Introduction: Imagining the American West

There shall be sung another golden Age,
The rise of Empire and of Arts,
The Good and Great inspiring epic Rage,
The wisest Heads and noblest Hearts.
Not such as Europe *breeds in her decay;*
Such as she bred when fresh and young,
When heavenly Flame did animate her Clay,
By future Poets shall be sung.
Westward the Course of Empire takes its Way G. Berkeley[1]

George Berkeley's famed expression "Westward the Course of Empire takes its Way" exemplifies America's tense and contradictory relationship between self-conception and spatial imaginations. The poem enticed the College of California to change its name to the University of California, Berkeley in 1866. A carefully groomed myth relates that when a group of college officials "stood at the rock outcropping looking west towards San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate, trustee Frederick Billings recalled a poem written in 1726 by George Berkeley [who] had unsuccessfully endeavoured to create a missionary college for both British colonists and Native Americans in the American colonies".[2] In 1878, Berkeley's name was adopted for the small community that bordered on the campus and that would later become the birthplace of the Civil Rights movement. The philosopher-poet's stipulation of the inevitable direction of empire moreover inspired the exceptionalist and expansionist themes of Emanuel Leutze's eponymous mural that still adorns the western staircase of the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C.[3] But neither Berkeley nor Leutze were native-born Americans: While the poet

1 G. Berkeley, "Verses by the Author, on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America", in: G. Berkeley (ed.), *Miscellany, Containing Several Tracts on Various Subjects*, Dublin: George Faulkner, 1752, pp. 185–186.

2 Berkeley Historical Society, "Why is Berkeley Called Berkeley?", http://berkeleyhistoricalsociety.org/history-notes/bishop-george-berkeley.html (accessed 21 April 2020).

3 Leutze is also known for *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851) that shows the future president leading a surprise attack against Hessian mercenaries (G. B. Tindall and D. E. Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 7th edn, vol. 1, New York: W. W. Norton, 2007, p. 217). "Westward the Course of Empire takes its Way" has a notable (and somewhat ironic) transnational history that unfolds between the US, Great Britain, and Germany. After Leutze finished the original, the canvas was damaged in a studio fire and, after being restored, was acquired by the Bremer Kunsthalle. It remained there for almost a century before being destroyed again during a RAF raid in 1942 (J. K. Howat, "Washington Crossing the Delaware", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 26 [1968] 7, pp. 289–299, at 291).

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hailed from Ireland's County Kilkenny, the history painter was born in the southern German town of Schwäbisch Gmünd. Through writing and painting, they projected their personal imaginations of America as an allegory of mobility that always commenced alongside a distinct geographic trajectory: westward. For Berkeley, this mobility expressed the departure of art and philosophy from the timeworn and corrupt epistemes that "Europe breeds in her decay" and their subsequent reorientation towards the New World as a newfound muse that inspires "[t]he wisest heads and noblest hearts". This realignment of intellectual activity towards "spatial thinking" suggested by these verses was, of course, closely linked to the colonization of North America and the British Empire's global projection of power.[4]

At first glance, the themes and composition of Leutze's six by nine metre mural seem to convey a similar, albeit less poetically abstracted message: A trek of emigrants on foot, on horseback, and in covered wagons make their way to the top of a rugged passage. There, trappers and frontiersmen point them to an untouched wilderness, romantically illuminated by the setting sun as the grand western vista opens before their eyes. Portraits of Daniel Boone and William Clark, the pioneers who blazed trails through the Appalachians and Oregon, decorate the painting's margins. Beneath the central composition is a vignette of the Golden Gate that marks the entrance to the San Francisco Bay as the endpoint of westwards movement and gateway to the Pacific.[5] Struggling towards the light of their future homes, the eastern sky behind the pioneers is overcast with symbolic gloom as they claim and transform the western landscape, grazing their oxen, felling trees, and planting a flag on the highest point. The flag, of course, is the Stars and Stripes and not the Union Jack, hence symbolically supplanting British imperialism with American nationalism as the ascendant ideology that would bring order to the incommensurable and unfamiliar West.

On their surface, the spatial allegories presented by Berkeley's and Leutze's works appear mutually exclusive and, concerning their real-life backgrounds of military and diplomatic conflicts, even antagonistic. The British Empire not

4 In an eighteenth-century German collection of his poems, Berkeley's famous line is translated as *Gen Westen geht Britanniens Weg* [Westward the Course of Britain takes its Way] (B. Russell, *Philosophie des Abendlandes: Ihr Zusammenhang mit der politischen und sozialen Entwicklung*, Darmstadt: Holle, 1954, p. 536; see W. Breidert, "On the Early Reception of Berkeley in Germany", in: E. Sosa [ed.], *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012, pp. 231–241, at 238).

