

Transitional Locations in Contemporary German Literature: Thinking About Dynamic Environments with Bakhtin

Melanie Frölich

To describe and analyze the specific character which space and time assume in human experience is one of the most appealing and important tasks of an anthropological philosophy. [---] We must follow an indirect way: we must analyze the forms of the human culture in order to discover the true character of space and time in our human world.

– Ernst Cassirer (1944: 47.)

Analysing space and time:

Towards a dynamic cultural and environmental approach

Transformation processes are characteristic of our perception of the world today. In the case of Europe, since the decline of the Soviet Empire, the lives of many Europeans have been structured by a deep break and discontinuity. When such experiences find expression in cultural forms such as literature, analysis has to deal with this ‘fracture’. Continuity of time is interrupted, and spaces of coexistence and simultaneity come into being. Our thesis is that, at times of such discontinuity, a spatial order becomes more important than a temporal one.

Dominance of time in narratology

Narratology, in its canonical approaches, obviously means analysis of time regardless of space. That means we have, above all, to reverse the critique offered by the organisers of our conference, when they criticise environmental aesthetics, because of their treating ‘environment with respect to its spatial synchronous aspect, regardless of time’.¹ A strict division of time and space transformed to an opposition of form and content seems to be responsible for this dominance

¹ Cf. Call for Papers (www.eki.ee/km/locations/place_about.htm, Feb. 27, 2004).

of time in narratology. As investigations make clear, this imbalance is due to an understanding of language and literature stressing time as flowing, linearity or chronology. In order to clarify, an overview is offered, dealing with the canonical² positions (Günther Müller, Eberhard Lämmert and Gérard Genette) of time analysis. It is important to note that we are dealing with a traditional line: these positions are highly based on each other. This line can be read, on the one hand, as an increase in differentiation, but on the other hand it involves a fixation of the hardly reflected dominance of time.

First the fundamental distinction between *erzählte Zeit* ('told time') and *Erzählzeit* ('telling time')³ from Günther Müller has to be considered. This approach is highly influenced by 'calling on' Johann Wolfgang von Goethe⁴ and referring to his studies of morphology. Art is understood as a different kind of nature (*Kunst eine andere Natur*, Goethe). The comparison next leads to osteology and the notion of *Gestalt* (form). In a highly speculative act, from a contemporary point of view, Müller equates bone structure with time structure in narration (cf. Müller's 'Goethes Morphologie in ihrer Bedeutungen für die Dichtungskunde'; see Müller 1974: 297). Again, this time structure is determined as the relation between *erzählte Zeit* and *Erzählzeit*. We have to stress that Müller is primarily interested in an analysis of 'Gestalt', not of time. But, still, reception treats his conception as a model of time analysis.

To explain the terms of *erzählte Zeit* and *Erzählzeit*, it is important to mention that they basically refer to a story of events that has happened in a special order or chronology (*erzählte Zeit*). Starting from the *Erzählzeit*, Müller questions in which order these events are represented in the narrated story. Thereby, a story is reduced to a timeline of events, which is translated to another timeline in narration, so that we are confronted with a kind of double-linearity. But before we criticise a reductive understanding of time, we have to deal with problematic

² Cf., for example, the common introductory work used at German Universities, Martinez and Scheffél (2003: 30–47). As a critique on time analysis, see Gibson (1996: 179–184), who refers to Müller's 'Die Bedeutung der Zeit in der Erzählkunst' (1946, see Müller 1974: 247–268), and Genette (1994).

³ Müller first claimed this distinction in 1945 in a lecture also having the title 'Erzählzeit and erzählte Zeit'. Cf. Müller 1974.

⁴ Since WWII in Germany, studies of Goethe have been very common as an apolitical practice that allows the displacement of guilt. Efforts to establish a close analysis of the literary work, liberated from historical issues, have to be seen in this context.

implications of representation and completeness, which have to be explained by the determination of a special notion of language and literature.

