

Günter Grass

# ENCONTROS

+

Bianka Rolando

# DOBOSZ DRUMMER

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Gdańska Galeria Güntera Grassa  
Günter Grass Gallery in Gdańsk

*Encontros* means 'encounters' in Portuguese. Originally directed at Portuguese audiences, the Gdańsk version of the exhibition addresses the title motif on more levels. Firstly, we encounter Günter Grass in his Portuguese environment, which, though seemingly exotic, won't cut itself off from the northern scenery, so well-known from the writer's work. Indeed, staying in hot and sunny Portugal, Grass's thoughts would often escape elsewhere, for instance when he composed speeches for the sake of current political campaigns, wrote polemical essays or kept his diary whose excerpts were included in the novel *From Germany to Germany*. The motifs found in Grass's numerous watercolours, drawings or graphics of the time, often turn into *vanitas*-related still lifes, reminding us about the fragility of our existence. Grass is fascinated with grilled fish or their skeletons placed on stones. Another time the corpse of a gutted rabbit suggests his delight in expressionist turpism. On the other hand, his Portuguese landscapes often adopt cool colours and shapes of the North, so intensely present in Grass's iconography.

Still, the Gdańsk encounters are not only Grass's *encontros* with Portugal. It is also about transferring the context of that secure southern retreat to the northern, Gdańsk reality. Hence the presence of the Polish poet and visual artist Bianka Rolando, whose latest multi-element installation called *Drummer* was specially made for the Gdańsk exhibition. This is an invitation to an intergenerational, international, interdisciplinary dialogue with memory, identity, bearing witness, tangibility and intangibility of experiences. The key to it is applying the right communication register, which includes empathy (not without a dash of criticism) but also a significant dose of solidarity, understanding and acceptance. Grass used to write about what needs to be said. Rolando claims everything has already been said. The artist creates a multidimensional installation which comprises both visual and poetic elements. She also attaches great significance to the materiality of her objects, made up of old wood, sand from a Baltic beach, ash, coal. Their sensuality builds a certain sensual bridge, which leads to the deepening of that artistic dialogue. The double interlocked boats arranged by Rolando are an element of negotiating an interpretation of memory, forgetting, confessing or leaving things unsaid. With reference to difficult

truth and fluid memory in Grass's work and life, the artist quotes the notion of "self-designation of the speaking subject" defined by Paul Ricoeur. As she puts it, "Self-designation means that the speaker is read together with the whole story of his life, with all his experiences. Then his account can be interpreted as true, particularly when it stems from voluntary purgation of what was evil."

In accordance with the German idiom, *in einem Boot sitzen*, the two artists meet during the Gdańsk exhibition in order to sit in the same boat and be able to look in a mutual understanding towards a common point on the horizon.

Marta Wróblewska

Bianka Rolando

## Drummer boy

*Drummer boy*

When you were tin-made, darkness called you a little soldier  
The drum caved in, you opened your mouth, pronouncing  
that rhythm:

The truth, the truth, the truth, only then will the tin melt  
And the seal will bear a star, which means us.

### 1. Gdańsk's map of freedom

Gdańsk is a city of freedom. What is freedom, what is identity? A city-laboratory where the "Solidarity" myth developed along with social empathy, brotherhood and support of the weakest, a city where people fought for the fundamentals. Freedom, constantly revised, is a value determining our identity, and it can be actual support in difficult moments of the community in the future.

Gdańsk: a city continually constructed, over which static cranes emerge against the sky, lifting heavy phantom objects, facilitating exchange. It is they that are a significant visual metaphor of what is freedom structured through shared work and organization. The potential of movement and exchange has always been important for Gdańsk as a port – also a port of culture, considering its multinational character ever since the time of the Hanseatic League. And the motto in the city's emblem, *Nec temere, nec timide* (Neither rashly nor timidly), is an azimuth emphasizing the specific values of its residents.

And yet, the history of "Solidarity" and Gdańsk in the 20th century was not based on that principle; one could even say it was rash: after all, the grass-roots workers' movement could not defeat the machine of authority and violence. Rashness, in this sense refusal to negotiate, became a driving force on the path to freedom.

