

## 2.1 Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*

### Learning to Say "I"

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"Je forme une entreprise qui n'eut jamais d'exemple et dont l'exécution n'aura point d'imitateur. Je veux montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature ; et cet homme, ce sera moi."

(Rousseau, *Confessions*, Livre 1)

Born in 1929, Christa Wolf grew up under the Third Reich. In 1976 she published *Kindheitsmuster* [*Patterns of Childhood*], a novel about growing up in Nazi Germany in an ordinary middle-class family. Her text presents a childhood during the years of National Socialism from the perspective of the survivors who were not among the victims of the Nazis, and also the challenge of preserving the memory of it for future generations. Elaborating on a common theme among the German writers of her generation, Christa Wolf composed *Kindheitsmuster* by employing a remarkable technique of narrative layers with multiple voices which investigate the making of a generation within the making of a book and aspire to express events and experiences long silenced.

*Kindheitsmuster* is a novel *about* autobiography rather than an autobiography as such. Though the book does contain autobiographical traces, it focuses more on autobiographical writing as a theme, elaborating and challenging the genre from within, and it is characterised by formal experimentation and radical reflexivity. The text highlights how individuals create themselves over time and through processes of representation such as writing. Featuring a highly

self-reflexive storytelling mode, the book reveals aspects of and thematises the writing process while describing the challenges and problems inherent in (autobiographical) writing especially in cases when authors are dealing with a controversial or polemical past such as the Nazi period.

*Kindheitsmuster* therefore will be regarded as an exceptional example of post-war literature not because of its theme (the experience of the War and its aftermath) but mainly because of the way it reflects on it, structurally, formally and thematically, adopting the perspective of an autobiographer who has experienced the events from the position of the survivors. *Kindheitsmuster* is a post-war text about post-war literature and is striking also for its uncommon genre classification. The novel invents a unique narrative form and presents an alternative writing strategy for coping with the sensitive topic of a childhood under National Socialism, challenging and contesting the genre of autobiography from within.<sup>96</sup>

Within a project that focuses on the understanding of second-person storytelling, Wolf's novel might appear a poor fit at first sight since only one part is narrated in the second person and it is not entirely written from the second-person perspective. However, it does contribute significantly to the theme of this thesis and so will be discussed first in the close-reading part. *Kindheitsmuster* does contain a solid second-person narrative level which blends with the main third-person narrative and offers grounds for being examined in comparison to the more frequent, and expected, third- and first-person (singular) narrative perspectives (the latter missing for reasons that will be analysed further in this part). Such a comparative study of the second-person narrative perspective in fiction provides an ideal starting point for the project itself before it brings the focus deeper in the understanding of the phenomenon.

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**96** | Gretchen E Wiesehan, *A Dubious Heritage: Questioning Identity in German Autobiographical Novels of the Postwar Generation*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1997) 108.

Moreover, the narrative layering witnessed in *Kindheitsmuster* suggests a rich example for observing the functionality and broader use of pronouns in a narrative that addresses the theme of self-discovery, which appears to be one of the key themes in second-person fiction. In Wolf's case the second-person narrative perspective is employed to elucidate aspects of (autobiographical) writing, reflecting a self-control mechanism used by the narrator while performing her cross-examination. Here, second person designates (an aspiration for) authenticity and is linked with major issues addressed within the narrative mode such as self and self-awareness, reflexivity and representation.

## THE MAIN NARRATIVE COMPONENTS

The story centres on the continuous struggle of an anonymous female "Erzählfigur," an unconventional narrator (Christa Wolf's *fictional persona*) who chronicles her attempt to narrate her childhood under the Third Reich in the third person, after several failed attempts to do so from a first-person perspective which is more common and traditional on such narrative occasions.

Ein erneuter Versuch, dich zu verschanzen. Allmählich, über Monate hin, stellte sich das Dilemma heraus: sprachlos bleiben oder in der dritten Person leben, das scheint zur Wahl zu stehen.<sup>97</sup>

The story of the narrator, who is also the central character of the book (therefore *Erzählfigur*), evolves within a self-addressing dialogue written in the second person, which describes and comments on the writing process and its stimuli. The most important of these is the protagonist's recent trip to her birthplace in Poland, to which she reluctantly agreed and which she undertook with her husband H.,

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**97** | Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*. 1976. (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1987) 9.

her daughter Lenka, and her younger brother Lutz in the summer of 1971. This trip triggers her memory and offers grounds for evaluating what she remembers; it stands as a bridge between her and the events she tries to narrate, described in detail as a distinct sub-narrative. Complementing these narrative levels are generic comments and intertextual allusions that add a metatextual narrative level of generic and universal character.

Das Vergangene ist nicht tot; es ist nicht einmal vergangen. Wir trennen es von uns ab und stellen uns fremd.

[...] In die Erinnerung drängt sich die Gegenwart ein, und der heutige Tag ist schon der letzte Tag der Vergangenheit. So würden wir uns unaufhaltsam fremd werden ohne unser Gedächtnis an das, was wir getan haben, an das, was uns zugestoßen ist. Ohne unser Gedächtnis an uns selbst.<sup>98</sup> [...]

Wer gäbe nicht viel um eine glückliche Kindheit? Wer Hand an seine Kindheit legt, sollte nicht hoffen, zügig voranzukommen.<sup>99</sup>

These comments and generic statements are articulated in the first person plural or are embedded in the narrative through an impersonal syntax spread in the text, and they attempt to respond to the question which appears throughout the text as a motif and which also provides a title for the ninth chapter of the novel: “Wie sind wir so geworden, wie wir heute sind?”

This question appears repeatedly, at key points in the narrative to highlight its central theme and the narrator’s aspiration to understand the evolvment of a generation and a person through time and to bridge the distance between the past and the current self, which prevents a sense of continuity and the use of the first person for the whole period. Dealing with an alienated past, the *Erzählfigur* reflects on every aspect of the writing process and her memories. This reflection is realised mostly at a second-person narrative level

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**98** | Wolf (1976/1987), 9f.

**99** | Wolf (1976/1987), 37.

that enables the process of bringing the two levels together, examining them and involving numerous self-reflective parts.

For example, in the part quoted below, she describes the process of finding the appropriate title for the book. She then argues that the title should address the process of recalling the past rather than that of remembering it. Trying out several words such as “Grundmuster” or “Verhaltensmuster,” she agrees with her husband’s proposal of *Kindheitsmuster*. “Kindheitsmuster,” a noun consisting of two words full of semantic potential, announces the theme and structure of the book. It primarily declares that the narrative will cover a childhood story and also that the narrated childhood reflects a pattern.<sup>100</sup>

Ein Nachruf. Nach-Ruf könnte im Titel vorkommen. Gedächtnis nicht. Titelproben, beim Einkaufsweg mit H. In den Geschäften dieses Jahr immer noch die großen Apfelsinen, “Navelfrüchte”. Einkreisung des unbekannteren Wortes, das unter einer hauchdünnen Schicht zu stecken scheint, aber von den Such-Organen des Gehirns nicht zu fassen ist. Grund-Muster. Verhaltens-Muster. Kindheitsmuster, sagte H. beiläufig, es war vor der Apotheke, Ecke Thälmannstrasse. Damit war das geregelt. “Muster” kommt vom lateinischen “monstrum”, was ursprünglich “Probestück” geheißen hat und dir nur recht sein kann.<sup>101</sup>

Wolf’s *Erzählfigur* discusses the term “Muster” commenting on its origin and connotations. She seems to favour the first meaning of the word as it appears in the Etymological Dictionary of the GDR, communicating however erroneously its origin.<sup>102</sup> By adding the

**100** | Therese Hörnigk, *Christa Wolf*. (Göttingen: Steidl, 1989) 169.

**101** | Wolf (1976/1987), 52.

**102** | “Muster n. “Probe(stück), Modell, Vorbild, Vorlage, Verziehung”, entlehnt aus ital. *mostra* “das Zeigen, Schaustellung, Ausstellung,” das auf vlat. *mostra* beruht, zu vlat. *mostrare*, lat. *monstrare*, zeigen, (hin)weisen” Wolfgang Pfeifer and Wilhelm Braun, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989) 1142.

meaning “Probestück,” additional implications enrich and deepen its meaning such as draft, exemplar and ideal. The title hence suggests a text in progress, a story which may be set in the past, but by designating it as a *probe* it also has a component that takes place and evolves in the present and extends into the future, an element of universality and continuity. By choosing to name the childhood story *Muster*, Wolf (through her persona) generalises the content of the story effect that comes as a result of adding a collective, thus, universal character to the text. She makes it less *autobiographical* by reducing to a pattern the sense of subjectivity and individuality that is inherent in autobiography and succeeds to *de-personalise* a personal story.