In the context of morphology, narration is based on a biological term of development that is significant for both language and literature. Language understood as a 'restless river' (*rastloser sprachlicher Fluß*, cf. Müller 1974: 188), as 'growing' (*Wachsen*), lasting maturity (*dauerndes Reifen*) and development in the meaning of 'unfolding' (*Entfaltung*) is comprised of predetermination and completion (cf. Müller 1974). As we may imagine, this comprehension is closely correlated to the German *Entwicklungsroman* (novel showing the development of a character), especially Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lebrjahre*, 1794–1795). Within development, time (even in a special notion) becomes the dominant force of organisation, meaning something develops in time, regardless of space. Or in other words, as expressed by Goethe: 'The story of man is his character.' (Goethe 1980: 458.) Unaware of the cultural and historical determination of development, this lays the foundations for the relationship between *erzählte Zeit* and *Erzählzeit* and universalises it. In the case of the *Entwicklungsroman*, there is no decisive difference between told time and telling time; both are characteristically developed in time, in succession, which means, in a sense, of one after another. Neither of the problems of simultaneity (in the sense of side by side) and coexistence (in the sense of one on top of the other) is reflected. And this blind spot has to be seen as the blind spot of space. Concentrating only on time, three-dimensionality disappears, and the possibility of time is reflected in space as a kind of deposit or vice versa.

Focusing on the problem of time dominance in narratology there is no decisive alteration from Günther Müller to Eberhard Lämmert. As a pupil of Müller, Lämmert consequently systematised the conception of *erzählte Zeit* and *Erzählzeit* in his dissertation *Forms of Construction in Narrating* (*Bauformen des Erzählens*), published in 1955 and still a canonical work. But a historical determination becomes clearer when Lämmert refers to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's momentous writing *Laokoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (*Laokoön oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*, 1766), which is also mentioned by Müller. Here we receive a decisive indication of time dominance in Literal Studies when Lessing points out: 'Stick to the truth: the sequence of tenses is the area of the poet, as space is the area of the painter.' (Lessing 1988: 119.) Lessing drew this strict distinction, once and for all, between poetry and painting, by an opposition of time and space.

Although **Gérard Genette**, in a paper, reflects on *La littérature et l'espace* (1969), space also remained a blind spot in his conception of *Discours du récit* (1972, see Genette 1994: 11–194), which still sets the standard today. Even if Genette, in *Nouveau discours du récit* (1983, see Genette 1994: 194–304), considers that his working on Marcel Proust is responsible for some distortions, particularly for stressing problems of time, space as a blind spot is not reflected. But, in the case of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*, 1913–1927) thinking about space would have been important. In contrast to the *Entwicklungsroman*, Proust no longer tells us a story developed in the succession of a timeline. Time in the *Recherche* is something that belongs to the past and what has to be remembered (and that means time) is more the object of the story than the story itself (as a development in time).⁵ As the first part ('Combray') shows, Marcel attempts to go back into the spaces of his past in an act of memory. For example, he takes the rooms as a starting point to tell the stories of their inhabitants, most distinctively when the never-again-visited room of Uncle Adolphe in 'Combray' rouses the story of a quarrel (cf. Proust 1913: 100–110).

However, we have to pose the question: what can be done through an analysis of time *à la Genette*? In *Discours du récit*, he offers three complexes: a) order, b) duration and c) frequency. All three are based on – as we have called it, referring to the conception of Günther Müller – a double linearity, which means, in the case of Genette, no longer *erzählte Zeit* and *Erzählzeit*, but the relationship between *histoire* and *récit* (cf. Genette 1994: 15–20). We just indicate that this transformation lets Genette solve the problems of representation and completeness, which we have mentioned in the case of Müller.⁶ While order deals with the question of which order events are narrated in, duration asks how long, and frequency, how often they are narrated. But evidently this analysis still needs, as a given condition, a kind of order referring to succession and a re-arrangeable chronology. So the limits of this model must be seen in the kind of double-linearity that excludes stories breaking with continuity. Obviously this is also the case in Proust's *Recherche*, and as Genette elegantly visualises, Proust overcomes the traditional method of narrating. But even if Genette is able to determine the

⁵ In German we can designate this distinction as *Zeit-Roman* (time as an object) and *Zeitroman* (a novel mainly arranged in time, telling a story referring to a historical time), as Jauß (1955) introduced it.

⁶ For further investigations, see the explanations of Ricoeur (1989).

time structure of the *Recherche* in negation to traditional forms, problems of co-existence and simultaneity are hardly discussed. With regard to Mikhail Bakhtin this has to be explained by remaining in the traditional line of the biographical novel.

