citing real-estate facts. This repetition is yet another means to validate an artist’s, and the larger expatriate community’s, presence in Neukölln. Making a point to say that Berlin was built for more than double the amount of people it currently holds is another way to say: “See? There’s room for us.” It’s also another way to explain and assert Berlin’s welcoming nature, as the city will give artists the opportunity of that space. Implying that there is room and resources for all, these narratives also reinforce the moral stance of Berlin’s expatriates: anti-competition, anti-greed. While believing there is so much space, and that that space makes itself usable for expatriates, artists can pursue their goals without feeling they are taking something away from anyone else.

The personification of space and flow relates back to Neukölln ethos narrative elements that focus on the individual. Space-related narratives describe Berlin’s
atmosphere as being at one with the muse: ethereal, mystical, and having real effects on those who embrace it. The muse is an entity with power and agency, just like Neukölln. Imbuing the city with a sort of consciousness and will akin to that of a person also parallels the emotion and intimacy articulated in the epiphanic moment that an expatriate must move to Berlin. Artists describe an instinctual, often fated attraction to the city, akin to how one speaks of being in love. To fall in love with a place then, perhaps, is to imbue it with such magical, inspirational, humanistic quality.

The Neukölln ethos speaks to an artist’s personal perception and interaction with Berlin. Though not exhaustive, the elements discussed above readily speak to the character of this expert system – personal and instinctual – and character of the city – benevolent and magical. Each theme indeed serves a variety of functions, from reassurance, to artistic motivation to group cohesion. Taken together, these elements also give a mythological component to the Neukölln ethos. Neukölln’s community of sensibility imbues itself with significance and cements the purpose and place of its members, while at the same time mythologizing its ethos. Still related to Stewart’s contemplation of nostalgia, the Neukölln ethos’s mythologizing has most in common with Robert Redfield’s assessment of “aspiration” in The Little Community:

Aspiration corresponds to myth. It is a vision of the desired state of things. But it is prospective, and it is more closely related to action that are the retrospective myths of the little-changing communities; the past cannot be lived; the future must be. So aspiration gives rise to policy at the point where the people formulate means to realize the aspirations.\footnote{Redfield, The Little Community, 106.}
The Neukölln ethos indeed expresses a desired state of things: fatedness, purpose, active benevolence on the part of Berlin. By framing narratives in this manner, artists keep themselves focused on their goals. This ethos also cements expatriate artists’ identity as such, and links them to the expatriate tradition. As these artists (some, like Ema, quite consciously, and others less aware) continue in this tradition, their uniquely created community anchors their place in the greater whole.

Most interesting however, is the role the Neukölln ethos system plays in relation to the expatriate artist coherence system. For many artists, the Neukölln ethos forms the basis of their presence in Berlin; it is the pulse from which the larger story grows. These perceptions bring the other, more outwardly observable reasons into focus. The motivations expressed through each coherence system are equally true, equally significant and equally important. But because of the differences intrinsic to each system and body of narratives, the sharing of each is starkly different. Narrative presentation is dependent on audience, and as Linde reminds, reflexivity is required when negotiating coherence with that audience. Artists choose what to say to whom, and how to say it, in order to project the image they desire. Examining differences in presentation between the expatriate artist system and the Neukölln ethos further illuminates how each system functions for both the speaker and broader expatriate tradition.

When considering the self-aware nature of narrative, Linde’s discussion of establishing a “functioning social self” is particularly relevant. As she explains, the speaker seeks to present a narrative that both makes sense to their audience and

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establishes their identity and moral persona.\textsuperscript{148} This moral stance comes across clearly in discussions surrounding the expatriate artist coherence system. The values of social freedom, creative lifestyle and artistic support are easily understood, even if not condoned, by most audiences, and espouse tangible, rational reasons for relocation. Notions about what a good artist is, how they should act, and what they should prioritize are easily communicated, and promote a more effortlessly positive image of the artist. Expatriates will typically share these narrative elements with family, friends from home, loose acquaintances, and the general public.

Conversely, expert system details are only shared with trusted, like company, as a commonality of experience and knowledge are necessary for conversation. When speaking with those outside the Neukölln community of sensibility, artists will employ more general, good artist, expatriate coherence system themes. The Neukölln ethos is based on personal, emotional reactions and ethereal concepts. Phrases such as “it just felt like home” and “this is where I have to be” belong to a shared, secret language among artists. Because of the difficult-to-articulate and ethereal nature of these perceptions, discussing Neukölln ethos themes with outsiders would most likely result in confusion.