Der Titel “Kindheitsmuster” bezeichnet zugleich Thema und Struktur des Textes, von dem hier aus den ersten hundert Seiten ein kleiner Ausschnitt gegeben wird. Eine Gedächtnisprüfung findet statt. Die Kindheit der **Erzählfigur** soll erschlossen werden, geprägt in der Zeit des Faschismus, in einer östlichen Stadt, die heute zu Polen gehört.<sup>103</sup>

The title calls attention to some frequent and apparently acquired patterns of behaviour and shifts the emphasis from the individual to the collective, more precisely to Germans of the same generation. Consequently, it entails an additional shift in the historical focus from the debate about personal responsibility and participation in Nazi governance to the factors that shaped that generation’s (and Wolf’s) character and their attitude towards history. Hence it reveals and explains the approach and perspective that the author has towards the past involving references to the actual historical incidents as well, adding a metatextual and thus authentic element to the novel.

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**103** | Christa Wolf, “Kindheitsmuster.” In *Text + Kritik*, 46. (München, 1980) 1.

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Die später so genannte "Kristallnacht" wurde vom 8. zum 9. November durchgeführt. 177 Synagogen, 7500 jüdische Geschäfte wurden im Reichsgebiet zerstört.<sup>104</sup>

Consistent with her choice of title, Christa Wolf also warns readers even before the text proper begins that potential similarities with real people dead or alive should not be seriously considered, explaining that they are an inevitable outcome of the fact that the period narrated cultivated certain patterns of behaviour:

Alle Figuren in diesem Buch sind Erfindungen der Erzählerin. Keine ist identisch mit einer lebenden oder toten Person. Ebenso wenig decken sich beschriebene Episoden mit tatsächlichen Vorgängen.

Wer Ähnlichkeiten zwischen einem Charakter der Erzählung und sich selbst oder ihm bekannten Menschen zu erkennen glaubt, sei auf den merkwürdigen Mangel an Eigentümlichkeit verwiesen, der dem Verhalten vieler Zeitgenossen anhaftet. Man müßte die Verhältnisse beschuldigen, weil sie Verhaltensweisen hervorbringen, die man wiedererkennt.<sup>105</sup>

Interesting also is the fact that Wolf refused to classify her text as pure autobiography while still conforming to an autobiographical narrative mode. She drew a line confirming the fictional aspect of it (implying that the same applies for every autobiographical text) by stressing the fictional origin of the names used, keeping the narrator anonymous and choosing another name for the experiencing subject.

[...] ich meine, ich kaschiere an keiner Stelle, daß es sich sozusagen um Autobiographisches handelt; das wird nicht verschwiegen. Wobei dieses "sozusagen" wichtig ist, es ist nämlich keine Identität da. Aber es gibt doch – das ist eine Eigentümlichkeit meiner Biographie, aber vielleicht

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**104** | Wolf (1976/1987), 209.

**105** | Wolf (1976/1987), 6.

geht es ändern in meinem Alter auch so – ein **Fremdheitsgefühl** gegenüber dieser Zeit.<sup>106</sup>

Although Wolf complicates the process of categorising her text as a specific genre by adding that it is *somehow* autobiographical, there are several elements which make this quotation more of a disclaimer than a statement. While the author states that her text is not a conventional autobiography and prevents the book from being read as such, the fact that the text does involve numerous autobiographical references contradicts its being pure fiction in the traditional sense. However, by including fictional elements, *Kindheitsmuster* questions and challenges the norms of autobiography and it presents a way of dealing with the limitations of the genre and its inherent problems. For this reason it cannot be simply classified as autobiography. As it combines facets of both autobiography and fiction it can be regarded as a unique narrative example which addresses and experiments with autobiography and reveals how it is generated. The text admits the unreliability of memory and remembering and adds fictional aspects to complete the story that the narrator (and fictional author) is unable to write purely based on her memories.

Gedächtnis. Im heutigen Sinn: “Bewahren des früher Erfahrenen und die Fähigkeit dazu.” Kein Organ also, sondern eine Tätigkeit und die Voraussetzung, sie auszuüben, in einem Wort. Ein ungeübtes Gedächtnis geht verloren, ist nicht mehr vorhanden, löst sich in nichts auf, eine alarmierende Vorstellung. Zu entwickeln wäre also die Fähigkeit des Bewahrens, des Sich-Erinnerns.<sup>107</sup>

The activity of remembering as the author describes it above presupposes constant activation in order not to fade away; with this state-

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**106** | Wolf in Caroline Schaumann, *Memory Matters. Generational Responses to Germany's Nazi Past in Recent Women's Literature*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008) 92.

**107** | Wolf (1976/1987), 18.

ment Wolf explains the *narrator* wilfully exercising some control over her memories, the process of cross-examination narrated in the second person which designates the key element of the plot and the generation of the story. It will be analysed in more detail later.

Very important before we proceed to the analysis of the book but also for this thesis is Wolf's choice of an "Erzählfigur" (see previous excerpt) instead of an "Erzähler(in)." The term – difficult to translate into English – implies the ambiguous nature of the *narrator* in Wolf's text: she is both the generator of the story and the subject of the narrated action and belongs to the discourse that she chronicles, hence she is not a conventional narrator ("Erzählerin") but the persona of a fictional narrator ("Figur"), a fact that justifies the use of the German term "Erzählfigur" or using the English *narrator* in italics for this chapter. This duality is worked into the form of the text itself and will be discussed in more detail in the pages relating to the pronominal use in *Kindheitsmuster*.

The passage quoted earlier contains one more key term that needs to be taken into account for the reception and understanding of the text: "Fremdheitsgefühl." Estrangement, self-alienation and the notion of an abandoned and dead childhood are fundamental themes in the narrative. Those notions stem from a poem by Pablo Neruda, which is cited prior to the main narrative:

Wo ist das Kind, das ich gewesen,  
ist es noch in mir oder fort?

Weiß es, daß ich es niemals mochte  
und es mich auch nicht leiden konnte?

Warum sind wir so lange Zeit  
gewachsen, um uns dann zu trennen?

Warum starben wir denn nicht beide,  
damals, als meine Kindheit starb?

Und wenn die Seele mir verging,  
warum bleibt mein Skelett mir treu?

[...]

Wann liest der Falter, was auf seinen  
Flügeln im Flug geschriebenen steht?<sup>108</sup>

Agreeing with the poem and echoing the same problematic regarding the past and its reception, the opening sentence of the text paraphrases the opening sentence of Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*, as Caroline Schaumann notices.<sup>109</sup> In Wolf's narrative, too, the past is viewed as an integral, living part of the present.<sup>110</sup> This approach reflects the subject's agonising search for reconnection with a deliberately forgotten past and an abandoned childhood, but it also emphasises the notion of a pattern, which leaves the *narrator* and *Erzählfigur* no other choice but to individualise her past self as another person. The childhood pattern described in the third person evolves into the present adulthood of the *narrator* (and, apparently, Wolf and all her contemporaries) told in the second person. This transition is what she tries to access as a continuous process, making the autonomous past an integral part of the present, without an appropriation process but in its most authentic form.

Das Vergangene ist nicht tot; es ist nicht einmal vergangen. Wir trennen es von uns ab und stellen uns fremd.<sup>111</sup>

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**108** | Pablo Neruda, *Buch der Fragen*. Trans. Erich Arendt. In: Wolf (1976/1987), 7.