As a result of time dominance in narratology, we can paradoxically point out, according to Andrew Gibson, a 'geometrisation or spatialisation of time' in the form of double-linearity, which consequently leads to the fact that '[t]ime is neutralised, programmed to a set of co-ordinates, rid of any disquieting events' (Gibson 1996: 182). But what happens if it is not the story that is narrated but, instead, its unavailability; if narrative order of one event after another can not be generated and the timeline is interrupted?

Thinking about dynamic environments with Bakhtin

We have already stated that space as a blind spot that seems to be responsible for narratology is neither able to deal productively with simultaneity (side by side) nor with coexistence (one on top of the other). By emphasising only the dimension of time, and so linearity, more complex modes of narrating are not adequately describable in their quality. Due to Bakhtin, from his first main writing on, namely *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (*Проблемы творчества Достоевского*, 1929), these problems have been examined in a convincing way. Therefore we point out the special quality of the Bakhtinian approaches that contrasts with canonical narratology.

The notion of language

The notion of language and literature is important to the analysis of narration. What I find amazing is that, as Tzvetan Todorov has pointed out, 'there is no *development* in Bakhtin's work' (Todorov 1984: 12), which means that everything is already included in his work on Dostoevsky. This shows two different qualities: on the one hand, the meaning of Dostoevsky's consequently breaking with a story told in succession, following ideals such as completeness and truth, expressed by an omniscient narrator, and on the other hand Bakhtin insisting on dialogism and fighting for new ways of thinking more complexly, highly oriented to Dostoevsky, as expressed by the following quotation: 'We must renounce our monologic habits so that we might come to feel at home in the new artistic

sphere which Dostoevsky discovered, so that we might orient ourselves in that incomparably more complex *artistic model of the world* which he created.' (Bakhtin 1984: 272.) This means, in contrast to Müller and Lämmert, Bakhtin does not stress the flowing of language and its final completeness, but rather its dialogical character and therefore ambiguity and inexhaustibility. Instead of stressing the 'dialogue in the abused sense of encounter, agreement, convergence, compromise and synthesis' (Ponzio 2003: 42), as Augusto Ponzio critically remarked on Bakhtin's main interpreters, dialogue is 'refractory to synthesis' (Ponzio 2003: 41). When Bakhtin even defines the word as the smallest unit of language encountered, then it does not necessarily indicate agreement. Rather, encountering aims at the cultural or historical determination of language: 'Only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs in the object.' (Bakhtin 1981b: 279.) In the best way, we can notice the discontinuous process of understanding through language. Accompanied by Bakhtin, we enter into a space of coexistence, simultaneity and interrelationship, as it is especially significant for the literal works of Dostoevsky.

The notion of literature

What makes Bakhtin so convincing is the fact that he does not reduce literature to Dostoevsky, although he evidently supports dialogical literature. First, this must be seen as a kind of polemic against the canon and secondly he also is aware of monological literature. While Müller and also Lämmert substitute for an aesthetic of the *Entwicklungsroman*, Genette writes primarily the great story of Proust's succeeding in liberating literature from traditional narration. Although Bakhtin also writes about Dostoevsky's inventing a new aesthetic, namely the aesthetic of the polyphonic novel, he generally disposes of two literal models distinguished by artistic perspective or, in other words, viewpoint. It is exactly this differentiation that makes his theory so productive. Contrasting the *Entwicklungsroman* with the novels of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin describes these two artistic perspectives in the following way, which, being central, has to be quoted in detail:

The fundamental category in Dostoevsky's mode of artistic visualizing was not evolution, but *coexistence* and *interaction*. He saw and conceived his world primarily in terms of space, not time. Hence, his deep affinity for the dramatic form. Dostoevsky strives to organize all available meaningful material of reality, in one time-frame, in the form

of a dramatic juxtaposition, and he strives to develop it extensively. An artist such as Goethe, for example, gravitates organically toward an evolving sequence. He strives to perceive all existing contradictions as various stages of some unified development; in every manifestation of the present he strives to glimpse a trace of the past, a peak of the present-day or a tendency of the future; and as a consequence, nothing for him is arranged along a single extensive plane. Such in any case was the basis tendency of his mode for viewing and understanding the world.