5 The vignette shows almost the same view that Frederick Billings admired when he allegedly remembered the line of Berkeley's poem, inspiring him to change his university's name accordingly.

only stood in the way of American independence but also of the nation's political ambitions directed at Canada in the North, Mexico (New Spain) in the South, Florida and Cuba to the Southeast, in addition to the natural resources of the western landmass. Despite differing imaginations, the latter was anything but empty and home to diverse Native American communities. Under British rule, a system of treaties between mostly sovereign actors restricted settlement and land acquisition beyond the Thirteen Colonies. In 1763, Pontiac's Rebellion shattered confidence in the stability of this spatial order after a pan-tribal uprising in the Great Lakes region had left thousands of white soldiers and colonists dead.[6] This led King George III to amend the Royal Proclamation with a clause "which set aside the trans-Appalachian region [...] as 'Indian country' and required the specific authorization of the crown before the purchase of these protected Indian lands on the other side of what was called the Proclamation Line".[7] Angering aspiring settlers, traders, and land speculators in the East, the policy added fuel to an already tense social climate in the colonies. Its impact as a contributing factor to the American Revolution remains contested among historians in a debate that is linked to the ideological and revolutionary conjunctions between the "inseparable nature of the ideals of Land and Liberty".[8] These highly flexible "ideals" proved pivotal for an American land politics of the Early Republic that culminated in the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the settlement of the trans-Appalachian West, border conflicts with Mexico and British Canada, and finally New Imperialism of the late nineteenth century.

Against the background of the close-knit but conflicting connection between emancipatory ideals and imperial policies, some have described the United States as an empire ab initio: "To George Washington the United States was a 'nascent empire,' later an 'infant empire'" Neil Ferguson notes. "Thomas Jefferson told James Madison he was 'persuaded no constitution was ever before as well calculated as ours for extending extensive empire and self-government.' The initial 'confederacy' of thirteen would be 'the nest from which all America, North and South [would] be peopled'".[9] During a 2008 lecture titled "Modern-Day American

6 Native leaders felt betrayed by General Amherst's decision to – in spite of opposite agreements – uphold a British military and civilian presence in the newly acquired territories after Great Britain's victory in the French and Indian War (Tindall and Shi, *America*, pp. 177–180).

7 R. V. Hine and J. M. Faragher, *Frontiers: A Short History of the American West*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 34.

8 N. Inman, "'A Dark and Bloody Ground': American Indian Responses to Expansion during the American Revolution", *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 70 (2011) 4, pp. 258–275, at 272.

9 N. Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*, New York: Penguin, 2005, p. 34.

Imperialism", Noam Chomsky claimed that the "United States is the one country [...] that was founded as an empire explicitly".[10] Joel Barlow in turn envisaged the republic as "the first great asylum and infant empire of liberty".[11] While the stability of these categories must ultimately be judged by political historians, the fundamental difference between empire and nation-state, as it is understood here, lies in the former's function "of stabilizing inequality or, perhaps more precisely, reconciling some rituals and forms of equality with the preservation of vast inequality".[12] The nation-state in turn regularly "proclaims the commonality of its people [...] while the empire-state declares the non-equivalence of multiple populations".[13]

Leutze's artistic rendition seems to simultaneously confirm and contradict the concept of an "automatic" American Empire. On the one hand, the painting was commissioned by the government and thus represents an authoritative expression of western expansion as both a national and imperial policy. On the other hand, the mural's thematic composition points to the definite completion of empire but also retains traces of its processual, conflictive, and ambiguous unfolding: Among Leutze's imperial iconography, hidden between the elated faces of Euroamerican emigrants, an African-American boy can be seen in the lower centre whose future and freedom in the upcoming empire appears anything but definite. In the rolling hills that stretch towards the ocean, smoke curls up from hilltops, leaving it to the viewer's imagination to be interpreted as fires lit by the vanguards of conquest or warning signs sent out by indigenous peoples. While there was little doubt about the direction of either nation-state or empire, the way of getting there, physically and mentally, was less straightforward than many historical narratives recognize. "Westward the course of empire takes its way" therefore becomes more than a line in an Englishman's poem or the title of a German-American's painting. It not only hints at the seemingly fixed direction of empire or nation-state but also at key characteristics of the American space: Simultaneously as an invitation to perpetual mobility and as a cultural performance that aestheticized and authorized the appropriation of territory,

10 N. Chomsky, "Modern-Day American Imperialism: Middle East and Beyond", Lecture, Boston University, 24 April 2008, https://chomsky.info/20080424 (accessed 21 April 2020); see R. Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, Boston: Beacon, 2014, p. 3.

11 J. Barlow, *The Columbiad: A Poem*, Philadelphia: Fry and Kammerer, 1807, p. 134.

12 C. S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 23.

13 J. Burbank and F. Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 8.

hence discursively propelling forward both British imperialism and American nation-building. For the purposes of this book, this may serve as a first, albeit cursory example of how spatial discourses can work alongside various real-and -imagined scales.

