

Territories and Histories:
Transgressive ‘Space Travels’ and ‘Time Travels’ in Grass’s *Dog Years*

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“Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe
which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.”

- Walter Benjamin: “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

I

Günter Grass’s name is inextricably linked to his first novel from 1959, *The Tin Drum*, famous for its dwarf narrator and protagonist, Oskar Matzerath, and perhaps rendered even more famous by Volker Schlöndorff’s “Palme d’Or” film (1979) based on it. However, this novel’s well-deserved status has somehow led to the neglect of Grass’s second novel, *Dog Years*, published in 1963. *Dog Years* is in fact an extraordinary accomplishment that in some ways surpasses *The Tin Drum* in both narrative and thematic complexity. The novel constitutes the third part of Grass’s *Danzig Trilogy* (the first part being *The Tin Drum*, the second part the novella *Cat and Mouse* published in 1961). All three works are set in the unique cultural setting of Danzig and the delta of the Vistula River and they are part of the artistic ‘movement’ usually referred to as ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ (‘a coming to terms with the past’) as they deal with the rise of Nazism, the war experience and the post-war era of the German ‘Wirtschaftswunder’.

Dog Years in particular focuses on the region's mixed ethnicities and complex historical background. The novel comprises three books narrated by three different narrators who each focuses on a different period. Grass thereby stages a *multiperspectivism* that contributes to the complexity of the novel in that the three storylines both supplement and at times contradict each other. The novel is populated by a range of important characters, humans as well as scarecrows and dogs, but its two main characters are Eduard Amsel (or Brauxel along with several other aliases), a half Jew and artist, and Walter Matern, a miller's son, an actor and a member of both the Communist and the Nazi Party. Eduard and Walter are the narrators of the first and third book respectively, whereas Harry Liebenau narrates the second book. The novel is about the friendship between Eduard and Walter as it unfolds before, during and after World War II. The friendship functions as a prism through which Grass manages to evoke a true plethora of themes such as guilt, persecution, victimisation, amnesia, purity and racism.

Dog Years offers a dark, albeit brilliant, satiric and comic commentary on the German people's view on the rise of Nazism and war time events. It weaves together a variety of dense, evocative narrative threads consisting of oddly patterned and bizarre events circling around a cast of petit bourgeois Danzigers. The novel depicts the banal unwitting horror of everyday life during Hitler's rise to power and the destruction of humanity and civil society during the war years, just as it articulates a satirical-ironic critique of the self-congratulatory exultation of the post-war Adenauer generation

when the political and economic establishment mostly consisted of those who had inexplicably forgotten their involvement in Germany's recent past.

II

Salman Rushdie has quite rightly argued, in his 1984 essay "Günter Grass", that Grass is one of the foremost exponents of a so-called "literature of migration" characterised by its migrating heroes, its migrant/migrating perspective and its themes of unbelonging and disorientation (Rushdie 277). It is my belief that Rushdie's assertion has not yet been given the attention it deserves. Hence, this article is an attempt to explore some of the themes and discursive strategies typical in both Grass and the literature of migration as such.

In what follows I aim to examine what I choose to call 'space travels' and 'time travels' and the way in which they are interrelated in *Dog Years*. The three narrator-protagonists (along with many other characters in the novel) have lost their hometown as a result of their emigration from Danzig to West Germany after the war (an experience similar to Grass's own). In other words, their emigration to the West implies the loss of the East – but also the loss of the past. In this sense their forced migration to the West causes the narrators to travel back in time, both in order to reconquer or preserve the memory of the past and the East, but also in order to understand the present: the space travel in the present necessitates a time travel into the past.

