Herta Müller's *Atemschaukel (The Hunger Angel)* in the Context of Twentieth-Century Forced Migration in East-Central Europe
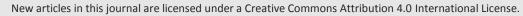
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Abstract: My paper elaborates Herta Müller's Gulag novel, *Atemschaukel* (2009; published in English under the title of *The Hunger Angel* in 2012), in the historical, political and ethical contexts of twentieth-century forced migrations by placing the novel among those exodus narratives that have unfolded the parallel history of Romanian-German and Jewish communities during and after the Second World War. Given the fact that the memory of forced migrations and of the Gulag is a "soft memory" (Etkind 2004), there are no consensual remembrance policies in any concerned East or East-Central European country regarding their history. In the absence of official ownership, the legacies of these colletive and individual traumas became predominantly text-based (rather than image- or monument-based). One must therefore study those aesthetical forms by which literature is able to encode the physical, psychological, moral, social-political conditions of any totalitarian rule—and thus, attempt to establish the perceptional and sensational frames on which the universe of the Gulag can be re-constructed. Accordingly, my paper gives an amplifying view of the tendencies by which Müller's *Atemschaukel* both preserves and subtly re-orchestrates the conventions of the genre of the Gulag novel. One of the main achievements of her (politics of) aesthetics consists in re-creating the image of the labor camp through an ethically grounded conception of literary testimony, which, at the same time, gains and fulfills a mediative (mimetic) function.

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   Several spatial and temporal parameters of the events that take place in Herta Müller's novels can easily be linked to and associated with the history of the Romanian-German minority in the twentieth century, such as their deportation into Soviet labor camps in 1945, or their immigration to Western Europe (mainly to Germany) in the 1970–80's. Nevertheless, we must

realize that from a larger perspective these events at the same time form part of those collective and individual narratives of the twentieth-century East-Central European history that are of a heteronomous nature. The military coup on August 23, 1944—designed mainly by the Sovereign and leftist political forces—directly led to calling off the further deportation of Romanian Jews to Nazi death camps in Transnistria. Shortly thereafter, it also led to the occupation and sovietization of Romania. Beginning in January 1945, the main body of the German community was coercively deported to Soviet forced labor camps to compensate for the losses suffered by the USSR during the war.

These virtually drawn paths of forced migration during and after the Second World War reveal a double exodus (in terms of time and space) in the history of both ethnic groups in Romania. The intersecting paths of exile create a dynamic concept of *shared spaces* over the traditional and static concept of the places of coexistence, that is, of culturally, historically and symbolically fixed places of remembrance. Given the slow, unstoppable disappearance of the witness generations, making a radical change of remembrance policies towards ones that make their own practices more multi-medial seems inevitable. This consideration is required not only to keep up with the changing paradigm of media, but it derives from the character of the differing exile narratives of the two groups as well. Their structure is much more divergent, their temporal and spatial traces are much more diffusive than those of the traditional narratives and historical representations based on the cultural and symbolical ethos of the *lieu de mémoire* ['site of memory']. The concept is related to collective memory, stating that a *lieu de mémoire* can be "any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" (Nora 1996: xvii). No matter how virtual the overlapping routes of exile may be, they nevertheless join the array of the alternative *lieux de mémoire* of the twentieth-century history: death camps, concentration camps, labor camps, refugee camps, prisons, reeducation camps, interrogation chambers, and so on. They emerge as both historical and fictional places, constituted by differing remembrance policies and collective or individual narratives.