**109** | "The past is never dead. It's not even past." William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1919) 85.

**110** | Schaumann (2008), 69.

**111** | Wolf (1976/1987), 9.

## NARRATIVE LEVELS: NELLY JORDAN

As mentioned above, the structure of the book in layers consists of a third-person narrative for the experiences of Nelly Jordan during the years 1932-1947 as well as a second-person narrative for the writing struggle of the adult *narrator*. This narrative is divided into two subplots: one which describes the process of autobiographical writing starting in 1972 and finishing in 1975, and the other chronicling the trip to Poland during the summer of 1971 that stimulated the writing process. An additional metatextual level is spread across the narrative's universal comments, common truths, intertexts and intertextual references. These phrases and comments fill the main narrative by enriching and commenting on scenes described, and they signal the central figure's and narrator's tendency to clarify, comment and reflect on what is remembered and written.

Es handelt sich ja nicht um eine Geschichte, die notwendig zu einem bestimmten Ende führen muß. Oder welches wäre der gedachte Punkt, bis zu dem sie vorgetrieben werden müßte? Im Krankenhaus, ohne Arbeitslust, unter den ersten, noch unverstandenen Anfällen von Angst, glaubst du klar zu sehen: Der Endpunkt wäre erreicht, wenn zweite und dritte Person wieder in der ersten zusammenträfen, mehr noch: zusammenfielen. Wo nicht mehr "du" und "sie" – wo unverhohlenen "ich" gesagt werden müßte. Es kam dir sehr fraglich vor, ob du diesen Punkt erreichen könntest, ob der Weg, den du eingeschlagen hast, überhaupt dorthin führt. Es schien dir immerhin nicht wünschenswert, vorher aus der Welt zu gehen – wovon übrigens keine Rede sein konnte. Heimliche Rechnungen, die nur in Zeiten von Unglauben aufkommen: Unglauben an die Unerschöpflichkeit gewisser Fähigkeiten oder Antriebe. Oder Zwänge.

[...]

Steckt denn in der Frage "Wer bist du?" noch irgendein Sinn? Ist sie nicht hoffnungslos veraltet, überholt von der Verhörfrage: "Was hast du getan?",

die in dir selbst auf die schwache Gegenfrage stößt: Was hat man mich tun lassen?<sup>112</sup>

Dann aber saßest du plötzlich – nicht du: Nelly, das Kind im Elternhaus, in dem schmalen Durchgang zwischen elektrischer Rolle und Laden auf einem Zuckersack, und Schnäuzchen-Oma, erblindet, stand neben Nelly und stützte sich ungebührlich schwer auf ihre Schulter. Von dem Druck bist du erwacht. Du konntest diesen Druck nicht abschütteln.<sup>113</sup>

*Kindheitsmuster* is a text in which all pronouns are used for different narratives, coexisting in the same story and thus revealing their narrative functions and rhetorical properties. The third-person voice employed in the story of Nelly, though detached from the personal life and memories of the *narrator*, does not evolve independently of the other narratives. The central figure of the novel reflects diverse *narrators* – the inquisitor, the one remembering the trip to Poland, the other chronicling Nelly's story and the impersonal one offering generalising comments – that reflect on each other continually. The one performing the composition of the autobiography admits that writing is destined to improve her self-awareness, re-establish her connection to the past and resolve the problem of self-continuity. A successful ending would restore the broken relationship with the past and allow her to use again the first-person narrative voice for all parts of her life.

Das Kind selbst aber, das nun zu erscheinen hätte? Kein Bild. Hier würde die Fälschung beginnen. Das Gedächtnis hat in diesem Kind gehockt und hat es überdauert.<sup>114</sup>

Nelly Jordan stands for the *narrator's* former self and re-experiences the incidents of the narrated childhood from 1932 to 1947 in a process of integrating a hidden non-articulated past into the present. She is a

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**112** | Wolf (1976/1987), 453.

**113** | Wolf (1976/1987), 170.

**114** | Wolf (1976/1987), 12.

figure created and named by her to fill the gaps in her memory and create a restored sense of autobiographical continuity of self.

Aus dem Wohnzimmerfenster hätte die Mutter nun das Kind zum Abendbrot zu rufen, wobei sein Name, der hier gelten soll, zum erstenmal genannt wird: Nelly! (Und so, nebenbei, auch der Taufakt vollzogen wäre, ohne Hinweis auf die langwierigen Mühen bei der Suche nach passenden Namen.)<sup>115</sup>

Her story covers the larger part of the text and is narrated purely from the third-person point of view of the adult *narrator* who narrates the story from an emotionally distant perspective and who can re-assess the past with the knowledge of how things turned out. Nelly Jordan, the imagined child, becomes an object of observation, a case study that brings the *narrator* closer to her own past by simulating it. At this narrative level, she may have a temporal superiority to the experiences narrated but she is still challenged by the limitations of memory and the reliability of her sources. She chooses to position herself outside the world of the narrative by being intentionally heterodiegetic and aims to evaluate the prompting testimony and to deal with the fundamental problem of authenticity in conventional homodiegetic autobiographies in order to be able to produce the most authentic version of her own autobiography whilst admitting that it includes fictional elements.

Das Kind – Nelly – erscheint dir allerdings hilfsbedürftig, und du hast es, man kann wohl sagen: vorsätzlich, in diese Lage gebracht. Nun kannst du sie schon mit keinem anderen Namen mehr anreden: Dabei ist es dein Wunsch und Wille gewesen, sie so und nicht anders zu nennen. Je näher sie dir in der Zeit rückt, um so fremder wird sie dir. Und das nennst du merkwürdig? [...]

Oder glaubst du, man könnte den verstehen, dessen man sich schämt? Den in Schutz nehmen, den man mißbraucht, um sich selber zu verteidigen?<sup>116</sup>

**115** | Wolf (1976/1987), 13.

**116** | Wolf (1976/1987), 277f.

[...]

Das Kind, das in mir verkrochen war – ist es hervorgekommen? Oder hat es sich, aufgescheucht, ein tieferes, unzugänglicheres Versteck gesucht? Hat das Gedächtnis seine Schuldigkeit getan? Oder hat es sich dazu hergeben, durch Irreführung zu beweisen, daß es unmöglich ist, der Todsünde dieser Zeit zu entgehen, die da heißt: sich nicht kennenlernen wollen?<sup>117</sup>

Nelly Jordan is portrayed as an ordinary girl of her time and generation; the focus on ordinary people applies also to her parents Charlotte and Bruno Jordan. The Jordans appear to be apolitical “Kleinbürger” whose main concern is their family business and children, and they represent an example of the German lower middle class of the time. They may not promote fascist ideals but they have also no objection to Nelly participating in local youth organisations. In fact, the entire order of the Jordan family is founded on silence and secrecy, which is a common phenomenon of childhood that the narrative attempts to break. Nelly seems to keep silent so as to fulfil her parents’ wishes and the social values and virtues of the time. Similarly sensitive issues like marital conflict, sexuality and alcoholism are banished from discussion or acknowledged in the same way as Nazi actions are.<sup>118</sup>

Was ich nicht weiß, macht mich nicht heiß.

Was sie nicht wussten, machte sie lau. Übrigens hatten sie Glück. Keine jüdische oder kommunistische Verwandt- und Freundschaft, keine Erb- und Geisteskranken in der Familie (auf Tante Jette, Lucie Menzels Schwester, kommen wir noch), keine Auslandsbeziehungen, keine nennenswerten Kenntnisse in irgendeiner Fremdsprache, überhaupt keinen Hang zu zersetzenden Gedanken oder gar zu entarteter und anderer Kunst. [...]

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**117** | Wolf (1976/1987), 530.

**118** | Elizabeth Snyder Hook, *Family Secrets and the Contemporary German Novel: Literary Explorations in the Aftermath of the Third Reich*. (Rochester: Camden House, 2001) 26.