One usually associates Grass's trilogy with the city of Danzig (now Gdańsk) and the petit bourgeois world, just as the period linked with the Third Reich is generally taken as the historical period in which the action of the trilogy unfolds. However, I will argue that both these points need reconsideration. In short, my aim is to show the complexity of the spatial and temporal configuration in *Dog Years*. As to the spatial configuration I will show, on the one hand, that Danzig is much more than just a petit bourgeois world, and, on the other hand, that the novel is about much more than the city of Danzig, although this city certainly occupies a central role. Instead, the novel's topography can be described as a heterogeneous, *impure* space where migration and cross-cultural border crossings play a central part. As to the temporal configuration, I will show that Grass does not limit himself to the years linked to National Socialism, although the narrated time primarily consists of this period. Instead, time in *Dog Years* can be described as a boundless reservoir, a virtuality bestowed with the power of constantly remodelling the official version of history and the present. Time, therefore, is to be regarded as a *destabilising* factor in Grass, which means that time never assembles the novel's different elements into any organic, coherent whole. In this way the novel is formally structured as a puzzle in which the pieces do not fit together.

Why this relatively narrow focus on *Dog Years*? Besides feeling inclined to rehabilitate this novel's status in the overall *œuvre* of Grass, I want to use the limited focus on *Dog Years* to exemplify my argument in a more precise manner. As it is, many of the points reached in this article about 'space travels' and 'time travels' also apply to other works by Grass (*The Tin Drum*, *The Flounder* and *Too Far Afield* in

particular), just as they apply to the broader genre of migration literature with its thematic focus on home, memory, belonging and displacement.

III

Danzig and the suburb of Langfuhr may rightly be regarded as a microcosm with a unique representational potential in Grass's work. As the often quoted passage in *Dog Years* reads: "There was once a city – in addition to the suburbs of Ohra, Schidlitz, Oliva, Emmaus, Praust, Sankt Albrecht, Schellmühl, and the seaport suburb of Neufahrwasser, it had a suburb named Langfuhr. Langfuhr was so big and so little that whatever happens or could happen in this world, also happened or could have happened in Langfuhr" (Grass, *Dog Years* 337; henceforth only the page number is listed when quoting the novel). With passages such as this, it comes as no surprise that Grass's work is considered to be about Danzig. Hanspeter Brode speaks of Langfuhr, for example, "as a mirror of the world, as *theatrum mundi*" (Brode 59, my translation), and Danzig is "for the period of time depicted by Grass [as] a centre of universal historical importance" (Brode 62). Thus Brode correctly attributes an essential role to Danzig-Langfuhr. At the same time it is important to acknowledge Brode's rejection of Danzig-Langfuhr as a timeless allegory; the city must be 'read' in its *concrete historicity*. But what does Brode mean by "universal historical importance"? In my opinion, the representational role of Danzig can be divided into two, in many ways opposing roles. First of all, and this is what Brode refers to and what the critics usually agree upon, Danzig-Langfuhr holds the seeds of what turns out to become world

history, that is, the seeds of Hitler, National Socialism and World War II. This *negative* quality is closely related to the petit bourgeois society in Danzig. Secondly, and this is not always sufficiently appreciated, but it is an important point for my overall argument, Grass's Danzig area also possesses a multiethnic, *positive* quality, which makes it a territory with a certain international ambience. Thus, regionalism in Grass points in two directions: provincialism and cosmopolitanism.

IV

Throughout the trilogy, the petit bourgeoisie is regarded as an organism ripe with future developments (“zukunftssträchtiges Kleinbürgertum”, as it says in the German original of *The Tin Drum*). Before and during World War I, Danzig belonged to the German Empire, but after the war it became a free city under the League of Nations. However, during the interwar years, the majority of the population remained German. The Danziger Germans longed to be “heim ins Reich” and therefore they welcomed Hitler's idea of a new Great German Empire. Grass was born in this period, namely in 1927, the son of a German, Protestant father and a Polish-Cassubian, Catholic mother. Grass's family owned a grocery shop and thus belonged to the very petit bourgeoisie which is typically regarded as one of the premises for Hitler's invasion: “Their ‘plight’ was to be the pretext of Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939” (Hollington 2). When depression hit Germany, the petit bourgeoisie were struggling to survive and they were easy targets for Hitler's demagoguery. It is in this sense that Danzig can be viewed as a microcosm of what I choose to call the negative impulses of the period.