One subversive and challenging thematization of East-Central European forced migration throughout the 1930s and 1940s is Péter Forgács's *The Danube Exodus: The Rippling Currents of the River*, an extended documentary film and interactive installation about the displacement of Jewish and German minorities during the Second World War and the numerous connections between these two stories. One of the main connections between them is the person of Nándor Andrásovits, a Hungarian sea captain and amateur filmmaker, who recorded the voyages of both groups with his 8mm camera. Herta Müller's *Atemschaukel* (which translates as: "swing of breath"), a novel that was actually written in cooperation with Oskar Pastior, a Romanian-German poet, and then published in 2009 without any indication of their co-authorship, recounts the preparations of its seventeen-years-old protagonist, Leo Auberg, (Pastior's alter ego) for his deportation and journey in a converted cattle truck together with hundreds of other ethnic Germans from Romania to the Ukraine. This occurred in January 1945 when, on orders from Moscow, some 80,000 adult Romanian-Germans (nearly half of whom were from the Banat, Müller's birthplace) were rounded up by the Red Army in an act of revenge and recompence for Nazi crimes and deported to the Soviet Union to work on reconstruction projects, where some 10,000 subsequently died (Wichner 2005: 135).

The installation entitled 'The Danube Exodus' immerses its visitors into three interwoven historical narratives. They can choose to enter three separate spaces in any sequence, and, within each, to use a touch-screen monitor interface to pursue a particular pathway. One story-line tells of Hungarian and Slovakian Jews fleeing Nazi persecution in July 1939 as they try to reach a ship on the Black Sea that will carry them to Palestine. The second story, set throughout October to November 1940 following the Soviet re-annexation of Bessarabia from Romania, tells of émigré German farmers abandoning their adopted homeland to migrate to the Third Reich and eventually being relocated to occupied Poland, from where they would have to flee again during the western advancement of the Red Army in 1945. Both groups were transported along the Danube River by Captain Nándor Andrásovits. He and the Danube are the subjects of the third story.

Well-known for his compelling documentaries based on found footages from the 1930–40s, Péter Forgács and the team of The Labyrinth Project re-orchestrated this rediscovered footage. Together with recent interviews conducted with survivors (juxtaposed with images of them on the ships, their family photos), diaries and official records were supplemented by sound tracks emitting the mechanical rhythms of ships' engines, regional music from the period, songs and prayers of the refugees, voice covers of the Captain and his passengers accompanied by the minimalist music of composer Tibor Szemző. By creating three sequences from different historical databases, Forgács therefore built a contiguous multi-medial narrative space and put on screen those off-screen historical events to which Captain Andrásovits was both witness and participant. I find the great achievement of this creation of interwoven narrative spaces in its capacity to offer spectators the possibility to understand—as perhaps Andrásovits once did—the political, ethical and psychological correlations related to these historical events. Once you take a pathway, you might start experiencing at the same time the singularity and the interdependence of these traumas when it comes to understanding them. As Forgács (2012) expressed it in an interview, you attempt "to compare the incomparable" [*összehasonlítani az összehasonlíthatatlant*]. The ethical challenges such an experiment can expose (namely, to preserve the singularity of related historical events, but to open them up to each other at the same time) are not only contained in those emotional-ideological shortcuts that urge us to compete collective and individual suffering, but also in the lack of the consensual remembrance policies that might guarantee the evolvement of dialogues and strategies in political-social contextualization. In elaborating and conceptualizing any historical, cultural or individual trauma, today's cultural and literary studies inevitably resort not only to Holocaust studies but to the variety of academic, artistic, cultural debates and achievements concerning Holocaust legacy. This seems explainable not only because Holocaust is a paradigmatic cataclysm that changed or radically influenced the course of philosophical, ethical and political thinking, but also given the fact that Holocaust is an example of effective consensual remembrance policies, when and where they are preceded by large-scale social, political and (most importantly) interdisciplinary debates. Other than better-integrated cultural and political practices regarding memory work, decades-long debates have additionally produced both adequate descriptive languages and a system of concepts that aid grasping the issues that unceasingly emerge in connection to the Holocaust's legacy. As a particular aspect of my research, elaborating Herta Müller's work has many connections to the issue of phenomenalizing historical experience in its collective and individual forms, the experience of dictatorship, the aspects of communal and totalitarian repression. I must therefore first undertake examining the possible available and adequate

concepts and frames of interpretation that might help understand the true political and aesthetic character of the historical experiences that are recounted in Müller's novel.