In contrast to Goethe, Dostoevsky attempted to perceive the very stages themselves in their simultaneity, to juxtapose and counter-pose them dramatically, and not to stretch them into an evolving sequence. For him, to get one's bearings in the world meant to conceive all its content as simultaneous, and to guess at their interrelationships in the cross section of a single moment. (Bakhtin 1984: 28.)

While the model of Goethe is organised in time, showing an evolving sequence, a unified development, the model of Dostoevsky is organised in space, showing simultaneity, coexistence, and inter-relationships in a single moment. As we can see, the main criteria of this differentiation are a) the way of dealing with a story (evolutionary line vs. single moment) and b) the kind of the story itself (intensive unfolding/story of a life vs. extensive unfolding/story of a crisis).⁷ Furthermore Bakhtin puts these two types in different traditions of the genre; while Goethe's *Lehrjahre* represents a biographical novel, the novels of Dostoevsky, such as *Crime and Punishment* (*Преступление и наказание*, 1866), in contrast are adventure novels. Stressing the diachronic perspective and discontinuous development of the novel, Bakhtin is aware of different space and time conceptions. Considering these points, the contrast between Goethe and Dostoevsky turns out to be the contrast between biographical time, concentrating on recognisability and aiming towards completeness and, on the other hand, carnivalesque time and space in 'joyful relativity'. While Goethe shows the process of maturity (development), Dostoevsky shows the protagonist in an exceptional situation, proving a special idea (threshold).

Keeping this in mind, we finally have to look at another fruitful study of Bakhtin, namely *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel* (*Формы времени и хронотопа в романе*, 1937–1938, see Bakhtin 1981a). Thereby we focus on our topic of transitional locations as dynamic environments.

⁷ We indicate that Lämmert (1955: 42) has pointed out a comparable differentiation between the story of life versus the story of crisis.

First, we have to emphasise that the specially specified form-content category of the *chronotope* breaks with the approaches of canonical narratology, which we have characterised as a form-content opposition transferred to a time-space opposition. On the contrary, chronotope evidently visualised the interrelationship of time and space. This incompatibility might, furthermore, explain narratology's resistance to Bakhtinian approaches. Also in contrast to Müller and Lämmert, who focused mainly on literature from the 18th and 19th century, and Genette, who concentrated on Proust, Bakhtin's study is based on a wide range of literature (from antiquity to Rabelais and beyond).

Considering the study of chronotope, we can support our conjecture concerning transitional locations, when Bakhtin, facing the era of Dante Alighieri, points out: 'Such divisions as time introduces – "earlier" and "later" – have no substance here; they must be ignored in order to understand this vertical world; everything must be perceived as being within *a single time* ..., one must see this entire world as simultaneous.' (Bakhtin 1981a: 157.) Let us sum up: contradictions in one time lead to a narrative model organised by absolute simultaneity and coexistence. In the case of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (*La divina commedia*, around 1307–1321), the world is shown in an elevation of one moment, which is to be explained by the transition from a profane to a secular order. This being in between two ages is characteristic of Dante. Only a few years before, when Giovanni Boccaccio was finishing *The Decameron* (*Il Decamerone*, around 1350), the profane order clearly prevailed over the secular order.⁸

To come to the point, also in the case of German Reunification a few years are decisive in regard to the 'change' (in German, the term *Wende* is a metaphor for the reunification). Focusing on the 'fall of the wall'⁹ generation, we are mainly interested in two issues related to the Bakhtinian artistic perspective or viewpoint: first, the fact of dealing with experiences of transformation, or more generally the artistic perspective on the story (evolutionary line vs. single moment) and the kind of story (intensive unfolding/story of a life vs. extensive unfolding/story of a crisis), and second, the mode of time and space, which is significant to those experiences, especially when focusing on transitional locations.

⁸ Due to Neuschäfer (1969), the spirit of the Renaissance expressed in the novellas of Boccaccio, stands in contrast to medieval predecessors' persuasion.

⁹ The generation of in-between was born around 1975 in the GDR, but reached maturity in the reunified system of the FRG. Primarily, this means that this generation was too young to tangle with the political system, which makes the experience of transformation in general more important.

