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Train Journeys in Postmemorial Narratives of *Heimatverlust*: Reinhard Jirgl's *Die Unvollendeten* and Sabrina Janesch's *Katzenberge*

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Introduction

In the last two decades, flight and expulsion have emerged as important topics in contemporary German literature and culture, with authors exploring narrative modes in literary texts that open transnational perspectives. Reinhard Jirgl's *Die Unvollendeten* (2003) and Sabrina Janesch's *Katzenberge* (2010) are examples of such texts, dealing with traumatic experiences of displacement in the aftermath of the Holocaust and Second World War, while challenging exclusionary narratives. Both novels employ the railway journey, including places and objects associated with it such as the platform and the station, tracks and railcars, as a central motif. In the following I will show in how far the use of this motif allows for "multidirectional" (Rothberg 2010, 2011) modes of "postmemory" (Hirsch) that transcend national borders and memory discourses. The railway provides a link between different generations in both of the texts discussed. However, it also interlinks the traumatic displacement of ethnic Germans and Poles at the end of the Second World War with the experience of Holocaust victims. Can modes of postmemory in Jirgl and Janesch therefore be read as multidirectional, or do they simply equate distinct experiences, blurring distinguishing features of different groups' suffering and historical contexts, or even participate in an "Opferkonkurrenz", i.e., a competition in their legitimacy of victimhood (Assmann 2013: 169)?

Both texts are autobiographical novels, tracing the respective authors' family histories of expulsion and the trauma associated with it through several generations and across national borders.[1] They can thus be regarded as examples of postmemory, relating to a history the narrator has not personally experienced, but with which the narrator is associated through a network of family relations (Hirsch 111).[2] In both cases, this network has a "transnational" dimension, if transnationalism is understood as a "plurality of intersecting movements… over borders" (Herrmann 1). German-Polish author Sabrina Janesch was born in the West German town of Gifhorn in 1985. *Katzenberge* tells the story of Polish flight and expulsion from the Polish-Ukrainian border region of Galicia into the German-Polish border region of Silesia, experienced by her grandfather's generation at the end of the Second World War. Reinhard Jirgl was born in 1953 in East Berlin and grew up in the GDR, where his family had settled, having been expelled from the former Sudetenland in western Bohemia in the final years of the war. In this sense, Janesch is an author one, and Jirgl two generations

[1] While the novels' derivation from the authors' family histories is not made explicit within the texts, it is mentioned in interviews and other epitexts.

[2] It is also worth noting here that "postmemory's connection to the past is… mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (Hirsch 5).

removed from traumatic experiences of expulsion and flight. Both received literary awards for their works.[3] While *Die Unvollendeten* is set in a Czech-German context, and the primary focus of *Katzenberge* is on Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, the chosen texts open perspectives on Central and Eastern European borderlands that also apply to or affect Polish-German relations.

According to Ulrike Zitzlsperger, in literature of the second generation the railway platform has become an "Aushandlungsort" (negotiation site) for memories of different groups of victims of National Socialism (118), i.e., the motif of the platform both links and contrasts different memory discourses. I would argue that the use of this *Aushandlungsort* has been extended even further in contemporary literature, interlinking the experiences of victims of the Holocaust under National Socialism with those of ethnic Germans or Poles expelled shortly before or after the end of the war. A number of authors who are second- or third-generation descendants of refugees reference elements of the railway to reflect on individual and collective experiences of flight and expulsion around 1945.[4] Focusing primarily on exile literature, Zitzlsperger touches only briefly Holocaust literature. This article will show how, in the texts discussed, the platform and other elements of the railway become both transit spaces of deportation across national borders and nodal points for memory discourses. Through imagery and characterization, the authors draw on the symbolic meaning of the railway as a *leitmotif* in exile and Holocaust literature,[5] as well as in post-war literature on flight and expulsion,[6] thus allowing for the "unbequeme Aneinanderstoßen von Erinnerungen," an unsettling collision of memories (Assmann 2013: 179). The texts discussed differ, however, in how far the trope of the railway provides the reader with a nodal point for multidirectional memory, a "knotted intersection" of history and memory that cuts across categories of national and ethnic identity (Rothberg 2010, 8), or rather implies a universalization or "Holocaustizing" of distinct experiences that seems ethically questionable (Power 32).

At the end of the Second World War, railway stations had become a key symbol in German-language film and literature. In exile writing, platforms feature both as end points of flight and new beginnings, while symbolizing a terrible – "heillose" – time (Zitzlsperger 134). In Holocaust literature, train journeys turn into journeys to death, ending at platforms outside extermination camps. The European rail network "played a crucial role in the implementation of the 'Final Solution'" (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). Those persecuted were not only taken from their homes, but deported to concentration and extermination camps or to other killing sites. If they happened to survive, their family members often did not, leading to a further trauma for

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[3] Janesch was awarded the Mara Cassens Prize, the Anna Seghers Prize and the Annette von Droste Hülshoff Prize. Jirgl received an impressive number of awards, in particular for his writing on historical themes, including the Lion Feuchtwanger Prize and the Georg Büchner Prize.

