



**Sabine EGGER**

Magical Realism and Polish-German Postmemory:  
Reimagining Flight and Expulsion in Sabrina Janesch's *Katzenberge* (2010)

**Abstract**

In the course of the last decade, flight and expulsion in the eastern part of Central Europe have increasingly become a topic in contemporary German literature by young authors. Part of this trend is the search for narrative modes which may open different perspectives on places and historic dates which have tended to be absorbed in national historical narratives and their political contexts. A brief overview of the development of *Heimatliteratur* and examples of Polish borderland writing after 1989 will provide the background for an analysis of Sabrina Janesch's novel *Katzenberge* (2010), which aims to address the following questions: How can magical realism provide a transgenerational narrative framework for third-generation authors and readers to witness and empathise with the traumatic experience of the first generation? In how far is history turned into myth by this mode of writing?

**Abstrakt**

Flucht und Vertreibung in Ostmitteleuropa haben in den letzten zehn Jahren zunehmend Eingang in die jüngere deutschsprachige Literatur gefunden. Dabei geht es auch um die Suche nach einem Modus, der die überdeterminierten Landschaften und Daten aus ihren geschichtspolitischen Überschreibungen löst. Vor diesem Hintergrund soll anhand des Beispiels von Sabrina Janesch's Roman *Katzenberge* (2010) nach der Funktion des magischen Realismus als ein solcher Modus im Hinblick auf stellvertretende Zeugenschaft und Empathie der jüngeren Generation gefragt werden. Hierbei ist die transnationale Perspektive, die durch die magisch-realistische Schreibweise aufgerufen wird, ebenso von Interesse wie die nachfühlbare Erfahrung der Vergangenheit, bzw. des traumatischen Bruchs dieser Erfahrung. Denn der Umgang mit diesen Traumata der Vertreibung verbindet Janesch sowohl mit der deutschen Heimatliteratur als auch mit Autorinnen und Autoren der polnischen ‚Grenzlandliteratur‘ nach 1989.

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## MAGICAL REALISM AND POLISH-GERMAN POSTMEMORY: Reimagining Flight and Expulsion in Sabrina Janesch's *Katzenberge* (2010)

### 1. HEIMATVERLUST IN BORDER LITERATURE

Sabrina Janesch's *Katzenberge* is an example of a new German border literature dealing with the traumatic experience of displacement or "verlorene Heimat".<sup>1</sup> The same would apply to Janesch's second novel *Ambra* (2012) and works by Polish-German contemporaries such as Artur Becker.<sup>2</sup> This "Grenzlandliteratur" (Stefan Chwin) can be seen in the light of a new literature of memory which emerged in Polish writing in the course of the 1990s, following the collapse of the Iron Curtain, with writers such as Stefan Chwin, or Olga Tokarczuk.<sup>3</sup> The term *verlorene Heimat* is a distinct concept within the broader *Heimat* discourse.<sup>4</sup> *Heimat* ("home" or "homeland") is a subjective construct, with a long history in German literature. Generally, it refers to a sense of belonging brought about when individuals project their image of themselves onto a space, its people, its customs, etc. in order to reaffirm themselves socially, and thus stabilize their identities.<sup>5</sup> The concept of "Verlorene Heimat" ("the lost homeland"), as a spatialized identity, applies to a specific place with strong political, historical and cultural associations: the territories of the former German East – Silesia, East and West Prussia, Brandenburg, Danzig and Pomerania – from which more than seven million Germans fled or were expelled towards the end of Second World War.<sup>6</sup> For several decades, those borderland territories were at the center of political discussions in Germany, and, if discussed less openly before 1989, an issue of concern in Poland.<sup>7</sup> In the years immediately following the Second World War, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) refused to give up its claims to German-Polish border regions east of the Oder-Neisse line. It was not until Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* in the late 1960s and early 1970s that the

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1. Sabrina JANESCH, *Katzenberge*, Berlin, Aufbau, 2010. References to this book are given in the text in brackets (KB, page number).

2. Sabrina JANESCH, *Ambra*, Berlin, Aufbau, 2012.

3. Stefan CHWIN, "'Grenzlandliteratur' und das mitteleuropäische Dilemma", in: *Transdora* 17, October 1997, 5 – 13, 1, [online], <http://www.dpg-brandenburg.de/nr17/chwinde.htm> (accessed 29.09.2014).

4. Claudia WINCKLE, "A Third-Generation Perspective on German-Polish Flight and Expulsion: Discursive and Spatial Practices in Sabrina Janesch's Novel *Katzenberge* (2010)", in: *German Politics and Society*, 2013, 109, 4, 86.

5. Peter BLICKLE, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*, Rochester, N.Y., Camden House, 2002, 66-71.

6. Mathias BEER, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen: Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen*, Munich, Beck, 2011, 85.

7. Ulrich BEST, *Transgression as a Rule: German-Polish Cross-border Cooperation, Border Discourse and EU-enlargement*, Berlin, LIT, 2007.

FRG retracted these claims and accepted the *de facto* German-Polish border. By that time, most genuine attempts on the part of expellees to assert any rights to the physical territories of the *verlorene Heimat* had all but disappeared. Not only had a return become politically impossible, but also a generational shift in attitude toward the *verlorene Heimat* was underway. The latter also informed new political debates about the German-Polish border, sparked off by the political changes of 1989/90 in both Poland and Germany. The first generation of expellees and refugees harbored more static notions of *Heimat* as something that could only be experienced in a specific geographic location.<sup>8</sup> For subsequent generations, however, this attachment to the physical space and cultural practices of the *verlorene Heimat* yielded more affective and fluid understandings of *Heimat*.

Such understandings of *Heimat* are reflected in discursive and spatial practices of third-generation German-language authors like Sabrina Janesch, in which *Heimat* manifests itself no longer in a physical place, but in stories and memories, as Claudia Winkler shows.<sup>9</sup> Friederike Eigler diagnoses a “shift from a concern with lost places of origin and transgenerational traumatization” to a “concern with reconstructing family history”.<sup>10</sup> However, I would argue that the relation between trauma, *Heimat* and family history is more complex in *Katzenberge*, because of the way in which it reconstructs individual and collective processes of remembering through magical realism. In the course of this journey, the young protagonist shares the traumatic *Heimatverlust* of the older generation as part of her own identity formation, while moving towards a more dynamic and hybrid concept of belonging, an “unscharfe Identität” (fuzzy identity).<sup>11</sup> Magical realism proves suitable as a narrative strategy, as it allows for a “mysterious sense of fluid identities and interconnectedness”, challenging boundaries on an (inter)cultural, interpersonal and temporal level, offering nexuses for the sharing of a ‘felt experience’, and thus allowing for the working through traumatic memories within the broader frame of cultural memory.<sup>12</sup>

8. Andrew DEMSHUK, *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945-1970*, New York, N.Y., Cambridge UP, 2012, 17-19.