A crane suspended in the air  
is lifting rocks, the worker closes his eyes  
The structure has broken off and soared  
It is seen as northern lights against the sky  
Full of green, full of grace  
Armfuls of wild stars are smiling gap-toothed smiles  
Waiting for the sailing ship to get a name

(from *Capital phosphori*)

I begin with my own poem about Gdańsk. I was writing it while preparing the Drummer boy exhibition, which was designed as a sort of dialogue with the work, history and person of Günter Grass.

Reading Grass in Poland is a specific experience. He and his literature are associated with very difficult themes: old ethnic issues, terrible fascination with Nazism, painful purging of memory, struggle with the social rejection of searching for the truth.

An encounter can be understood as something that happens by chance and is very superficial; but there are also encounters whose essence is complete or crucial change. The result of my work is also an intellectual quest, examining the contexts of the life and work of Günter Grass.

The starting point was thinking about honesty/truth and its importance for memory. The notion of memory is quite problematic and in order to approach the subject properly, we need to consider methodological aspects.

Memory can be connected with very difficult experience of witnesses. Words and stories can heal, but when specially designed and steered, they can also poison. Bearing that in mind, an artist who takes up outlining memory anew, aesthetically decides to use a certain form of expression and adjusts it to a given situation. She also needs to perform a thorough and insightful analysis, re-drawing the shape of memory of places, people, history, traumas, misunderstandings, problems in comprehending. The more honest and profound the reflection, the more the drawing in memory realistically becomes something of a mental map, which will help to fill the gaps that are unfair or difficult. The encounter with Günter Grass started with my sounding out his life and books and immersing myself in them; it was only at the very end that I faced again his drawings.

Günter Grass, a Nobel-prize winner, writer, artist, community activist, a figure very important for Gdańsk, after the war unequivocally espoused Gdańsk being Polish. His owning up to have enlisted in the Waffen-SS as a se-

venteen-year-old is nowadays discussed rather in a political than historical context, definitively excluding him from the group of distinguished citizens of the city. The writer himself owned up to that war incident in his book *Peeling the Onion*. His decision to finish telling the story was connected with the desire to get purged and was a sort of confession of a person who believes in human forgiveness. That act became a leitmotif of my *Drummer boy* poem, which accompanies the exhibition:

*The truth, the truth, the truth, only then will the tin melt  
And the seal will bear a star, which means us.*

Why do I start from the most difficult? After all, Günter Grass might have concealed that fact; he must have realized that he was going to provoke a storm, which he did. First of all, I have a feeling that Grass realized purification requires a sacrifice and wanted to make that sacrifice consciously. My encounter with Günter Grass can't have been accidental, considering when it happened. In 2019, I published my *Stelle* poem, which, evoking the map of stars in the sky, is also an attempt to find a poetic language combining various traditions, various poetic languages into constellations. Among the cited poets are: Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Rafał Wojaczek, Edward Stachura, Tadeusz Różewicz (who Günter Grass was friends with), Bruno Schulz, Artur Rimbaud, Elizabeth Bishop, Alejandra Pizarnik, and of German authors, Rainer Maria Rilke and the coupled Paul Celan and Friedrich Hölderlin.

An important connection I would like to quote, appears in the poem called *Charioteer*, whose content is reminiscent of the story of Odysseus who wanted to smuggle his men under sheep's bellies thus rescuing their lives.

### Charioteer – **Flüstern**

shh, us up there on high?  
shh, blind, mute, beggars?  
yes, let us storm the crystals of depth  
hush, blowing into ash reveals a star  
shh, the charioteer's song turns inside us, rises  
hush, there are no time wheels in the flames  
passiert, abducted, skywards, up to a trace of the way, up to a scar  
passiert, troops tied to a sheep's belly by Nobody

(Bianka Rolando, *Stelle*, 2019)

I wanted this poem, which carries inspirations connected with the experience of German-language poets (high register of Friedrich Hölderlin's poetry combined with high and very experienced register of Paul Celan's poetry) to lead me to thinking about an encounter. I was looking for a dialogue which is more about listening than speaking (to walk the path of seeing but also forgiving).

Forgiving is an elaborate and problematic process. Often those who have never witnessed painful events directly, are not able to forgive; they carry inside them the memory necessary for shaping their identity, yet that identity, based on anger and lack of forgiveness, becomes a trap for them. Such memory does not know forgiveness or mercy. It is like carrying stolen emotions and traumas, not belonging to the carriers. Celebrating the "we will never forgive" attitude, one neither finds the way to dialogue and release, nor a cure or reward, because in fact that attitude does not really need a solution. Therefore the prospect of exit and dialogue is necessary, especially if someone asks for the purging and forgiving, which can also be a very important moment for the forgiver, a moment of freedom and memory, which is forgiving and full, because it is thoughtful.