[4] Reinhard Jirgl's use of the platform as a place of transgenerational trauma and irreversible loss anticipates, for example, the symbolism in Julia Franck's *Die Mittagsfrau* (2007). Here, the mother who leaves her young son behind on the platform of a train station is on her way from Szczecin to the west.

[5] Simone Gigliotti describes the deportation transports by train as a principal location of victims' suffering and memory, reflected in the train journey as a "'cattle car' experience" in Holocaust literature and visual media (2); and "suggested through references to the physical infrastructure of railway travel, such as departure platforms, train stations, and train tracks, with arrival at camps as the fatal and geographical core of the Holocaust." (6)

[6] Karl Schlögel (58) points to the cattle car as a collective symbol of displacement in this context.

survivors.[7] In first- and second-generation Holocaust literature the Jewish victims are dehumanized already on their 'journey.' They find themselves driven across the platform, "herded like animals,"[8] to be deported in sealed freight cars, where they suffer from extreme heat in summer, freezing temperatures in winter, and the stench of urine and excrement. Without food or water many deportees die before the trains reach their destinations (Gigliotti 1-3).[9] This "cattle car experience" is remembered in Holocaust literature and visual media. It became part of cultural memory in post-war Germany in the course of the public's confrontation with textual and visual memories of the Holocaust, together with the platform as a transit point for victims being transported to killing sites.[10] This also applies to external references to railway infrastructure, e.g., Claude Lanzmann's framing of the intersecting grid of iron tracks in his film *Shoah* (1985) (Gigliotti 12).

Such images are in stark contrast to the railway as an epitome of modernity in 19th century literature, with platforms as places of social encounters and portals to traveling at a new speed. Passengers enjoying panoramic views out of the train window is a central motif in travel writing of that period (Schivelbusch 35-50). The latter is still present in literary train journeys in the early 20th century, opening vistas on modernity, if modern life is now turning into a more ambivalent experience. While positive connotations are already challenged by images of railcars transporting soldiers to mass death on the battlefields of the First World War (Rademacher 115-16), the railway as a symbol of modernity is radically re-coded after the Holocaust as outlined above. The novels by Jirgl and Janesch allude to this key motif of Holocaust literature. They retrace the railway transit of family members who are forced to leave their homes, and experience stations and platforms as places of *Heimatverlust* and inhumanity.

***Heimatverlust* in Borderland Literature**

"Verlorene Heimat" (Winkler 86) is a distinct concept within the *Heimat* discourse and its long history in German-speaking cultures. Generally, *Heimat* refers to a sense of belonging brought about when individuals project their image of themselves onto a space, its people and customs in order to reaffirm themselves socially, as Peter Blickle explains (66-71).[11] This ties in with the notion of home as a childhood place, but also

[7] Joanna Jablkowska and Hubert Orlowski have pointed to the different place that *Heimatverlust* thus takes in the collective and cultural memory of victims of the Holocaust and victims of expulsion (Jablkowska 926; Orlowski 460), whereas Gigliotti highlights the "experiential trauma of deportation train journeys" as a core experience of Holocaust survivors (19).

[8] Account by survivor Regina Hoffmann, cited in Gigliotti 93. The verb "herded" is frequently used in victim accounts, as well as literary and visual depictions. See Gigliotti 99.

[9] According to Gigliotti, "[t]his policy and project of forced relocations identified Jews as deportable, administered them as 'travelers', and transported them as freight" (3).

[10] Gigliotti points to iconic photographs displayed in exhibitions and printed works: "A commonly used example […] is the film still, widely circulated as a photo, of a frightened child […] peering out of a cattle car, en route from Westerbork transit camp" (12), or images of the Dachau "death train" with railcars containing the bodies of between 2,000 and 3,000 prisoners who were evacuated from Buchenwald in April 1945 (17-18). Furthermore, Gigliotti lists examples of a "cinematic gallery of deportation", including "violent scenes of boarding trains in ghettos and transit camps, external images of closed freight cars in motion, and selections of deportees at arrival at camps. There are some films, such as *The Pawnbroker* (1964), *Angry Harvest* (1985), *Fateless* (2005), and *Der letzte Zug* (2006), which have taken the inside of the cattle car as an extended stage of immobilization and distress, portraying deportees' battles with space, smell, sound, and each other" (12).

[11] *Heimat* can be roughly translated as 'home' or 'homeland,' even though the word has no exact equivalent in English. All translations in the following are by the author of this article, except those of *Die Unvollendeten*.

with the understanding of home as an ancestral and communal place that can manifest itself in genealogical conceptual metaphors such as the 'fatherland' and territorial claims of ownership (Görner 90). In Nationalist Socialist ideology, this understanding was integrated into racist beliefs of Aryan Germans' harmony with their 'native soil' and genocidal practices, while excluding Jews and others from the concept of *Heimat*. Territorial claims that have tended to be associated with Heimat as an ancestral place have also been part of ideas of *verlorene Heimat* as a spatialized identity linked to a specific place with strong political, historical and cultural associations: in this case, the territories of the former German East—such as Silesia, East and West Prussia, and the Sudetenland—from which ethnic Germans fled or were expelled towards the end of the Second World War (Beer 85). For several decades, those borderland territories were at the center of political discussions in West Germany, frequently dominated by claims to the *verlorene Heimat* voiced through expellees' associations. In contrast, the official GDR discourse did not encourage open debates on the flight and expulsion of ethnic Germans to ensure harmonious relations to other Eastern Bloc brother states. Border issues were an issue of concern in Poland as well as in Czechoslovakia, even if not discussed openly before 1989 (Best; Kunštát and Retter). The GDR government's early and unconditional recognition of the Oder-Neiße border followed the GDR *Umsiedlergesetz* of 1950, which aimed at integrating refugees from the East (Kleßmann).