9. Claudia WINCKLER, “A Third-Generation Perspective”.

10. Texts by second-generation authors she refers to are Christoph Hein’s *Landnahme* and Reinhard Jirgl’s *Die Unvollendeten*, those by third-generation authors include Kathrin Schmidt’s *Gunnar-Lennfjens Expedition* and *Himmelskörper* by Tanja Dücker. (See Friederike EIGLER, “Beyond the Victims Debate: Flight and Expulsion in Recent Novels by Authors from the Second and Third Generation (Christoph Hein, Reinhard Jirgl, Kathrin Schmidt, and Tanja Dücker)”, in: Laurel COHEN-PFISTER and Susanne VEES-GULANI, *Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture*, Rochester, N.Y., Camden House, 2010, 88. For an overview of German literature on flight and expulsion, see Louis F. HELBIG, *Der ungeheure Verlust: Flucht und Vertreibung in der deutschsprachigen Belletristik der Nachkriegszeit*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 3rd rev. ed. 1996; from a comparative perspective: Elke MEHNERT (ed.), *Landschaften der Erinnerung. Flucht und Vertreibung aus deutscher, polnischer und tschechischer Sicht*, Frankfurt/M., Peter Lang, 2001.

11. Stefan CHWIN, “Grenzlandliteratur”, 1. See also Jeanne RUFFING, *Identität ermitteln: Ethnische und postkoloniale Kriminalromane zwischen Popularität und Subversion*, Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2011, 251.

12. Wendy B. Faris, cited in Hubert ROLAND, “Is Magischer Realismus Compatible with Magical Realism? A Case Study for an International Historiography of Literature”, in: Theo D’HAEN (ed.), *A World History of Literature*, Brussels, Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, 2012, 85.

## 2. THE TRAUMA OF UPROOTEDNESS<sup>13</sup>

In *Katzenberge*, the story of Polish flight and expulsion out of the Polish-Ukrainian border region of Galicia into the German-Polish border region of Silesia at the end of the Second World War is narrated by the granddaughter of one of the Polish expellees. She has a German father, lives in Berlin and is seen as a German by most of her relatives and their neighbours. In this sense *Katzenberge* chronicles a generational shift in relationships to the *verlorene Heimat* from the expellee generation to the third generation's more fluid conceptions. After her grandfather's death, the young journalist Nele Leibert traces her family history by travelling from Berlin to Silesia, where the family of her grandfather and other Poles from Galicia settle after being forced to leave their homes in Eastern Poland at the end of the Second World War, and then further east to Galicia. They stand for the hundreds of thousands of Poles who were forced out of territories bordering the Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania between 1943 and 1946.<sup>14</sup> In *Katzenberge* they have to flee their Galician village when their former Ukrainian neighbours commit pogroms against the Polish population. Their struggle for bare survival continues on the hard journey by train to the west, when sent to Silesia to make a new beginning in the houses of Germans who have been expelled or, as in the case of Nele's grandfather, committed suicide when facing the prospect of losing their homes on account of a National Socialist system they supported. The westward flight of the grandfather (who returns to bring along his wife and first son) mirrors the displacement of the German population, and at the same time links both experiences of displacement to the Holocaust, thus opening a transnational perspective on collective experiences which had been claimed by competing historical narratives after 1945.<sup>15</sup> Nele's own journey east, which is linked to her grandfather's journey west on various levels of the narrative, including the train as a mode of transport for part of it, also opens a transgenerational perspective. On her

13. The use of "uprootedness" in the following analysis does not directly draw on Édouard Glissant's concept, but there are certain parallels to Glissant's postcolonialist understanding of the relation between the epic and uprootedness and his criticism of Western notions of genealogy, filiation and lines of legitimacy, which could be further explored (Édouard GLISSANT, *Caribbean Discourse. Selected Essays.*, trans. J. M. DASH, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989).

14. Jerzy KOCHANOWSKI, "Gathering Poles into Poland: Forced Migration from Poland's former Eastern Territories", in: Philipp THER and Ana SILJAK (eds.), *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, Lanham, M.D., Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, 135-154. The book by Ther and Siljak places the expulsion of Poles from Eastern Galicia in the context of a policy of population transfers in East-Central Europe, which was pursued for different political reasons both under Soviet and Nazi occupation and by the Allies after the end of the war (see, for example, Orest SUBTELNY, "Expulsion, Resettlement, Civil Strife: The Fate of Poland's Ukrainians, 1944-1947", in: *ibid.*, 155-172; Marek JASIAK, "Overcoming Ukrainian Resistance: The Deportation of Ukrainians within Poland", in: *ibid.*, 173-195). See also Timothy SNYDER, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999*, New Haven, CT., Yale University Press, 2003, 169.

15. "Grandfather said that he nearly suffocated when he was brought to Silesia for the first time. The cattle wagons, in which he and the other farmers from the eastern end of Poland were bundled off West, were completely boarded up. [...] We did not know where we were going, grandfather said, where they would bring us. He said one of the younger men in the wagon had murmured that it was over now, that they would be sent to the same place they had sent the Jews to. That there was no Silesia. That they had invented it: a camp they called Silesia." ("Großvater sagte, als man ihn zum ersten Mal nach Schlesien gebracht habe, sei er beinahe erstickt. Die Viehwaggons, in denen man ihn und die anderen Bauern vom östlichen Ende Polens gen Westen verfrachtet hatte, seien über und über mit Brettern zugenagelt gewesen. [...] Wir wussten nicht, wohin wir fahren, sagte Großvater, wohin sie uns bringen würden. Einer der jüngeren Männer im Waggon habe gemurmelt, dass es nun vorbei sei, jetzt bringe man sie dorthin, wohin sie auch die Juden gebracht hatten. Es gäbe gar kein Schlesien. Erfunden hätten sie es: ein Lager namens Schlesien." (KB, 22-23)). On the other hand, the burning of German books when the Polish settlers change a Silesian manor house into flats for Polish families evokes memories of the *Bücherverbrennung* in 1933 (KB, 138).