Atemschaukel has been evaluated as a materpiece that "breaks new ground in German, Romanian and Russian memory culture" (Haines – Marven 2013: 119), while at the same time it has also received considerable criticism, including being branded as kitsch in comparison to Müller's other works or other paradigmatic works in Gulag and Holocaust literature. Iris Radisch points out that in *Atemschaukel* Müller, in contrast with her earlier works, uses an overly poetical language due to the fact that the core of the experiences this language expresses is not Müller's own. By this, Radisch makes reference to the special circumstances of Müller's literary cooperation with Pastior: the narrative of *Atemschaukel* is based on Pastior's oral recollection of his experiences in the Gulag, where he, as a teenager, had been deported in 1945. When the two authors, both exiled in Germany, made acquaintance in 2002, Müller's old and previously aborted plan to write on the Gulag experience of the Romanian-Germans finally seemed accomplishable since Pastior agreed to share his memories and the poems he wrote during his detention in the Ukrainian labour camps. According to Radisch (2009) the inauthenticity of its language makes *Atemschaukel* "perfumed and coulisse-like" [*parfümiert und kulissenhaft*], adding that "Gulag novels cannot be written second hand" [*Gulag-Romane lassen sich nicht aus zweiter Hand schreiben*]. I think that a principal mistake of criticism such as that of Radisch consists in ignoring the present-day condition of the Gulag legacy, neglecting not only the actual poetical challenges of the *postmemory*[1] situation, but the nearly total lack of political, moral or cultural consensus on this period in any of the Eastern and East-Central European countries that are concerned.

Neither in Russia nor in Romania are there any national places of mourning or national museums dedicated to the victims of the Gulag. It is true that there are some five hundred monuments, plaques, and commemorative inscriptions, as well as two memorials in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but these are "inadequate in scale," and many were by all means the result of personal initiatives (Etkind 2004: 49, 55). In Romania there is hardly any literary research on *Atemschaukel* (or other pieces of Müller's œuvre) due to a larger problem: the anomalism of the Romanian historiography and collective memory. Recent scholarly debates and research have shown that social knowledge relates most of the twentieth-century historical events and traumas to an antagonistic division of the Nazi and Communist dictatorships (Cesereanu 2007). That is, official history privileges the ideological mechanisms of comparative and competitive trivialization of the Holocaust and the Gulag (Shafir 2013). Instead of a consensual and integrative memory work being expedited, the legacy of the Holocaust and the Gulag became more like asymmetrical counterconcepts that mutually deny the significance or the existence of

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[1] Marianne Hirsch's (2008: 103) term of postmemory describes "the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up." This relationship consists in defining the present in relation to the traumatic past, thus, it can be perceived rather as a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, the situation of postmemory is an active state, when the subsequent generations relate to these overwhelming inherited memories not by direct recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation (see: Hirsch 2008: 103–108).

the other. Mainstream, contemporary Romanian historiography focuses on elaborating the history of the so-called "Romanian Gulag" [*Gulagul românesc*] (Anisescu 2007: 212–225), a more nationalized line of inquiry aiming to fully disclose the system of the Soviet-type Romanian labor camps, prisons and reeducation camps, such as Pitești (Pitesk), Sighet (Maramureschsigeth/Máramarossziget), Gherla (Neuschloss/Szamosújvár) etc. Except for a few articles (usually reviews or essays on *Atemschaukel*), the chronicle of the Romanian Germans' deportation and relocation is outside of the main inquiry line of academic research, appearing only as an amplifying example. Thus, the lack of adequate historical discussion about this novel has a slightly ethnocentric motive as well.