Transitional locations in contemporary German literature

Despite the highly heterogeneous character of my examples in their dealings with experiences of transformation, we can trace a close relationship between them in the kind of translating that breaks into literature.

We start with Jana Hensel's (b. 1976) national best-seller *Zonenkinder* (2002), which as a literary essay makes the issue of transformation more easily accessible to us and will probably support the understanding of the extreme symbolic novella *Engagements with Mattok* (*Verabredungen mit Mattok*, 2004), by Julia Schoch (b. 1974).¹⁰

Jana Hensel, *Zonenkinder* (2002):

Generating continuity – the story of loss and success

Artistic perspective

Hensel starts her narration directly with the break in her biography, 'the end of her childhood' (Hensel 2002: 14), which is synonymous with the end of the GDR. She attempts to reconstruct her past as a sunken world, and claims that the loss of her memories is caused by her always looking forward and never backward. So she says: 'I'd like to know again, where we come from, and so I will try to trace the lost memories and unrecognised experiences, even if I fear not finding the way back.' (Hensel 2002: 14.)

The consequent use in the perspective of 'we' to create a generation is decisive. It is important to mention that Hensel organised her chapters thematically in relation to Florian Illies' *Generation Golf* (2001), a narration of the 'normal way' of growing up in West Germany, in which the East is definitely a blind spot. This fact gives the best-seller *Zonenkinder* a kind of political meaning, because Hensel is the first young East German to tell her story, having for a long time been silenced. Only afterwards was the phenomenon of telling the eastern past born,¹¹ with such popular examples as the film *Good bye Lenin!* (director Wolfgang Becker, 2003).

Over and above telling of a different past in *Zonenkinder*, the narrative act receives a sort of compensational function. During the narration, the story of

¹⁰ All quotations are translated by myself and, in the case of Julia Schoch, in consultation with the author.

¹¹ Following Hensel, there are more stories added about childhood in the GDR, for example: Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (2003) and Michael Tetzlaff's (b. 1973) *Ostblöckchen: Neues aus der Zone* (2004).

loss changes into a story of success. While in the beginning Hensel tells of lost memories, lost experiences and also the lost home (*Heimat*), in the end she says 'we have managed it'. The fear of a missing point changes into the knowledge of 'we are flexible enough to stand different circumstances'. As we can see, more important than a truthful reconstruction is the act of re-writing her story. Hensel's strength is highly connected to the experience of her successfully dealing with the break. Thereby, discontinuity is defused to continuity in the narrative act. Concerning our main question, we can state that a story of crisis is transformed to a kind of evolving sequence of development,¹² so the tension of the break is still alive in the tension of form and content. But we can, on no account, reduce *Zonenkinder* to a reassuring story, as the reception shows exactly the contrary: for example, discussions between different positions and generations, between East and West. If discussions have arisen, then that is because Hensel named the contradictions directly. That means *Zonenkinder* is anything but reducible to one meaning.

Mode of space and time

As in the case of Dante, where transitions lead to contradictions in one time/space, we can observe comparable descriptions of transformations in *Zonenkinder*, which I would like to analyse through examples of transitional locations. In anticipation, I have assumed the mode of coexistence is significant. Transformation thereby can be understood as a shifting between familiarity and strangeness. I would like to present one example where Hensel is describing the main station of her hometown Leipzig, using dramatic contradictions:

But this main station was not our train station any more. It was not this one or the other high polished temple of service in Dresden or East-Berlin, where unemployed persons enter service as porters and train employees try hard to achieve servile subservience, where we start out for foreign parts. These **painted-over** locations we do not know, we are not familiar with them, and either as a door to go far away or as a key to home they are no good, which make them different from their predecessors. (Hensel 2002: 30; my emphasis – *M. F.*)

This image, comparable to a highly polished pamphlet, clearly shows how capitalism overcomes locations with a socialist past. Especially in the meaning of 'pain-

¹² Trying to generate an offer of identification to her 'companions in distress', she necessarily has to synthesise.