Überhören, übersehen, vernachlässigen, verleugnen, verlernen, verschwitzen, vergessen.<sup>119</sup>

Charlotte Jordan appears to be the only person to express reservations about Nazi policies, however this happens just after these have affected her family, and all her objections are silenced by her husband Bruno. Charlotte, a mother who decided to stay behind and be separated from her children in 1945 when Germans were exiled and left as refugees, is presented as a dynamic person who had a significant impact on Nelly as she grew up and even after her death remained an influence on the adult *narrator*:

Plötzlich ein Schreck bis in die Haarspitzen: Auf dem Tisch im großen Zimmer das Manuskript, auf dessen erster Seite in großen Buchstaben nur das Wort "Mutter" steht. Sie wird es lesen, wird deinen Plan vollständig erraten und sich verletzt fühlen ...<sup>120</sup>

Interestingly enough the *narrator* calls her *Charlotte* rather than *mother*. This indicates the emotional and psychological distance necessary to assess their relationship more honestly. The *narrator* does not openly express feelings of guilt or pain towards her, and we, as readers, are only able to track their relationship indirectly through incidents in the narrative. The daughter-mother relationship becomes a central theme of the text as it is not limited to the bond between Nelly and Charlotte but expands to the *narrator's* relationship with her daughter Lenka, implying that history repeats itself and that a broader approach to the topic is needed.

Lenka personifies the younger generation to which the *narrator* wishes to relate Germany's Nazi past. This purpose is confirmed by the fact that at the very beginning Christa Wolf dedicates the book to her real daughters Annette and Tinka. During the trip to the *narrator's* birthplace in 1971 Lenka is the same age as Nelly was in 1945.

**119** | Wolf (1976/1987), 197.

**120** | Wolf (1976/1987), 19.

But in certain ways the two characters are very different. Unlike Nelly, Lenka dares to express her protest or dissent; she criticises and refuses to accept the ideologies of the GDR authorities and their politics as well as the Nazi ideology and questions its impact on the everyday life of the common people who lived in that era.

Lenka does not show any interest in hearing Nelly's story or hearing about her worldview. In fact she seems to be reluctant to accept the distance from her mother when disguised as Nelly Jordan. She even has difficulty understanding her and her mother Charlotte. Her attitude reflects some of the reasons that caused the *narrator's* former (narrative) silence and inability to write her autobiography. However, despite these challenges, the experience of the Nazi past is communicated in an authentic way from one generation to the next by supporting memory with real facts while Lenka, as a representative of the younger generation, personifies hope and continuity as she dares to criticise, comment on and examine history in constant pursuit of the historical past.<sup>121</sup>

Set in the period of the Third Reich, Nelly's story offers a glimpse into the circumstances and incidents that created the generation of Christa Wolf's contemporaries. Everyday incidents, ordinary events and random moments, which in Nelly's eyes had minimal significance, are described in such a way as to show how influential they actually were or how decisive they were to the evolution of the story. They helped to shape Nelly's personality within complex familial relations and values that served to facilitate the transmission of Fascist ideology. Thus Nelly Jordan can be read as a symbol of her time, with whom readers – especially contemporaries of Christa Wolf – can identify, confirming the appropriateness of the word “Muster” in the title and offering the author a means to present typical patterns of a childhood during the Third Reich.<sup>122</sup>

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**121** | Schaumann (2008), 73.

**122** | “Eine Kindheit wird intensive betrachtet, “gemustert” – nicht nur, um diesen Erinnerungsbereich möglichst vollständig zu erfassen, sondern mit dem Ziel, Wurzeln für heutiges Verhalten, prägende Einflüsse zu finden.”

The use of a third-person *narrator* in this part of the story serves a self-protecting function, which makes questioning and evaluating the past possible. It makes the disclosure of sensitive, upsetting information safer and more bearable as they are assigned to another person rather than being treated as personal. However, the gesture of putting the elaborated autobiographical part in third-person syntax may be judged as ambiguous: on the one hand the distance from Nelly eases self-criticism while on the other hand it suggests a further source of guilt as the denial of the past constitutes a moral lapse.<sup>123</sup> The *narrator's* choice to disguise her childhood behind Nelly's fictional persona enables her to adopt a more objective perspective on events as well as serving authenticity. At the same time, though, the alienation of what is narrated and the fictionality of the third-person narrative make it hard to distinguish between the fictional and the factual and to arrive at any safe conclusions regarding Christa Wolf's true past or that of the narrator.

Weil es nämlich unerträglich ist, bei dem Wort "Auschwitz" das kleine Wort "ich" mitdenken zu müssen: "Ich" im Konjunktiv Imperfekt: Ich hätte. Ich könnte. Ich würde. Getan haben. Gehorcht haben.<sup>124</sup>

The above quote clarifies one of the reasons why the *narrator* does prefer the third person for her autobiographical memoir. The issues here are not just related to temporal distance and forgetfulness but also involve a moral distance as the memories of the past relate to a shameful period. When she acknowledges the degree of shame and pain involved in the narrative with powerful examples such as putting the word "ich" next to "Auschwitz" she proves that employing the third person is not a narrative trick to avoid responsibility but a narrative form that helps her writing to achieve authenticity.

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Christine Schaper, *Christa Wolf: "Kindheitsmuster". Epische Struktur und Gehalt* (Doctoral Dissertation Halle, 1980) 163.

**123** | Wiesehan (1997), 111.

**124** | Wolf (1976/1987), 303.

Christa Wolf confirmed as much during a public discussion when she explained that employing the third person in this part of the text provided her and her *Erzählfigur* with an emotional safeguard and also resulted from her estrangement from the past. The author maintained that during the composition of *Kindheitsmuster* her detachment from her past was so strong that it would have been impossible and self-deceiving to use the first person; it would apply to any person having the same experience as, for example, the *narrator's* persona.<sup>125</sup>

Schließlich kann man ein Spiel mit sich um sich beginnen. Ein Spiel in und mit der zweiten und dritten Person, zum Zwecke ihrer Vereinigung. Zwei Brände beschließen dieses Kapitel, einander so ungleich wie Brände es nur sein können, in Nellys Erinnerung aber unlösbar miteinander verknüpft: In solchen Dingen kann man sich nicht helfen.<sup>126</sup>

Apparently the attempt to explore and re-experience the past is connected to that of arranging grammatical conditions in the right order again. The text can succeed only if at the end the *narrator* manages to re-establish first-person authority and connect with the child she once was, thereby restoring the past in an accurate way. However, in

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**125** | “Ich habe vorhin gesagt, daß ich mehrere Anfänge habe, und davon sind die meisten in der Ich-Form. Und gerade das hat sich aus Gründen, die mir damals nicht einleuchten wollten, die ich auch gar nicht richtig verstand, immer wieder als Hindernis erwiesen, wirklich an die Sache heranzugehen [...] Aber es gibt doch – daß ist eine der Eigentümlichkeiten meiner Biographie, aber vielleicht geht es anderen in meinem Alter auch so – ein Fremdheitsgefühl gegenüber dieser Zeit. Seit einem nicht auf den Tag genau, aber doch auf eine Zeitspanne genau anzugebenden Moment ist man nicht mehr diese Person, habe ich nicht mehr das Gefühl, das ich das war, die das gedacht, gesagt oder getan hat. Und das wollte ich mit der dritten Person ausdrücken, das heißt, ich mußte es, weil sich anders das Material mir nicht öffnete, wie ich durch Versuche erfuhr.” Wolf in Schaumann (2008), 92.

**126** | Wolf (1976/1987), 209.

the third-person environment personified by Nelly, there is only one moment when the adult *narrator* identifies her own *I* with Nelly's – but this happens during sleep and therefore at a sub- or unconscious level.

Taking into account all the above, it seems as if the narrative took the form of a “Bildungsroman” that shows how the character learns to claim the first person again. Such a learning may involve stages and parts of the text that are told in other non-first-person narratives but the ability to say *I* remains the principal goal and aspiration of the entire narrative attempt. And indeed, at the end of the narrative, the *narrator* adopts a first-person perspective. This, however, is presented more as a necessity and compulsory convention than a successful outcome of the lasting struggle to restore and establish the continuity of her own self and of integrating her past into her present.