### 3. Three generations of memory

What is memory and how does it show? How does its shape change? To what extent can we talk about the truth and reliability of testimonies or memories? The relation between memory and fiction and objectivization, like selecting a specific spectrum of expression for the language of the testimony/narration, make up the shape of memory. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricœur cites a notion connected with a specific nature of a testimony – it is a gesture of *self-designation of the testifying subject*. The testifier asks to be believed and knows that his testimony will not be rejected as false. This gesture assumes a great deal of trust for the reader/recipient, their sensitivity and imagination. *Self-designation* also means that the testifier is read along with the whole story of his life, with the whole experience. Then his account may be interpreted as true, particularly when it stems from voluntary purging of what was evil.

Grass's biography is a struggle for memory, also for the truth, which is difficult. The language he uses giving testimony, reveals everything to the reader; for me personally it is the language searching for the truth (it wants to finally find it), that is why I deem that register extremely significant (struggling with history, including one's own history, is not a language of escaping into relativization and hiding).

*Encontros/Dobosz* in the Gdańska Galeria Miejska is an exhibition where I present my installation, poems and drawings next to the drawings by Günter Grass. I take up the themes of memory, history, the need for purging and the Gdańsk background. Art ought to point to the most difficult things, seeking names for our reality, for pain, suffering, conscious forgiveness. The title *Drummer boy* is a reference to *The Tin Drum*: the drummer boy, hitting the instrument rhythmically, tries to change reality and remind people of the ghosts of Nazism. I am interested in the problem of memory flow, the process of forgiving but also the public act of self-purging that Grass had performed.

In two eight-meter boats I scattered ash and sand, symbolizing memory and purging. They are combined in one by poems.

A promise of red trimming I recognize its shaded steps  
It leads us dead with a song of the only way

the truth, the truth, the truth, only then will the tin melt  
and the seal will bear a star, which means us.

Both poems have been burnt into the construction parts of the boats. They give a significance to the old fishing boats. They have become objects with a history recorded in their materiality, unable to perform their original function any more.

I had to rename them so that they became verse, in order for the poems to build a new shape of memory.

The dispute over history is ascribed to generations. The first generation is the one of witnesses, active participants. The second generation is the history of those who have gained freedom and know its taste. There come further generations, not of witnesses any more, but onlookers, interpreters, in the reality developing in the spirit of holistic historical identity, where distance does not mask or hide history, but lets us look more broadly at the difficult experience of the previous generations. That distance makes it possible to talk about memory. Reflection on memory is a privilege of free people.

Freedom also obliges us to find the points of reflection on memory in a situation more peaceful and favourable to deep reflection. The distance connected with the passage of time should not be a reason for relativization of difficult memory, where there is always a moment of good/evil and personal choices. Also in that emerging and re-found shape of memory we need to revise and fill in details, re-construct questions about forgiveness.



The question of generational inheritance of memory can be captured in a metaphor of three generations of rememberers. The generation of witnesses is not able to keep their distance, defining certain notions concerning memory. Very tragic experiences, one's own or of one's nearest and dearest, are an extreme hindrance to the act of forgiveness. Images stemming from memories and the atmosphere of confidence, often accompanied by tears and a need to make others remember, link with belonging to a certain community of values, choices, by which that community is joined. For the witness, the bond between positive values created by the narrated story is also linked with remembering himself as the speaker. The speaker himself becomes an important and living testimony of values, and his testimony becomes a lesson in identity and consistency of choices for the future generations. The narration of a witness memory is burnt out by suffering, it is impossible to live it with reserve. That is why we feel special esteem for the memory of witnesses.

The second generation, of those who have gained inner freedom, is based on inner autonomy in the face of evil experienced. As indirect "inheritors of witnesses", they look ahead into the future, being able to develop a dynamics of mercy, which is stronger than stigmatization with evil memory. The generation of freedom has a potential of distance and reflection, which create a possibility of a dialogue with those who seek mercy, themselves being free to become merciful. The memory of that generation is merciful memory, a voluntary act of clemency and peace one can choose consciously in order to become free inside. The temptation of this generation is to abandon merciful memory for the sake of avenger memory.