ted over', transformation receives a metaphorical expression. This being 'painted over' furthermore makes the interrelationship between space and time more evident. 'Painted over' means there still exists a deeper layer connected to the past. I would like to recall the borders of narratological analysis of time. In the case of transitional locations, we definitely need the relationship between time and space as different time deposits in space like inscriptions, even when the deeper coats disappear from the surface until: 'The East has become, in contrast to this [the West – *M. F.*], **featureless**.' (Hensel 2002: 34; my emphasis – *M. F.*) Thereby, we get another metaphorical expression for the sunken world: 'featureless' in the sense of locations having lost their expression, their character and, not least, their identity; they become interchangeable. Using the same expression to express human identity, the value of space is transferred to the human being:

The change [metaphorical for Reunification – *M. F.*] has made us children of 'the rise', suddenly coming from nowhere and every side is whispering about where they have to go. We only look forward, never backward. Continuously, the goal in front of our eyes, we do well to forget our roots as quickly as possible, becoming flexible, adaptable, **featureless**. (Hensel 2002: 72; my emphasis – *M. F.*)

The close connection between space and identity actually becomes clear through the term 'featureless'. As the locations become featureless, human beings have to become featureless in the process of adaptation. This leads us to a different point of view on the story of success, which as a story of flexibility implies the ideology of capitalism. Flexibility is also criticised as adaptability. Also in our next case, Schoch's *Verabredungen mit Mattok*, adaptability and flexibility play an important role.

**Julia Schoch, *Verabredungen mit Mattok* (2004):
Narrating the break – novella of catastrophe**

Artistic perspective

In contrast to Hensel, Schoch deals symbolically, rather than directly, with the break in her biography. But in an interview she still stresses the meaning of the break in her biography:

West Germans do not miss the GDR. Instead, it is the experience of an absolute break – and the 'change' was such a break. This means the fundamental experience that what exists is not self-evident or natural. (Schoch 2002.)

As this statement suggests, it is not the story of a different past, 'the story as such' (the content), that is decisive, but the more general experience of a break as an experience of discontinuity. In an essay, she also speaks against working off historical events or issues, because this would involve authors becoming popular historians. Instead she proclaims a notion of literature which stresses the non-evident and deals more with possibility than reality (cf. Schoch 2003: 54). For Hensel, narrating her story was more important than a truthful reconstruction. In a similar manner, for Schoch it is not the story of transformation in its content that is meaningful, but the influence on perception. That brings us to our thesis: the level of form seems to be more relevant in terms of the break than the level of content. To come to the point: *Verabredungen mit Mattok* does not necessarily need to be read as a story of transformation, but it could still reveal interesting information about the perception of a whole generation that we attempt to discover.

Here again narratology, in concentrating on the story (as a timeline of events) and a universalised notion of time related to the biographical novel, reaches its limits. The disquieting or disturbing event in its unavailability means space is a blind spot, but is highly relevant in dealing with experiences of transformation.

Above all, *Verabredungen mit Mattok* can be classified as a novella of catastrophe and, hence, is much closer to the story of crisis, showing the hero in an extraordinary situation. The narration starts connecting two catastrophes right in the first sentence: a ship transporting heavy oil across the Baltic Sea is breaking apart near the coast, where Claire (the protagonist), who is staying at a health-resort, is informed of the untreatable eczema on her right hand. The reader, in the first sentence, is confronted with exceptional situations, the threshold between normality and abnormality. It is striking when Schoch uses the German word *Riss* ('rip') and thereby generates a possible connection between the two catastrophes in the images of a 'rip in a ship' and 'chapped skin'. On the other hand it opens a door to another meaning of *Riss* as a rip in the landscape: Claire is looking through binoculars at the landscape, which is ripped as the ship sinks. Also her perception is determined by the rip. These rips float on the story, marking disquieting events and instability.