Whereas the flight and dislocation of ethnic Germans from states that would become part of the Eastern Bloc remained largely absent from East German literature until after 1989, with few exceptions (Niven), they were highly present in West German writing from the late 1940s. At the same time, this literature was perceived as resentful, or even revanchist, within large parts of the West German literary landscape, particularly between the 1960s and 1990s.[12] *Heimat* as something that could only be experienced in a specific geographic location was a concept shared by most of the first generation of expellees and refugees in both parts of Germany (Demshuk 17-19); for subsequent generations this has increasingly been replaced by more fluid ideas. In texts by second- and third-generation authors, *Heimat* manifests itself less in a physical place than in stories and memories (May-Chu; Winkler), in family histories (Eigler), and in hybrid concepts of belonging (Aydemir and Yaghoobifarah).

Railway stations as places of universal human suffering in *Die Unvollendeten*

Die Unvollendeten tells the story of four women from the small town of Komotau (Czech: Chomutov) in the Sudetenland: seventy-year-old Johanna, her daughters Hanna and Maria, and her eighteen-year-old granddaughter Anna. The novel follows their expulsion to an arrival that is merely a further stop in an ongoing journey. It brings them from their home town via Munich, Leipzig and Dresden to the Altmark, a rural area between Hamburg and Magdeburg. While Hanna and Maria eventually make their living in a local town, Anna moves on to East Berlin, where she has a son. The events are described in three parts and from different perspectives. When Anna's son, awaiting his death in the cancer ward of the Berlin Charité, looks back at a life that has failed on

[12] This was also due to the fact that, in addition to critical works by authors such as Günter Grass or Johannes Bobrowski, much of the *Heimatliteratur* disseminated by and above all in the expellees' associations tended to follow the same pattern: "Es war einmal ein Paradies namens 'Heimat', in das aus völlig unerklärlichen Gründen und wie aus dem Nichts Panzer der Roten Armee eindrangen und die dort lebenden Menschen vertrieben" (once upon a time there was a paradise called "Heimat" into which, for completely inexplicable reasons and as if from nowhere, tanks of the Red Army invaded and expelled the people living there; Joachimsthaler).

various levels, it is clear that the state of being uprooted and emotionally isolated constitutes a continuum in the family history. Within these three parts, modes of focalisation and narrative are shifting between characters, a heterodiegetic narrator and unidentifiable voices. Overlapping perspectives and voices that are difficult to assign or cannot be identified point, first, to shared experiences with individuals and groups outside the family. Second, they draw attention to fluctuating borders and interconnections between individual and family memory.[13]

Throughout the novel, the railway is employed as the central symbol for this traumatic experience of homelessness, of family members finding themselves in a constant state of transit and waiting. All three generations are affected by this. The narrative opens with an announcement that sets the tone and highlights what is going to be a central theme:

> 30 MINUTEN ZEIT – MIT HÖCHSTENS 8 KILO GEPÄCK PRO PERSON – AM BAHNHOF SICH EINZUFINDEN – DIEJENIGEN, DIE GEGEN DIESEN BEFEHL VERSTOSSEN, WERDEN NACH DEN KRIEGSGESETZEN BESTRAFT –

These lines are indented, placed in a prominent position on the page and printed in capital letters, thus drawing the reader's attention.[14] The first lines are repeated to announce the imminent death of Hanna's grandson at the end of the novel, highlighting the loss of life as a key theme (U 251). The experimental use of layout, syntax and orthography of the written language is a trademark of Jirgl's writing. Played in a loop from the loudspeakers on the platform of the Komotau railway station, the announcement barely gives those to be deported time to pack their lives together, before being transported to an unknown location. The scene is one of many in the book invoking the "Ikonographie des Holocaust" (Śliwińska 489), in this case announcements to Jews to assemble in order to be transported to camps. Iconic images of the railway thus create a polyvalent symbol or "conceptual metaphor" of forced relocation in Jirgl's narrative (Kövecses 2).[15] The inhumanity and human misery associated with expulsion and deportation is further highlighted through a reference to the bubonic plague as an earlier example: "Zuerst, wie in Früherenzeiten vor der Pest, drangen von-überall-her die Warnschreie menschlicher Stimmen an: *!Heutmorgen sind Viele schon erschlagen & erschossen worden –*" (U 5).[16] It turns both expulsion and

[13] This reflects the author's own childhood that was dominated by stories about the *verlorene Heimat*: "Nahezu der gesamte Alltag fand im innerfamilären Raum sich verwoben mit dieser Thematik" (Jirgl 2004; "Almost the entire everyday life in the inner-family space found itself interwoven with this theme").