The third generation can look from the distance of the holistic whole. They are able to see ambiguity and traumatism of human choices on an individual and social scale. Liberation myths are complemented through realistic consequences, interests or identity conflicts, which come with time. Myths must fall into concrete reality and sometimes, unfortunately, get damaged, which can become a point of contention.

The awareness of a non-ideal myth as well as "difficult" memory become pretexts to rethink the shape of memory. Remembering is an important element of a community identity, compared to the roots, it constitutes support when specific values are needed; it is also an important reservoir one can refer to so as not to relativize evil. However, maturity of communities consists in generational handing down of memory and ability to solve its problems, look into contexts, understand contradictory motives, empathy, differentiate between motivations, understand the accepted images of the world, etc., i. e. all that transcends a black and white image, but by no means relativizes history or instrumentalizes memory. The culture of memory is a cul-

ture of late maturity, achieved through cherishing the witnesses and showing gentle attention to their tale. Its result is among others the language of building the structure of the past and present time. The language of structure of time is a tool of memory, it is an effect of several generations seeking the truth, it is indispensable to constructing conscious forgiveness and dialogue. The holistic look at history allows to discern details which could not be seen in the emotional perspective of the witnesses or by the generations gaining freedom. Sometimes it is those details that re-determine the points which join together to form memory which is conscious and free.

Finally, the holistic approach to history provides a possibility to make a dialogue, because it notices values, cementing diverse communities. History is a narration of a group, therefore it is impossible to bring it down to the level polished like a diamond and of an unambiguous colour. The situation seems to be as follows: we are entangled in multiple narrations and lack of mutual understanding. What comes to our rescue is the act of forgiveness, which at the same time does not allow for banalizing evil, to use Hannah Arendt's term. The language of time structures lets us hope that the construction of this memory bridge will not be temporary, but extended by the awareness of what and why is forgiven; only then is it a genuine and insightful experience, both for the forgivers and for those who need forgiveness and building the future of their community not only on shame.

Gdańsk is a city of dramatic fates of Poles slaughtered by the Nazis, a city of a slow reconstruction of memory, finally of the eruption of the "Solidarity" freedom in the face of Communist enslavement. It is also the memory of Gdańsk which is no more, multinational, and multilingual, freeze-framed on the pages of *The Tin Drum*. Grass – as a writer and as a Gdańsk resident – understood the significance of a relay of memory, and above all, its purging power. Hence the naked, naturalist and anti-metaphysical record of history in his books. And in his owning up to the youthful fascination with the power of the system lies the inner conviction about the power of truth without which history becomes merely an ideologized façade of memory.

Time. The hourglass measures out the duration of particular stories. When it is turned round to resemble the symbol of infinity, the mechanics of the passing sand disappears. The motif of the hourglass and the resulting illustration of two boats touching each other is an attempt to join the past and the present, seeking a bridge to meet upon.

The exhibition presents my drawings in ash and charcoal inspired by Günter Grass's illustration for a tale by Hans Christian Andersen. The ghost shapes of the protagonists of the tale about a steadfast tin soldier evoke a different dimension of a tale as a formula of negotiation with reality, not with

unrealism of experience. The need to engrave the reality of memory is closer to writing and the writing on the boats was a sign of understanding Grass's inner need to fully express himself in writing, that is, yield in to the processes of purging, and open to forgiveness.

#### 4. Ash and sand

The central object of my work is sixteen-metre long and it comprises old wooden boats whose prows are touching.

In one of the boats there is ash and sand, the other carries sand only. Together they form an hourglass in which time is significant; it is measured out in two ways, with memory and with forgiveness. The only questions that appear now are those about the possibility of an encounter, potentiality of trust and throwing a rescue rope where the past is already a "dead end" and there is no way out of it.