Exploring the workings and interplays across these scales, the following engages a wide array of nineteenth-century sources, ranging from canonical literature to adventure stories, poems, newspaper articles, paintings, to previously unstudied journals and diaries of western emigrants and travellers. It traces their (inter)textual dynamics as they create, argue, or act out spatial visions. Many of these visions, it will become clear, did not confine themselves to fictional or imaginative exercises but had far-reaching social, cultural, political, and economic consequences that continue to pervade present-day issues. The book's two-tiered structure accounts for its overarching comprehension regarding the outcomes of these processes. The first chapter approximates the Old Northwest through its utopian formatting as a stage of national revitalization in James Hall's "The Backwoodsman", arena for the reconfigurations of gender roles in Margaret Fuller's *A Summer on the Lakes*, and as a racially charged site of local colour nostalgia in Paul Laurence Dunbar's poems. Analysing these sources demonstrates that the region's formatting as part of the nation-state took place more intricately than assumed by traditional frontier narratives, but also by more recent schools of history. The second chapter probes colliding views of the Louisiana Territory. First, it highlights how the region's diverse cultural landscapes are Americanized in Hall's "The French Village". Subsequently, George Catlin's *Letters and Notes on the Customs and Manners of the North American Indians*, together with his artistic renditions and collecting of artefacts, highlight the complex interplays between philanthropy and exploitation in western discourses. Finally, the book shifts its focus to clashing viewpoints between Oregon's national integration and its hemispheric connectedness to Asian-Pacific networks. The inner workings of and alternatives to these views come to the fore in spatially sensitive re-readings of Francis Parkman's *Oregon Trail*, Washington Irving's *Astoria*, an anonymous proposal for an independent "Pacific Republic", as well as bioregional and other contemporary separatist movements.

Although spatial discourses in both chapters are occupied with negotiating the West as an incommensurable space and canvas for various visions and agendas, they reveal two fundamentally different conceptualizations of the West in relation to national and global contexts. The first, historically "victorious" concept proposes the opening of western spaces in the service of the nation-state. Integrating these spaces, however, was not merely a matter of political and economic conquest but – as demonstrated by the Old Northwest – involved negotiations at the intersections of race, class, and gender. The second chapter therefore

reflects alternative proposals to the transcontinental expansion of the US, which include a partitioning among colonial powers or the emergence of independent ecoregions on the West Coast. Illuminating these conflicting ideas together with their fault lines and overlaps, the book asks questions that aim at the heart of the country's self-conception, for example: What role do these alternatives and their cultural memories play today and how were (and are) they reflected in literary and cultural discourses? How do nineteenth-century arguments concerning integration or separation stabilize or undermine the United States' national identity and global projection of power? And finally, how stable are the discursive foundations of the country's socio-spatial unity and what might be the consequences of its collapse? The efforts of this book – without providing definite answers to these questions – are dedicated to fostering their renewed and critical debate from a more spatially informed and interdisciplinary perspective.[14] Prefixed to the analytical chapters are two additional sections, the first of which gives an overview of the West's historiographical schools of thought, while the second accounts for the need of building a robust theoretical foundation that includes the introduction of spatialization processes as a new way of approaching the study of space in literary studies and elsewhere.

On the outset, the results of the following investigations might seem as fixed as the location of Leutze's painting in the House of Representatives' western staircase: Over the course of the nineteenth century, it is generally agreed, western history congealed into the hegemonic narratives of the frontier and manifest destiny that in turn supported the doctrine of American exceptionalism and undergirded the nation's imperial geopolitics starting at the turn of the century. The sequence of western – and therefore national – history emerges as linear, coherent, and unchanging.[15] Presently, it has turned into something that scholars embellish by adding previously unknown or obscure details, hence enriching but also endorsing the West's historical functions. As the example above indicates, however, the story is less clear, resulting in a contradictory geographic identity that oscillates between inward-looking nationalism and outwardly

14 Similar questions could be raised (either separately or in a comparable manner) regarding other geographic and postcolonial contexts, e.g. the emancipation of China and Russia from the Mongol Empire and their subsequent nation-building processes.

15 In 1959, John Caughey related a similar impression of western historiography: "Being in motion in time and space, through discrete time zones and contrasting environments, the West came to have a neatly stratified history. It is a convenient and remarkable feature, but no more noteworthy than the continuities that unite all the Wests, early and late, Atlantic seaboard, midcontinent, and Pacific slope" (J. W. Caughey, "The American West: Frontier and Region", *Arizona and the West* 1 [1959], pp. 7–12, at 9).

directed imperialist projects. This antithesis today persists in interventionism abroad and the fostering of distinctly anti-imperial traditions within the margins of a continentally defined homeland. On the one hand, the core values of American democracy are understood as direct results of revolutionary struggle against foreign rule. Admonishing its own emancipatory history, the US supported independence movements by discursively co-opting revolutions abroad, for instance in Cuba and the Philippines. At same time, increasingly aggressive geopolitics transformed the nation into a de facto colonial power that however strongly resists the integration of this role into its national identity, instead viewing itself as an exception from historical precedents of "non-democratic empires". Walter Lippmann recognized these conflicting epistemologies already during the interwar period:

> All the world thinks of the United States today as an empire, except the people of the United States. We shrink from the word 'empire,' and insist that it should not be used to describe the dominion we exercise from Alaska to the Philippines, from Cuba to Panama, and beyond. We feel that there ought to be some other name for the civilizing work which we do so reluctantly in these backward countries. [...] We do not feel ourselves to be imperialists as we understand that word. We are not conscious of any such desire for expansion as the Fascists, for example, proclaim every day. We have learned to think of empires as troublesome and as immoral, and to admit that we have an empire still seems to most Americans like admitting that they have gone out into a wicked world and there lost their political chastity.[16]

This nationalist-imperialist double-consciousness culminated in spatial discourses that perpetually switch codes by foregrounding either the exceptionality or universality of the American space. Conversely, the concurrent weakness of the US as either continentally-defined nation-state or limitless empire frequently enables peripheral and subaltern actors to carve out counter-geographies and alternative imaginative regimes. Nonetheless, the economic, military, and technological dominance of the country in the twentieth century and until today continues to feed from the strength of metanarratives that celebrate western expansion, even though they have come under more critical scrutiny in recent decades.