journey, Nele encounters traumatic gaps in her family's memory, including the mysterious disappearance of her grandfather's brother on their flight from Galicia, and remembers the stories her grandfather told her about his experience. For him, like for others of the first generation, the experience of dislocation is marked by the physical violence suffered but also by the pain of being cut off or uprooted from his homeland. Having believed as a child "that his body was inextricably linked to the earth on which he lived"<sup>16</sup>, this experience shakes his sense of identity to the core, and allows him to survive only "in pain"<sup>17</sup>. The deep hatred and fear inflicted by this loss shapes his subsequent life, specifically the attempt to settle in Silesia: "Grandfather said he did not know that he would tie himself to a piece of land for the rest of his life"<sup>18</sup> and is followed by the fear that the Germans might come back

to take away again what he had built. Like love, hatred and fear have their own logic, grandfather said. He did not want to grow fond of anything they had left behind, or have to call it his own, did not want to use their plates, break in their horses, or eat the fruit of the trees they had planted.<sup>19</sup>

He tries to maintain a link to his Galician homeland by constructing an imagined idyll of it through stories he shares with his granddaughter Nele, and which she retells in the course of the novel. In these tales, his village, Żdzary Wielkie, appears as an almost mythical place, characterised by the harmony of man and nature, a countrylife of Arcadian contentment:<sup>20</sup>

[...] the village on the Bug, in which, as a child, one could teach the frogs how to speak, could hide in the tree branches in the autumn and wait for the king of the foxes until one could let walnuts hail down on him. What was considered work in other places was in this village a simple matter of checking that things were in order, because the seeds, once planted, grew on their own [...]. Anyhow, the earth: It was rich and heavy, you could almost eat it. In the forests there were cep mushrooms, he said, so big that those who could harvest them from the humus soil could shoulder them and carry them home like umbrellas.<sup>21</sup>

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16. "dass sein Körper mit der Erde, auf der er lebte, untrennbar verbunden war" (KB, 29). When the grandfather talks about his birth, he also stresses the importance of the physical place he was born into: "Naturally, he had rather chosen the earth on which he wanted to live, than the family [...]" ("Natürlich habe er sich mehr für die Erde, auf der er leben wollte, entschieden, als für die Familie [...]") (KB, 254).

17. "unter Schmerzen" (KB, 29).

18. "Großvater sagte, er habe nicht gewusst, dass er sich für den Rest seines Lebens an ein Stück Land binden würde" (KB, 43).

19. "[um] ihm das, was er aufgebaut hatte, wieder wegzunehmen. Der Hass und die Angst, sagte Großvater, haben, wie die Liebe, ihre eigene Logik. Er wollte nichts mögen oder sein Eigen nennen müssen, das sie gelassen hatten, wollte nicht ihre Teller benutzen, ihre Pferde zureiten, von den Früchten der Bäume essen, die sie gepflanzt hatten" (KB, 43).

20. This is reminiscent of the eastern "Heimatlandschaften" in works by West German post-war authors, such as the Suleyken in *So zärtlich war Suleyken* (1955) by Siegfried Lenz, which depicts a "rückwärtsgewandte Utopie" ("retrogressive utopia") of an arcadian idyll, removed from history and everyday reality. See Tadeusz NAMOWICKZ, "Zwischen Historizität und rückwärtsgewandter Utopie. Ostpreußen als 'Heimat' in der deutschen Literatur nach 1945", in: Hubert ORLOWSKI (ed.), *Heimat und Heimatliteratur in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, Poznań, New Ton, 1993, 85.

21. "[...] das Dorf am Bug, in dem man als Kind den Fröschen das Sprechen beibringen konnte, im Herbst sich in Astgabeln verstecken und so lange auf den König der Füchse warten konnte, bis man einen Regen aus Walnüssen auf ihn hinabprasseln ließ. Was an anderen Orten Arbeit war, würde an jenem Ort ein bloßes Schauen-nach-dem-Rechten werden, denn die Saat, einmal ausgebracht, entwickelte sich von allein [...]. Überhaupt die Erde: Satt war sie und fett, fast zum Verzehr selber geeignet. In den Wäldern gäbe es Steinpilze, so groß, dass, wer es schaffte, sie vom Humusboden abzuernten, sie als Regenschirme geschultert nach Hause tragen konnte." (KB, 253-254).

The change to indirect speech together with the fantastic size of the mushrooms indicates the narrator's disbelief in this magical world, which is not present in most of the other passages in which she recounts her grandfather's tales in his voice. Instead, this disbelief tends to be limited to her own encounters with the supernatural, thus not undermining the reality of the supernatural as such. However, in the passage above, the description of the inhabitants, living in perfect harmony not only with nature, but also with each other despite cultural differences, appears completely ludicrous to the narrator, and to the reader, who knows what has led to the grandfather's expulsion from his home village:

And then there were the people: tall as well, their hair the same color as the wheat that thrived on their endless fields; and even though they were only farmers they had a feeling for language and culture. This was no wonder: While in cities thousands of people of different origins get lost in hundreds of streets, without ever having spoken to each other, in Żdźary Wielkie Poles and Ukrainians lived closely together within the smallest of spaces and spoke both languages.<sup>22</sup>

Andrew Demshuk explains that many expellees in the German context dealt with their traumatic experiences by simultaneously constructing two images of *Heimat*. On the one hand, they imagined the “*Heimat of memory*”, “an idealized vision of what they had lost” that centered on the geography of the homeland and often involved reenacting its cultural practices.<sup>23</sup> As time passed, and a return to the geographical *Heimat* became evermore impossible, also because of the change the actual place had undergone in the meantime, the expellees, rather than continuing to insist on a return home, retreated into their *Heimat of memory*. In the case of Janeczko, the idealized, unchanging home of his stories becomes a mythical “imagined space” outside time, and hence beyond the violence experienced at the hand of his neighbours.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, he tries to physically recreate aspects of his Galician home in Silesia, for example the kitchen stove, which is a central element in Galician homes and an important motif in the story. (KB, 64) The traumatic experience of betrayal, not only by the former neighbours, but also by the grandfather's own brother taking the side of the persecutors, leads to him turning from his brother, who curses him for denying his own blood, and the brother's subsequent disappearance, for which the grandfather is blamed by his own parents. (KB, 212) The dark irony of the contrast between the grandfather's idealisation of rootedness in a particular soil and the importance of family ties to him, together with his conscious cutting of blood ties, can be read as a careful distancing of the narrator's perspective from the blood-and-soil ideology of National Socialism.<sup>25</sup>