[14] Jirgl 2012, 5. (Further references to *Die Unvollendeten* are given as U and the page number, or only the page number.) "YOU HAVE 30 MINUTES — MAXIMUM BAGGAGE 8 KILOS PER PERSON — CONGREGATE AT THE STATION — PERSONS DISOBEYING THIS ORDER WILL BE PUNISHED UNDER MARTIAL LAW —" (Jirgl 2020). All translations of passages from *Die Unvollendeten* are from this translation of the novel by Ian Galbraith. Taken from an E-book, they do not include page numbers. In the following, quotation marks will not be used for translations.

[15] Katarzyna Śliwińska diagnoses a "metaphorische Herstellung… [von] Kontinuität" through these references to iconic images of the Holocaust (489), a creation of continuity through metaphor. Jablkowska (936), Menke and Welzer also find references to the Holocaust in Jirgl's depiction of expulsion, while focusing on different aspects in their interpretations. Welzer's evaluation of Jirgl's discourse from a historical and ethical perspective differs from the others in that he accuses Jirgl of turning perpetrators into victims (58-59). On this debate, see also Kammler 227-234.

[16] In the beginning, as in earlier times when the-pest came close, human voices raised in alarm sounded from-every-quarter: !Many shot & beaten to death this morning —. While this appears to be the voice of an heterodiegetic narrator, the impression of timelessness is given from different perspectives,

the Holocaust into comparable examples of a universal, and timeless, experience. Furthermore, the reference to a pandemic beyond human control implies a denial of individual or collective responsibility both for the Holocaust and for the partly violent expulsion of ethnic groups.

The announcement is followed by the description of displaced people with white armbands, marking them as ethnic Germans, being transported in cattle cars. Again, this triggers associations with Holocaust victims: "Zuerst leitete man die Züge mit den Güterwagen, dadrin zu Hunderten Flüchtlinge mit weißen Arrmbinden hin1gepfercht, nach Bayern, bis knapp vor München." (U 6)[17] The trains, stations and platforms turn into places not only of *Heimatverlust*, but of dehumanization. While the suffering of women expellees from persistent acts of sexual violence is a striking feature of the narrative, acts of cruelty are committed by members of both genders and of different nationalities. In the internment camp on the Czech side, the young Anna is repeatedly raped, but is also saved by a Czech former partisan who directs her over the border (31). On the one hand, the events are put in their historical context: reference is made to measures agreed in Yalta by the Allied Forces to ensure a safe passage of the expellees, and to the Czech administration disregarding them (6). In the text, these violent expulsions and their political contexts are referred to as "*Wilde Vertreibungen*" (28). However, inhumanity against expellees is equally shown by Germans. When stranded on a roadside in rural Bavaria, the mayor refuses to give them accommodation, and the local Germans ignore their suffering (6). In other passages, the narrator stresses the misery of both Czech- and German-speaking communities brought about by the war: "Die Bomben der Allierten waren… in Komotau u in den anderen Orten im Sudetenland auf Tschechen u auf Deutsche gleichermaßen gefallen." (41)[18] Overall, inhumanity is depicted by Jirgl as a universal experience continuing throughout human history.

Being allowed to stay in Munich is tied to the condition of being separated from their mother – Jirgl's language and formatting interlinks this with the separation of older Jews from younger ones still deemed fit to work in concentration camps: "Denn für Alte hatte Niemand *Verwendung*."(6)[19] The cursive writing of terms generally associated with National Socialist discourse, through its thematization in historical works and Holocaust literature, creates associative links for the reader. The women refuse the offer and are forced on the train again: "So mussten sie erneut *auf-Transport*, wieder gefercht in Güterwaggons tage&nächte=lang: […]" (6).[20] The parallel implied between how expellees and victims of National Socialism experience their deportation is further enforced by repeated allusions to the 'cattle car' as an iconic image of Holocaust memory, and the comparison of people with animals. Both are part of the

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particularly in the first part of the novel. See, for example, Anna's description of the faces of those she sees on their way to the train station following the announcement when Anna's experience of this day is presented ten pages later: "In den Gesichtern selbst der Jüngsten schon dieses Erschrecken, als hätten Böen aus Kalksturm auch diesen Gesichtern bereits die Züge des Ewigen Deportierten aus allen Jahrhunderten – Angst Hunger Wut Dreck Krankheiten – tief 1gebrannt." (U 15-16; Even in the faces of the youngest she saw the same terror, as if blasts from a chalk storm had cut deeply into their features, branding them with the traits of the Eternal Deportee of All Centuries Past — fear hunger rage dirt sickness.)

[17] At first, the trains, goods-wagons packed with 100s of refugees wearing white armbands, were routed into Bavaria, finally coming to a halt shortly before Munich.

[18] During the past few years, in Komotau and the other Sudeten towns, the bombs of the-Allies had fallen on Germans n Czechs alike.

[19] […]; nobody had any *use* for old people.