Proceeding from these considerations, a basic question imposes itself: How can we define the American West? After all, it is the book's central object of investigation. At first, it seems intuitive to define the West as a strictly geographic location with certain features that differentiate it from other, ipso facto "nonwestern" regions. Such features could be a generally warmer climate, rugged mountain ranges, or inhospitable deserts. In terms of its demographic structure, the West has a less-than-average population density with large distances between urban centres. Through these distances, the West can alter everyday perceptions of

16 W. Lippmann, *Men of Destiny*, Piscataway: Transaction, 2003 [1927], pp. 215–216.

space and time as travellers who were taken aback by its expanses occasionally reported. Some emigrants even described feelings of placelessness that distorted their sense of scale. In her *Diary of a Journey from Pittsburgh to Oregon City* (1852) Esther Belle Hanna relates that the Great Plains to her became "the most desolate and barren region on our whole route, & extends 150 or a thousand miles".[17] Despite its thin population density, the West is by no means rural. According to the 2010 Census, "[o]f the 10 most densely settled urban areas, nine are in the West, with seven of those in California".[18] A considerable percentage of western acreage consists of public land protected by federal law and designated as National Parks like Yosemite, Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone, which a Missouri senator in 1872 envisioned as the "great breathing-place for the national lungs".[19] Most of the country's Native American territories are also situated in the West, adding up to around six per cent of its total acreage. Finally, immense stretches of mostly intact wilderness still exist in Alaska as the country's least populated state and America's "final frontier".[20]

These "exceptional" climatic, topographic, and demographic features paint the West as an idiosyncratic ecoregion distinct from eastern states and other world regions. For many, its diverse sociocultural composition as well as the movements of people into the West have held the temptation of equating environmental with ideological exceptionalism. "In these nearly universal images, the West seems grandly conceived and easily explained", Clyde Milner summarizes this notion: "It

17 E. B. Hanna, "Diary of a Journey from Pittsburgh to Oregon City", Oregon City, 1878, P-A 313, Bancroft Library Western Americana Collection, University of California, Berkeley, p. 21.

18 US Census Bureau, "Growth in Urban Population Outpaces Rest of Nation, Census Bureau Reports", census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb12-50.html (accessed 21 April 2020).

19 Hine and Faragher, *Frontiers*, p. 179.

20 In lieu of a consensual definition, the following understands the western United States as the trans-Mississippi states. These include in alphabetic order: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Of course, this does not mean that the West simply "ends" at the borders of some of these states. Instead, as William Riebsame writes, "the 'West' keeps moving around in time and space. At moments in American history it was everything beyond the Alleghenies, then all lands west of the Mississippi, and, finally, a coastal West of dynamic Pacific cities" (W. E. Riebsame and J. J. Robb, *Atlas of the New West: Portrait of a Changing Nation*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1997, p. 46). In history and elsewhere, the West ends wherever and whenever the limits of its imaginational capacity are exceeded. Or, in the words of George Catlin: "Few people even know the true definition of the Term 'West;' and where is its location? – phantom-like it flies before us as we travel, and on our way is continually gilded, before us, as we approach the setting sun" (G. Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, vol. 1, Philadelphia: Willis P. Hazard, 1857 [1841], pp. 109–110).

is the West that serves as popular myth and national symbol".[21] Patricia Nelson Limerick notes that the West thus presented a convenient "way to find, quite literally, common ground in seemingly detached and separate narratives".[22] Through its effort to shake up and dig into this supposedly common ground, this book works in the opposite direction. It aims to break through the hardened crust of homogenizing narratives and reappraise western discourses through the lens of spatialization processes using "a poetics of interpretation that draws from literature and literary criticism to represent a real world that is always simultaneously real-and-imagined".[23] Approaching the West in this manner prompts questions about defining America (or the Americas) as its epistemic superstructure.[24] Here, similar dynamics are at play that produce these spaces as

> effect[s] of a dialectic between the practice and the knowledge production of the colonized, the colonizers, and the imaginaries of European intellectuals. What America and the Americas actually are and for what they were taken are the products of both the social practices in as well as beyond the Americas and of the epistemological assumptions, foundational mythmaking, and narrations on and about the continent and the regions, countries, and people on it.[25]

The American West always presented a mental canvas for diverse imaginations, experiences, and performances that differ greatly from person to person. In the introduction to *Over the Edge* (1999), Blake Allmendinger relates his own relationship with the West that highlights the tensions between the cyclical historicity and linear geographies entrenched in dominant narratives and the West's unfettered spectrum of cultural diversity:

> As a gay man who grew up on a ranch where [...] I had few role models and no alternative culture to draw inspiration from. Feeling alienated by or bored with the West as I found

21 C. A. Milner, "America Only More So", in: C. A. Milner, A. M. Butler, and D. R. Lewis (eds.), *Major Problems in the History of the American West: Documents and Essays*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989, pp. 33–41, at 33.