Und die Vergangenheit, die noch Sprachregelungen verfügen, die erste Person in eine zweite und dritte spalten konnte – ist ihre Vormacht gebrochen? Werden die Stimmen sich beruhigen? Ich weiß es nicht.<sup>127</sup>

## NARRATIVE LEVELS: THE *NARRATOR*

The second-person *narrator* records the process of writing her autobiography starting on 3 November 1972 and finishing on 2 May 1975:

Was du heute, an diesem trüben 3. November des Jahres 1972, beginnst, indem du Packen provisorisch beschriebenen Papiers beiseite legend, einen neuen Bogen einspannst, noch einmal mit der Kapitelzahl I. anfängst.<sup>128</sup>

Within this narrative territory she discusses the difficulties of writing, admits to the limitations of memory and gestures towards

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**127** | Wolf (1976/1987), 530.

**128** | Wolf (1976/1987), 9.

the perplexities of self-representation. Acknowledging the reasons that doomed previous writing to failure, she confesses her inability to respond directly to questions about her past, a phenomenon that may also apply to her contemporaries. The part of the narration that covers her efforts to write her autobiography is written in present tense and it suggests a simultaneous narration, giving the impression that it is happening now and is synchronised with the writing act as it evolves through the second-person self-reflexive dialogue which the author likens to a *cross-examination* process. Person and time align towards the production of the text:

Im Kreuzverhör mit dir selbst zeigt sich der wirkliche Grund der Sprachstörung: Zwischen dem Selbstgespräch und der Anrede findet eine bestürzende **Lautverschiebung** statt, eine fatale Veränderung der grammatischen Bezüge. Ich, du, sie, in Gedanken ineinanderschwimmend, sollen im ausgesprochenen Satz einander entfremdet werden. Der Brust-Ton, den die Sprache anzustreben scheint, verdorrt unter der erlernten Technik der Stimmbänder. **Sprach-Ekel**. Ihm gegenüber der fast unzählbare Hang zum Gebetsmühlenklapper: in der gleichen Person.<sup>129</sup>

At the centre of *Kindheitsmuster* is the notion of personal and civic obligation and the relationship between history and writing as a moral activity in which remembering is analysed, assessed and reflected upon “im Kreuzverhör mit dir selbst.”<sup>130</sup> Within this investigation, the *narrator* aspires to identifying the reasons for her inability to use language in a grammatically correct way and also for her attempt to deal with this problem through employing the second person. She announces that she is experiencing an annoying “Lautverschiebung,” a term used rather incorrectly to reflect a violent change of grammatical conditions which affects her writing. Being somewhat blocked between a hybrid internal monologue and apostrophe, she discusses the problem profoundly affecting her self-au-

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**129** | Wolf (1976/1987), 9.

**130** | Wolf (1976/1987), 9.

thority at the level of language as well. Though referring to the same person, "ich," "du," "sie" are mixed but need to be separated into different voices. The child self and the adult self cannot be referred to as identical; self-schism and self-discontinuity provoke a "sprach-Ekel," which, while additionally challenged by the weaknesses of memory, generates the writing.

Memory forms one of the central patterns under investigation in the book. The *narrator* maintains that without memory we would be estranged from the things that have happened to us and thus from ourselves. In times when memory is universally lost, she argues that the present should be built on a vividly and properly remembered past.

Im Zeitalter universalen Erinnerungsverlustes (Ein Satz, der vorgestern mit der Post kam) haben wir zu realisieren, daß volle Geistesgegenwart nur auf dem Boden einer lebendigen Vergangenheit möglich ist.<sup>131</sup>

Es ist der Mensch, der sich erinnert – nicht das Gedächtnis.

Der Mensch, der es gelernt hat, sich selber nicht als ein Ich, sondern als ein Du zu nehmen. Ein Stilelement wie dieses kann nicht Willkür oder Zufall sein. Der Sprung von der dritten Person in die zweite (die nur scheinbar der ersten nähersteht) am Morgen nach einem lebhaften Traum.<sup>132</sup>

Aware of the limitations inherent in the process of remembering and the unreliability of memory as a mechanism, the *narrator* employs several techniques so as to filter and legitimate it. One of the devices employed is cross-examination, as she calls the dialogue she performs with herself while writing. This process means that what she remembers from the past is double-checked before being incorporated into the story itself. Within this process she then manages to stimulate and make the writing genuine, as the second-person voice enables the division of the self into two sub-selves: one testifying, the other evaluating the testimony. Should she appropriate another

**131** | Wolf (1976/1987), 202.

**132** | Wolf (1976/1987), 157.

voice or narrative form for this part, this memory filtering could never take place.

Another device employed to support her memory is the trip to her birthplace L. in Poland to which the *narrator* had reluctantly agreed. The place that she had left as a refugee in January 1945 became travel destination G. with another name, language and currency, and it constitutes a narrative bridge enabling the transitions between Nelly's story and the *narrator*'s. Detached from any emotional involvement the *narrator* mentions that the reason for the trip should correspond to its true purpose and argues that she would call it "Arbeitsreise" or "Gedächtnisüberprüfung" if this would not sound odd and strange to the authorities.

Damals, im Sommer 1971, gab es den Vorschlag, doch endlich nach L., heute G., zu fahren, und du stimmtest zu. Obwohl du dir wiederholtest, daß es nicht nötig wäre. Aber sie sollten ihren Willen haben. Der Tourismus in alte Heimaten blühte.<sup>133</sup>

[...]

Zutreffende Angaben wie "Arbeitsreise" oder "Gedächtnisüberprüfung" hätten Befremden erregt. (Besichtigung der sogenannten Vaterstadt!) Die neuen Passfotos fandet ihr – im Gegensatz zu den Angestellten der Volkspolizeimeldestelle – euch unähnlich, eigentlich abscheulich, weil sie dem Bild, das ihr von euch hattet, um den entscheidenden nächsten Altersschritt voraus waren. Lenka war, wie immer, gut getroffen, nach eurer Meinung. Sie selbst verdrehte die Augen, um sich zu ihren Fotos nicht äussern zu müssen.

Während die Anträge auf Ausreise und bei der Industrie- und Handelsbank die Gesuche um Geldumtausch liefen, bestellte Bruder Lutz in der Stadt, die in deinen Formularen zweisprachig, unter verschiedenen Namen auftauchte, als "Geburtsort" L. und als "Reiseziel" G., vorsichtshalber telegrafisch Hotelzimmer, denn ihr kennt in deiner Heimatstadt keine Menschenseele, bei der ihr hättet übernachten können.<sup>134</sup>

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**133** | Wolf (1976/1987), 10.

**134** | Wolf (1976/1987), 10f.

The trip to the actual location of the memories filters remembering and past reflections as either correct, false, or modified. Due to its temporal and cognitive proximity to the narrative in which the character is writing her autobiography, the account of it is also composed in the second person. It prompts the *narrator* to re-evaluate her childhood, not only by re-examining her memories in terms of their authenticity but by uncovering new and unexpected ones.<sup>135</sup> During this trip the reader witnesses not only her past reflections but also the memories and the comments of her fellow travellers. H., her husband, appears mainly in the narrative of the trip, and he is described through his reactions and brief comments. He seems to be a vital contributor to the writing process. Similarly Lutz, her brother, represents a realistic and laconic fellow-traveller during the trip to Poland, yet he remains almost unmentioned during the narrative at Nelly's level, thus stressing her very young age and her inability to comprehend the past when it happened. The trip, which is undertaken by a group, is narrated in the second-person plural, stressing its dynamic and the sense of collectivity and echoing the respective experience of each person ("denn ihr kennt in deiner Heimatstadt").<sup>136</sup>

While remembering the trip the *narrator* compares her approach to the narrative that is taking place in the past with a "Krebsgang," signalling a sideways and backward movement rather than a linear backward one. *Crabwalk*, defined by Günter Grass as "scuttling backward to move forward,"<sup>137</sup> refers both to the necessary as well as to other events, some of them occurring at the same time, the same events that would lead to disaster eventually. Crabwalk might also imply a more abstract backward glance at history so as to allow

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**135** | Schaumann (2008), 71.