Ash is therefore a representation of what is finished and closed. Sand represents the passing of time but also freedom, rescue, forgetting. Let me once again refer to the book by Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, where the author, citing Kant in his last part of the sketch *Concerning the Indwelling of the Evil Principle with the Good, or, On the Radical Evil in Human Nature*, very aptly analyzes the important question of the principle of forgiveness:

*As radical as evil may be, Kant states – and it is indeed radical as the first of all the maxims concerning evil – it is not original. Radical is the "propensity" to evil, original is the "predisposition" to good. It was this predisposition to good that was assumed in the famous formula with which the first section of the Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals opens: "Nothing in the world – indeed nothing even beyond the world – can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will". (...) It is in the "original predisposition to the good" that the possibility of "the restoration to its power" resides. I would say that under this modest heading – "the restoration... of the original predisposition to the good" – the entire project of a philosophy of religion centred on the theme of the liberation of the ground of goodness in human beings is veiled and unveiled.*

Therefore forgiveness connected with testimony and remorse is connected with human good will, with a belief in the possibility to restore in us the original predisposition to good.

Drawing is a fundamental form of handing down memory. Drawing does not only accompany text; on the contrary, it becomes an original expression of memory which goes beyond words, allows us to find the lost course of the cause-and-effect process, finally, it allows to express the power of pain which can not be expressed in words. A drawing is always personal. A drawing in ash reveals the stages of the journey of the tin figure and shows a developing memory.

Günter Grass's illustration showing *The rat asking the soldier for a passport* became my first inspiration, in which I searched for a complement to the whole story. In the drawing there also appears a small paper boat covered with text, which is to rescue the protagonist. The text-covered boat has been in a way reflected in the concept of my work as the boats; they carry poems, protective spells, they are to find and to evoke, to constitute the sense of history. This depicts our common denominator, belief in words, their power, the possibility of words transcending the designated scheme and place. It is seen particularly in Günter Grass's drawings at the Encontros exhibition; he fills his drawings with writing, "burdens" them with a rock of text in order to hold their fleeting nature and temporariness of the still life thrown on the ocean shore.

I wanted to repeat by means of drawing the motif of *The rat*, who checks and does not let pass. He is a synonym to aggression and scrupulosity, calculation. The repetition is for me a gesture seeking understanding and a possibility for potential tropes to appear and complete the whole. Repeating the tale, if only in part, we enter one boat, we listen to each other, we try to communicate despite various limitations. The tale became for Günter Grass a stage for possible events, a matrix, where individual stories can be worked on, referring to higher values. It is they that are supposed to justify the right choices and decisions of the characters. Getting away from the context of politics and finished stories, one can also find what will always recur, what is common to those who are searching for good and purgation through the truth.

Eight drawings have been made for the exhibition. I searched for certain moments or motifs in the tale, deepening the reception, the reflection on all the connections and contexts of the encounter. There appears a journey inside a flounder (the fish Grass particularly liked, whose shape he sought in literature, drawing and sculpture), there is a rat, which does not notice "our" double boat. There is also a drawing of the double boat sailing a phantom sea, and a drawing of a star/spangle which appears both in the poem and the tale. At the end of Andersen's tale the tin figure melts into the shape of a heart, still with a star/spangle which belonged to the paper dancer. The shape of memory found in the ashes must resemble a heart. This is what memory should be like: prudent, forgiving, open.

## 5. A poem which does not separate

The nature of a poem is closely connected with language, its unrestrained possibilities of continual searching for the truth, but also searching for possible worlds, where our intentions, dreams and fears could be given shape in modelling a possible reality. Poetic language, when sincere, is in constant motion, always alert, always uncertain against hackneyed language clichés, in the face of commercialized, degraded language, which becomes a tool of manipulation. How important language is, to what extent verbalization of fears, desires and necessity can be politically significant, Günter Grass knew only too well. In his correspondence with Willy Brandt, it is clear how important sensitive language is, searching for the truth, and how it can become considerable support for developing history. It is worth citing concrete letters of Günter Grass, for example one of 25 November 1970, which outlines the format of German policy connected with the agreement on the normalization of relations between Poland and Germany. Of particular importance here is the very sensitive language of discussing the difficult history. Grass does not call himself and the Germans who are living in the territory of the new Poland “expellees”, but “refugees”. A refugee does justice to memory, usually taking some blame. Grass sees a unique chance for reconciliation between nations in the space of culture and any humanitarian activity. He suggests the commission to support the negotiations over the agreement on the normalizations of relations should be made up of scientists, people with great literary and scholarly competence, personally involved in the new eastern policy, writers and representatives of three religions. This would guarantee that each political decision and proposition of this commission on the German part would be preceded by delicate and respectful language with the aim to seek peace and reconciliation. He stresses that it is vital there is such a body representing citizens, not just one person of the chancellor signing the agreement. Let us recall a fragment of the letter to Willy Brandt’s office of 16 February 1971:

*Should the Federal Chancellor be ready to end his speech explaining in simple words the meaning of his kneeling down in Warsaw, I am ready tomorrow night (...) to prepare together with you this short fragment. Here is a concise concept:*

*The criminal racist policy and violation of human rights impose a heavy, fraught with consequences, burden on the Germans and German history. When I was in Warsaw at the beginning of December, that burden was on my shoulders. I did what people usually do when words fail: I went down on*

*my knees, thinking about the millions killed. But I did it also because racial fanaticism and oppression of others – despite Auschwitz – have by no means disappeared. Whoever wanted to understand me, did, and many people in Germany and the world understood what I wanted to say without words.*

And one more fragment which well illustrates the views of Günter Grass, very sensitive to the German past of Gdańsk. It is a fragment of a reply to a list from Wolfgang Schwarz:

*Due to our own misdeeds, we, Germans, have lost the eastern provinces. (...) The compatriots' associations ought to abandon the illusory hopes to regain the lost provinces and instead try to secure and preserve here, in the Federal Republic of Germany, the already largely depleted – for which we are to blame – cultural heritage of the lost provinces. As regards the task we have before us, that is, identifying the goals of cultural research, nothing stands in the way of German-Polish cooperation.*

Reading Grass's letters, it is clear how attentively he watched gestures and how heavy a burden the past was for him. His involvement in politics had always meant he paid particular attention to injustice towards the poorest social groups and the dependence of poorer countries on capitalist loans, which were becoming a source of political and economic manipulation.

Therefore, Günter Grass wanted to be an active participant of responsible thinking about memory and responsibility for memory, urging to lead a watchful and sensible life.

In my project, which is about complementing the memory about Günter Grass, I use poetry as a tool "testing" language and through language – reality, that already closed in the past and that which will shape the future. I am a depository of the third-generation memory and my task, also as an artist – however bombastic this may sound – is to try and generate a grammar of memory for my generation and the one which will come after it. Visual structures and images are included in the glossary of the language of memory. I assume it is a living language, in which there is space for new interpretations and new contexts. Re-drawing the shape of memory has a lot of gaps, this memory is often damaged. An artist ought to try to fix it – it is part of his duty and what is expected from art. A poem and a drawing have the power to fill in the gaps, they can be a quite flexible medium of doing that, thanks to poetic metaphor. A poem can be written with different intentions, that is why context is important, as well as who is speaking and why. If one learns those elements and starts trusting such poetry as a medium, a poem at first may seem not precise enough or too ambiguous; however,

experience shows that ambiguity may actually mean more precision. Our language and our understanding are (should be) seeking complementation through invoking our sensitivity or good will. What I come across in Grass is above all good will, readiness for a dialogue. I must, however, pose a question: how can we respond to that invitation, using the language of art and poetry?

Drawing on the matrix of language is poetry. It is a search for conjunction where so far such lexical or semantic combinations have not been possible. Let me cite here the poetry by Bolesław Leśmian, as one that connects. His characters, roaming only the possible worlds, were of quite a fabulous nature, which granted them a legitimization of "possibility" of connections thanks to their attributes. A poem's word-forming and thus world-forming potentials become a significant value of a tool which is to supplement the deficits in the damaged memory.

The propensity for conjoining in poetry is manifested through metaphors, in the possibilities of their ontological expansion. Conjoining suggests certain linearity and one can suppose that the structure of conjoining would be an important element of memory's superstructure as a holistic whole. Time is also a sphere of potentiality; it is what can be, what can happen but has not happened yet (following Martin Heidegger). Such understanding of time is the "conjoining" in poetry. A poetic text is never closed; it is not closed in the actions, states of mind, or ideas present in it. The "once" in a poem is always a starting point, which is supposed to signal at least temporary anchoring of the reader in the text. The lyrical "once" is possible through erasing the starting point, pursuing timelessness.

What would be memory and what forgetting in a poem? Let me cite again the notion of forgetting as defined by Heidegger. "Forgetting" is an intellectual action possible on the basis of our experiences through "allowing an action in the future a s possible". The potencies of our actions are only limited by our habits, and the possibilities of connections are limitless. Dependence on time may make us fall into conventionality, into a habitual mode of action, which can lead us on to gaps in meaning.