It is important to note that the general lack of scholarly or historigraphical interest in the experiences of Romanian-Germans in the Gulag is not the only issue one has to face here, but also the availability, or even more, the scarcity of resources, such as visual and textual documentation about the Gulag camp system and the suffering and grim everydays of its inhabitants. Alexander Etkind states that the cultural memory of the Gulag consists of a "soft memory," and in the absence of official ownership it remains text-based rather than monument-based, varied, dispersed and disintegrated. According to Etkind's (2004, 39–46) definition, a soft memory primarily consists of (literary, historical, biographical etc.) texts and all those public debates, interpretations, political and intellectual discourses that relate to them, whereas a "hard memory" culture is based on monuments, that is, on all kinds of memorials, museums, archives, associations, commemorative festivals, textbooks or state laws whose existence is due to the consent of the all-time state power and the consensual public opinion. These two forms of memory culture are nevertheless in many cases interdependent. In societies dominated by "soft memory" (such as in most Eastern and East-Central European countries, including Romania and Russia) this text-based form describes not only the tendencies and genres of different policies and memory works, but also the kinds of representation of the Gulag, revealing considerable deficiencies. Unlike in Nazi concentration and extermination camps, during the seventy years of the Gulag no visual records were made before or after the termination of the labor camps. For a long time, paucity of scholarly works on the subject was due to the scarcity of sources; academic work could not be backed up by archival research. The lack of any images of the camps corresponded to decreased understanding of the issues (Applebaum 2004: xx–xxi).

In her comprehensive analysis of Gulag memoirs, Leona Toker (2000: 245–246) points out that these testimonies tend to be concerned with camp experience and therefore cluster around a set of common topoi which include the arrest, the progressive loss of dignity and humanity, fantasies of escape, moments of reprieve, chance happenings, the "Zone and the larger Zone," unexpected kindness and "end-of-term fatigue." Many of these "lager story" conventions can be found in *Atemschaukel* as well. Gulag memoirs dispose us, as she puts it, "*to visualize* the mechanics of a disgusting, lingering, unquiet, dehumanizing death" [emphasis added], which, I claim, is not merely a poetical characteristic of the genre, but an attempt to compensate the inexistence of images about the Gulag. Accordingly, the urge felt by the witness generation to recall the past and testify about it gains both aesthetical and ethical relevance. The traditional concept of literary testimony *(Zeugnisliteratur)*, that is, to record the passing events in order to prevent their fading, and most importantly their repetition, is complemented with the prospect of giving an account, in order to re-construct and mediate them in the condition of total lack of visual representation and hermeneutic gap. By virtue of this tendency to recreate the world of

Gulag, the ethically grounded conception of literary testimony gains and fulfills a mediative prospect as well.

In order to understand the small (but all the more significant) ethically and politically rooted poetical differences between Gulag and Holocaust literary testimonies, one has to examine the historical, political and cultural circumtances in which they emerged. Adorno (2007: 380) speaks of "image ban" as a means of avoiding mimetic representation of the victims' body and suffering because doing so might "insult the victims' modesty" [*die Scham vor den Opfern verletzt wäre*] (1981: 423) by generating aesthetic pleasure of any sorts. Accordingly, art is given only a narrow scale of possibilities for authentic enouncements straddled between demand and prohibition: between the commitment of testifying and the realization of an anti-documentary negative aesthetics, which, for that matter, can easily lead to the "afunctionality" or self-liquidation of art itself (Rothberg 1997: 69). Following Adorno's assumptions, it therefore becomes self-evident that only ethically engaged and anti-mimetic (self-referent) art can possibly capture and present the cataclysmic experience of the Holocaust. In the case of the literary representations of the Gulag, I believe that (in contrast to Adorno's disjunctive concept) a conjunctive—ethically motivated *and* mediatory (mimetic)—dynamic of the testimony is at work. If one takes a closer look one can hardly miss, that while by the 1960s European and North American literatures had reckoned with almost all forms of mimetic and documentarist representations of the Shoah, not irrespectively of the emergence of the subsequent generations in literature, Gulag literature has preserved its mimetic, mediative and extremely sensual narratives up to this very day. This does not mean that Gulag narratives therefore lack any ethical dimension; on the contrary, part of their engagement is to compensate for the lack of empirical (sensual) evidence on the grounds of which the ethical and socio-psychological, respectively the historical importance of the Gulag trauma can be fully perceived.