[20] Which meant: getting back *on-the-transport*, crammed into freight wagons day&night: […]

same conceptual metaphor that is activated by accounts of Jewish victims being ‘herded’ into freight cars. The repeated use of the noun ‘transport,’ frequently in italics to draw further attention to it, is part of this metaphor. Descriptions of expellees as ‘left-over’ and left waiting on the platform recall iconic images of Jewish deportees and selection processes in this context: “Die Übriggebliebenen hockten hier, anonymes Menschen=Vieh mit dem Mief vomn Tier=Vieh auf *dem-Transport*, […]” (41).[21] Both the family members and others, of various ethnicities and nationalities, are turned into an unidentifiable mass of battered bodies:

> In den rissigen Holzabteilen hockende Menschen, vom Rütteln & Stottern der Fahrt gegen1nander geworfen, von 1 Halt zum anderen. […] Gestalten, zerschundne Gesichter mit bleichschwammiger Haut, Jung&alt gleichviel u gleichwenig unterscheidbar…– vielleicht weil sie, ob Tschechen od Deutsche, diesen Krieg überlebt hatten u: fortan in noch größerem Elend saßen als zuvor (40).[22]

However, this does not constitute a multidirectional memory in terms of “an ethics of comparison that coordinates the asymmetrical claims of… victims”, but rather “subsumes different histories under a logic of equation” (Rothberg 2011: 526). The distinctiveness and distinguishing features of different groups’ experiences in specific historical contexts are thus obfuscated.

Knotted intersections of history and memory?

According to Rothberg, multidirectional memory aims to bring different “histories into relation without erasing their differences or fetishizing their uniqueness. Proximate pasts are neither ‘separate and unique’ nor ‘equal’; rather, a form of modified ‘double consciousness’ arises capable of conjoining them in an open-ended assemblage.” (527-28) There are actually some passages in *Die Unvollendeten*, where such an assemblage is achieved. An example would be the description of the narrator’s grandmother Hanna, having become the head of the family after her husband’s death (U 69-71):

> Die dürr und sehnig wirkende Hanna würde auch dieses Mal die Strapazen der Reise, in Tabakkwalm u ins atemerstickende sauere Gedunste ungewaschner u kranker Menschen in den Waggons 1gepfercht, über-Stunden-hinweg aufrecht stehend gegen die Wand gelehnt od mit durchgedrücktem Rückgrat […] ohne Klagen stumm & aufrecht […] *anständig angezogen* […], als könne das-Anständige in ihrer äußeren Erscheinung ihrem Vorhaben behilflich sein. Denn es war nur einige Atemzüge her, daß Frauen *auf-dem-Transport*, um das Elend der Deportierten zu übertünchen, die Wangen mit eigenem Blut sich schminkten, den prüfenden Blicken der Selek-Tierer 1 Chance zum Weiteramlebenbleiben […] abzuringen. (24)[23]

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[21] Those who were left were crammed into these carriages, anonymous human=cattle exuding the stench of animal=cattle on a-transport.

[22] On the splitting wooden benches languished people who, between stops, were constantly being thrown against-1-another […], figures with chafed skin & pale bloated faces, whether old or: young made little difference […] — possibly because, whether German or Czech, they had survived the war only to find themselves feeling even more wretched than before. (A similar comparison is made on page 31.)

[23] Cooped up in carriages thick with tobacco smoke n the suffocating sour stench of unwashed sick bodies, the thin n wiry Hanna would yet again endure the ordeals of the journey, silently standing with her back against the wall for hours-at-a-time […], her back straight as a rod, uncomplaining, […] *decently dressed*; […] as if giving herself a-respectable-appearance might help her achieve her aims.

Hanna's protective shell of respectability is both compared to and contrasted with the plight of those deported by the National Socialist regime on the level of imagery. The deportees resort to using their own blood as make-up to create the illusion of health in order to survive. This takes the measures adopted by Hanna a step further, while also exposing their even greater vulnerability. For them, it is a question of survival. The comparison therefore creates a "noeud de mémoire" (Rothberg 2010: 7), a knotted intersection of memory and history that shows both difference and similarity. Nevertheless, the overarching comparative structure in *Die Unvollendeten* implies the universality of suffering, rather than creating a web of multidirectional memory.

The universal nature of inhumanity also manifests itself on a temporal level in *Die Unvollendeten*. On the one hand, this can be read as a deconstruction of modern temporality which is transformed into an efficiency of utmost cruelty. The clock at the railway station, with its standardized time communicated acoustically by means of announcements, points to a perverted idea of progress, reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer's grim assessment of Western Enlightenment in their *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947). In it, the authors ask how the progress of modern science and technology can promise to liberate people from ignorance, disease, and brutality, yet help create a world where people are willing to swallow fascist ideology and practice deliberate genocide. Their answer is that reason has become irrational, with a technologically advanced society radiating under the sign of disaster triumphant. This is also reflected in the three-part-structure of the novel, with the second part, "Unter Glas" (Under Glass) structured by place names, and the third part, "Jagen Jagen" (Chasing Chasing) by hours and minutes. In the epilogue of his previous work, *Genealogie des Tötens* (1990), where Jirgl refers to *Die Unvollendeten* as his next project, he outlines his reading of *Heimatverlust* as a loss of "Lebenszeit" or time to live.[24]

On the other hand, this results in the dehistoricization of historical experience. The latter supports Clemens Kammler and Arne de Winde's argument that Jirgl's genealogical perspective on the past reaches behind historical events and their specific political circumstances to highlight the atavisms in what he describes as "the century of camps & expulsions" (U 250). However, he also finds atavisms in the former GDR and in the present. Jirgl thus creates a mythical framework that subordinates history (Egger 93-128). Even if, from a psychological perspective, such a repetitive, timeless structure could be read as a "poetologische Konsequenz der Zeitresistenz des Traumas"

For it was barely yesterday that women *on-the-transports*, in an attempt to disguise their misery as deportees, had rouged their faces with their own blood, hoping to wrestle from the scrutinizing gaze of the selectors what might be their sole chance to remain alive ….