However, it is obvious that *Verabredungen mit Mattok* and *Zonenkinder*, present an order which is far from reassuring described by Florian Illies (b. 1971 in West-Germany) as: 'I feel like the postman could have given, right at this moment, the 'all-around-careless-packet' [*Rundum-sorglos-Paket*], or as a cat,

which ‘Frauchen^[13] has put next to the “Sheba”^[14], a blade of parsley^[15].’ (Illies 2000: 9.) Both, Jana Hensel and Julia Schoch have a more critical perspective on advertisement, as we will see later in a detail from *Verabredungen mit Mattok*. In *Zonenkinder* you can find an echo of a coffee advertisement: ‘Oh, the revolution is going on: boundless cheap coffee prices by Tchibo!’ (quotation follows Hensel 2002: 50), as an allusion to the peaceful revolution of 1989. But Schoch’s novella, in my opinion, is more a critique of dealing with disquieting events, than just a comment on instability in the main sense of *Riss*. As the peaceful revolution is devalued in the advertisement, in Schoch’s novella people see extraordinary situations as normal and do not adequately deal with them. There is no discussion of problems, no attempt to find reasons instead of mechanical behaviour. It is – as we interpret it – a critique on changes which are neither remarked on nor scrutinised. Considering the mode of time and space in the novella, we are able to visualise our thesis.

Mode of time and space

In *Verabredungen mit Mattok*, descriptions of transitional locations play an important role. We quote and analyse one example, in which the expression ‘pasted over’ is comparable to Hensel’s expression ‘painted-over’:

They [Claire and Mattok – *M. F.*] went now through a quarter with newly painted houses and clean plots. The streets were named after kings, emperors or earls, who had lived at this place while staying at a health resort or used to spend the night there on their way through. How flexible everything was! The earlier designations had been replaced, and in some places the signs had only been pasted over with foil. Claire imagined again and again further layers, pasted up through the years on the signs, till the metal poles simply broke down. They had to go on for a while till they passed a little road where the old sign still existed, because it led harmlessly to a meadow footpath. (Schoch 2004: 44.)

As we can see, transitional locations are again characterised by different layers, in this case exaggerated into a fantastic mode. When Claire’s inner voice says ‘How flexible was everything!’, it is not said in a positive, fascinated way. Finally this flexibility leads to a symbolic breakdown of the pole. Otherwise she is shocked

¹³ Expression for a put-down woman, especially in the case of a pet owner.

¹⁴ Sheba is a high-priced cat food first marketed in the 1980s.

¹⁵ Naturally, this image comes from television advertising!

that everything is so flexible, and in a time of ecological catastrophe things keep going on in a mechanical way. She especially criticises an English slogan which she later hears on the radio: 'As times change, we have to change with them.' (Schoch 2004: 117.) This slogan makes her react in a very strict way: 'In anger Claire ripped off the wall paper next to her.' (Schoch 2004: 117.) We can read this novella as a critique of flexibility as adaptability. This becomes clear when Claire admonishes herself, 'Do only the impossible [---] Or nothing!' (Schoch 2004: 111.) Consequently, the novella ends with Claire acting impossible. She puts her hands into heavy oil, which we can interpret as an act of purification, which reverses the image of pollution from smut to energy.

Moreover, we can point to a connection between the image of transitional locations, in the description of 'pasted over' symbolising different layers, and identity. Claire, in her personal catastrophe, is characterised by the unhealthy peeling away of her skin, which she loses layer by layer. This image can be interpreted in a double sense: first, it stands symbolically for a deeper layer, as the 'true coat' comparable to the notion of the featureless in the case of *Zonenkinder*, and second, it carries the hope of a new coat as an act of recreation. Hensel criticised her own habit of always looking forward and never backward. *Verabredungen mit Mattok* likewise shows a critique of time conceptions, shown by Mattok's and Claire's attempts to break with a linear time conception, a mechanical and also a planned action. In the most expressive sequence Claire is finally going in circles:

Before there was an ending, things simply and continuously changed their form to keep on living like that. Claire felt surrounded by this softness like a fixed 'cubby stone'. But soon it occurred to her that her skin, kept under cotton padding, was also incessantly moving, moving into a time which was an open space. Furious about this hopelessness, she walked in circles for some time. (Schoch 2004: 86.)

This quotation shows, in contrast, two different time conceptions: on the one hand, the endless timeline as an open space and, on the other, the closed circle. The image of the circle means no beginning and no end, no progress, but also completeness in the sense of protection and in the sense of isolation. Searching for completeness means overcoming an 'unbearable wideness' (Schoch 2004: 87). In the context of transitional locations and transformation processes, we can read this attempt as a critique on the endless timeline of changes, which affects flexibility and adaptability. Finally, a more reflective involvement with the extraordinary is demanded by *Verabredungen mit Mattok*.