Nor should it be forgotten that Nazi concentration camps were shut down in 1945, barring those in the future GDR where the Soviets overtook and maintained them for their on purposes. The Gulag camps, however, stopped running only in the mid-1980s. Although Romanian-Germans had been deported in the same year when Nazi camps had been liberated and their captivity came to an end in the early 1950s, unlike many Holocaust survivors, they still did not get the chance to express the traumatic experiences of their deportation for many years to come. It took almost forty years when finally—with the liquidation of the Gulag system and the collapse of the whole Soviet type totalitarian regime that had maintained it—the gravity of decades of amnesia, censorship and the fantasm of colletive responsibility (or guilt) had vanished, thus making the elaboration of the traumatic historical events possible. Furthermore, the homecomig of Romanian-Germans from Ukraine was not the end of their exodus, but only its beginning: *Atemschaukel* cannot be fully understood without the history of Romanian-Germans' immigration to Western Europe, which resulted in both a demographic and a psychological aftermath. According to Wolfgang Rehner (2003: 231), between the 1970s and 1980s "a real immigration fever was set off" [*s-a creat o adevărată febră de emigrare*] in Romania, "a psychosis of some kind" [*un fel de psihoză*] that affected the entire German minority. This makes it clear that the twentieth-century traumas of the German minority in Romania are transgenerational ones which form a constellation of convergent narratives that can be (or have to be) told jointly by all the generations involved. When Iris Radisch considers *Atemschaukel* an inauthentic and second-hand encounter of the Gulag, not only is the transgenerational character of the collective traumas of Romanian-Germans ignored, but also the dissimilar medial, cultural and political aspects in

the history of the Holocaust and the Gulag that necessarily lead to their different poetical representations.

Despite the fact that it is thematically unprecedented in Müller's oeuvre, regarding its structure and poetical, narratological realization, *Atemschaukel* might be considered an extension of her earlier works. As well as her several other works, it is set in a world that has—according to the perception of its inhabitants—a doubled, concentric structure. Firstly, a simultaneous perception of the micro- and macrostructure of dictatorship emerges through the experience of "double imprisonment" (Haines – Marven 2013: 129). Secondly, there is what Toker calls in connection to Gulag memoirs the "Zone—Larger Zone" perspective. Also closely related to the problematics of co-authorship, these two types of world perception will be examined through a close reading of relevant excerpts from Müller's essays, novels and interviews. While the question of co-authorship equally raises aesthetical, ethical and philological issues, a full account of this issues cannot be adequately provided here: suffice it to say that three years after their co-work had started, short, jointly-authored parts of the novel were published (conf.: Müller – Pastior 2005), but these fragments can hardly provide a sufficient basis for a possible comparison to the full-length achievement of the novel. Nevertheless, there are three clean-cut sources of inspiration that need to be considered and ascertained regarding the aesthetical and philological issues of this co-authorship: Pastior's oral recollections of his Gulag experiences, terms and leitmotifs originating from his early lager poems, and his own avant-garde poetry.
The well-documented collaboration process, during which Müller filled several notebooks with his recollections of the Gulag, shows the confluence of their respective literary techniques. The information he conveyed was not only verbal and extraordinarily detailed, but also bodily (*Schnee*, 128–129). For example, Pastior acted out the chain of movements involved in those physical activities he and the other prisoners were forced to do (*Lebensangst*, 46). Jan Bürger (2009), the curator managing Oskar Pastior's manuscripts and legacy in the German Literary Archive ['Deutschen Literaturarchiv'] in Marbach, recalls a moment in 2005 when Pastior and Müller visited the Archive to see the booklet containing the poems Pastior wrote during his time in the camp. (The poems were written on the brown paper from cement bags, a detail that also appears in *Atemschaukel*.) He further points out those few but significant topoi that appear in Pastior's early, "naïve" lager poems and reoccur in the novel as well. Müller also mentions that, after Pastior's death, his avant-garde poetry provided inspiration during the writing process (*Lebensangst*, 50–51). In the following part of my analysis, I will only detail those circumstances which, in my view, made the co-authors' collaboration possible.