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22. “Und dann die Menschen: Groß auch sie, ihre Haare von der gleichen Farbe wie der Weizen, der auf ihren endlosen Feldern gedieh; und obgleich Bauern, hatten sie ein Gefühl für Sprache und Kultur. Ein Wunder war das nicht: Verloren sich in den Städten Tausende von Menschen unterschiedlicher Völker auf Hunderten von Straßen, ohne jemals miteinander geredet zu haben, so lebten in Żdźary Wielkie auf kleinstem Raum Polen und Ukrainer eng beieinander und sprachen beide Sprachen.” (KB, 254).

23. Andrew DEMSHUK, *The Lost German East*, 13, 17, cited in Claudia WINKLER, “A Third-Generation Perspective”, 88.

24. Edward Soja, cited in Kathrin WINKLER, Kim SEIFERT and Heinrich DETERING, “Literary Studies and the Spatial Turn”, in: *Journal of Literary Theory*, 2012, 6, 1, 253.

25. With regard to his discourse on rootedness and soil, see also KB, 39, 51.

### 3. “BECAUSE NOBODY HAS EVER GONE THERE”

Nele shares his experience through the tales that her grandfather told her when she spent her childhood summers with him. These tales create a strong emotional bond between Nele and her “Djado” (granddad), as she affectionally calls him. They are both equally stubborn,<sup>26</sup> and Nele seems to have taken her mother’s place, who resembles him more, both in her thinking and her physical appearance, than her brothers do,<sup>27</sup> but who has left the village to marry a German. Strong, intergenerational family links are also evident in the interaction between family members on the Polish and German side, and the way Nele participates in the everyday life of her aunt and uncle’s family during her visits,<sup>28</sup> as well as in the importance of Nele’s journey east with the task to uncover their family history for her mother. (KB, 41) Chapters in which the narrator tells about her own experience on her journey alternate with those beginning with “Großvater sagte” (“grandfather said”). This narrative structure imposes a strong link between their journeys, implying that Nele might not be fully in control of her movement, thus turning her trip into a fateful journey. This link is further enforced by other links, such as her arrival in a place through which he has passed, or an object, a view, or a noise reminding her vividly of a story he told her. The interlinking of their journeys suggests a magical connection between the generations and creates a dynamic which sparks memories in the narrator and moves the plot, and the narrator physically, forward: “My memory sets in the moment we were crossing the river Oder, when the rattling of the train sounded hollow for a moment, and we finally entered the endless Silesian forests.”<sup>29</sup> The fact that Nele is sent on her mission by her mother further emphasises the way different generations are affected by the grandfather’s traumatic experience as much as the protest of other family members against Nele’s embarking on her journey – “Because nobody has ever gone there” –,<sup>30</sup> which points toward the traumatic gap in memory shared by all, even if in different ways.<sup>31</sup>

The reimagination of the traumatic experience of *Heimatverlust* in the novel is an example of what Marianne Hirsch defines as “postmemory”: a connection to the past not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation, which links “the generation after” to the traumatic events that have shaped its family history and beyond.<sup>32</sup>

“Postmemory” describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experience of those who

26. This stubbornness also makes her, at least in part, Galician, as it is the result of the wind bringing pollen and dust from the Galician steppe (KB, 253).

27. She looks more like him (KB, 39), and they share an interest in European history (KB, 58).

28. The feeling of homeliness arising from descriptions of the warmth and flavours of home-cooked meals in her aunt’s house, and her aunt’s motherly care for her niece is contrasted with the coldness of her Berlin apartment and relationship with Carsten (see KB, 12, 18-19, 66, 84-87).

29. “Meine Erinnerung setzt in dem Moment ein, als wir die Oder überquerten, das Rattern des Zuges für einen Moment hohl klang und schließlich die endlosen schlesischen Laubwälder begannen.” (KB, 20)

30. “Weil überhaupt noch niemand dahin gefahren ist.” (KB, 86).

31. Cathy Caruth and Lawrence Kirmayer propose that trauma narratives are characterised by incoherence, gaps and absences, and often demonstrate the “frailty and impersistence of memory” (Lawrence KIRMAYER, “Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative, and Dissociation”, in: Paul AN-TZE and Michael LAMBED (eds.), *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, New York, N.Y., Routledge, 1996, 174; Cathy CARUTH, “Trauma and Experience: Introduction”, in: Cathy CARUTH (ed.), *Trauma: Exploration in Memory*, Baltimore, M.A., John Hopkins UP, 1995, 5).

32. Marianne HIRSCH, “The Generation of Postmemory”, in: *Poetics Today*, 2008, 29, 1, 107.



come before – to experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But those experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.<sup>33</sup>

While not identical to memory, “it approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects”, and is characterised by an oscillation between emotional closeness and distance from the events of the one engaged in “postmemorial work”.<sup>34</sup> Hirsch uses family inheritance as one model for postmemory. However, postmemory can go beyond such “familial” frameworks towards an “affiliative” postmemory which

strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. Thus less-directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory, which can thus persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone.<sup>35</sup>

Rather than an identity position, postmemory is a generational structure forming “an intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance, linked specifically to cultural or collective trauma”. Postmemory is “defined through an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by the unbridgeable distance that separates the participant from the one born after”.<sup>36</sup> How does this manifest itself in Janesch’s *Katzenberge*?

One could argue that memory in *Katzenberge* constitutes a „familial postmemory“, which even seems to come close to an “inherited memory” (Alan Rosen), experienced by the protagonist to a great part on an emotional, semi-conscious level, and hardly allowing for critical distance between the granddaughter and the traumatic memories her grandfather has shared with her, memories which seem to be within and all around her, permeating the landscape in which she moves and most aspects of her thinking. Her own life story and everyday experiences are thus shaped by traumatic fragments of events that exceed comprehension. According to Aleida Assmann, the family is a privileged site of memorial transmission. The “group memory” in her theory is based on the familial transfer of embodied experience to the next generation.<sup>37</sup> While the family is at the centre of this process in *Katzenberge*, it also goes beyond the family. Cultural references extend the network of embodied memory to a transnational Polish-German framework connected by an emphatic sharing of stories as symbolic systems which “embody” traumatic ex-

33. Marianne HIRSCH, “The Generation of Postmemory”. *Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York, N.Y., Columbia UP, 2012, 5, emphasis in original.