Conclusion

To sum up, we have to consider the introductory quotation by Ernst Cassirer. As we have seen in the examples of contemporary German literature, the character of space and time in our human world is anything but universal: 'It would be a naïve and unfounded assumption to consider the appearance of space and time as necessarily one and the same for all organic beings.' (Cassirer 1944: 47.) Therefore we have to stress space and time as being determined by culture and history. As our investigations have shown, the experience of transformation to a young 'in-between' generation is characteristically reflected in literature, not only at the level of content but also at the level of form.

The limits of narratology thus not only have to be explained by space as a blind spot, but also by the lack of cultural and environmental or historical dimensions. In contrast to this, Bakhtin, strictly influenced by Cassirer, is aware of these determinations of cultural forms. His study of chronotope makes this especially evident. Stressing the interrelationship between space and time, as well as between form and content, his approach adequately deals with transitional locations, which could be understood in the mode of coexistence.

Moreover, as the examples of Jana Hensel and Julia Schoch show, space in narration is more than just scenery. Identity processes not only take place in space and time, but are also highly connected to them. The metaphorical term 'featureless', used in *Zonenkinder* to describe the East as well as the identity of one generation, and also the term *Riss* in *Verabredungen mit Mattok* clearly show space and time being constitutive for identity.

Transformation experiences correlated to unavailability, as pointed out by our examples, require an analysis which accepts the disquieting event as such. This especially denies the possibility of narratology being an adequate instrument to question order, duration and frequency based on double-linearity.

Further investigations will be necessary to deal with a special chronotope of transformation processes in the case of German Reunification. Moreover, it would actually be interesting to compare those experiences and perceptions with those of our European neighbours through cultural form of literature, as well as through other cultural expressions.

References

- Bakhtin, Mikhail 1981a. *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*. – M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 84–258
- Bakhtin, Mikhail 1981b. *Discourse in the Novel*. – M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 259–422
- Bakhtin, Mikhail 1984. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Cassirer, Ernst 1944. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press
- Dostoevskij, Fjodor (1866) 1996. *Verbrechen und Strafe*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch
- Genette, Gérard 1969. La littérature et l'espace. – *Figures II. Essais*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, pp. 43–48
- Genette, Gérard 1994. *Die Erzählung*. München: Fink
- Gibson, Andrew 1996. *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (1794–1795) 1980. *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Ed. Erich Schmidt. Frankfurt am Main: Insel
- Hensel, Jana 2002. *Zonenkinder*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt
- Illies, Florian 2001. *Generation Golf: Eine Inspektion*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer
- Jauff, Hans Robert 1955. *Zeit und Erinnerung in Marcel Prousts «À la recherche du temps perdu»: Ein Beitrag zur Theorie des Romans*. Heidelberg: Winter
- Lämmert, Eberhard 1955. *Bauformen des Erzählens*. Stuttgart: Metzler
- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1766) 1988. *Laokoön oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*. Ed. Kurt Wölfel. Frankfurt am Main: Insel
- Martinez, Matias; Scheffel, Michael 2003. *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*. München: Beck
- Müller, Günther 1974. *Morphologische Poetik: Gesammelte Aufsätze*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft
- Neuschäfer, Hans-Jörg 1969. *Boccaccio und der Beginn der Novelle*. München: Fink
- Ponzo, Augusto 2003. Modeling, dialogue, and globality: Biosemiotics and semiotics of self. 1. Semiosis, modeling and dialogism. – *Sign Systems Studies*, Vol. 31, pp. 25–63
- Proust, Marcel 1913. *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Combray. – M. Proust. *In Swanns Welt*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, pp. 9–248
- Ricoeur, Paul 1989. *Zeit und Erzählung*. Bd. II. *Zeit und literarische Erzählung*. München: Fink
- Schoch, Julia 2002. Generation Trabant. – *Die Welt*, 9. 11. 2002

Schoch, Julia 2003. Die wattierte Wirklichkeit und ihre Literatur. – *EDIT. Papier für neue Texte*, Vol. 32, pp. 52–55

Schoch, Julia 2004. *Verabredungen mit Mattok*. München: Piper

Todorov, Tzvetan 1984. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press