There is indisputable ambivalence in Grass's relationship with the petit bourgeoisie. At times he depicts it with affection, but more often he portrays it with ruthless cynicism. If one is to talk about a nostalgic tone in the novel (and nostalgia is a recurring theme in the literature of migration and exile, cf. authors such as Milan Kundera and W.G. Sebald), it is rarely to be found in Grass's depictions of the petit bourgeois world, but rather in his delineation of a more general Danzig atmosphere evoked by the descriptions of architecture, street life, beaches, trams and the constant invocation of place-names. As W.G. Cunliffe remarks in relation to the paradoxical function of the exile's memory, in this case Grass's memory in *Dog Years*: "The accuracy of the background springs from the fact that the exile remembers his lost home with barely-suppressed nostalgia for its speech, customs and place-names. Yet the same accuracy forces the narrator to include, for example, the concentration camp of Stutthof, near Danzig, which duly appears in Grass's picture of the region. Reality precludes the attitude of nostalgia" (Cunliffe 95). Hence, it is very difficult for nostalgia to sustain any significant role in Grass's technique simply because the harsh reality of his past precludes it.

Dog Years contains numerous examples of a cynical unmasking of the empty ideals of the petit bourgeoisie. The episodes concerning cynology and the genealogy of the dogs, for instance, are ironic commentaries on the obsession of the petit bourgeoisie and the Nazis with genealogy and purity. In the example below Harry narrates an episode from his childhood where the family's dog is examined by a dog expert:

The organ of the German Shepherd Dog Association sent a cynologist, whom my father was obliged to turn out of the house. For this dog expert began at once to carp at our Harras' pedigree. The names, he declared, were revolting and alien to the breed; there were no data about the bitch that had whelped Senta; the animal itself was not bad, but it would be his duty to inveigh against such methods of dog raising; precisely because this was a historical dog, a sense of responsibility was in order (171).

The irony is unmistakable and the novel's frequent references to dogs and their pedigree parody the idea of mythical Aryan origins which Hitler and his racist pseudo-authorities claimed for the German people. What is more, the irony is emphasised by the fact that Hitler's own dog, Prinz, is said to have impure origins: "Under a regime obsessed with purity of genealogy, Grass stresses that all the ethnic and religious groups, which the Nazis set on one another, had been mixed from the beginnings of settlement in the region. Not even the pedigree Alsatian is 'pure' because three generations back he is descended from an indisputably Slavic she-wolf" (Preece 63). The example is only one of many in which the illusions of national and racial purity are deconstructed from within through inevitable differences and impurities.

Another example of anti-sentimentality towards the petit bourgeoisie concerns Stutthof, which is invoked (according to Cunliffe) as a consequence of Grass's exilic and thereby accurate memory. In one of Harry's 'love letters' to his cousin Tulla Pokriefke (the novel's second book is written in the epistolary form and comprises more than a hundred letters from Harry to Tulla), it says:

Stutthof: on your account!

That little word took on more and more meaning. “Hey, you! You got a yen for Stutthof?” – “If you don’t keep that trap of yours shut, you’ll end up in Stutthof.” A sinister word had moved into apartment houses, went upstairs and downstairs, sat at kitchen tables, was supposed to be a joke, and some actually laughed: “They’re making soap in Stutthof now, it makes you want to stop washing” (294).

First of all, this is one of the examples of what John Reddick calls “ironic contrast” (Reddick 16) between form (love letters) and content (concentration camps), and this contrasting technique is in itself an anti-sentimental device (in the same manner Grass uses the adventure formula “Once upon a time...” in his famous rendering of the Crystal Night in *The Tin Drum*). To speak in the language of Georg Lukács, the example can be described as an unmasking of the incommensurability between soul and form in modernity as Grass, in accordance with Lukács, incorporates the “fragmentary nature of the world’s structure into the world of forms” (Lukács 39). Secondly, Grass shows us how the word Stutthof is imperceptibly absorbed into everyday conversation in a supposedly innocent way, except for the fact that there is nothing innocent about Stutthof. The quotation insinuates the complicity of the petit bourgeoisie, who are laughing even though they have a pretty good idea of what is going on at Stutthof. What Grass illustrates in a masterly way are the mechanisms of collective repression formally articulated through slogans which both *conceal* and *reveal* reality. Finally, the theme of purity, also present in the parody on cynology, is invoked once again. As one of Harry’s examples implies: what is usually a symbol of purity, i.e. soap, is no longer pure as it is made of ‘them’, the ‘impure’ Jews.