Filling in the meaning becomes the basic task of a human, as a rational and empathetic being that marks its existence in this way. In other words, it is conscious, insightful participation in the world. Intensification of meanings through their increased connectivity determines the complementation of temporality ridden with gaps due to lack of meanings.

A poem evokes moments of possible actions taking place in the reader's mind, where it is merely an outline of reality drawn in the mind but also dependent on time. There appears a tension, an attempt to balance between

naming and not naming what is inexpressible, what is in our minds. Art, literature, and particularly poetry, can improve the shape of memory, complement it, through new contexts give it a real dimension of contemporary questions through referring not only to a specific time but to the mind of a viewer or reader, who can redefine his understanding of memory again and again. Art and poetry can invoke complex formulas of social and historical negotiation in their metaphors, or cite emotional records of memory (especially in order to seek new ways, new solutions, referring to difficult and disturbing themes of testimonies, which are a record of injustice, crash of memory, damaged memory, which cannot find a way out in time understood as another stage in history).

## 6. Non-illusion of a boat

Two boats in Gdańsk. Searching for conjunction and identities of two nationalities, two languages in the testimony to difficult history. The good will to do this search has brought me to the conclusion that apart from sincerity in genuine encounters, what is necessary is listening to the one we are encountering. Of course, we may have a beforehand prepared scenario, we can be ready for the encounter, and yet face a lot of unexpected changes during the listening. I always try to make my works listen out for contexts and events. I want them to surprise me, teach me to notice again what I have not seen or grasped before.

Originally, I planned to separate the boats clearly into one with ash and one with sand. However, while listening out, I understood that sand must also (symbolically) be represented in the boat with ash. The boat with sand only is the part of the installation which was going to be the “purged” part; the other one, more damaged, was supposed to be an ashpit. Pondering over that while making the installation, I understood that the lack of sand in the ash part is not a dialogical formula, but a conservative one, it is a gesture of closing one of the boats to what is the past. That is why I changed it. Listening changed my perspective from more conservative to more involved in the shape of that memory.

I made the change because I saw in Günter Grass not only a Nobel prize winner, poet, writer, artist, public figure, politician and community activist; I saw a man fighting for his own memory, and thanks to this exhibition I could also participate in that process.

August Zamoyski said that the artist does not create but only uncovers, exposes. It is not only about aesthetic beauty but something more, exposing the world of ideas as reservoirs of possibilities that we can refer to.



The whole artistic work – literary and visual – of Günter Grass, has become for me a space of negotiation over what is closer to me and what is more distant. The poem *Drummer boy burnt into the boat* invokes the notion of truth three times.

What is truth nowadays? Is it but an individual and arbitrary identification of changing meanings and worthless “values”? Can truth be tuned in, shifted, manipulated, depending on a situation, on temporary profits? The truth of *Drummer boy* is one which must be said, which is the bone of the fish (say, a flounder), its backbone in the world of fluid, changeable reality, full of illusory glitter. The drummer, beating out rhythm on a toy drum (perhaps one from a common tale), signals that truth is necessary, warns against the evil not only of Nazism and fascism, but against any form of admiration for totalitarianism; he wants to be heard all the time, because he knows it is essential in order not to fall asleep in blissful ignorance or infantile oblivion, not to forget the signal of increased vigilance of tin drums. The credibility of a testimony can always be questioned or belittled. For my part, I assumed the same dose of trust of the testimony to life and work as Grass himself assumed for his readers and viewers, harbouring a deep belief in man and his good will despite weaknesses or limitations. And it is on that boat of trust that I constructed my personal reflection and an appendix to Günter Grass’s exhibition *Encontros*.

To end with, I would like to add a poem which was also inspired by the exhibition, the encounter with Günter Grass and the phenomenon of the city in which even encounters beyond time are possible.

### *The boat*

Darkness, rooftiles shining like fat grubs  
and the image I see is cranes again  
not of steel and chain but of body and spirit  
lifting, and though I’m writing this poem late  
the stars are navigating, leaden stitches  
stopped, not carrying loads anymore  
I climb the planed towers of words  
and I believe it is the right height  
to be with the weakest, on the lowest deck



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