22 P. N. Limerick, "Region and Reason", in: E. L. Ayers et al. (eds.), *All over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. 83–104, at 95.

23 E. W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-imagined Places*, Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996, p. 174.

24 For the sake of readability, the following simplifies the Americas' complex terminologies according to common usage. America hence becomes a shorthand for the North American colonies and, after 1776, the United States. Unless stated otherwise, West refers to the American West as opposed to the so-called western world or western culture.

25 H. Warnecke-Berger and G. Pisarz-Ramirez (eds.), *Processes of Spatialization in the Americas: Configurations and Narratives*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2018, p. 11.

> it, I made up a West that was more appealing and personally relevant. It was the West of my imagination, one that questioned western ideals, mythic archetypes, tradition, and received information; one which glorified the marginal and fetishized things that were transgressive, outrageous, or camp. All of us recognize the West whose history is represented by certain dates and hard facts; whose literary heritage is embodied by a canon of literature; whose images are communally recognized, shared, and experienced; whose geographic identity is sketched as a series of immobile boundary lines. But at the same time, each of us makes up the West for ourselves. We interpret historical facts, individually experience works of fiction and film, and transgress those seemingly immobile boundary lines in peculiar, often quite profound ways. To argue that there is one West, one frontier, or one borderland – that we know where it is and how to make sense of it – is to claim the fragile authority of the Wonderful Wizard of Oz.[26]

Allmendinger's personal experience of the West points to dimensions of spatiality not readily captured in linear yet, as seen above, already highly ambiguous spatial narratives. The analyses that follow, even though not as intimately as Allmendinger, enter in a scrutiny (or better, a dialogue) with a diverse body of sources with the goal to tease out the dynamics of their placemaking trajectories and real-and-imagined interactions with different places and on different scales from the regional to the global. On the one hand, entering this dialogue risks losing the reassurances that undergird streamlined concepts and terminologies. On the other hand – as demonstrated by the achievements of interdisciplinary research at Leipzig University's SFB 1199 "Processes of Spatialization under the Global Condition" – reappraising how we think and therefore talk about space opens immense opportunities.

Entering this dialog becomes a prerequisite of observing and understanding spatial configurations such as the hybridizations of nation-state and empire (or "nation-cum-empire") not only in the United States but also as a part of the nineteenth century's global condition in France, Great Britain, or Japan.[27] This task might be considered revisionist in its desire to "implode myths of national innocence and cultural purity by exposing such myths to the unruly bodies of others".[28] Here, these "unruly bodies" are here not only understood as interactive parameters in the form of literary imaginations, aesthetic strategies, and

26 B. Allmendinger and V. J. Matsumoto, "Introduction", in: B. Allmendinger and V. J. Matsumoto (eds.), *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 1–14, at 2.

27 A. Dietze and M. Middell, "Methods in Transregional Studies: Intercultural Transfers", in: M. Middell (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2019, pp. 58–66, at 65.

28 V. M. Kutzinski, "Borders and Bodies: The United States, America, and the Caribbean", *CR: The New Centennial Review* 1 (2001) 2, pp. 55–88, at 61.

political ideologies but explicitly include the experiences and stories of people like Allmendinger, albeit in different configurations of time and space. Approaching the "mythical bodies" of the West first demands a closer look at the historiographies that have traditionally framed American writings about space. Prefixed to the analytical chapters are therefore a literature review that outlines various academic approaches of theorizing the West, a discussion of relevant methods and theories, and finally the introduction of a new typology of spatialization processes.[29]

A main objective of this study is to uncover the heterogeneity and multiplicity of geographic imaginations by analysing their manifestations in a wide selection of literary and other sources from that period. The results illustrate that the American West – while acting as a venue for nation-building, conquest, and exploitation – functioned (and continues to function) as a mental template through which knowledges and performances of nation and region, home and away, native and foreign, mobility and inertia, access and ownership are perpetually imagined, formatted, and ordered. At the western peripheries, these processes commenced alongside, behind, and in front of oftentimes vaguely defined territories that simultaneously connected and separated a diverse cast of actors or "spatial entrepreneurs", among them the authors, audiences, and textual performances of western literature. Their ideas of the places that they physically or literarily traversed regularly overlapped, collided, and assembled with metanarratives such as the frontier thesis and manifest destiny.