However, Danzig-Langfuhr and the novel as such consist not only of the petit bourgeoisie. This fact is not always properly recognised by the critics who tend to focus exclusively on this milieu. Volker Neuhaus for example claims that “The ‘Danzig Trilogy’ confines itself to the world of the petit bourgeoisie” (Neuhaus 20, my translation). As I will hopefully make clear in what follows, *Dog Years* also incorporates other ‘worlds’. It is true that the petit bourgeois circle dominates the Grassian canvas by providing the prevailing grey colour that Grass is so fond of, but, at the same time, what really distinguishes the work of Grass, and *Dog Years* specifically, are the small but nevertheless intensive and colourful spots that stand out from the general greyness of the petit bourgeois universe. In *Dog Years* both Jenny Brunies, the gypsy, Oswald Brunies, the humanist teacher who refuses to fly the Nazi flag and ends up at Stutthof, and Eduard Amsel, the half Jew and artist, are examples of colourful outsiders who transgress the otherwise enclosed provincial circle of the petit bourgeoisie. And as readers we are led to sympathise with these transgressive and impure characters; they represent the positive counter-images to provincialism.

One example that explicitly indicates the novel’s high estimation of Oswald Brunies is when Brauxel/Eduard admits that the whole novel is actually a tribute to Oswald: “the authors’ consortium is planning to build him a monument” (102). However, as always in Grass there are no simple black and white divisions. Even though Eduard and Jenny, together with Oswald, may pass for the novel’s positive

artistic-cosmopolitan protagonists, they are involved with the ‘Wernemacht’ during the war as they work as Hitler’s employees at the German Ballet in Berlin (the same is true of Oskar in *The Tin Drum* when he travels with Bebra’s ‘Fronttheater’). However, this somewhat dubious involvement with the Nazis cannot hide the fact that Jenny and, especially, Eduard are the true heroes of the novel. Both of them have been victims of persecution throughout their childhood, on the one hand for being a gypsy and a Jew, on the other hand, for being too fat. One of the key episodes in the novel is the depiction of their simultaneous (literal) metamorphoses – both transformations trickered by Tulla’s and Walter’s violent persecutions – into thin artistic figures: Eduard is transformed into the chain-smoking Haseloff later to become master of the Berlin Ballet, and Jenny is transformed into the perfect ballet body who eventually joins Haseloff in Berlin and becomes his star performer (Grass’s wife at the time of writing *Dog Years* was a ballet dancer).

Hence, the negative but nevertheless emblematic qualities of Danzig related to the petit bourgeois world are not the only qualities in the novel. As Brode acknowledges, there is also a more positive side to the city, namely that of cosmopolitanism and multi-ethnicity:

The Danzig milieu, this mixing of different peoples and cultures – German, Polish, Cassubian –, a Catholicism mixed with pagan elements, the mysterious widths of the Vistula landscape, Prussian mythology, and the gypsies in the woods near the former German-Polish border (e.g. in *Dog Years*), the atmosphere of sea-port with far-reaching connections to all the other neighbouring states in the Baltic Sea and beyond, and furthermore a dimension blurred in prehistory (in *The Flounder*) (Brode 22f.).

The Grassian model as described by Brode is not only a model of the petit bourgeois world (as claimed by Neuhaus); on the contrary, Brode stresses Danzig's hybrid qualities, both in terms of population, culture, religion, territory and history. Grass's literary cartography can therefore be described as a map of heterogeneities, impurities, collisions and transgressions.