[24] In direkter Folge des Zweiten Weltkriegs war zunächst eine Unzahl von Familien deutscher Herkunft aus ihrer angestammten Heimat in Osteuropa vertrieben worden; viele überlebten diesen Treck nicht. Die übrigen waren gezwungen, in fremden Lebensräumen unter vollkommen veränderten Umständen neben ihnen keineswegs freundlich gesinnten Einheimischen neu sich anzusiedeln; sie blieben oftmals für die restliche Lebenszeit "Die Unvollendeten". Die Zeit für ihr Leben aber ist der Menschen ursprünglicher Besitz. Vielen war niemals ihre Zeit gegeben, vielmehr durch alle Vorkommnisse im 20. Jahrhundert ist diesen Menschen stets ihre Zeit genommen worden. (Jirgl 1990, As a direct consequence of the Second World War, a large number of families of German origin were expelled from their ancestral homeland in Eastern Europe; many did not survive this trek. The rest were forced to resettle in foreign habitats under completely changed circumstances next to locals who were by no means friendly to them; they often remained 'The Unfinished' for the rest of their lives. Their time to live, however, is the original possession of the people. Many of them were never given their time; rather, through all the events of the 20th century, their time has always been taken away from these people.)

(Vedder 77), i.e. a poetic manifestation of the time resistance of trauma, it adds further to the universalization of memory on a textual level.

Transgenerational trauma as an endless journey

Throughout his work, Jirgl sets out to explore the negative impact of National Socialism, the GDR as another form of totalitarianism, and capitalism (Jirgl 2004; Śliwińska). He does not so much distinguish between fundamentally different political systems, or dimensions of suffering inflicted by individual systems, but rather focuses on similarities, particularly on how regimes affect people's lives subcutaneously. In *Die Unvollendeten,* he asks how *Heimatverlust* affects the minds and bodies of a family in post-war East Germany in the form of a "transgenerational trauma" (Atkinson; Salberg), an issue he finds marginalized both in GDR discourse and discourses about the GDR after 1990 (Śliwińska). For those women of the first generation in *Die Unvollendeten*, who have experienced acts of violence and inhumanity as a normality, any act of kindness becomes unsettling, close relationships impossible. Hanna's refusal to enter a loving relationship with a colleague in her new place of work, while desperately holding on to the idea of a return to the old *Heimat*, is caused by her traumatic experience. This results in further suffering, both on her part and that of her family members. It is sadly ironic that both her old and new place of work is with the railway. The railway providing Hanna, her sister and grandson also with a new place to live – next to a station –
also creates a sense of continuity through what is a symbol of discontinuity throughout the narrative.[25]

The autodiegetic narrator in the third part of the novel, Anna's son Reiner, comments on how he finds himself disabled by this transgenerational trauma. Biographical rupture points where family narratives falter merge with unhappy memories of his childhood at the railway station.[26] These points enter the text as ciphers. The same applies to "DAS SCHWARZE O",[27] a recurrent motif that interlinks traumatic memories of acts of inhumanity on the level of language. The black "O" suggests, and at the same time denies, a causal relation between the child Reiner throwing a stone at one of the workers who he witnesses loading livestock onto a railcar in a cruel way, accidentally knocking out one of his eyes (U 201), and one of the onlookers from Komotau who Anna sees violently tearing an earring from the ear of one of the expellees on their march to the train station (U 16). What links these events is the absence of God, which the author indicates by his spelling of the word "GOtt" and "TOD" in the passage where Reiner remembers his own act of cruelty (U 201). Here and elsewhere in the text this absence is graphically marked as a black hole, an "O". Jirgl's language of memory works with changes in typography and orthography, punctuation, syntactical structure, and the splitting of words, strongly pronouncing the formal qualities of the text. Like the railway does on a symbolic level, it exposes language as "Schnittstelle unterschiedlicher Diskurse bzw. Stimmen" (Śliwińska 479),

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[25] Hanna's relief when being allocated the rooms in the train station (111) is in stark contrast to the train station as the key symbol for her traumatic experience, which points to her traumatized state: "Das Wort BAHNHOF stieg plötzlich auf zur Drohung: Immer werden auf BAHNHÖFEN über Menschen ENTSCHEIDUNGEN gefällt – –.(18, The word BAHNHOF suddenly became a threat in itself: again and again people's fates are DECIDED at !STATIONS — —.).

[26] One example among many is the child witnessing the brutality with which cattle is being loaded into trains. When he throws a stone at one of the workers beating one of the animals, he accidentally hits the man's eye. Some days later, he reads in the local paper that the man has died of Tetanus (201-4).

[27] THE BLACK O

an interface of different discourses or voices, while making historical and traumatic distortion visible. The way the text works with variable focalization makes the family history a larger collective story, thus merging postmemorial lines of filiation and affiliation.