**136** | Wolf (1976/1987), 11.

**137** | "Ob ich der Zeit eher schrägläufig in die Quere kommen muß, etwa nach Art der Krebse, die den Rückwärtsgang seitlich ausscherend vortäuschen, doch ziemlich schnell vorankommen." Günter Grass, *Im Krebsgang*. (München: Steidl, 2002) 8f.

people to move forward. A crabwalk approach to the past allows the *narrator* actually to reflect on her experiences while shifting back and forth between past and present and provides multiple perspectives (narrative voices) on the narrated events. By doing this and by involving a gnomic statement, she highlights the importance of knowing one's past as a firm basis for future decisions while the sideways movement enables seemingly disconnected levels to be linked.<sup>138</sup>

Frühere Entwürfe fingen anders an: mit der Flucht – als das Kind fast sechzehn war – oder mit dem Versuch, die Arbeit des Gedächtnisses zu beschreiben, als Krebsgang, als mühsame rückwärts gerichtete Bewegung, als Fallen in einen Zeitschacht, auf dessen Grund das Kind in aller Unschuld auf einer Steinstufe sitzt und zum erstenmal in seinem Leben in Gedanken zu sich selbst ICH sagt. Ja: am häufigsten hast du damit angefangen, diesen Augenblick zu beschreiben, der, wie du dich durch Nachfragen überzeugen konntest, so selten erinnert wird. Du aber hast eine wenn auch abgegriffene Original-Erinnerung zu bieten, denn es ist mehr als unwahrscheinlich, daß ein Außenstehender dem Kind zugesehen und ihm später berichtet haben soll, wie es da vor seines Vaters Ladentür saß und in Gedanken das neue Wort ausprobierte, ICH ICH ICH ICH ICH jedesmal mit einem lustvollen Schrecken, von dem es niemandem sprechen durfte. Das war ihm gleich gewiß.<sup>139</sup>

In the same gnomic statement, she comments on the unreliability of memory and reveals as a starting point for her autobiographical narration the moment when her past self is consciously articulated as the *I* for the first time. Showing that the claiming of the first-person pronoun is an outcome of a process of learning and experimenting which does not occur automatically as one grows older, she then implies that for the needs of her text this procedure should be

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**138** | Schaumann (2008), 71f.

**139** | Wolf (1976/1987), 11f.

reversed. The *narrator* needs to *un-learn* the use of the first person and employ the second person instead, so as to *learn* to use it again.

As Snyder Hook highlights, Nelly's first awareness of *I* is accompanied by shock, excitement and a fierce awareness of self. Later in the story we find Nelly alienated from her initial sense of autonomy and forced to change her feelings and behaviour out of obedience and for self-preservation conforming to social norms and parental wishes.<sup>140</sup> While assessing patterns of childhood and perception, Wolf also explores the act of remembering supporting the process with additional, authentic material. This is the third device employed for filtering and controlling memory and supporting the credibility of what is being chronicled. By involving such material and mentioning actual historical events, Wolf's text connects to reality showing the development of collective history in tandem with her personal history.

Erinnerungshilfen. Die Namenlisten, die Stadtskizzen, die Zettel mit mundartlichen Ausdrücken, mit Redewendungen im Familienjargon (die übrigens nie benutzt wurden), mit Sprichwörtern, von Mutter oder Großmutter gebraucht, mit Lied anfangen. Du begannst Fotos zu sichten, die nur spärlich zur Verfügung stehen, denn das dicke braune Familienalbum wurde wahrscheinlich von den späteren Bewohnern des Hauses an der Soldiner Straße verbrannt. [...] Wie es nicht umsonst sein mag, gleichzeitig den Blick für das, was wir "Gegenwart" nennen, zu schärfen. "Massive Bombenangriffe der USA-Luftwaffe auf Nordvietnam." Auch das könnte ins Vergessen sinken.<sup>141</sup>

[...]

Wie so oft in den letzten eineinhalb Jahren, in denen du lernen mußt: die Schwierigkeiten haben noch gar nicht angefangen. Wer sich unterfangen hätte, sie dir der Wahrheit nach anzukündigen, den hättest du, wie immer,

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**140** | Snyder Hook (2001), 3.

**141** | Wolf (1976/1987), 15f.

links liegenlassen. Als könnte ein Fremder, einer, der außen steht, dir die Rede abschneiden.<sup>142</sup>

## OTHER NARRATIVE LEVELS

Welche Grenzen also? Halblaut: Zum Beispiel Grenzen dessen, was man mit Lenka bespricht. Und in welcher Weise. Man kann Kinder auch überfordern. Man kann ihnen auch zuviel zumuten – Du fragst: Und uns? Als wir Kinder waren? Und man uns immer nur diese halben Sätze zumutete? Unverständliche Blicke, an uns vorbei? Geschlossene Türen? Und diese mörderischen Szenen?<sup>143</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the *narrator* frequently offers to the core story additional – detailed – information or commentary in the first-person plural voice. The first-person plural narrative level refers to the people of her generation in the GDR. It comes in terms of the *we* mentioned in the question motif “Wie sind wir so geworden, wie wir heute sind?,” enquiring about the evolution of her generation and also emphasises the collective nature of the narrated events while it immerses the reader in a joint or common experience with her and the events and experiences narrated.<sup>144</sup>

The implied or articulated *we* includes the first-person singular, the *I*, which is never employed in a narrative spanning more than five hundred pages. The authority of the first person is disguised in a comfortable collective identity, a need already evident in childhood, when Nelly’s estranged *I* seeks to be included in a collective *we* and is illustrated as a process of losing self-identity within the group and self-consciousness during the oppressive Nazi period. This problematic search for the self encompasses the things that Nelly suppressed in her enthusiasm for National Socialism, an identity

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**142** | Wolf (1976/1987), 9.

**143** | Wolf (1976/1987), 241.

**144** | Hörnigk (1989), 174.

later confused by post-war GDR policy. During that time the blame for Nazism was shifted onto the West, away from *us* onto *them*.<sup>145</sup>

Similar to the use and function of the first-person plural is the impersonal (“man”) or the passive voice as an alternative way to express generic thoughts and ideas so that they sound broader and more universal and less limited to the German context. By choosing impersonal or passive syntax (voice) the *narrator* avoids the difficult task of ascribing responsibilities to individuals, children and common people and concentrates instead on the events themselves and on how they are treated today by her contemporaries.

Fragen muß man sich, ob sich wirklich in derartig extremen Lagen zwangsläufig und zwingend herausstellt, was einem das Wichtigste ist: durch das, was man tut. Wenn aber der Betreffende nicht vollzählig die Informationen hätte, die ihm erlaubten, seine Entscheidung genau den Umständen anzupassen?<sup>146</sup>

The dilemma the text seeks to resolve reflects a historical paradox: human beings were physically present during the Third Reich though, at the same time, oddly absent. Wolf's text attempts to find an appropriate voice to narrate a period that was silenced, acknowledging the historic circumstances and investigating the formation of a generation without intending self-excuse or self-accusation:

Frühere Leute erinnerten sich leichter: eine Vermutung, eine höchstens halbrichtige Behauptung.

[...]

Zwischenbescheide geben, Behauptungen scheuen, Wahrnehmungen an die Stelle der Schwüre setzen: ein Verfahren, dem Riß, der durch die Zeit geht, die Achtung zu zollen, die er verdient.

In die Erinnerung drängt sich die Gegenwart ein, und der heutige Tag ist schon der letzte Tag der Vergangenheit. So würden wir uns unaufhaltsam

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**145** | Snyder Hook (2001), 23.