There are constant reminders of transgressions of borders and clashes between segmentations in Grass's novels. The inclusion of the Cassubians (a Slavic-Pomeranian people) and their landscape add (cultural and ethnic) diversity to the fictional universe, introducing a completely different reality than that of the petit bourgeoisie in the city of Danzig. The Cassubian reality is a rural and austere reality that is more oriented towards the past than the future. In short, it is a reality that accentuates the Danzig setting as a cross-cultural border territory. Another example: when the gypsy Bibandengero hands over the bundle that contains Jenny Brunies, we are told that "Amsel isn't sure whether or not this is Polish territory. (...) Neither of them sees the border" (122). Incidents like these are reminders of the blurring and displacement of borders, the territorialisations and deterritorialisations, that take place on this geopolitical/geographical level in the novel. In addition, the handover of Jenny at the border underlines her own status as a 'Grenzgänger'. As Roger Bromley has rightly pointed out in regard to migrant narratives in general: "Each deterritorialisation (of people, of identity, of form or genre) constitutes and extends the territory itself; it is a way to keep on opening up meanings. We are talking about radical refiguration:

against boundary, limit and demarcation” (Bromley 100). Following Bromley, we come upon an extension of meaning in Grass as a result of the complexity and extension of territory. Grass achieves this, as we shall see below, by activating or actualising the inherent potentialities of a given space.

VI

The rural countryside east of Danzig plays an important role in *Dog Years*, the beginning of which is set in the landscape where the Vistula flows into the Baltic Sea. The Vistula is endowed with an enormous symbolic value throughout the novel and can be regarded as an image of the Heraclitian river-bed, that is, a symbol of the eternal flow of time. The Vistula can be characterised as pure potentiality in that it is a reservoir from which yet untold stories may flow. In the words of Brauchsel/Brauxel: “What had long been forgotten rose to memory, floating on its back or stomach, with the help of the Vistula” (11). Hence, the Vistula becomes a metaphor for history and memory (and Mnemosyne, mother of the muses, is also the one who grants the poets authority and inspiration).

In Grass’s work history is always in motion but without purpose, inner logic and coherence (this explains the oddly patterned micro-structure of the novel). History is ultimately seen as *catastrophe*. The remembrance of a problematical past is determined by the way time as a *creative* filter discloses history as being replete with forgotten stories which in turn are endowed with a potential to persistently modify this very same history. History can therefore no longer serve as a metaphysical point of

anchorage: firstly, because it contains an immanent potential for micro-political stories undermining its own stability; and, secondly, because it, in the novels of the anti-Hegelian Grass, is not teleological or equipped with any ideological final point.

The beginning of *Dog Years* presents an image of the Vistula as a river that both gives and takes. On the one hand, it constantly throws up new things left behind in the dustbin of history, it ‘hurls wreckage in front of the narrator’s feet’, objects just waiting to be unfolded and ‘told’. This is what Michael Hollington means when he speaks of “the river Vistula as an image of the course of history, a kind of preserving fluid in which concrete evidence of the reality of the past is gathered” (Hollington 68). So, in the novel history is a constant *presence*, or to be more precise, a presence of concrete objects, ruins and wreckage in the Benjaminian sense. However, as opposed to Benjamin’s angel of history, Grass never turns away from history – rather, he confronts it despite its brutality. Grass’s endeavour is quite simply to rescue the past and its objects from oblivion – in *Fünf Jahrzehnte* (“Five Decades”) Grass thus speaks of his “fixation on the objectedness” (Grass, *Fünf Jahrzehnte* 15, my translation). On the other hand, history does not only provide the narrator with objects and potential stories, it also swallows up all that comes close to it – and this, literally, means everything because nothing in Grass can hide from history. This engulfing power of history is explicitly evoked through the repetition of the word “took” nine times in relation to the Vistula on page eleven in the novel. So, on one hand, nothing escapes history, everything is swallowed up by this irrational monster, but at the same time

history becomes a reservoir of objects and stories just waiting to be unfolded, and *refolded* into (if not orderly then) meaningful patterns.