In these real-and-imaginative encounters, western authors, travellers, emigrants, and tourists argued for certain ways of space-related thinking and acting, some of which asserted themselves while others were forgotten, suppressed, or replaced by concepts that appealed to a broader sociocultural spectrum or prevailing political, economic, and racial ideologies. The relationships and interactions between dominant and alternative (meta)narratives, this book suggests, can be

29 The present book came into being as part of Collaborative Research Centre 1199 "Processes of Spatialization under the Global Condition" and a project titled "Raum-Fiktionen. (Re)Imaginationen des Nationalen an den südlichen und westlichen Peripherien der USA im 19. Jahrhundert" under the aegis of Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez. Her research elucidates the role of Florida as a transitory realm for runaway slaves and other "unruly" spatial entrepreneurs. The book at hand is accompanied by a sister thesis written by my friend and colleague Deniz Bozkurt (to be published as volume 14 of the *Dialectics of the Global* series under the title *Imagining Southern Spaces: Hemispheric and Transatlantic Souths in Antebellum US Writings*) who traces spatial imaginations of the American South through the lens of manifold national, (trans)regional, and global connections. Together, these efforts make visible the complexities of a nation entangled between continental expansionism, regional and global networks, and the search for a spatial identity that culminated in the rise of such metanarratives as manifest destiny and the frontier mythos.

made visible through the lens and expressed through the language of spatialization processes, consisting of spatial formats (i.e. patterns of thinking and acting "spatially" that assist in the visualization and communication of spaces that exist subconsciously or metaphorically), spatial orders (i.e. the products of spatialization processes that are scalable from local to global orders), and spatial imaginations as the creative and aesthetic mechanisms that engender, perform, negotiate, affirm, or subvert spatial formats and orders.[30] Cultural discourses provide toolsets that enable actors to attach experiential forms to abstract concepts of space. Recognizing these expressions or speech acts, for instance in the form of spatial metaphors, allegories, identities, or intertextual networks, is the task of literary and cultural studies. Using this analytical approach thus enables a critical re-evaluation and revision of placemaking dynamics within an equally coherent and disruptive theoretical framework.

While some of the envisioned spatial configurations eventually resulted in today's western states as political constituents of the US, the examined literary accounts were by no means only preoccupied with ideas of the nation-state as an axiomatic generator of an American identity that celebrated frontier violence and settler colonialism. Instead, some sources reveal complex regional reconfigurations, while others expand their discursive trajectories to the Caribbean and archipelagic networks of the Pacific hemisphere. As a result, the "spatially literate" analysis of these sources complicates views that perceive national, regional, or global identities either as prerequisites or outcomes of historical (spatialization) processes by asking:

1. What spatial imaginations, formats, and orders reveal themselves in an analytical sample of nineteenth-century US literature and personal accounts and how do they speak to each other intertextually?
2. What strategies do they use to convey, confirm, or challenge canonized spatial narratives such as the frontier thesis, manifest destiny, errand into wilderness, agrarian empire, or settler colonialism and what alternatives do they suggest?
3. How do spatial discourses scale the relationship of imaginations of space and how do they negotiate the tensions between the sociocultural identities connected to them?
4. How do literary and cultural discourses function regarding the ordering of the American nation-state and empire during the nineteenth century and how do they continue to inform contemporary discourses on different scales?

30 The terminology of spatialization processes will be explained in more detail in the methodological chapter below.

In asking these questions, the book proposes an epistemological reconceptualization of the American West alongside literary, cultural, historical, social, geographical, philosophical, political, and economic vectors. It understands itself as working within the interdisciplinary and intertextual frameworks of new historicism, critical regionalism, and cultural geography as its main supporting pillars. Together, these approaches conceptualize a West that works alongside many "multiscalar trajectories".[31] This means that rather than attempting to arrive at a coherent definition – for instance as a fictive, "authentic", or empirically observable space – the following views the discursive interplays of literary or sociocultural performances and (underlying or overarching) epistemic trajectories as the locality of spatialization processes that (de)construct, transform, and (de)stabilize imaginations of the West and in this manner produce a multilayered and often contradictory spectrum of "westernness". In terms of narratology, this means going beyond the discourses that emanate from singular textualities and instead exploring "how the social discourse represented in cumulative texts constructs an overall narrative".[32] Such a nonlinear engagement stands in contrast to approaches that operate alongside more clear-cut categories, for example Richard Etulain's proposed tripartite epistemology of going "to-the-West" (i.e. the frontier period until 1890), being "in-the-West" (i.e. the regional period until World War 2), and moving "beyond-the-West" (i.e. the post-regional period until today). Literary scholar Thomas Lyon attempted to discern the "real West" from the "mythic West" according to parameters such as "seriousness" or "maturity" of western authors and texts.[33] To be sure, the present book does not mark an attempt to minimize the usefulness – and to a degree, the necessity – of periodization and categorization; nor does it make the relativistic suggestion that the West exists only in our minds. Conversely, it aims to lay bare the discourses that contributed to or resisted the mental structuring of the American West into unequivocal categories, periods, or narratives.

In doing so, the following does not simply look for spatial "breadcrumbs" inside the boundaries of American Studies' familiar analytical triangle of race, class, and gender. In contrast, it accesses and re-approximates these categories from a radically new perspective by placing space and spatialization processes

31 N. Glick Schiller and A. Çağlar, "Displacement, Emplacement and Migrant Newcomers: Rethinking Urban Sociabilities within Multiscalar Power", *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 23 (2016) 1, pp. 17–34, at 19.

32 F. Usbeck, *Ceremonial Storytelling: Ritual and Narrative in Post-9/11 US Wars*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2019, p. 20.