Railway journeys and generational shift in *Katzenberge*

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 neighbors. 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 traveling 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. Her family stands for those Poles who were forced out of territories bordering the Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania between 1943 and 1946 (Kochanowski). In *Katzenberge* they have to flee their Galician village when their former Ukrainian neighbors carry out ethnic violence against the Polish population. Their struggle for 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. The previous German owner of the farm taken over by Nele's grandfather committed suicide when facing the prospect of losing his home. The westward flight of her grandfather, who returns once more to the east to bring along his wife and first son, therefore mirrors the expulsion of the ethnic German population, and at the same time links both experiences of displacement to the Holocaust. The grandfather's description of being forced to make this journey in cattle wagons with an unknown destination associates his experience with that of Jews who were forcibly transported to concentration camps in the east in such wagons, as a key symbol of Holocaust literature. This link is further enforced through a direct reference to the Holocaust:[28]

> 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).[29]

[28] "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" (Janesch 138). Further references to *Katzenberge* are given as KB and the page number, or only the page number.

[29] 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, grand-father 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.

This is a clear reference to the railway journey in cattle cars as a key trope of Holocaust literature, and in stark contrast to the 19th century railway journey through landscapes the traveler perceives through the carriage window. Like those deported to their death by the National Socialist regime, being denied their most basic human needs already on their way there, the Polish men find themselves in cattle cars without windows, being transported to an unknown destination. In *Katzenberge*, Janesch employs this trope to interlink Polish, German and Jewish experiences as a multidirectional memory that opens transnational perspectives on examples of collective suffering that were claimed by competing historical narratives after 1945. However, these experiences are not simply equated. The above reference is presented in the subjunctive, thus assigned to the protagonist's grandfather and the other men trying to make sense of what is happening by making recourse to the (at that time) recent events of the Holocaust. The historic guilt of Germans supporting National Socialism is present to the reader throughout the novel, the victimhood of ethnic Germans losing their homes in Silesia thus relativized. This also applies to the status of victims/perpetrators of the grandfather and his travel companions, and their territorial claim or search for a new home. Both readings are present throughout the novel. The safe arrival and survival of the Polish displaced men in Silesia distinguishes them from Jewish victims of the Holocaust. While the suffering of Holocaust victims is addressed, Polish involvement in the persecution of Jews is not explored in greater depth. Because of the narrative's thematic focus, more attention is given to forced labor by people from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland and displacement. At the same time, the novel stresses the need for humanity to find common ground between different groups, in the past and present. In the course of the narrative, the grandfather's experience of displacement as a physical struggle for survival is made tangible for the reader through internal focalization. The reader is taken on a journey, sharing the experience of physical movement and the sensory perception of a concrete outside world with its magical elements from the grandfather's perspective in large parts of the narrative. Through this, the reader is invited to empathize with the grandfather, while sharing the bond that connects the narrator, Nele, with her grandfather, and her perspective on his story. Bonds are created through the narrative mode of magical realism and by means of the railway. At the same time, the grandfather's generational and 'Polish' perspective remains clearly distinct from that of his granddaughter's 'Polish-German' perspective, both by means of these narrative modes and on the level of language. One example for the latter is the use of subjunctive in passages where the narrator re-tells the stories of her grandfather. The translation of his experience from Polish into German by his granddaughter is also to be seen in this context.

The grandfather tries to maintain a link to his Galician homeland by constructing an imagined idyll of it through stories he shares with his granddaughter Nele when she spent her childhood summers with him, and which she retells in the course of the novel. These tales, which tend to include magical elements, create a strong emotional bond between Nele and her "Djadjo" (granddad), as she affectionately calls him. Her journey to Silesia after his death reminds her of her childhood journeys. She perceives the Silesian forests as mythical places: "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] The way her and her grandfather's journeys and ability to perceive the supernatural are interlinked

[30] 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.

creates a transgenerational perspective, and a dynamic that sparks memories in the narrator and moves the plot, and the narrator physically, forward. On her journey, first to her grandfather's farm in Silesia, then further east, across the Ukrainian border, to track his story of dislocation 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.

Transcending boundaries

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 uprooted from his homeland. Having believed as a child "dass sein Körper mit der Erde, auf der er lebte, untrennbar verbunden war" (KB 29),[31] this experience shakes his sense of identity to the core, and allows him to survive only "unter Schmerzen" (KB 29). The deep hatred and fear inflicted by this loss shapes his subsequent life, specifically the attempt to settle in Silesia: "Großvater sagte, er habe nicht gewusst, dass er sich für den Rest seines Lebens an ein Stück Land binden würde." (KB 43) And it is followed by the fear that the Germans might come back to take away again what he had built (KB 43). His experience of having been disowned himself, and forced to take the home of another, leads to an ongoing fear of loss and feeling of insecurity. Nele goes on a quest, traveling further east to bring back soil from his home village in Galicia to her grandfather's grave to give him peace – and to find out more about her family history. Earth as a central motif of the narrative plays with older concepts of *Heimat*, as well as the National Socialist ideology of blood and soil. The irrational protest of other family members against Nele's embarking on her journey – "Weil überhaupt noch niemand dahin gefahren ist." (KB 86)[32] – further emphasizes the way different generations are affected by the grandfather's experience: a gap in memory shared by all, even if with different consequences on their everyday lives. On one of her railway journeys through the Silesian forest the child Nele sees a supernatural creature. The grandfather's comment on the apparition of this "Biest" (KB 71), a beast that has haunted him and his family since he left his eastern home village, points toward the transnational meaning of the trauma the creature embodies:[33] 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 protagonist's biography, symbolized by her annual railway journey across the river Oder, transcends national and cultural boundaries: "weil ich beide Teile vereinte, von drüben, von jenseits der Oder, und von hier" (KB 27).[34]