Even though *Atemschaukel* may be the first of her works to deal extensively with the experiences of previous generations rather than her own, the historical events and experiences it recounts had defined Müller and her writing, just as the deep silence surrounding Romanian-German involvement in the history of the Third Reich. Accordingly, when Müller started her research and writing project on Ukrainian labor camps with the help of Oskar Pastior, different levels of involvement and personal implication were at work. Through the story of Leo Auberg (Pastior's alterego in the novel) not only the trauma of the deportation of Romanian-Germans is depicted, but also, through Müller's authorship, a subsequent layer of transgenerational trauma is added. Among her many essays, one of Müller's essays in particular tells of her encounter with Oskar Pastior by beginning with three sentences that seem strangely familiar from *Atemschaukel*:

Since I know my mind, my mother says:
Cold is worse than hunger.
Or: wind is colder than snow.
A warm potato is a warm bed.
(*Schnee*, 125)

Seit ich denken kann, sagt meine Mutter:
Kälte ist schlimmer als Hunger.
Oder: Wind ist kälter als Schnee.
Eine warme Kartoffel ist ein warmes Bett.

These recurrent, fixated and puzzling sentences of her mother were the first accounts of the lager experience Müller ever came across. Her initial plan to write a novel about the Soviet labor camps, where her mother and many other villagers had been interned as well, soon derailed when she was forced to face their enormous resistance and struggle with amnesia. Müller's attempts to interview her mother and other villagers about their experiences resulted in similar failure.

Against all odds, shortly after their encounter in Lana in 2002, Pastior seemed keen to help Müller "*with everything I have gone through*, he said" [mit allem was ich erlebt habe, *sagte er*] (*Schnee*, 126; emphasis in the original). Pastior himself had a traumatic background, given that as a homosexual he had already felt the depressing and repressive pressures exerted by life in a small community (family and other spaces of socialization), which he recurrently experienced: first, during his five years in camps Kriwoj Rog and Gorlowka, in the Ukraine, then under the dictatorship of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in Romania. The first chapter of *Atemschaukel* describes Leo packing his possessions with barely concealed excitement before deportation. Though he did not know what a lager was (nor would it fulfill his illusory hopes of escaping the claustrophobic narrowness of his teenage years), Leo managed to acclimate quite easily. Wherever he went—from Ukrainian camps back to Romania, then emigrating to Vienna—the forms of oppression, causing the feelings of threat (exposure, blackmail or death) and homelessness, essentially remained the same. They only reproduced themselves in different guises: "I carry silent baggage," he says, "I packed myself into silence so deeply and for so long that I can never unpack myself using words" [*Ich trage stilles Gepäck. Ich habe mich so tief und so lang ins Schweigen gepackt, ich kann mich in Worten nie auspacken*.] (*Hunger Angel*, 3; *Atemschaukel*, 9). When Pastior met Müller and they started their collaboration, this long period of silence and amnesia had to be broken on his part, even though his involvement with the Securitate remained unmentioned. *Atemschaukel* reflects as a whole the major conflicts that lay between the commitment of bearing testimony and the incapacity (or uselessness) of doing so. In the novel's last chapter, Leo Auberg reterms the same experience he confessed before his deportation: "One can not protect oneself, either by silence or by telling" [*Man kann sich nicht schützen, weder durchs Schweigen noch durchs Erzählen.*] (*Atemschaukel*, 294).