**146** | Wolf (1976/1987), 38.

fremd werden ohne unser Gedächtnis an das, was wir getan haben, an das, was uns zugestoßen ist. Ohne unser Gedächtnis an uns selbst. Und die Stimme, die es unternimmt, davon zu sprechen.<sup>147</sup>

Christa Wolf (and her *Erzählfigur*) acknowledges that what is experienced and what is narrated ideally should be identical. Admitting that such an aspiration cannot succeed and given the fact that there is no technique that could provide preciseness, the *narrator* in her text needs multiple narrative voices to describe the events from different perspectives and memory filters to objectify her writing and support its authenticity. In that sense one could argue that the book is a unique work of narrative art that reproduces at an autobiographical level historical and personal details of the past and tests the childhood world against authorial fantasies and perceptions in a work of fiction.<sup>148</sup>

Im Idealfall sollten die Strukturen des Erlebens sich mit den Strukturen des Erzählens decken. Dies wäre, was angestrebt wird: phantastische Genauigkeit. Aber es gibt die Technik nicht, die es gestatten würde, ein unglaublich verfilztes Geflecht, dessen Fäden nach den strengsten Gesetzen ineinandergeschlungen sind, in die lineare Sprache zu übertragen, ohne es ernstlich zu verletzen. Von einander überlagernden Schichten zu sprechen – “Erzählebenen” – heißt auf ungenaue Benennungen ausweichen und den wirklichen Vorgang verfälschen. Der wirkliche Vorgang, “das Leben”, ist immer schon weitergegangen; es auf seinem letzten Stand zu ertappen bleibt ein unstillbares, vielleicht unerlaubtes Verlangen<sup>149</sup>.

Success would consist in managing to do so in accordance with the actual historical events, which are implied or briefly mentioned in the main text and which match the character’s persona as credible. By motivating the process of remembering through use of docu-

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**147** | Wolf (1976/1987), 9f.

**148** | Snyder Hook (2001), 20.

**149** | Wolf (1976/1987), 354.

mentary material, the *narrator* may slip into genre confusion, but she succeeds in composing a personal narrative of what she calls *subjective authenticity*. Wolf developed this practice to reconcile the demands of Socialist Realism and authenticity with a subjectivity associated with eccentricity and aberrance from the collective.

*Kindheitsmuster* involves a complex mixture of personal memories, critical comments and self-reflections alongside historical facts and observations on the nature of memory. In contrast to the narrator of a conventional autobiography, the *narrator* of *Kindheitsmuster* is not projected as a self-knowing subject; rather, as the veracity of the *narrator* is being established within the narrative itself in which she performs, she portrays a subject caught up in a process of growing self-awareness. Wolf's life story introduces the notion of "phantastische Genauigkeit," accepting the subjective perception of reality and consequently the narrative necessity of constructing a fictional character along with his or her memories within the autobiographical process.<sup>150</sup>

Weggefeigt ist der Rauchvorhang vor dem Gewimmel der erdichteten Gefühle. Einsicht herrscht, Nüchternheit und Kenntnis bei gesteigerter Sensibilität: Realismus. Nicht Dürre der Konstruktion oder Naturalismus, aber auch der Überschwang erhitzter Empfindungen nicht.

Sondern: phantastische Genauigkeit.

[...] Ihnen mag es leichter fallen als den Schreiben, zu definieren, woran sie arbeiten – sie wollen herausfinden, aus welchem Material die Welt besteht; aber merkwürdigerweise brauchen sie – je kleiner die Teilchen werden, mit denen sie es zu tun haben, je schwieriger exakte Messungen – eingeständenermaßen eine unmeßbare Größe: die schöpferische Phantasie.<sup>151</sup>

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**150** | Renate Rechten, "From Vergangenheitsbewältigung to Living with Ghosts: Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* and Leibhaftig." In *The Self in Transition. East German Autobiographical Writings Before and After Unification*. Eds. David Clarke and Axel Goodbody. (New York: Rodopi, 2012) 126.

**151** | Christa Wolf, *Lesen und Schreiben: Neue Sammlung*. (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1980) 33.

The author avoids the instructive character of Socialist Realism and describes an alternative. She does not describe what is supposed to be *real* in terms of her past or even Nelly's past admitting the unreliability of memory and confirming the fact that what is historically projected as real, also in autobiographies, might not be. Nelly's persona experiences the real events but in a non-realised way, not really being in a position to perceive the incidents as they are; as readers we therefore read an experience-based text without speculations and assumptions about the past, taking into account the situation of the experiencing subject and the distance from the one narrating it. At the same time, Wolf rejects the charge that her writing is *subjectivistic* as she attempts to produce a narrative as close to the real as she is able to, as close as possible to the unattainable goal of total accuracy.<sup>152</sup>

Dies ist eine durchaus "eingreifende" Schreibweise, nicht "subjektivistische". Allerdings setzt sie ein hohes Maß an Subjektivität voraus, ein Subjekt, das bereit ist, sich seinem Stoff rückhaltlos ... zu stellen, das Spannungsverhältnis auf sich zu nehmen, das dann unvermeidlich wird, auf die Verwandlungen neugierig zu sein, die Stoff und Autor dann erfahren. Man sieht eine andere Realität als zuvor ... Die Suche nach einer Methode, dieser Realität schreibend gerecht zu werden, möchte ich vorläufig "subjektive Authentizität" nennen – und ich kann nur hoffen, deutlich gemacht zu haben, daß sie die Existenz der objektiven Realität nicht nur nicht bestreitet, sondern gerade eine Bemühung darstellt, sich mit ihr produktiv auseinanderzusetzen.<sup>153</sup>

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**152** | Wiesehan (1997), 107.

**153** | Wolf (1980) in *Lesen und Schreiben*, 75.

## CONCLUSION

Das Letzte zu sagen: Die Wirklichkeit dieses Jahrhunderts selbst wendet sich gegen die Prosaschreiber. Sie ist phantastischer als jedes Phantasieprodukt. Ihre Grausamkeit und ihre Wunderbarkeit sind durch Erfindung nicht zu übertreffen. Wer also "die Wahrheit" lassen will, das heißt: wie es wirklich gewesen ist, der greift zu Tatsachenberichten, Biographien, Dokumentensammlungen, Tagebüchern, Memoiren.

Der Kuchen "Wirklichkeit", von dem Prosaschreiber sich früher in aller Seelenruhe Stück für Stück abschnitt, ist aufgeteilt.<sup>154</sup>

Wolf suggests that recalling the past, no matter by what process we do so, can never lead to fiction or autobiography only. For her, restoring the reality of the past is a mixing of fictional/invented memories with pieces of truth, provided by memoirs, diaries and real documents. Containing different layers and involving complex social structures and schemes, *Kindheitsmuster* shows how even when the attempts of an authorial *I* fail, painful memories can be still expressed.

Vielleicht sollte es dir um Verluste, die Nelly erlitt – unwiderrufflich erlitt, wie du heute weißt –, doch leid tun. Vielleicht sollte es dir leid tun, um das Kind, das sich damals verabschiedete: von niemandem gekannt und als derjenige geliebt, der es hätte sein können. Das sein Geheimnis mitnahm: das Geheimnis von den Wänden, in die es eingeschlossen war, die es abtastete, um jene Lücke zu finden, die ihm etwas weniger Angst machte als die anderen – aber doch auch noch Angst genug.

Eine Angst, die sich damals in einem durchdringenden, andauernden Gefühl von Selbstfremdheit zu erkennen gab und deren Spur eben darin besteht, daß sie die Spuren löschte: Einem Menschen, der nicht auffallen will, fällt bald nichts mehr auf. Der entsetzliche Wille zur Selbstaufgabe läßt das Selbst nicht aufkommen.<sup>155</sup>

**154** | Wolf (1980) in *Lesen und Schreiben*, 17.

**155** | Wolf (1976/1987), 305.

Writing (and reading) appears in *Kindheitsmuster* as the essence of life. Writing gives the *narrator* a skeleton on which to hang memories and thoughts and making them more understandable; whereas the second-person self-cross-examination works as a mechanism by which to distinguish invented memories from actual ones thus adding validity to the statements and memories. The act of writing supports the work of associating the *narrator's* multiple selves by integrating its past and present into a single, unified, diachronic sense of self.