34. *Ibid.*, 31.

35. Marianne HIRSCH, “The Generation of Postmemory”, 114-116. Hirsch draws here on Said’s dialectics of “filiation” and “affiliation”, “filiation” referring to the vertical line of transmission from one generation to the next, and “affiliation” to a horizontal structure interlinking parallel and complementary systems within a society (see Edward SAID, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Cambridge, M.A., Harvard UP, 1983, 19-20). I also wish to thank Britta C. Jung for her ideas on this.

36. Marianne HIRSCH, “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory”, in: *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2001, 14, 1, 12.

37. Aleida ASSMANN, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, Munich, Beck, 2006, 3-10.

perience by making it tangible.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Nele has moments of distancing herself from her grandfather's experience, even questioning her closeness to him in general.<sup>39</sup> Nele's journey can thus be seen "both as an act of working through traumata of loss, and as an act of bearing witness to that loss",<sup>40</sup> therefore an act of emphatic identification or postmemory which moves between identification and distance. This movement is reflected, to some extent, in the movement between magical realism and realism in the story.

#### 4. READER EMPATHY

The magical realism in *Katzenberge* lets the reader participate in the process of remembering. The reader gains insight into the states of mind of both the first-person narrator and her grandfather, as Nele retells her grandfather's stories from his point of view, and both grandfather and granddaughter experience events and magical encounters on their individual journeys.<sup>41</sup> Vivid descriptions of these strong physical, emotional and sensory experiences of what is real and what is not from the reader's perspective allow him or her to participate on different levels. Natural and supernatural objects are made "handgreiflich" ("palpable") in Hannah Arendt's sense of the word.<sup>42</sup> The boundary between the real and the supernatural is blurred, with the latter taking on a concrete presence that challenges the reader's imagination. Both the real and the supernatural take readers along on Nele's journey, and invite them to empathise with her experience, including her doubts, which are due to her biography, her education and her experience of everyday life in Berlin. The latter makes Nele different from her grandparents, for whom the marvellous is as much part of their mundane everyday lives, part of the same reality, as cooking or looking after the garden.<sup>43</sup> Nele and her grandparents are haunted by the gap in family memory in the shape of a supernatural beast, which embodies the experiences of dislocation in Galicia and Silesia, and links these experiences to the disappearance of the grandfather's brother. (KB, 69) When the grandmother sees the beast for the first time after her arrival in Silesia, she has a recipe ready to fight it, as much as she has recipes for her jam, as well as remarking on its inferior quality in comparison to that of the Galician devils – as if she were comparing cattle or hens. (KB, 104-105, 113-114). For Nele, who belongs to the third generation, the beast's presence distorts the traditional categories of place, time, and causality. She feels in-between on different levels: in-between the

38. See Eugene L. ARVA, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction*, Amherst, New York, N.Y., Cambria Press, 2011, 188.

39. A certain distance is already established as part of the narrative's structure. Each chapter or paragraph in which past events are told from the grandfather's perspective begins with "Großvater sagte". At the same time, the reader is then put directly into the story told at this point, seeing things very closely from the grandfather's point of view, experiencing the events through different senses, i.e. sharing the way in which the granddaughter identifies with him at this moment.

40. Eugene L. ARVA, *The Traumatic Imagination*, 164.

41. Examples would be the grandfather's encounters with the beast (KB 56, 63), and Nele seeing the beast herself when staying at her grandfather's house after his funeral (KB, 66). See also the beast's appearance during the birth of the grandparents' second son (KB, 144-146), the discovery of the nest of the beast (KB, 116) or Nele's encounter with the Baba Jaga (KB, 196-197).

42. Hannah Arendt stresses the significance of the "Handgreiflichkeit des Dinghaften" for memory (Hannah ARENDT, *Vita activa oder: vom tätigen Leben*, Munich, Piper, 1981, 87).

43. This corresponds to the definition of magical realism in Wendy B. FARIS, *Ordinary Enchantments. Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004, 1.

pre-modern world of her grandparents and her postmodern existence in Berlin, and in-between Polish and German culture. Like her grandparents and other members of the community, she is endowed with extra-sensory perception. Her actions are led by her experience of the beast, even though, in contrast to her grandparents' generation, for Nele the supernatural is not part of the ordinary, and she repeatedly questions its existence as such.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the end of the book leaves it up to the reader to decide whether it is part of reality in Nele's world.<sup>45</sup> This ambivalence is already noticeable at the beginning of the novel. The narrator reflects on her reception in the village after her return from Galicia, when she brings earth from her grandfather's village, in what is Ukraine now, to his grave in Silesia to give him peace: "I was always considered to be somewhat peculiar, but since I have returned from my journey, I have been regarded as an auratic apparition. Despite the fact they can touch and feel me, they question my physical presence."<sup>46</sup> As a child, Nele regularly takes the train to Silesia to spend the summer with her grandparents. On one of her journeys, she catches a glimpse of the "Biest" ("beast") haunting her grandfather (and his family) for the first time in a forest.<sup>47</sup> Her grandfather's comment on the meaning of this apparition points toward the transnational meaning of the historical trauma that the beast embodies: the experience of persecution, ethnic cleansing, and expulsion, and the fact, suppressed in family and cultural memory on both sides, that the Polish-speaking Galicians and German-speaking Silesians share this experience. The reader can empathise with the Polish-German, Galician-Silesian narrator, who is working through traumatic memories. Through her biography she is confronted with, and at the same time transcends, national and cultural boundaries: "because I combined both parts, from over there, the other side of the river Oder, and from here".<sup>48</sup>

## 5. FLUID IDENTITIES

Nele has moments of "clarity of consciousness" when a sensitive perception of things leads to a loss of structural perspective, a disorder of consciousness which is simultaneously isolation and fusion with all things being.<sup>49</sup> In these mo-

44. "When I passed the sign with the place name I cursed the moment I had let myself in for my mother's idea. A funeral meant an end, to let rest in peace. And I had nothing better to do than to shake the dead and their worlds. Djado had infected me with fantasies." ("Während ich am Ortschaft vorbeilief, verfluchte ich den Moment, in dem ich mich auf die Idee meiner Mutter eingelassen hatte. Eine Beerdigung war Abschluss, Ruhelassen. Und ich hatte nichts besseres zu tun, als an den Toten und ihren Welten zu rütteln. Mit Hirngespinnsten hatte mich Djado infiziert.") (KB, 196).