Sharing Neukölln ethos narratives with non-community members also risks promoting an unfavorable image of the artist who expatriated. Responding to the question “why did you come to Berlin?” with “because I was fated to” or “Berlin provides and the karma system works here” or “I just feel it” gives a bold impression of the speaker, and not necessarily a positive or stable one. Trusting intuition and employing open, ethereal perceptions of the world are indeed reportable moral traits. But these positions coupled

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 81.
with conversations of revelatory moments and karma are less convincing to those outside the Neukölln group. An explanation based solely on these reasons can make an artist’s decision to expatriate seem fanciful, as opposed to vital, romantically bohemian instead of artistically serious. Explications from the expatriate artist coherence system, then, are more instrumental in establishing coherence with general audiences. Additionally, because of their place in the (more well or popularly-known) expatriate tradition, the telling of these more tangible themes lends additional resonance to each narrative, and secures an artist’s space within the greater tradition.

Finally, issues of fate and creative epiphany are highly personal, sacred things. The selective sharing of Neukölln ethos stories speaks to this nature. Just as many artists wish to keep the details of their creative process close, so they protect their inveterate beliefs about personal purpose and the mystical aspects of community. To an extent, these narratives are the muse - and the muse must be kept protected. The Neukölln ethos is an inside joke, an x-factor faith. It is a story not to be shared with non-believers.
CONCLUSION

Like many artists, I journeyed to Berlin knowing only a few friends of friends. I too felt the instinctual attraction. It was the identification of and wonder about this intuitive pull that inspired this research. I readily shared my captivation with my consultants, thus identifying myself as part of the inside, expert Neukölln ethos system. Because of this self-presentation – folklorist and artist who simply had to come to Berlin – I believe community members were more likely to speak with me on an intimate level. Had I been a non-artist ethnographer who wasn’t also somehow in love with the city, I doubt issues of fate, flow or karmic balance would have surfaced. Because of this shared perspective however, my understanding of these narratives is more potent and full. The artists lent me their eyes; and because I shared them, I was able to see. Expatriation forces change. The abroad is chosen as a place for artists to bloom, and it is the naming of the place as such which enables blooming. Fruitful perception of place, knowledge of past communities, awareness of tradition, and repetition of creative goals keep expatriates focused. Once abroad, the creation of a meaningful, motivational narrative often is the creation of the self as artist.
On one of my last days in Germany, Alex, Ema, Luiza and I took a trip to Teufelsberg – an abandoned Cold War “listening station” on the outskirts of Berlin. Designed to intercept radio transmissions, Teufelsberg is now a popular painting ground for street artists. Ema was working on a huge mural, 40 feet wide by 25 tall. Alex made a smaller painting in a doorway, while Luiza and I explored and took pictures. As it happens in Berlin, we ran into Vanessa, George, and their friends, out on their weekly painting excursion. As the afternoon waned, we all climbed the radome tower to watch the sunset. We looked out over the city – Berlin, glowing in the distance like a creature arching its back off the ground. It’s the people inside, I thought, with their stories, who help it breathe.
And we with our stories - dragging them behind us like transmission wires stretching back. Back to Alex’s home in London, to the reasons she came to Berlin, to why she stayed. Back to Romania, and Paris, and Luiza’s refusal to settle for any place that didn’t feel like home. Back to echoes of expatriate myth and tradition, and the artists that made them sound. Back to Neukölln, where many of us met in Ema’s living room. Back to the pictures that we made, and the names we gave Berlin so we could make
them. Fate. Freedom. Possibility. Back to the muse. Back to being in love with the city, which was really being in love with the creation of our expatriate selves.
APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS

This series of drawings was created during my time in Neukolln, Berlin. With titles such as “Berlin, for you to bloom,” “The City as a garden and you its new seed,” “Home,” and “Into the city,” these pieces illustrate Berlin’s welcoming, muse-like nature. Neukolln is portrayed through the eyes of its expatriate artists - flower imagery expressing the nurturing, blossoming effect community and atmosphere can have on those who move there. The figures represented are silhouettes, meant to symbolize both artist and ethnographer abroad.
Berlin, for you to bloom
the city a garden, and you its new seed

Home
into the city
BIBLIOGRAPHY