As already mentioned, *Dog Years* consists of three books, each concentrating on a specific historical period and each narrated by a different narrator: 1. Eduard, 1917-27; 2. Harry, 1927-45; 3. Walter, 1945-62. At a first glance, this macro-structure only seems to reinforce the idea of Grass as a novelist exclusively focused on the time leading up to and succeeding the Third Reich, just as it gives the reader the impression of a chronological sequence. But as I will try to show, this is only partly true. In a lecture held in 2001 called “Erinnerungslosigkeit” (“Amnesia”), Karl Heinz Bohrer criticised the German politicians, historians and writers for their inability to “fernerinnern”, that is, to remember the distant past, which according to Bohrer has led to an *unhealthy obsession* with the years linked to the Third Reich:

Without going further into these new accounts of historical epochs (first and foremost of the nineteenth and twentieth century), which are marked by structural and causal clarities, one can nonetheless mention two main causes to the amnesia. First: German history is seen through the prehistory of the Third Empire. Second: A German history before Bismarck’s founding of the Empire does actually not exist in this perspective – and what is more: The concepts “German” and “German nation” become disqualified as historically obsolete (Bohrer 18f., my translation).

Bohrer may very well have a point, but in that case I believe Grass might be an exception to the rule. Grass never portrays historical periods with any structural or causal clarity; he does quite the opposite, always emphasising the chaotic and absurd nature of history, and always trying to generate the potentiality of history, that is, the

forgotten and absent stories (“whose frolicsome black fables portray the forgotten face of history” as it reads in the Nobel Academy’s statement). And though there is no doubt that Grass’s work in general is preoccupied with the prehistory of the Third Reich, Grass nevertheless expands the historical horizon in *Dog Years*. So when Bohrer claims “that the present time of our epoch has become more and more broad, and therefore the past has become shorter” (Bohrer 21), it is, as far as I am concerned, only partly true when speaking of Grass. Undoubtedly, the present is expanded in Grass, but at the same time he stretches the historical thread of the past. Actually, this stretching is precisely what results in the broadening of our present. Merging the past and the present is precisely what Bohrer believes literature should carry out in the first place: “To poetic memory – memory is since the Greek Mnemosyne something like the basic definition of poetry – it is not about an objective invoking of past events, rather about the creation of an imaginative link between my present time and the past” (Bohrer 11f.). In my opinion, this is exactly what Grass is doing in his novels, in that memory and amnesia are intrinsically linked to the time-space configuration and to the ‘archaeological’ discovery of cultural and ethnic heterogeneity.

VII

But let us take a closer look at *how* Grass actually engenders such a past and, furthermore, what implications this has for the territorial design of the novel. In short, I aim to show that Grass’s archaeological meanderings into the past are a means of expanding the field, or the territory, of the present, of making it diverse and pluralistic.

In the first book of *Dog Years*, Eduard informs the reader about Walter's ancestors and describes how the Materns came to be millers:

When at length the governor, Count Rapp, signed the capitulation of the fortress, August Matern in out-of-the-way Nickelswalde counted the Danish specie and two-thirds pieces, the quickly rising rubles, the Hamburg mark pieces, the Laubtalers and convention talers, the little bags of Dutch gulden and the newly issued Danzig paper money; he found himself nicely off and abandoned himself to the joys of reconstruction (20f.).

The territory of the Danzig region is here shown as having a history of international encounters on its soil, traversed, as it was, by Danish, Russian, Hamburgian, Dutch and Danzig currencies. By digging into the distant past and showing us that the Danzig area was quite impure, Grass at the same time ruptures and expands (the reader's comprehension of) the present Danzig territory. He is, so to speak, trying to bring the multiple ethnic, cultural and religious roots of the territory back to life by re-vitalising them (through narration) in the present, which, for its own part, becomes multilayered (Danzig was not the region's only city of plurality: the cities of the Hanseatic League, among them Kant's Königsberg, are other examples of German dominated Baltic cities that, though small, were cosmopolitan in terms of commerce and population; furthermore, it could be argued that Kant's cosmopolitanism springs, like Grass's, from *historical* roots as well as from imaginative and ideological commitments). This merging of past and present is best described as a technique of *superimposition* or a manifold exposure. It is a tense configuration in which pasts and presents, myths, legends and world history coexist in a complex constellation. This is what Walter

Benjamin terms a “Jetztzeit”, a now-time, that is, a brief flare of a monadic moment from the continuum of history understood as homogeneous, empty time: “Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad” (Benjamin 262f.). The quoted passage above points to such a monadic crystallisation in which the reader senses the tensions and potentialities of a given space.