45. KB, 9, 196, 267-272.

46. "Für etwas sonderbar hat man mich schon immer gehalten, aber seit ich von meiner Reise zurückgekehrt bin, hält man mich für eine auratische Erscheinung. Obwohl man mich berühren, spüren kann, glaubt man mir meinen Körper nicht." (KB, 15).

47. The child sees what must be a "Tier" ("animal" (KB, 27)). While different parts of it are described in the course of the story, the fact that it is not named, but either just referred to as "es" ("it") or by changing terms ("Tier" (KB, 27)), "die Augen" ("the eyes" (KB, 56)), "Biest" ("beast" (KB, 71)), "Schatten" ("shadow" (KB, 141)), "dunkler Fleck" ("dark spot" (KB, 141)) points to the difficulty of those encountering it to grasp or even define their experience.

48. "weil ich beide Teile vereinte, von drüben, von jenseits der Oder, und von hier". (KB, 27).

49. Michael SCHEFFEL, "Magischer Realismus", in: Georg BRAUNGART, Harald FRICKE, Klaus GRUBMÜLLER, Jan-Dirk MÜLLER, Klaus WEIMAR (eds), *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. II, Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2000, 526-527, cited in Hubert ROLAND, "Is Magischer Realismus Compatible with Magical Realism?", 86. *Katzenberge* therefore comes under Uwe DURST's category of "Literatur des entgrenzten Wunderbaren", where the magical-realist structure creates a subsystem which then spreads beyond the limits of this subsystem (Uwe DURST, *Das begrenzte Wunderbare: Zur Theorie wunderbarer Episoden in realistischen Erzähltexten und in Texten des "Magischen Realismus"*, Münster, LIT, 2008, 250).

ments, she is open to apparitions and magical objects linking her to the trauma suffered by her grandparents and others of their generation. Their trauma includes experiences shared by the dislocated Galician Poles, the Germans in Silesia and the Poles who were brought to Germany as *Fremdarbeiter* under National Socialism. In these moments, Nele can sense the beast as well as the place where a Polish forced labourer who returned to Galicia after the war hid the pieces of delft that she brought back from Germany. The delft is a reminder of the German father of the child she gave birth to after her return, and with whom she seems to have had a romantic relationship. (KB, 206-207, 220-221) Fusion with all things being means the awareness of missing objects and incomplete stories pointing to gaps in transgenerational memory, but also of the experiences shared by members of a generation across cultural and political borders. If magical realism is understood as a universal aesthetic expression, a poetics favouring a “mysterious sense of fluid identities and interconnectedness”, the definition applies both to the interconnectedness between different generations and the intercultural nexuses experienced by the protagonist, and the sense of fluid identities emerging from this experience on both levels.<sup>50</sup> Nele’s portrayal makes her a representative of a third generation characterised by its ‘fuzzy identity’ in terms of cultural belonging. In certain situations, she is seen as Polish, in others as German, or the daughter of a mother who has an outsider role in the family because of her university degree and marriage with a German. The movement between different perspectives creates an unstable identity discourse, which changes to some extent according to the situation, and defines the interaction with different characters and the supernatural, while, at the same time, Nele’s sensitivity for the supernatural allows her to transcend such cultural boundaries and allows for a transnational remembering process. Renate Lachmann takes this cultural dimension into account when she states that the fantastic “brings something back into the culture and makes manifest what has been marginalized” and, through this, performs a “transformation into the cultural Other”.<sup>51</sup> According to Lachmann, only fantastic literature is concerned with the cultural and anthropological Other in its double meaning as something marginalised, forgotten, but also strange. This applies even more so to magical realism which blurs the distinction between realism and the fantastic, as Wendy B. Faris shows in *Ordinary Enchantments. Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (2004).<sup>52</sup>

In *Katzenberge*, the sensory and extra-sensory perception of a magical world is not restricted to the older generation, or the “Dörfler” (the “villagers”), as a village community removed from urban life and higher education. (KB, 41) It is a way of being and communicating shared by those from the ‘east’, and passed on to their children, which differentiates them from the ‘Germans’. This is also reflected in the first chapter in the contrast between Nele’s Berlin life as an urban dweller and a journalist, on the one hand, and the mythical image of the village engulfed in

50. Wendy B. Faris, cited in Hubert ROLAND, “Is Magischer Realismus Compatible with Magical Realism?”. Roland and others have pointed to the lack of a generally accepted, coherent definition of Magical Realism (see also Uwe DURST, *Das begrenzte Wunderbare*, 90) and argued for an understanding of it as a universal narrative technique, not least to bridge the gap between German *Magischer Realismus* and the internationally more widely accepted understanding of Magical Realism as a postcolonial, postmodern poetics or genre, tied to a particular cultural and geographical location.

51. “etwas in die Kultur zurückholt und manifest macht, was den Ausgrenzungen zum Opfer gefallen ist”; “Transformation in das Fremdkulturelle” (Renate LACHMANN, *Erzählte Phantastik. Zu Phantasiegeschichte und Semantik phantastischer Texte*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2002, 44).