33 See D. M. Wrobel, "The Literary West and the Twentieth Century", in: W. Deverell (ed.), *A Companion to the American West*, Hoboken: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 460–480, at 463–464.

at the analytical centre of the triangle. In the following chapters, detaching spatiality from its status as a trendy but exotic side activity yields numerous advantages. First, it reveals previously hidden patterns, for instance of political resistance and cultural dissent. Second, it adds a new dimension to the representations, experiences, and performances of spatial actors like economic subalterns, minorities, and women concerning their positioning inside or outside of dominant geographical identity vectors from "Americanness" or local colour. This enables the present study to address complex questions, for instance how racial minorities and social outsiders gain potentialities to subvert or transform spatial narratives that hail western expansionism as the nucleus of American identity.

Compiling an analytical corpus that speaks to these issues, however, can leave one feeling "like Krylov's Inquisitive Man, who didn't notice the elephant in the museum".[34] This proverbial animal materializes in the questions: Why select these texts instead of others and what (if anything) makes them so special (or "spatial") to warrants their exemplary study in the context of spatialization processes? Finally, why implicitly purport a literary canon of nineteenth-century spatiality? At their core, these questions lead back to issues of American exceptionalism and nagging suspicions that Americanists in particular "work through a deep-rooted and inextricable exceptionalism" because, as Evan Rhodes asks provocatively, "how does one *do* American studies without 'America' as the object of study?"[35] This quasi-solipsistic conundrum seems all the more problematic from the perspective of European Americanists who tend to engage in exceptionalist discourses through an "objective" gaze of seemingly detached, innocuous observers. Responding to this self-enhancing circle of exceptionalism, this book proposes an open-ended re-examination of various primary sources, not as uniquely spatial, American, or western but as discursive nodes in larger, interconnected networks of spatial imaginations.

Such an approach is not free of risks, particularly regarding anything-goes approaches that see space everywhere. Quite literally, this issue comes with the "spatial territory" and is linked to the general impossibility of "escaping space" as a universal facet of the human condition that leaves "none of us [...] outside or beyond geography".[36] The holistic nature of anything spatial and its omnipresence

34 F. Dostoyevsky, *Bésy* [*Demons*], R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky (trans.), New York: Vintage Books, 2006 [1871], p. 38.

35 E. Rhodes, "Beyond the Exceptionalist Thesis, a Global American Studies 2.0", *American Quarterly* 64 (2012) 4, pp. 899–912, at 900; see F. Kelleter, "Transnationalism: The American Challenge", *Review of International American Studies* 2 (2007) 3, pp. 29–33, at 29.

36 E. W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, p. 7.

in all aspects of life imprint themselves in manifold instances, making those who look for them susceptible to finding anything anywhere. "The problem is", Henri Lefebvre ponders, "that any search for space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise: enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about. What texts are special enough to provide the basis for a 'textual' analysis?"[37] Lefebvre circumnavigates the dilemma by appealing to the "*universal* notions" of Hegelian and Marxist philosophy that promise to shed light on "the concepts of *production* and of the act of *producing*" space.[38] For the purpose of this book, however, the issue of canonical or selective western literariness, or what might be deemed the "spatial literacy" of western texts, cannot be answered conclusively, not even through Lefebvrian rhetoric. Instead, the examined texts here are understood not as canonical but as samples taken from a deep, wide, and interconnected ocean of American literatures and cultures, allowing for a litmus test and tangential approximation of western spatiality. The following takes samples from the topmost and most visible layers, yet also probes deeper into a tangle of journals, diaries, letters, interviews, newspapers, memoirs, and paintings, some of which over time have sunken beyond our sight and populate the deeper strata of these imaginary waters.

The present effort thus accepts Annette Kolodny's invitation to let go of the "Grand Obsessions" of American Studies and "not decide *beforehand* what constitutes literariness but rather expose ourselves to different kinds and contexts so as to recover the ways they variously inscribe the stories of first contact".[39] This is attempted by retracing and interweaving the movements of people and narratives throughout the American West, thereby emphasizing the specific modes of expression that undergird(ed) or resist(ed) the construction of western identities via spatialization processes. Lastly, it also invites comparisons with similar or contrasting developments in the spatial histories of other places.

The book does not proceed chronologically because the continent's westering also did not happen evenly through time and space but rather in trickles, flows, waves, and on a variety of scales. Nonetheless, it follows a general sequence of conquest and thus cannot stand unquestioned. In fact, this very structure might hint at underlying preoccupations concerning "the West" and the purview of spatial imaginations itself. It moreover calls into question perspectives of the West that already imply a Eurocentric, colonizing viewpoint and bias towards a

37 H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Hoboken: Blackwell, 2005, pp. 14–15.
38 Ibid., p. 15.
39 A. Kolodny, "Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions: Notes Toward a New Literary History of the American Frontiers", *American Literature* 64 (1992) 1, pp. 1–18, at 14.