Yet another way of amplifying the present by merging it with the past is Grass’s etymological excursions when he points to a certain name’s composite nature. This is what Harry is doing with the names of Tulla and Osterwick, where the following is listed as their etymological and historical roots:

Duller, Tolle, Tullatsch, Thula or Dul, Tul, Thul. When the Pokriefkes were still living in Osterwick, they were tenants on Mosbrauch Hill near the lake, on the Konitz highway. From the middle of the fourteenth century to the time of Tulla’s birth in 1927, Osterwick was written as follows: Ostirwig, Ostirwich, Osterwigh, Osterwig, Osterwyk. Ostrowit, Ostrowite, Osterwieck, Ostrowitte, Ostrôw. The Koschnavians said: Oustewitsch (133).

The passage shows a constellation of coexistent levels of time where myth and legend are interwoven with world history and the present. This narrow focus on a proper name and a place name contains a political dimension by insinuating the chaotic but nonetheless powerful mechanisms of world history. Passages like this underline the plurality, impurity and transformative nature of the Grassian time-space dimension. As Bromley says about ‘narratives for a new belonging’ in general (repeating Homi Bhabha’s words from his introduction to *The Location of Culture*): “The fictions

engage with and renew the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, a space of innovation which interrupts the performance of the present which has cleansed, erased, expelled and buried difference” (Bromley 7).

Bromley’s characterisation fits well with the work of Grass in which the past is re-invented as “a past charged with the time of the now” (Benjamin 261), and thereby the stability and the *stabilising effect* of the present is disturbed. Grass’s narrative thus emerges from a ‘technique of rupture’ because “it makes impossible any return to ethnically closed and ‘centred’ original histories” (Bromley 97). If history, and time as such, has a natural tendency to function palimpsestically, that is, to overwrite its own past layers with the new and present layers thereby presenting itself as a homogenous continuum, Grass struggles against this palimpsestic process of history by way of bringing the overwritten layers back to life and situating them side by side with the present ones.

VIII

In regard to the war years, we can detect an expansion of the novelistic space, now including as an integral part the entire European continent and, at times, the entire world. At one point, we hear about French prisoners of war now carrying blocs of ice in Danzig, and a bit further on in the novel Harry describes how two Ukrainian workers at Liebenau’s carpenter shop had to be replaced by two others: “there were plenty of them – and the first two, so we heard, were sent to Stutthof” (294). These are examples of the international aspect being integrated into the space of Danzig-

Langfuhr, in this case alluding to the exploitation of forced labour that took place during the war. And in relation to Tulla and her mother, we hear that: “She and her mother wore underthings from all over Europe” (314f.). Once again, Europe is – tragically – brought into Danzig. A couple of times distant locations are evoked: “Paris, Belgrade, Salonika” (298), “Salonika, Athens, Belgrade, and Budapest” (349) and “Budapest, Vienna, and Copenhagen” (353). At another point, Harry informs us about the weekly reviews in the cinemas that linked Langfuhr to Europe: “All this and more could be seen not only in the two movie houses of the suburb of Langfuhr, but in Salonika as well” (341f.). All this points to the idea that nobody can escape history: it involves everyone. History is in a way accentuated during war in the sense that everything is interrelated much more intensely. But in addition to this evocation of an international space and what seems to be a universal brotherhood, Grass concurrently emphasises its subtext, i.e. the war, which once again reveals Grass’s technique of ironic contrast. In this case, Danzig’s international atmosphere cannot be counted on the ‘positive’ side as it is brought about by the Nazi desire to dominate the world, a desire that also contained the explicit wish to eradicate and expel ethnic differences within the Reich.