*Kindheitsmuster* is defined by the unattainable *I* and is narrated using all narrative voices except for the first person singular while reflecting on their use and function. The multiple narrative voices employed correspond to different perspectives, and they constitute a narrative palimpsest of a broader range of narrative voices and rhetoric. Wolf manages herewith to show the circumstances and processes which shaped her generation, and she communicates her findings and thoughts as authentically as she can by revealing to the younger generation and her contemporaries as well as admitting to herself the various doubts, problems and insecurities she feels while writing.

In this process, a first-person level coexists of course, but that is only implicit because of the suspension and omission of the first person in every utterance of the novel. Readers can never decide whether the first person is just silenced or missing. Whether singular or plural (including her company on the trip), even when the narration is realised in the second person exclusively, the first person is not eliminated as a possibility but remains the unarticulated outcome of a sort of speech disorder or aphasia, emphasising the problem of self-continuity and disconnection from the past.

The implicit first person designates an unattainable possibility that highlights its being unavailable for the *narrator* and justifies the selection of the third person in Nelly's part reflecting the radical alienation from the past, and the second person in the self-reflexive part serving as a carrier of objectivity and enabling the cross-examination that she performs to generate the text. Thus the narrative,

though reflecting a personal story, is deprived of every subjectivity, alienated in the sphere of a third-person territory – narrated as a story of Nelly's – and examined externally by the narrative “du.”

By dramatising the past and present disruption with the employment of the second person, Wolf is creating a sort of second self to double the first. The “du” is not only a device for the self-talk that generates Nelly's story but also refers to the reader within a narrative space which acts as a mirror and includes him/her in the purpose of her book which is to understand her own generation. At the same time this narrative “du” qualifies as an essential part of the writing process, orienting its content towards its recipients.

First-person discontinuity as detected here is a problem inherent in autobiographical writing. Most frequently, essential factors such as the distance between the narrating and the experiencing self, youth or even (deliberate) ignorance obscure the process by which the past can be narrated by the autobiographer with full authority and reliability. Wolf deals with this problem openly, using Nelly Jordan as the past self of her *narrator* to experience the chronicled childhood and to evolve into her adulthood while composing her autobiography. Dealing with the problem of a person's development and the pronouns to use, Michel Butor proposes the second person as an appropriate narrative form in such cases.

Si le personnage connaissait entièrement sa propre histoire; s'il n'avait pas d'objection à la raconter ou se raconter, la première personne s'imposerait: il donnerait son témoignage. Mais il s'agit de le lui arracher, soit parce qu'il ment, nous cache ou se cache quelque chose, soit parce qu'il n'a pas tous les éléments, ou même, s'il les a, qu'il est incapable de les relier convenablement. Les paroles prononcées par le témoin se présenteront comme des îlots à la première personne à l'intérieur d'un récit fait à la seconde, qui provoque leur émergence.<sup>156</sup>

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**156** | Michel Butor, *Répertoire II*. (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1964) 66f.

Butor claims that using the second person rather than the first enables the narrator to speak the truth; it broadens his/her perspective and gives the narrative a sense of testimony. This dialogic form of narrative, made possible by the use of the second-person agent, addresses the division of the self into sub-selves marked by different pronouns as distinct instances and reveals the temporality of the self as a sum of individual synchronic instances and not as a single, continuous diachronic unit.

The existence of second-person autobiographies already in antiquity proves the intriguing relationship between the second and the first person as interchangeable in certain narrative cases and supports the above argument. The employment of the second person in autobiography enables the author to bridge the temporal distance between narrated time and narrating time, corresponding to different versions of the self and enabling her to make them part of the narrative. Furthermore, the dialogic dimension of second-person narrative adds to its perceived reliability and authenticity, even though it is of course purely subjective, as we discussed earlier and in greater detail.

Paul Eakin defines autobiographical writing “as a ceaseless process of identity formation in which new versions of the past evolve to meet the constantly changing requirements of the self in each successive present.”<sup>157</sup> This definition reflects the inner need of the autobiographer to express the ongoing struggle of experiencing the self in textual terms and treats the process of autobiographical writing as a work in progress, thematising the relationship between past and present and their continuity. Hence appropriating the use of a pronoun that can express the contemporaneity is legitimised as well as the dominance of the present tense. Seeing the past as an integral part of the present is crucial to understanding the self as a diachronic continuous unit and justifies its being the primary aspiration of the notion of autobiography that Wolf writes about.

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**157** | Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) 36.

In Wolf, however, we identify a major difference from and exception to what Butor and other theorists imply. In *Kindheitsmuster* the past self and the present self are separated not only by a chronological but also by a moral distance. Experiencing events of shame, guilt and historical importance, the past self is represented by a non-personal alienated third-person agent, whereas the second-person voice dictating the story appears within the writing itself in a dialogue that the *narrator* performs with herself. To put things more simply the events are narrated to the *narrator* in a second-person narrative and not to Nelly, as she and the *narrator* are different. The *narrator* is the one to whom Nelly's story should be narrated in a form that is more understandable as Nelly does not exist anymore. To this extent, the second-person entity represents the inherent but constant transformation of the writing *I* to the narrated *I*, expressed in the third person due to this recorded alienation and in the second person in the part reflecting the investigation that the *narrator* performs and the aspiration of objectifying and authenticating what is narrated.

Weil es schwerfällt, zuzugeben, daß jenes Kind da – dreijährig, schutzlos, allein – dir un erreichbar ist. Nicht nur trennen dich von ihm die vierzig Jahre; nicht nur behindert dich die Unzuverlässigkeit deines Gedächtnisses, das nach dem Inselprinzip arbeitet und dessen Auftrag lautet: Vergessen! Verfälschen! Das Kind ist ja auch von dir verlassen worden. Zuerst von den anderen, gut.<sup>158</sup>

In other words, whereas the third person represents the voice of alienation and enables the observation of a narrative persona different from the *narrator* which functions as an object of narration, the second-person voice suggests the device for inquiry and investigation and is a vital part of the writing process. It orientates the narrative towards its addressee (reader, contemporaries, the *narrator*, Christa Wolf, future generations), examines and controls that which is narrated and reflects the self-reflective relationship between the

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158 | Wolf (1976/1987), 14.

writing and the narrated *I*, which is actually the main theme of the novel. This transcendence appears in the narrative with the cross-examination that the *narrator* performs and reflects the constant transformation of the composing *I* to a reflected *you*, which stimulates the writing and functions as a self-awareness mechanism.

In addressing this problem of autobiographical narratives, namely the reliability or unreliability of her *narrator*, Wolf introduces the term “phantastische Genauigkeit” (see previous excerpt) which describes the form and technique of her book and summarises the balance between fictional and autobiographical elements in the narrative: fictional events coexist with historical ones and make the text as genuine as it can be, even while acknowledging its subjectivity, reflecting a person’s past and emotions.

Structured in layers and narrated by different narrative agents at different points, *Kindheitsmuster* offers a palimpsest of narrative forms revealing and thematising its own nature. It thus provides the basis for modelling and mapping second-person narrators in other texts written exclusively from the second-person point of view. Wolf, using different pronouns to narrate different versions of the same person, echoing periods or variations of the self, reveals a more depersonalising aspect of the pronominal use as it brings ambiguity to the character and identity to different persons or personae of the same person. However, it would be reductive to claim that the use of the pronoun is just a narrative trick and wrong to examine it only as a grammatical form because it actually designates the exact opposite, a manifestation of the versatility and resilience of the persona. An assumption that we may make about Wolf’s text is that through a process of depersonalisation, provoked by the dominance of the second-person pronoun, it makes the narrative more impersonal even though it addresses a personal theme and opens up an additional field for experimentation and elaboration on some complicated themes and self-constructions, related to authenticity, reception and representation.

Having started with the genre of autobiography and focussing on self-referring and self-reflecting texts, the next example of sec-

ond-person storytelling to be examined is Michel Butor's *La Modification*, presenting a pure second-person text, written almost entirely as "vous" and thematising a self-awareness story, this time entirely at the level of the adult self.