"pioneering, male 'American' spirit always under threat from races and cultures beyond the border".[40] After all, for most Native Americans the West was no periphery but the centre of existence. For Mexican-Americans, the West was (and still is) the North, and for those in the former British and French colonies of today's Canada, it is the South.[41] Contemporary identity politics might furthermore understand the act of looking at the West through the works of mostly white authors as appropriating their views and agendas, including those considered racist or misogynistic today. Acknowledging these concerns, it seems important to realize that every perspective alignment represents an exercise in reduction. All examinations, no matter how critical, consolidate dominant axioms since discussing them as being dominant substantiates the very core of their authority. As will be seen, the West's diversity, complexity, and fuzziness profoundly demonstrates the limitations of today's seemingly clear-cut (moral) categories, thus asking us to reconsider the presumptions under which we as "global citizens" partake in today's domineering discourses.

In response to these challenges and based on a concept laid out in Brent Hayes Edwards' *The Practice of Diaspora*, the book enters a dialogue with the American West in an effort of bridging historical difference through what Edwards terms *décalage*, namely "the reestablishment of a prior unevenness or diversity [by] the taking away of something that was added in the first place, something artificial".[42] *Décalage* refers to the uneven patterns in time or space that are hidden under seemingly clear-cut, homogenous discourses.[43] Connecting with and making sense of these patterns necessitates "a process of linking or connecting across gaps – a practice we might term *articulation*".[44] The notion of articulatory practice

40 H. K. Bhabha, "The Other Question …: Homi K. Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse", *Screen* 24 (1983) 6, pp. 18–36, at 22.

41 From a Mexican perspective, the American West is often imagined as "*el norte*, the temporary or permanent destination for millions of Mexicans who have been forced to cross the northern border into the United States, at times searching for political stability and refuge, but generally seeking better economic opportunities than those found in the nation of origin, *la patria*" (J. Martínez-Saldaña, "La Frontera Del Norte", in: V. J. Matsumoto and B. Allmendinger [eds.], *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 370–384, at 376).

42 B. H. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 14.

43 K. K. Robinson, "My Journey From Louisiana to Havana, and Back Again", *The Nation*, 15 July 2016, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/my-journey-from-louisiana-to-havana-and-back-again/.

44 The book discusses members of the black diaspora who encounter similar regimes of oppression but gravitate towards opposite ends of the political spectrum, for example "black

as a link between structural/spatial and textual/discursive parameters then becomes central for the work of this book. This is based on the notion that the subjects of literary spatialization processes in general, and that of the American West as a generator of ideologies and identities, are characterized by uncertainties, differences, and diversities. To navigate the seemingly distant yet deceptively familiar dynamics between text and space, practicing articulation means finding one's own voice by hearing that of others. "Articulation", Edwards suggests, "functions as a concept-metaphor that allows us to consider relations of 'difference within unity' [and] non-naturalizable patterns of linkage between disparate [...] elements".[45] In his essay "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance", Stuart Hall adds that articulation

> is always, necessarily, a 'complex structure': a structure in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities. This requires that the mechanisms which connect dissimilar features must be shown – since no 'necessary correspondence' or expressive homology can be assumed as given. It also means – since the combination is a structure (an articulated combination) and not a random association – that there will be structured relations between its parts, i.e. relations of dominance and subordination.[46]

Building upon these definitions, the book recognizes that spatially and temporally disparate locations and people may become shared sites and actors of knowledge and cultural productions. The spatially literate excavation of these sites becomes possible through *décalage*, while the language of spatialization processes provides the means to articulate findings. In this manner, spatial literacy turns into one of "the mechanisms which connect dissimilar features" via the production and negotiation of (potentially new or unstudied) spatial epistemologies of the American West and their enunciation on different scales from the local to the global. These interactions form the "complex structures" that become visible first by assuming the existence of a semantic dimension through which texts articulate spatial subjects, and second by developing a typology that can access and unravel these articulations. Entering a productive dialogue with nineteenth-century sources in this manner requires a heightened sense of openness and innovation on both sides of history, lest it not turn into a

writers seeking solace from Jim Crow in Paris, while simultaneously Africans were struggling against French colonialism" (Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, p. 11).

45 Ibid.; see T. M. Davis, *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, & Literature*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011, p. 150.

46 S. Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance", in: UNESCO (ed.), *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, Paris: UNESCO, 1980, pp. 305–345, at 325.

presentist soliloquy that deals in the codification of self-fulfilling "spatial prophecies". Framing this endeavour as part of an unbiased or "objective" exercise seems like an equally distant possibility as it means entering dialogue from a position of historical hindsight and moral authority. This, however, would obscure the very access to a wealth of spatial imaginations by piling even more layers on top of the encrusted surface of western metanarratives and their "correct" interpretations, hence defeating the very purpose of this book.[47]

47 Such an approach would run the additional risk of producing "whiggish histories" that interpret the past with the goal to validate current belief systems (J. A. Hijiya, "Why the West is Lost", *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51 [1994] 2, pp. 276–292, at 284). The term was first introduced by British historian Herbert Butterfield, although its application and use remain matters of debate since "[o]ne person's whig history is another's revisionism" (P. J. Bowler, "The Whig Interpretation of Geology", *Biology and Philosophy* 3 (1988), pp. 99–103, at 100).