This in-between is also reflected in the ambivalence between the natural and supernatural in the story, even embodied by Nele herself. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator reflects on her reception in the village after her return from Galicia, when she brings the earth she has taken from the grandfather's village, in what is Ukraine

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[31] […] that his body was inextricably linked to the earth on which he lived. When the grandfather talks about his birth, he also stresses the importance of the physical place he was born into: "Natürlich habe er sich mehr für die Erde, auf der er leben wollte, entschieden, als für die Familie […]" (KB 254, Naturally, he had rather chosen the earth on which he wanted to live, than the family [...]).

[32] Because nobody has ever gone there.

[33] While different parts of this creature are described in the course of the story, the fact that it is not named, but either just referred to as 'it' or by changing terms ("Tier" (KB 27, animal), "Biest" (KB 71), "Schatten" (shadow), "dunkler Fleck" (KB 141, dark spot) points to the difficulty of those encountering it to grasp or even define their experience.

[34] […] because I combined both parts, from over there, the other side of the river Oder, and from here.

now, to his grave in Silesia: “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)[35] The train serves here as a vehicle to cross boundaries between natural and supernatural, West and East, present and a violent past. On one level, the memory process in *Katzenberge* constitutes a familial postmemory that has features of a “group memory”, i.e., the familial transfer of embodied experience to the next generation (Assmann 2006: 3-10). It is experienced by the protagonist-narrator largely on an emotional, semi-conscious level. The traumatic memories her grandfather has shared with her 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 experience are thus shaped by traumatic fragments of events that exceed comprehension. In contrast to Jirgl’s novel, however, *Katzenberge* does not leave the granddaughter with a transgenerational trauma that proves debilitating and eventually destructive. Instead, her journey, retracing that of her grandfather to bring a handful of *Heimaterde* (soil from his old village) for his grave proves to be a healing act. The supernatural dimension of this act acknowledges both his perspective on his experience, and is an act of liberation. The magical realism Janesch employs for telling this story proves to be a suitable 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 of traumatic memories within the broader frame of cultural memory (Egger 2014). Furthermore, magical realism as a characteristic genre of Polish literature provides a further connection between the voice of the ‘German’ granddaughter and the ‘Polish’ grandfather.

Conclusion

Both *Katzenberge* and *Die Unvollendeten* address a family history marked by *Heimatverlust*. In both texts the trope of the railway journey brings together different threads of this history. In *Katzenberge*, the journey connects the granddaughter’s quest with the experience of those who lived this history in the past, and the histories of different groups of victims, without equating them. In the course of her 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 sense of belonging. The narrative mode of magical realism turns the journey into a shared experience, allowing for a level of empathy that includes emotional and corporeal connections while, at the same time, allowing for freedom and agency (Egger 2014). Furthermore, it highlights Janesch’s greater distance to the historical events remembered as a third-generation author.

In *Die Unvollendeten* the railway plays an even more central role as a motif. It interlinks the experience of being made powerless and homeless by external forces – symbolized by the transport movement and anonymous announcements – shared by different family members and groups of victims of National Socialism and the war. Homelessness as a form of powerlessness, in the form of being transported or reduced to a permanent state of waiting on platforms, is communicated in powerful images and an aesthetically challenging language. It is in line with this powerlessness, on a

[35] 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.

psychological and political level, that the journey in Jirgl's text is not a quest. The experience of being transported against one's will extends to the present-day narrator, the great-grandson, grandson and son of those expelled. Unlike Nele in *Katzenberge*, he does not become an agent, taking on an active role in reconstructing his family history. Furthermore, the continuous experience of powerlessness in Jirgl's novel reflects the author's negative experience of life in the GDR, as Śliwińska points out (477). It is this perspective on powerlessness and exposure to violence as a universal and transhistorical feature of human life, that makes the railway station in *Die Unvollendeten* a point of equation rather than multidirectionality. If read as part of a movement towards a postmemorial transnationalism to be found in Central and Eastern European writing since the 1990s, the two texts open quite different perspectives, which may also merit further discussion in a post-Soviet context. [36]

[36] In public media, Jirgl has spoken out against "Verhaltenskodizes sowohl der Schuld- als auch der Schamkultur" (2004), and in his 2016 article for *Die Zeit*, "Die Heimatvertriebenen" Hans Hütt counts Jirgl among those German intellectuals reverting to conservative, even right-wing ideas. This warning is justified in view of several public statements made by Jirgl. However, if applied to *Die Unvollendeten* without further textual analysis, such a reading would blend out the presence of more complex knots of memory and history in the text.

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