52. See Wendy B. FARIS, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 1.

fog and an uncanny nature with its own bodily shape, on the other: “The upper end of the forest disappears under the pale skin, and down there, on the forest soil [...] the wafts of mist move around the stems, blurring their contours.”<sup>53</sup> The ‘Germans’ include Nele’s father and younger brother, the latter telling stories about strange rituals performed by the superstitious, and from his point of view, “exotic” villagers at the funeral, before running back to their BMW (“which was parked on the other side of the graveyard”).<sup>54</sup> At the same time, Nele’s grandfather is unhappy about the prospect of Nele’s marrying “einen Deutschen” (“a German” (KB, 18)). Nele and her mother occupy an in-between position between the two cultural groups which are referred to and contrasted from the perspective of various characters throughout the story. They understand and participate in this magical world, even if questioning it. The fact that her mother, a historian now living in Germany, sends Nele on her journey, implies that she might still believe in the existence of the supernatural (KB, 41-42). By allowing for this ambivalence, rather than resolving it, magical realism constitutes a strategy to transcend cultural boundaries in the novel. Such boundaries are further questioned through warnings by Nele’s Silesian relatives against travelling to what they regard as the barbarian, ‘Wild East’ that they suspect to be in the former Soviet Union, beyond the eastern Polish border. Their warnings – at times comically – reflect and undermine by ridicule stereotypical images of the Poles that Nele encounters in Germany and arbitrary cultural boundaries in general.<sup>55</sup>

Janesch adopts a similar strategy in her second novel *Ambra*, in which Kinga Mischa, a young Polish-German woman, returns to Gdańsk, the former Danzig, when her grandfather dies. This is the city that her grandfather, who has been brought up as a German, and denied his Polish heritage, left after the Second World War to settle in the north of Germany. Similarly to Nele in *Katzenberge*, Kinga attempts to overcome the divisions between herself and her Polish family who fear that she will lay claim to the apartment Kinga’s grandfather has inherited from their great-grandfather. As in Janesch’s novel, the familial framework stands for German-Polish intercultural relations and memory, with a piece of magic amber, also a family heirloom, as one of the three voices narrating the story. It is only when she arrives in Gdańsk that Kinga realises her gift as a clairvoyant who is able to read the thoughts of those around her, a gift which becomes increasingly painful for her. One of the minds that she reads is that of her Polish cousin Bartosz, whose traumatic memory of serving as a soldier in the 2003 Iraq War becomes the focus of the story. The story ends in the unexplicable disappearance of Bartosz and the beautiful Renia, who has become Kinga’s closest friend, with Kinga beginning to fall in love with her. With her novel’s setting and narrative mode Janesch joins a literary tradition molded by

53. “Das obere Ende des Waldes verschwindet unter der bleichen Haut, und unten, am Waldboden [...] fließt der Nebel um die Stämme und verwischt ihre Konturen.” (KB, 8).

54. “der an der anderen Seite des Friedhofs parkte” (KB, 41).

55. Nele’s aunt warns her to go on her journey because of the danger the east, beyond Poland, entails: “After all, one knows them, the Ukrainians, who passed through Poland from time to time, with their fur hats and grim faces, like savages. Exactly like grandfather, I said, but Aunt Aldona said this was something completely different. Grandfather was a Pole.” (“Und man kenne sie ja, die Ukrainer, die ab und zu durch Polen fahren würden, mit ihren Fellmützen und grimmigen Gesichtern, wie die Wilden. Genau wie Großvater, sage ich, aber Tante Aldona meinte, das wäre etwas grundlegend anderes gewesen. Großvater war Pole.” (KB, 86)).

Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (*Blechtrommel*). Grass's epic, magical realist novel, with its first part set in the Free City of Danzig, spans the history of Germany during the first half of the twentieth century, and is told on one level through the experiences of a family.

## 6. MAGICAL REALISM IN CONTEMPORARY POLISH-LANGUAGE LITERATURE

Paweł Huelle (born 1957) and Stefan Chwin (born 1949), two of Poland's best-known writers of the post-war generation, have also chosen Gdańsk to explore its historical, intercultural dimension as a borderland, a topography long suppressed in Polish consciousness. In their work, as well as in the writing of Olga Tokarczuk (born 1962), two geographies are often superimposed: the melancholy, scarred landscapes of the post-war era and the submerged archipelago of a vanished realm which occasionally surfaces through enigmatic clues: unfamiliar, magical objects, details of architecture, or a rare figure who has made the crossing from 'before' to 'after'. They represent a new Polish literature of memory that returns, "via a backward leap over communism and the Second World War, to the moment just before catastrophe and rupture", as a traumatic experience which seems to have made the "before" inaccessible in collective memory, and beyond.<sup>56</sup> In Huelle's first novel, *Weiser Dawidek* (1987; 1990), Weiser, a young Jewish boy with supernatural powers, appears among a group of Polish schoolchildren in 1957 Gdańsk to lead them astray.<sup>57</sup> After staging a spectacular explosion with a hidden cache of old German munitions, Weiser and the girl in the group, Elka, vanish without a trace, leaving the three other boys, including the novel's narrator, to explain their disappearance to the authorities. Their disappearance is reminiscent of that of the two characters in *Ambra*, which leaves both the German-Polish narrator and Bartosz's parents equally puzzled, and offers no clues for the reader.

Stefan Chwin's novel *Hanemann* (1995; *Tod in Danzig*, 1997) is also set in Gdańsk, a city which has always drawn on the intermingling of cultures, languages and religions. It begins in the summer of 1944, with the main character, Hanemann – a German physician and anatomist – slipping into melancholia in the wake of his fiancée's death, and becoming a "living corpse" while lacking the courage to commit suicide.<sup>58</sup> When most ethnic Germans flee from Gdańsk at the end of the war, he is one of the few who stay, forming a fragile bridge between past and present. A Polish family, one of the many that have moved to the newly-gained territories west of the destroyed Warsaw, or from the eastern regions annexed by the Soviet Union, arrives in an apartment still bearing the stamp of its former owners' presence. With the story narrated by the young son of his Polish neighbours, Hanemann appears as a dignified and now displaced figure, haunted by memories of departed friends and of writers who committed suicide, such as the German Heinrich von Kleist or the Polish "Witkacy". Reflecting on the differences between Polish and German Romanticism, he serves as a guide to the intensely emotional universe of an earlier German culture. The upheavals of history, including the wartime destruction of

56. Eva HOFFMAN, "Paradise glossed", in: *The Guardian*, 1 May 2004 [online], <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/may/01/featuresreviews.guardianreview31> (accessed on 29.09.2014).