The moral and psychological condition of the Romanian-German communities, including Herta Müller's family, was characterized by neglect and guilt after the Second World War. The gravity of amnesia, guilt and incapacity to testify (as well as, the fact that it was also forbidden to talk of these events in Romania) were the symptoms of an unobjectified but firmly planted communal oppression. Müller's statement, "the first dictatorship I knew was the Banat-Swabian village" [*Die erste Diktatur, die ich kannte, war das banatschwäbische Dorf*] (Haines – Littler 1998: 17), renders the polar concept of "double imprisonment" explicit with the insular, confined

atmosphere of the Swabian village on one end and the totalitarian rule of Ceauşescu's dictatorship on the other one. Already in the beginning of her career, this micro- and marcostructure of the forms of oppression simultaneously reoccur in much ofMüller's fiction, most significantly in *Niederungen (Nadirs)*, 1984; *Der Mensch ist ein Großer Fasan auf der Welt (The Passport)*, 1986; *Herztier (The Land of Green Plums)*,1994. Moreover, it is suffcient for the protagonists of these works to experience and overstep the brutality of the smaller community only once in order to reencounter and recognize it in the larger one.

The novel also tells of several encounters Leo had with "the larger Zone," the world outside the camp. One such encounter leads to his meeting with an old Russian woman living in a nearby village. During their short meeting Leo finds out that her son had also been deported, and she is being threatened by her neighbors who denounced her son. On other occasions, Leo also receives an inside view of the deprived, rural life—one beyond hope—that the inhabitants experience. In this regard, labor camp seems to be "merely" an intensification of the tendencies at work in the Soviet Union as a whole; it is a more obscene and direct manifestation of the repressive, dehumanizing and exploiting mechanisms of the society that embraces the Gulag universe (Toker 2000: 91–93).

In his essays on Solzhenitsyn, György Lukács (1990: 24–25) claims that the embodiment of the Gulag's ruling conventions, their moral correlations, the objectified details of existence are always of social—and I might add: political—origin. However, *Atemschaukel* lacks both naturalistic and totalizing tendencies; the fictional re-creation of the camp's micro-world can at most be perceived as an incomplete and fictional reconstruction of the actual labor camps. The novel instead generates autonomous and self-inventing forms of perception, resulting in an intensive and vibrant regime of images. The purpose here is not to capture or preserve the Gulag experience (because Müller does not have one), but to create an authentic one. The form of the novel is consonant with Müller's poetological concept of "the invented experience" [*die erfundene Wahrnehmung*] (see: *Teufel*, 9–43), which she uses to theorize the transformation of experience into writing and to acknowledge the role of imagination. Müller repeatedly considers how observation and perception merge into invention, as well as how these phenomena interact in the process of textual composition. The cognitive processes involved in writing are explored through metaphors that work intuitively, without the constraints of logic and linearity. In fact, among Müller's many other novels, *Atemschaukel* is her only work which provides us sufficient philological basis and context to see this concept in work through many examples. The authenticity of any Gulag novel is not the matter of the author's personal involvement, but the matter of creating the necessary conditions of perceiving the Gulag along those political, historical, moral, psychic, physical etc. factors that constituted its existence. It is therefore not a matter of possessing such experience, but phenomenalizing it through fiction.

All in all, I believe that here one can face the common patterns that made their co-authorship possible: the conditions of amnesia, "soft memory" and tabooization regarding Gulag, the legacy of the Third Reich and homosexuality in both smaller and larger social scales; the situation of postmemory; and most importantly the acts of reconstructing and sharing the experience of "double imprisonment" reflected not only in the characters' psychic economy, but in the structure of the novel. In this sense, *Atemschaukel* is not a second-hand rewrite of Pastior's Gulag experience, but rather a shared space of transgenerational experiences.

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