Space, place, and mobility are increasingly prominent topics in contemporary French and Francophone fiction. While we can arguably situate the development of this spatial trend in the aftermath of World War II, the current enthusiasm for all matters spatial has been considerably fueled by key aspects of globalization: the intensification (in both frequency and speed) of travel, the proliferation of transit spaces (hotels, train stations, airports, etc.), and the emergence and subsequent expansion of new technologies. In this collaborative project we reflect on the treatment of space, place, and networks of mobility in works by French author Jean Echenoz (b. 1947), and Belgian author Jean-Philippe Toussaint (b. 1957). We are particularly interested in examining how certain spatial concepts coined by anthropologists (e.g. Marc Augé’s “non-place”) and geographers (e.g. Michel Lussault’s “hyper-place”) shed light on the interaction between humans and space in an age where technological advancement challenges not only our perception of space and place, but also the very identity of both places and the people who experience them.

Alina Cherry is an Associate Professor of French and the author of Claude Simon: Fashioning the Past by Writing the Present (Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2016). Her current research examines questions of space and place, literary geography, and intersections between the humanities and mobilities studies.

Sandra Rodriguez Bontemps is a Ph.D. candidate in French in the department of Classical and Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures. Her dissertation, “Global Wanderings: The Poetics of Space and Mobility in the Works of Jean-Philippe Toussaint and Jean Echenoz,” explores various facets of global travel and spatial practices as reflections of the complex nature of our hypermodern existence.