57. Paweł HUELLE, *Weiser Dawidek*, Frankfurt/M., Luchterhand, 1990.

58. Stefan CHWIN, *Tod in Danzig*, Berlin, Rowohlt, 1997.

Gdańsk and the takeover of the city by the Polish administration happen all around him. Finally, Hanka, a young woman who has been displaced from the eastern borderlands of former Poland, shakes him out of his torpor. She also seems lost in a strange place, one of life's shipwrecks, suffering from the atrocities done to her in the east, and tries to commit suicide. Hanka's suicide attempt, however, which Hanemann averts, becomes the turning point in his own life story. Chwin's novel, while critically acclaimed as a new Polish literature thematizing aspects of Polish-German history which had been marginalised in Polish memory and challenging unitary mythologies of the nation,<sup>59</sup> has also been criticised for employing stereotypes of the exotic, 'eastern' Other in the portrayal of Hanka.<sup>60</sup>

Hanemann's world and the course of history in Chwin's novel is mythical and beyond human control, something which also characterises his earlier work.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, in both Huelle's and Chwin's texts, the point of view is essentially that of a child – a perspective that can register ambiguities which do not easily fit into dominant ideologies, and allows the narrative to set up its own laws, while making stories of the past and the gaps in them tangible. It is the permeability of borders between memory and history, imagination and reality that is the subject of Olga Tokarczuk's novel. The original title of her magical realist novel *Prawiek i inne czasy* (1996; *Ur und andere Zeiten*, 2000) points to this: *Prawiek* is the name of a place, but also refers to a pre-time.<sup>62</sup> It is the history of a small village in the former Galician region near Kraków, told in the polyphonic voices of human characters, parts of landscape, even a mystical Jewish game. These fragments are brought together through a synoptic and ultimately consoling, mythical vision of history, the angelic perspective of the four archangels through whose eyes the reader follows the events, where the most terrible and the smallest seem equally justified. In her novel *E.E.* set in Wrocław, formerly Breslau, a young girl from a Polish-German background discovers that she is a medium, like Kinga and Renia in *Ambra*, capable of transmitting the voices of the dead and dissolving the boundaries between past, present and future. A Jungian analytical approach – which influences Tokarczuk's writing in general – is one of the ways of interpreting her abilities discussed in the novel, without leading to satisfactory explanation from a rational point of view.

*Katzenberge* differs from novels such as *Ambra* or *Hanemann* in that the protagonist succeeds in changing reality by her openness to different realities and in taking an active role. Nele's attitude and actions indicate a possibility of influencing the course of history by retelling it, rather than accepting it as a force of fate, and also sets it apart from the magical realism in German literature of the 1950s. In novels by Ernst Wiechert, Elisabeth Langgässer or Hermann Kasack, National Socialism and war appear as natural forces, putting the individual at their mercy. Causal

59. Irene SYWENKY, "Representations of German-Polish Border Regions in Contemporary Polish Fiction: Space, Memory, Identity", in: *German Politics & Society*, 2013, 31, 4, 26.

60. Oleh KOTSYUBA, "Reestablishing Borders: The Other as Ukrainian and Female in Stefan Chwin's Novels". Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, New Orleans Marriott, New Orleans, L. A., Nov 15, 2012.

61. See Marion BRANDT, "'Der Geist der Geschichte' in den Romanen *Der Butt* von Günter Grass und *Dolina Radości* von Stefan Chwin", in: Elisabeth WAGHÄLL NIVRE, Brigitte KLAUTE, Bo ANDERSSON, Bobro LARDEN, Dessislava STOEVE-HELM (eds.), *Begegnungen. Das VIII. Nordisch-Baltische Germanistentreffen in Sigtuna vom 11. Bis zum 13.6.2009*. Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2011, 328.

62. Olga TOKARCZUK, *Ur und andere Zeiten*, Berlin, Berlin Verlag, 2000.

relations between the actions of individuals, groups, and historical events are sidelined or suspended and replaced by mythical cycles and states of being.<sup>63</sup> What the works by Janesch and the other contemporary Polish *Grenzland* authors mentioned above share is the topic of postwar Polish-German history expressed by means of magical realist writing. This narrative strategy allows them to address questions of memory and belonging that were marginalised, suppressed or instrumentalised in dominant national discourses before, but also after 1990, while disrupting and challenging unitary narratives of the nation on either side of the border and opening different perspectives on the dynamic between place, historical memory and self-identification. Providing a narrative space for a multiplicity of experiences allows for the formation of fluid identities.

Magical realism as a narrative strategy transfers forgotten, impalpable and elusive events to memory by making them tangible without negating their complexity.<sup>64</sup> The unreal or the magical of these narratives conveys a “felt experience” that simulates, instead of trying to explain, the overwhelming effects of extreme experiences. *Katzenberge* simulates the trauma of displacement by letting a representative of the third generation retell stories of the actual experience of postwar displacement, rather than telling it from the point of view of a first-generation character or focusing primarily on its effects, which would be the case for most contemporary German novels on the theme.<sup>65</sup> In this sense, magical realism constitutes a literary form of emphatic identification and embodied memory which goes beyond individual, familial or group memory, and allows the reader to participate in this process. Such an emphatic identification can transcend interpersonal and cultural boundaries, and can even offer a framework for a multidirectional memory in which different narratives do not compete for status of victimhood, but can find connection points and a sense of shared experience.<sup>66</sup>

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63. Mathias BERTRAM, “Literarische Epochendiagnosen der Nachkriegszeit”, in: Ursula HEUKENKAMP (ed.), *Deutsche Erinnerung: Berliner Beiträge zur Prosa der Nachkriegsjahre (1945-1960)*, Berlin, Erich Schmidt, 1999, 15. As examples of this discourse Bertram lists Ernst Wiechert’s *Der Totenwald* (1945), Elisabeth Langgässer’s *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* (1946) or Hermann Kasack’s *Die Stadt hinter dem Strom* (1955). In Ernst Wiechert’s novel on German flight and expulsion *Missa sine nomine* (1950) the indomitable beast of a cyclical history materialises in the Soviet tanks crushing the carts of civilians on the trek west; cultural or national belonging does not play a role in this.

64. Taking into account the author from a psychological perspective, magical realist writing is “the artistic process by which the traumatic imagination transfers to memory events that have eluded memory in the first place: the writing mode does not copy reality but reconstructs it by using all of its familiar elements – only in a somewhat different manner. [...] bringing apparently incongruous concepts from different discourses under the same hat” (Eugene L. ARVA, *The Traumatic Imagination*, 98).

65. See Claudia WINCKLER, *A Third-Generation Perspective*, 88.

66. Michael ROTHBERG, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonisation*. Stanford, C.A., Stanford UP, 2009. See also Aleida ASSMANN, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur. Eine Intervention*. Munich, Beck, 2013, 179-180.