What the above examples show is an expansion of the space in *Dog Years*, thus indicating a more complex spatial framework than just Danzig and the petit bourgeoisie. On the one hand, we come upon an outward spatial movement, e.g. when we hear about the war unfolding around the globe, a war that both Walter Matern and Harry Liebenau participate in – here Danzig ‘*explodes*’ into the world. On the other

hand, we come upon an inward spatial movement, e.g. when we hear about Tulla's underwear from all over Europe – here the world 'implodes' into Danzig. The double mechanism of explosion and implosion is represented in one and the same place, namely in the harbour of Danzig. The harbour, the sea and the waterfront occupy a central topographic role in the *Danzig Trilogy* (as they do in *The Flounder* and *Crabwalk*). The harbour reinforces the international ambience of the city by connecting it to other cities and other 'worlds' just as the harbour area itself is an international or cosmopolitan space where sailors from all over the world meet and collide.

The narrators of *Dog Years* all migrate to Western Germany at some point during the novel, thereby making a final movement away from Danzig. The migration away from Danzig also contributes to the spatial expansion in the novel, in that quite a substantial part of the action now unfolds in the West – the trilogy is also *narrated* from the West. The migration is not just a migration in space but also in time and history, that is from a childhood and adolescence spent in the world of National Socialism to an adulthood spent in the world of Western capitalism and the German 'Wirtschaftswunder'. It is thus a spatial, temporal and indeed also a mental crossing of borders that has wide-ranging but different effects on the main characters, most of them struggling to adapt to their new environment and to the new historical epoch, the era after Nazism.

IX

Let me conclude this article by summarising its main arguments and by making a few points of more general concern. What I have tried to show is how space and time interact in a complexifying way in Grass's *Dog Years* – complexifying because of constant displacements, dislocations and expansions. This complexity and the discursive strategies behind it have not been adequately dealt with in the reception of Grass's work. On the one hand, time in *Dog Years* is not limited to the relatively short period surrounding the Third Reich. The expansion of (narrated) time is one way of making the novel multilayered and plural because Grass portrays history as chaotic and full of absent stories bestowed with a potential to rupture both past and present. Thus, time is a transformative element in the novel. Grass's fascination with 'time travels' is, I would argue, a consequence of his ambition to keep the wound of European history open through monadic crystallisations (configurations pregnant with cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious tensions). On the other hand, space in *Dog Years* is not limited to Danzig and the petit bourgeoisie. The expansion of space is another way of turning the novel into a multilayered and pluralistic text because Grass constantly evokes the inherent hybridity and potentialities of a given place just as he operates with a more general spatial migration in the fictional universe.

My investigation of Grass's 'space travels' and 'time travels' in *Dog Years* has pointed to the novel's character of flux and multilayered archaeology in regard to both cultural, temporal and spatial identity. And it is my belief that authors such as Salman Rushdie, Milan Kundera, W.G. Sebald, Gao Xingjian, Aleksandar Hemon and Natasha

Radojčić (just to mention a few) would also fit into this description of (and benefit from being read as) migration literature. Their novels are explorations of memory and they are all occupied with peeling back the layers of time in order to rediscover the forgotten face of (national and individual) history. In addition, they are characterised by a migrant perspective on the world, that is, a narratorial gaze located in-between two or more languages, cultures, nations and religions. It is precisely this in-betweenness and the resulting transgression of national frontiers, of monoglossia and of monoculture that adds complexity to their fictional universes and further instigates a general dynamics of cultural identity in their novels. What is more, these are all authors who pose a great challenge to the institution of Literary Studies which still, by and large, is legitimised by the study of nationally based literary historiographies. In Grass's case, he is usually regarded a full-blooded German, and since his canonisation (not least with the award of the Nobel Prize in 1999) he has in many ways come to epitomise Germany and German culture at large. However, his multiple ethnic roots and his experience of uprooting offer a somewhat different version of his position within German culture. The same is true of the above mentioned authors whose constellations of India-UK-USA, Czechoslovakia-France, Germany-Switzerland-UK, China-France, Bosnia-USA and Serbia-USA position them in a space between transnationalism and internationalism.

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